

Enigmatic Wooden Structures, Shoshone National Forest, NW Wyoming

48PA3352 Cow Creek

Lawrence Todd (GRSLE), Kyle Wright (Shoshone National Forest), John Kappelman (U. Texas, Austin), and Jack Hofman (U. Kansas)

48PA258 Stockade Lake

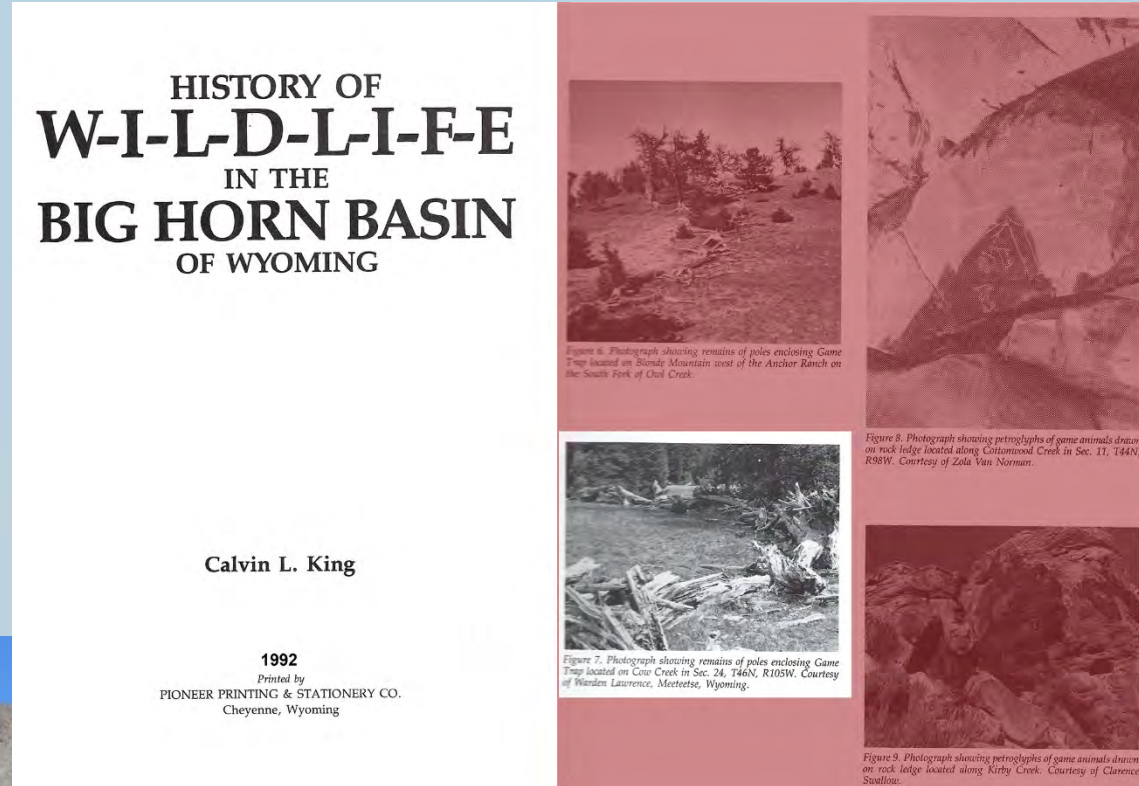
Although no systematic archaeological investigations of the Washakie Wilderness in northwestern Wyoming's Shoshone National Forest were undertaken until the early 2000's, King (1992) published brief descriptions of a number of prehistoric wooden structures in the area, including one noted only as a "game trap similar to the trap on Blonde Mountain was built on Cow Creek...trap is illustrated in (Figure 7)." This extensive structure is composed of curvilinear fences/walls made of fallen timbers or logs and additional, presumably, associated features. The walls expand across a partially enclosed key game trail and an historic pack trail. The structure's combination of drive lines and corrals may have served as alternate and strategic routes for trapping sheep/game or for blocking and creating bottlenecks, enhancing the use of game trail blinds.



In July, 2017 with CLG funds awarded to the Park County Historic Preservation Commission, documentation of the substantial system of stacked and piled wooden walls/enclosure at the Cow Creek site (48PA3352) was conducted in conjunction with inventory and recording of a series of near-by prehistoric sites ranging in age from Paleoindian through Late Prehistoric (Todd and Hofman 2018).

The structure at 48PA3352 may have been constructed, maintained, and used over an extended period, perhaps for decades or centuries, with re-design and rebuilding of structural elements occurring periodically. Deadfall trees on the talus slope from avalanches would have provided a source for some of the trees used in the construction of the log walls. Some modification of the walls and structure has occurred in the last 150 years, notably at the trail crossings of the walls. There is no clear, single interpretation for the timing of construction or use of the structure.

