

IN MEMORIAM

Louis Arthur Payen (Jr.), 1940–2013

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Sam Payen near a rock-ring feature on the Gulf Coast of Baja California in the 1980s (photo by Eric Ritter).

BORN 30 JANUARY 1940 IN SACRAMENTO, and a lifetime resident of California, Sam Payen (as he was known by colleagues, friends, and family) was an archaeologist with an enduring focus on California native cultures and prehistory. More broadly, though, he mastered an incredible body of knowledge about northern and central California ethnography and prehistory, excavated numerous prehistoric sites, recorded many rock art sites, and explored caves in the Sierra Nevada for archaeological deposits. He also excavated

historic sites and became sufficiently knowledgeable about historical archaeology that his expertise was sought out by others to help in analyzing historic artifacts recovered in the course of their projects. He participated in salvage excavations at reservoir construction and other sites, carried out fieldwork on rock art and surface lithic assemblages in Baja California, studied Paleoindian archaeology, and critically evaluated alleged pre-Clovis discoveries across North America. He engaged in a very wide range of research activities, as detailed in the

listing of his writings presented here, which identifies the colleagues with whom he worked and the major sites and projects that were involved. The list of writings is no doubt incomplete, and several projects on which he collaborated remain to be finished.

Sam was the only child of cattle ranchers whose bimodal settlement pattern was focused near Folsom in the Sierra foothills and near Loyalton in Sierra Valley. The outdoor life exposed him to archaeological traces at an early age. While still in high school, he began volunteering his time and efforts at the State Indian Museum in Sacramento, working on collections under the direction of Francis Riddell. Shortly thereafter he was influenced by Robert Heizer at Berkeley, which no doubt contributed to his interest in rock art studies. His first publication, at age 19, on petroglyphs of Sacramento and adjoining counties, appeared in the University of California (Berkeley) Archaeological Survey *Reports* in 1959. There followed an anthropological career of more than 40 years, with as much or more time spent in the field than any other California archaeologist.

Sam's higher education began at what was then Sacramento State College, where he also completed a Master's degree in 1966 with a thesis entitled *Prehistoric Rock Art in the Northern Sierra Nevada, California*. Thereafter he was employed for a number of years as an archaeologist by the California Department of Parks and Recreation. He returned briefly to graduate studies at the University of California, Davis, and then transferred to the University of California, Riverside, about 1977, where he studied with R. E. Taylor. There he joined the latter's quest to determine the ages of alleged pre-Clovis human remains claimed to date from the Pleistocene of North America.

Sam earned his doctoral degree in 1982 with a dissertation entitled *The Pre-Clovis of North America: Temporal and Artifactual Evidence*. This survey involved road trips that he took to most of the 70 major pre-Clovis candidate sites across North America, including 15 in California. He carried out fieldwork at some of these sites. Sam's work focused on the quality of the evidence: the means by which the sites and remains were dated, their depositional contexts, taphonomic influences at work on them, and the enduring issue of determining human vs. natural flaking in lithic assemblages. His dissertation is the most comprehensive survey of that

nature ever undertaken. According to his research, evidence for ages beyond 12,000 radiocarbon years B.P. was shown to be lacking, or highly debatable, in all cases.

After graduation Sam worked for a number of years in Taylor's radiocarbon dating laboratory, contributing significantly to a series of benchmark articles that established the ages of a suite of alleged Pleistocene sites as all being younger than 11,000 radiocarbon years B.P. Working on these projects left him very skeptical with regard to the early timing of the entry of Paleoindians into the New World and to claims that their arrival had occurred far back into the Pleistocene.

Sam had an encyclopedic knowledge of the literature in the broad range of topics that captured his interest. In part, that knowledge resulted from his having scrounged used bookstores for decades in the course of acquiring an enormous library that he used to great advantage in his writings. An inquiry on almost any esoteric topic in California ethnography or prehistory, or on supposed late Pleistocene archaeological sites across the continent, elicited a response that assured one that Sam had studied that literature in great detail.

Most of all, Sam loved archaeological fieldwork. When it came to getting out of town and doing fieldwork, almost any excuse would do, and he could usually be ready to go within the hour. He often worked with graduate students on their research projects while at Riverside, serving as both volunteer laborer and valued mentor.

I met Sam when he arrived in Riverside for graduate studies about the same time that I started work there. He often helped me on my projects, usually where some help was needed, but where that help was needed to be done by just the right person. We spent long and interesting days and nights on the ground on those projects, shunning the use of a tent whenever possible. We often cooked our Spartan evening fare on a rod over the fire, and talked late into the night. Normally a quiet, reserved, and very private person, at these times Sam opened up to nonstop discussions that focused on what must have gone on in prehistory, the initial entry into the New World, all aspects of traditional technology, the practice of archaeology, and a host of other topics. We only occasionally lapsed into our mutual disgust with the politics of archaeology, which in those days was a highly obstructive and well-oiled machine. Those fieldwork sessions still provide some of the most

cherished memories of my own career. But, for whatever reason, we never talked much about our personal lives or our families, and in that regard he remained the friend who, on that level, I never really knew.

Sam was very humble, a quiet, shy, and retiring person, and as a result he was not a very good public speaker. That demeanor probably contributed to his never having found employment in a museum or university context. This was a tragic missed opportunity. The knowledge he had, especially that of native California material culture, should have been put to good use in a major museum context. He could have brought out the meaning and significance of the objects housed there so they could have been better understood and appreciated by California's Indians and archaeologists alike, and by the public at large. He was the last of his kind, and our discipline will not see another like him.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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