

Alabama Archaeology Month 2020

Interviewing Women in Archaeology



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Kristin R. Koors

Cultural Resource Investigator, The University of Alabama

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Saluting Women in Archaeology



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**Cultural Resource Investigator
at The University of Alabama**

1. What is your educational background?

BA in Anthropology, Master's in Library and Information Studies, working on a BS in General Business currently as well as a GIS certificate

2. What is your current job?

My present title is Cultural Resources Investigator for The University of Alabama. I have a research position requiring expertise in coordinating all aspects of archaeological field investigations (scheduling, documenting on paper and digitally the environmental conditions and condition of cultural resources and historic properties), cartographic and other computer graphic productions, technical report preparation and editing, and conduct and oversee project collection curation once reports are final.

I also edit all of the technical reports that are produced by the Office of Archaeological Research for grammatical and data accuracy. Additionally, I plan Native American and federal agency government-to-government consultations, many times involving NAGPRA issues.

3. What are your primary research interests?

My primary research interests involve tribal consultation and Southeastern Archaeology in general. Because I read and edit so many technical reports and need to have a broad knowledge of current issues in archaeology, I have very general research interests by necessity.

4. What motivated you to become an archaeologist or how did you become an archaeologist?

When I was a young teenager living in Selma, Alabama, Linda Derry and my cousin Julie Lyons, both archaeologists, had started an Explorer Post based on archaeology. They had us participate in local digs and do artifact analysis at the Cahawba Center for Archaeology. One of the digs we participated in was with The University of Alabama headed up by Dr. Vernon Knight. I only lived in Selma for about 9 months, but it was a very impactful time. I ended up loving that time so much that I enrolled at The University of Alabama and Dr. Knight became my advisor and is still a great mentor to me to this day. However, if it wasn't for those two fabulous and strong women influencing me very early, I may not be where I am today.

5. What is the most interesting archaeological site on which you've worked?

The most interesting site I have worked on thus far would be the Historic Creek town of Cusseta/Kasita on the Fort Benning military base in Georgia.

6. Who was your most influential mentor? How did they influence your work?

My three most influential mentors were Linda Derry, Julie Lyons, Dr. Vernon Knight, and Dr. Keith Jacobi. Linda and Julie were early influences who laid down a good foundation and love for historic preservation and archaeology and showed me that it was possible to have a career in archaeology. Dr. Knight helped to guide several decisions along my career path and taught me how to do fieldwork properly. I still follow his principles and practices today. Dr. Jacobi also helped guide me in several decisions along the way and was a person who made learning such fun. I took every class he offered. We ended up collaborating in different ways throughout the years and I value his opinion.

7. Do you work with volunteers? If so, how do interested people become volunteers?

I do work with volunteers. I work with them through the Moundville Native American Festival and have volunteered myself a few times to speak to children about archaeology as a practice and as a career choice. To volunteer at the Moundville Archaeological Park, contact Lindsey Gordon, Educational Outreach Coordinator for the park, at 205-371-8732.

8. What public archaeological site do you think best handles preservation and interpretation? why?

I am going to be blatantly biased here and plug Moundville Archaeological Park since I work there. Only about 10% of the site has been excavated. The thought is that technology will advance, and noninvasive techniques will be developed that can be used to continue to interpret the site. The museum does a good job of interpreting the site based on the materials that were unearthed during the large excavations of the 1930s as well as guidance from the experts who have worked at the site in more recent years.

9. What is your favorite thing about being an archaeologist?

My favorite thing about being an archaeologist is that every day is different, and I work with a great group of people who I respect and enjoy being around.

10. What is your least favorite thing about being an archaeologist?

Working in the Southern heat. The older I get, the less I enjoy it.

11. Who do you most admire in our field and why?

Stacye Hathorn, Dr. Heather Puckett, Dr. Ashley Dumas, and Dr. Brooke Persons are all strong female leaders in our field, and I have great trust in their work.

12. Do you have advice for people who want to pursue a career in archaeology?

If you are in it for the money, pick another career. Participate in a field school or two and see if you want to spend a lot of time outdoors with red bugs, ticks, and snakes. Lastly, in all likelihood, you will spend a lot of time away from home, especially in the early years of your career; be prepared for this.

13. How do you feel about the Hollywood and/or reality tv portrayal of archaeology?

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14. What is your least favorite question that you are frequently asked by non-archaeologists and why?

Anything about dinosaurs and what is the coolest thing I have ever found.

15. What can the general public do to protect and preserve archaeological sites?

The general public should not pick up artifacts on public lands

17. What was the professional culture in archaeology like from a female perspective when you began your career?

I began my professional career in 1998. There were more males in the higher positions than females, but there were a lot of females in the profession. I felt like I was treated equally and given similar opportunities as the males and was expected to perform all the same tasks that the men were doing. I do feel I was expected to “be one of the guys” and endure a lot of sexist jokes.

18. Do you think that your gender made it more difficult to become an archaeologist? If so, how?

I don’t think my gender made it more difficult to become an archaeologist. I do think my parents, especially my dad, worried about me making a living as an archaeologist. This was mostly because he didn’t really know anything about the field and of what he did know, it was hard physical labor that men performed.

19. What barriers or challenges unique to women did you encounter?

When I began my career, there were lots of sexist remarks and things said as jokes by my male colleges that you were expected to go along with or at the very least, not make a big deal out of. There were also some men in positions of authority taking advantage of that authority with, many times, younger, female students, employees, and colleagues.

20. What advantages unique to women did you enjoy?

I have done oral interviews on occasion where I felt it was an advantage to be a female. I think my gender allowed people to feel comfortable with me and open to sharing their experiences with me. I also believe that there is a solidarity between female archaeologists that exists. We tend to give each other support, especially those with children, because we know the additional challenges faced by being the female parent.

21. Does being a woman influence your interpretation of the archaeological sites that you excavate? If so, how?

Based on conversations about site interpretation that I have had, I don't think so.

22. Are there ongoing stories or interpretations in archaeology that you think would be different if they had been interpreted by women?

I can't think of a situation I have been in where an interpretation would be different based on the interpreter's gender, but I am sure that they are out there.

23. Have you ever found something in the archaeological record that was specifically female? If so what? How did it make you feel?

I have found jewelry that was very feminine. I thought about the woman or girl who lost it and how they were feeling when they realized it was missing. I thought about the story that the piece of jewelry had to tell.



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