

The 2012 Field Season at Mochena Boraga Rock Shelter, Wolaita, SW Ethiopia

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Excavations at Mochena Boraga (formerly Moche Borago), a large ~70m wide rock shelter situated high on the slopes of dormant Mt. Damote volcano in S.W. Ethiopia, continued during the Spring 2012 semester under the joint directorship of Dr. Steven A. Brandt and Dr. Ralf Vogelsang of the University of Cologne (UC) Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology. As in the previous two field seasons, the German Science Foundation provided the bulk of funding, with additional funds coming from the UF International Center's Study Abroad Program. This year the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia also provided funds as part of a seed grant to develop a partnership between UF and Wolaita Sodo University (WSU) in the establishment of an archaeology and cultural heritage program at WSU.

Like previous years, the 2012 field season focused upon obtaining data that could help test the hypothesis that the SW Ethiopian Highlands were

a major environmental and cultural refugium for anatomically modern hunter-gatherers dealing with the cold, arid climates of the Late Pleistocene prior to and after human migrations across and out of Africa ~ 60-50,000 years ago. Under the direction of Dr. Vogelsang, graduate students from UC and UF concentrated on excavating the shelter's oldest known deposits in order to obtain more charcoal samples dating to >50,000 years ago. Additional stone artifacts and animal bones were also recovered, allowing us to reconstruct hunter-gatherer technological capabilities and subsistence patterns of this time period.

Under the direction of field supervisor Clement Menard of the University of Toulouse and Steve Brandt, seven UF undergradu-

ate students participating in UF's Study Abroad program as well as eight students and staff from WSU, undertook excavations at two other areas of the shelter in undated deposits suspected of dating to the final stages of the Pleistocene or even the early Holocene. UF alumnus Dr. Erich Fisher of Arizona State University and Dr. Oliver Bodeker of UC conducted geomorphological and geoarchaeological studies of the excavated deposits in order to elucidate information on the shelter's past climates, environments and formation processes.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of our project was our successful attempt to go completely paperless! Instead of using paper forms to record data and create catalogs, we used Android Tablets to digitally record all field information. Although initially challenging, we took to this new technology quickly, making field information easy to enter, retrieve and access.

Near the end of the field season we had the honor of a visit from then Deputy Prime Minister and now Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, pictured wearing a dark sport coat surrounded by project and security personnel (photo by Hannah Parow-Souchon). This was surely a very fitting ending to a very successful field season!

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