

Old Leupp Indian Boarding School and Nikkei Isolation Center Community-Accountable Archaeological Partnership

Our team of archaeologists is working with our Community Mentors to understand the history and landscape surrounding the Old Leupp Indian Boarding School and Citizen Isolation Center. Starting with a community accountable approach, we are working to utilize our diverse toolkits of methodological training in service to the unique priorities of the Diné (Navajo) and Nikkei communities. Due to the history of the site as both an Indian Boarding School for Diné youth and a Citizen Isolation Center for Japanese Americans, we approach this project slowly and with care, working to gather community-generated mandates for research design and deliverables.

Our team is made up of Diné and Nikkei members: Davina Two Bears, Jun Sunseri, and Koji Lau-Ozawa. Davina is Diné and originally from Birdsprings, Arizona, a community adjacent to Leupp. Kojun “Jun” Ueno Sunseri is shin-issei, born in Tokyo with biological paternal roots from Ueno and emigrated at five years old to the United States to be raised in other cultures in Southern California and eventually adopted. Koji Lau-Ozawa is a sansei/yonsei from San Francisco. His grandparents, along with great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, were all incarcerated at the Gila River Incarceration Camp where he focused his first major research project. As part of our community accountable practice, we began this project by first entering into agreements with communities around the Old Leupp site including Birdsprings and Leupp, as well as local schools. We also received input from some of the descendants of Japanese Americans imprisoned at Leupp.

In June of this summer, after receiving Community support and protective blessings, we completed our first season of fieldwork at the Old Leupp site, employing non-invasive archaeological methodologies to document structural and artifactual features which are visible on the surface and through multispectral imaging. Combining high precision mapping equipment, UAVs, and meticulous survey strategies, we recorded a large number of features and artifacts which promise to expand our understanding of life at Old Leupp and deliver on at least one community mandate regarding safely planning for the reintegration of the site back into contemporary community life. In our talk we look forward to sharing some of our initial results as well as seeking mentorship from community members as we work on analyzing our results and co-crafting our next steps.