



ANNUAL REPORT: Ruby 2021 FIELD SCHOOL

Name(s) of Directors: Haeden Stewart and Jason De Leon





PART 1: RESEARCH OUTCOMES

In the summer of 2021 the Ruby Fieldschool spent five weeks excavating at the ghost town of Ruby, AZ. It was the second season of the Ruby Archaeological Project, an outgrowth of the Undocumented Migration Project (UMP), which has been doing research in southern Arizona since 2008. Broadly speaking, the goal of the Ruby Archaeological Project (RAP) is to study the long-term histories of industrial mining in southern Arizona, in particular looking at the Oro Blanco Mining district and the ghost town of Ruby, Arizona. This project uses archaeology, environmental science and oral histories to explore the legacies of mining on the landscape over the past century and the ways through which different communities have navigated those legacies. Specifically, the 2021 RAP fieldschool was interested in the ways that migrant labor from Northern Mexico built their lives in Ruby, navigating the exploitation and segregation

that was endemic in mining towns like Ruby, as well as a landscape that was becoming increasingly toxic from mining tailings.

Now abandoned, the old mines and mills of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Southern Arizona once drove the colonization and settlement of the region, promoted the establishment of the border security infrastructure, and now serve as vectors for heavy metals and acidic runoff. This history is exemplified by the ghost town of Ruby. Founded in 1877, Ruby was one of the first mining towns and population centers along the US-Mexico border following the annexation of Southern Arizona by the United States. Funded by incoming Anglo-American capital, but mined by an array of migrant labor from Northern Mexico, Ruby was a productive silver, gold, and lead mine, and one of the largest population centers in Southern Arizona until it was abandoned in the 1940s. The town itself was segregated, with the Mexican miners families living in the south side of town and the Anglo-American engineers and managers living with their families up the hill on the north side of town. Today, Ruby is a heritage site with a small museum and tourist draw that purports to be a historic ghost town from the turn of the century, a snapshot of frontier life from the Old West.

The 2021 RAP field school was focused on using archaeological excavation to elucidate the lives of the migrant laborers who worked the mines at Ruby and to counter some of the rosy-colored views of Ruby's history that are endemic within the historical record and museums at the site. To do this we engaged in five weeks of archaeological excavation of two different neighborhoods in Ruby that were occupied during the 1920s and 30s: the tent city that was occupied by mining families and the more affluent neighborhood of the mining administrators and their families. This excavation followed four weeks of archaeological survey at Ruby in the 2020 field season. The goal was to unearth the daily lives of these different communities in order to better understand major differences that defined this segregated and unequal town. For the first three weeks we focused on excavating four units in a terrace that the tent city was located on, as well as three units in the privies that this tent city was associated with. Near the end of the fieldschool we also excavated a terrace and a privy from the more affluent neighborhood. Along with this fieldwork, we went on a number of different fieldtrips that introduced the students to the particularities of the Southern Arizona landscape, its history, and its contemporary status. These included numerous hikes throughout the area and a trip to the US/Mexico border wall. These field trips were planned in order to minimize contact with the surrounding community due to COVID.

Students learned how to excavate, how to set up units, how to write archaeological notes, how to screen, and how to clean artifacts. They played a vital role in this research, and did incredibly good work, with their own individual projects taking the main research questions of the project in really productive directions. Drawing from the material culture uncovered from these excavations, some students developed projects via the analysis of artifacts associated with daily family life. One student focused on toys in order to better understand the lives of the children of the miners, one student

focused on ceramics to think about the relation between imported ceramic and locally produced ceramic, another student focused on pharmaceuticals and how they related to questions of hygiene. Other students based their projects on data recovered from surveys of the area developed in concert with me and the TAs, students developed their own projects that built on the goals of the project. One student mapped the available edible species in the area to better understand the availability of local food to the local families. Another student used a PXRf unit to map the concentrations of lead across Ruby, and showed how concentrations were much higher among the miners families than they were in the more affluent community. A few students emphasized a number of other directions, with one student performing interviews with contemporary Mexican migrants to the US to compare their experiences with the experiences of migrants in the early twentieth century that we were researching. Another student focused on the heritage aspect of Ruby, looking at how the history of the site was represented, and how our research could change that. In total, the analysis and conclusions these students provided was both insightful and continues to be valuable to the broader RAP project.

The analysis of material culture recovered during this field season is still taking place, with one student from the field school still engaged in this analysis. This student has plans to adapt this work into a conference presentation. Data from this material will be part of an article being submitted in May 2022. Look for other updates and details from this project on the website, haedenstewart.com.