

# OPEN LETTER TO UN-INVITED AND UNWANTED SITE VISITORS

June 30, 2012 Tanya Peres Lemons Day of Archaeology 2012, Education, Prehistory  
Anthropology, Archaeology, her/his site, law enforcement, not-too shabby sports car, professional  
archaeologist, professor, real professional archaeologist, USD

I know I am not the only professional archaeologist that deals with members of the public that are curious about archaeology. I encourage questions and interest from people that are genuinely so. Tons of non-professional archaeologists contribute to our understanding of the past through advocacy, volunteer work, fundraising, and good ol' moral support. Avocational and amateur archaeology groups across the country work side by side with professional archaeologists and organizations. These are great relationships and interactions I enjoy.

One part of my job that I would rather not have to deal with is illegal digging and collecting. I know wishing it away won't make it go away. I know that education and outreach is the right path to understanding and appreciation. However, there are those individuals that test my patience. We have all met them. These are what I call professional looters. They are not interested in learning about the *people* that lived in the past. They are not interested in preserving the archaeological record and the knowledge of it for future generations. They are not interested in sharing knowledge. These individuals are interested in "my point is older/bigger/more complete/more rare (fill in the blank) than yours" and "how much is it worth." These individuals steal from our shared history for the benefit of themselves. I do not like this group of individuals. I was fortunate this field season to not be inundated with these types of people at our field site. My luck ran out on the afternoon of the last day of actual fieldwork. The encounter was typical as far as talking with looters, yet also very strange. What follows is my "open letter" to the individual I met that day.

Dear Un-invited Site Visitor (aka, Looter Dude),

It was so nice of you to drop by this afternoon while my undergraduate students were in the middle of their Field School Practical Skills Test. Your presence was absolutely not a distraction for them or me. I am always more than happy to take 30 minutes time away from the people who are completely serious about their studies and desire to become professional archaeologists (and are paying good money for the education they are receiving), or are genuinely interested in learning about people and the past. To that end, if we had had more time to chat I would have been able to clarify a few points for you:

(1) Not only is it inappropriate to ask someone whom you have just met how much they make, it's gauche and none of your business;

(2) Feigning interest in professional archaeology and how one "becomes one" is not cool; especially when it is clear you are trying to pump the real professional archaeologist for information about her/his site;

(3) Items taken from public lands are not yours to "donate" back to said public lands. They are stolen. This does not make you a philanthropist. It makes you a thief.

(4) Collecting along the edge of private property is still collecting from (and trespassing on) private property. I happen to know you do not have permission to be on said property. Please leave quickly and quietly.

(5) The casualness with which you dropped the names of several types of "arrowheads" that you have found in the area was very smooth. In case you didn't understand my reply "My interests in the past are more than just the lithics" – I meant – rocks are rocks if you can't tell me where exactly they came from; I am not impressed. Actually, I was bored.

I am also curious about you, dear visitor. Do you mind answering a few questions for me?

(1) If you truly only make \$17,000 a year cleaning pools, how can you afford a not-too shabby sports car?

(2) While we are discussing your car, what is up with all of the un-provenienced artifacts in your cup holders and console? Is this part of your donation?

(3) Don't you think you were being a little pushy when you left me a phone message only 30 minutes or so after meeting me? I might think you were desperate, but your rant on my university voicemail came across as snarky and anti-social. (FYI — I now have the make/model and license plate # of your car; you name; and your phone number — I'll be sure to pass them along to interested colleagues and law enforcement.)

(4) FYI – the “Ph.D” after my name means you can call me “Dr.” Ms. is a bit out-dated and shows your ignorance.

Again, thanks so much for stopping by the site this week. I know you were nervous to talk to me and I appreciate that you put on your good camo t-shirt over your wife-beater. It definitely made you seem more legit.

Sincerely,

Professor X



*Cup holder in looter's car with unprovenanced artifacts.*