



Visit to Texas

The University of Texas Rio Grand Valley (UTRGV) has an award-winning Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools (CHAPS) program. The CHAPS program takes on projects that are meaningful to the surrounding community. As part of our visit, (besides giving presentations) we joined 3 projects that are now in progress. Looking for the burial of Private Robinson, unmarked graves in Hidaglo pauper cemetery and unmarked graves in Historic Eli cemetery and Jackson Ranch Church cemetery.

Every few years Lynne and Adela visit a good friend in Texas, Russ Skowronek who is a professor at (UTRGV). Careful planning went into finding a date where

we would be able to do presentations for classes and still have cool temperatures to work in the field. The last time we visited Russ in 2017 (same time of the year) it was so hot we were limited to how much field work we could do. Well, we almost froze to death this time, light to heavy rain the entire time, standing water, temperatures in the low 40's to low 50's and wind that never stopped. But as you can see we tried our best.

Looking for Private Robinson



Piper, Carina Marques, Juan Gonzalez, Lynne Engelbert, Adela Morris, Jasper, Russ Skowronek

We believe we are standing at the location of where the old farm house was and where Pvt Robinson was buried.



The grave marker for James Robinson is along a farm road near the farm house where he grew up. When the marker was moved to this location were his remains also dug up or did they just move the marker?

You can see how hard the wind is blowing by the flag that is straight out.

We had the wonderful privilege to work with Professors Carina Marques, Juan Gonzalez and Russ Skowronek from UTRGV and the award-winning CHAPS program.

One of the current projects we got to participate in was trying to locate the grave of Private James Robinson (his name was misspelled on his headstone). He died in combat in WWII in France in 1944. Soldiers killed in action were buried in temporary cemeteries. Then after the war were reburied in official national cemeteries established overseas or returned home at the request of the family. In 1948, Private Robinson was returned home and buried on the family farm in Rio Hondo, TX. Documentation and newspaper articles stated

that he was buried close to the family farmhouse. His sister, Georgia Lee Robinson, died in 1952 and was reportedly buried next to her brother.

As with many historical events, going back and reading written documents and collecting oral history the story gets confusing with much conflicting information. Documentation is not clear when his mother sold the family home, but likely sometime in the mid 1950's to the early 60's. Maps of the area in 1962 show the house is no longer there. There is no documentation about when his grave marker was moved to the new location near the road or/and information if they moved his remains when the marker was moved.

The unanswered question is are his remains as well as his sister's still in the original location near the family house or were they moved to the location near the road. In April, the CHAPS team who has been investigating the burial did GPR and auger testing and found no evidence of burials at the roadside location. Russ asked us if we would use our dogs to see if they detected scent in either location.

With many of our projects, the dogs add another layer of information to the puzzle (or sometimes they add more questions). Because the weather was not in our favor we voted to start our search at the easily accessible location near the road. We thought if our dogs alert in this location we would be done. Lynne and I worked blind from each other on the area near the road where the marker is. Neither dog had any interest in the area around the grave marker. We then moved to the field. Russ and Juan walked to the area according to old maps where the farmhouse was located. In this area lots of old brick and glass was found giving us more information that this was the correct area. We started gridding the field, but soon conditions were deteriorating and the wind was getting stronger. The dogs did not have any alerts and we think, with the standing water, mud and 17 mph winds, they just could not get any scent. We were disappointed that we had such limited time and could not go back to the location on this trip.

Watch for more stories from our University of Texas Rio Grande Valley adventure in future editions.

~Adela~

Workshop with Ronda

In order to keep our dogs always ready to work, ICF has a continual re-certification program that spreads the required skills we must pass over the

entire year. We also encourage handlers to go to workshops and work with other teams and trainers. This way we are keeping an eye open for new ideas to improve our techniques.

In November we brought in one of our favorite trainers, Ronda Bowser, who has a facility in Idaho. She specializes in working dogs as well as last-chance troubled dogs. This is her third time working with us and giving us an outside look at our teams. By having a knowledgeable, experienced person observing us she can give us ideas on how to make improvements, different techniques and give us feedback to make sure we are working at our peak.



Joseph and Clío work a problem that has been in place for over 24 hours. The elapsed time, wind patterns / weather, and layout of the area made the problem challenging. Clío tried her best to alert (down) even though she does not fit in the space. ("Does this alert make my butt look big?")



We worked a variety of problems in different and demanding environments. Here a bone was hidden well inside the collapsed barn, surrounded by unstable lumber and exposed nails. Bryn has figured out where the scent is coming from and is pictured figuring out how to alert.



Zia is learning that strangers can be fun. Here she is having a blast playing tug with Ronda.

~Adela~



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(650) 503-4473 | info@ICFK9.org | www.ICFK9.org

We are happy to talk with you about your project and
how our dogs might help locate human remains or burials.

Call, email, or check out our website.

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Our mailing address is:

Institute for Canine Forensics
P.O. Box 620699
Woodside, CA 94062-0699

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