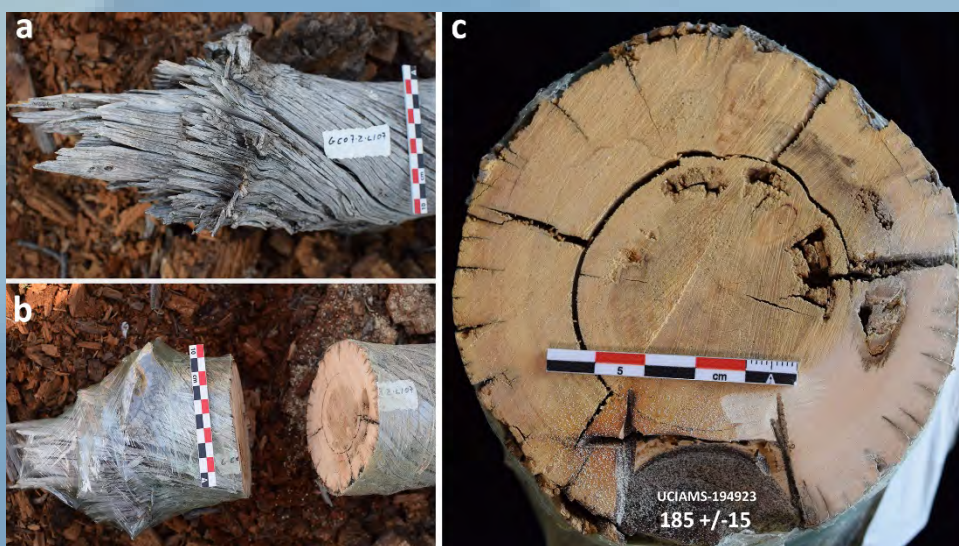
1992 Description



Many of the component logs in the wall are large, heavy and would have been difficult to move into place.



Although a limited number of logs in the Cow Creek walls have indications of chopping and/or sawing, the majority exhibit breaks rather than tool-assisted modifications.



Several of the structural logs, and adjacent standing trees were cored for dendrochronological assessment, and radiocarbon dating of two of the wall logs have been undertaken. It is likely that most of the dates represent avalanche events rather than construction dates.

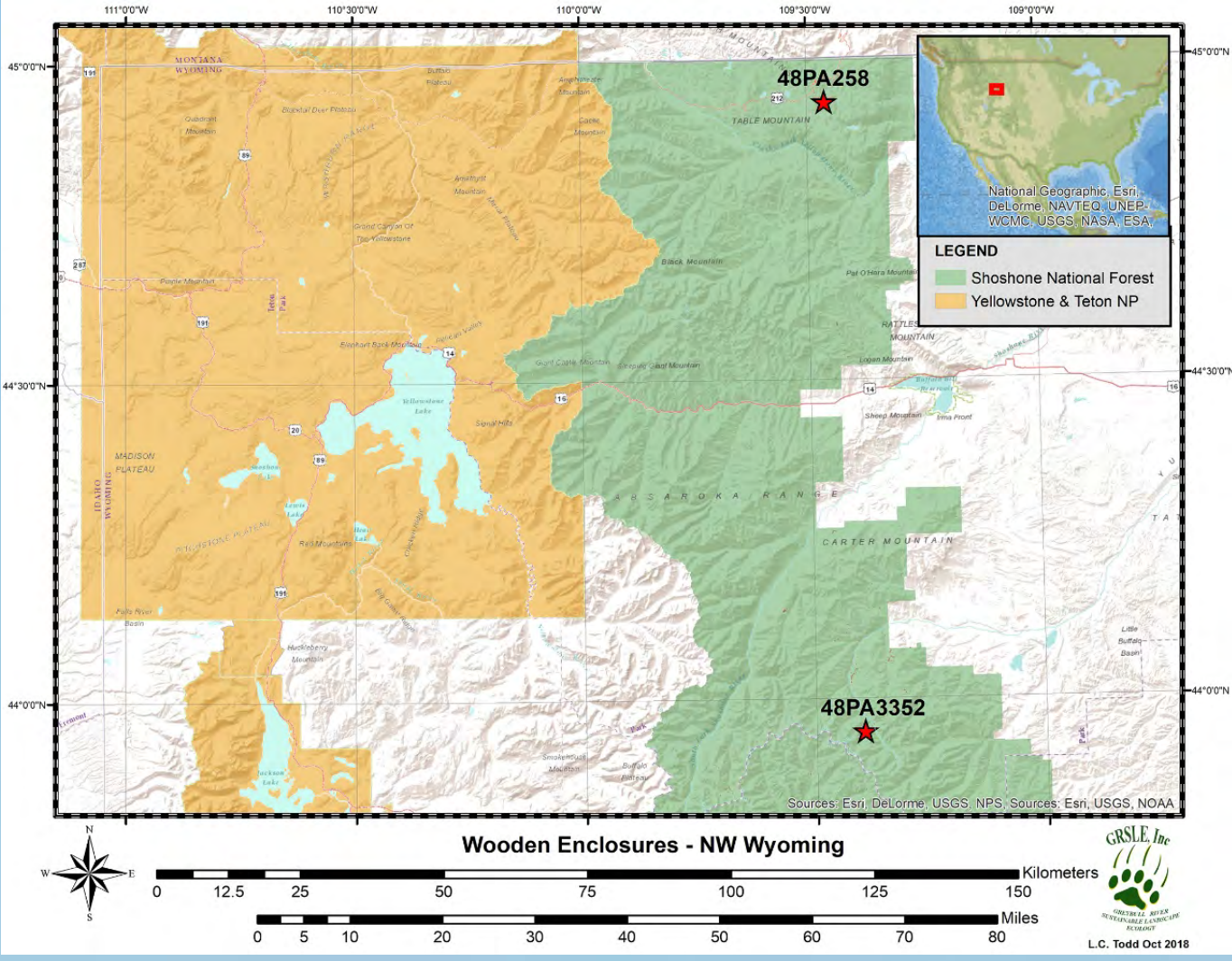
For additional information, contact:
Lawrence Todd ltodd@grsle.org

Enigmatic Wooden Structures, Shoshone National Forest, NW Wyoming

Lawrence Todd (GRSLE), Kyle Wright (Shoshone National Forest), John Kappelman (U. Texas, Austin), and Jack Hofman (U. Kansas)

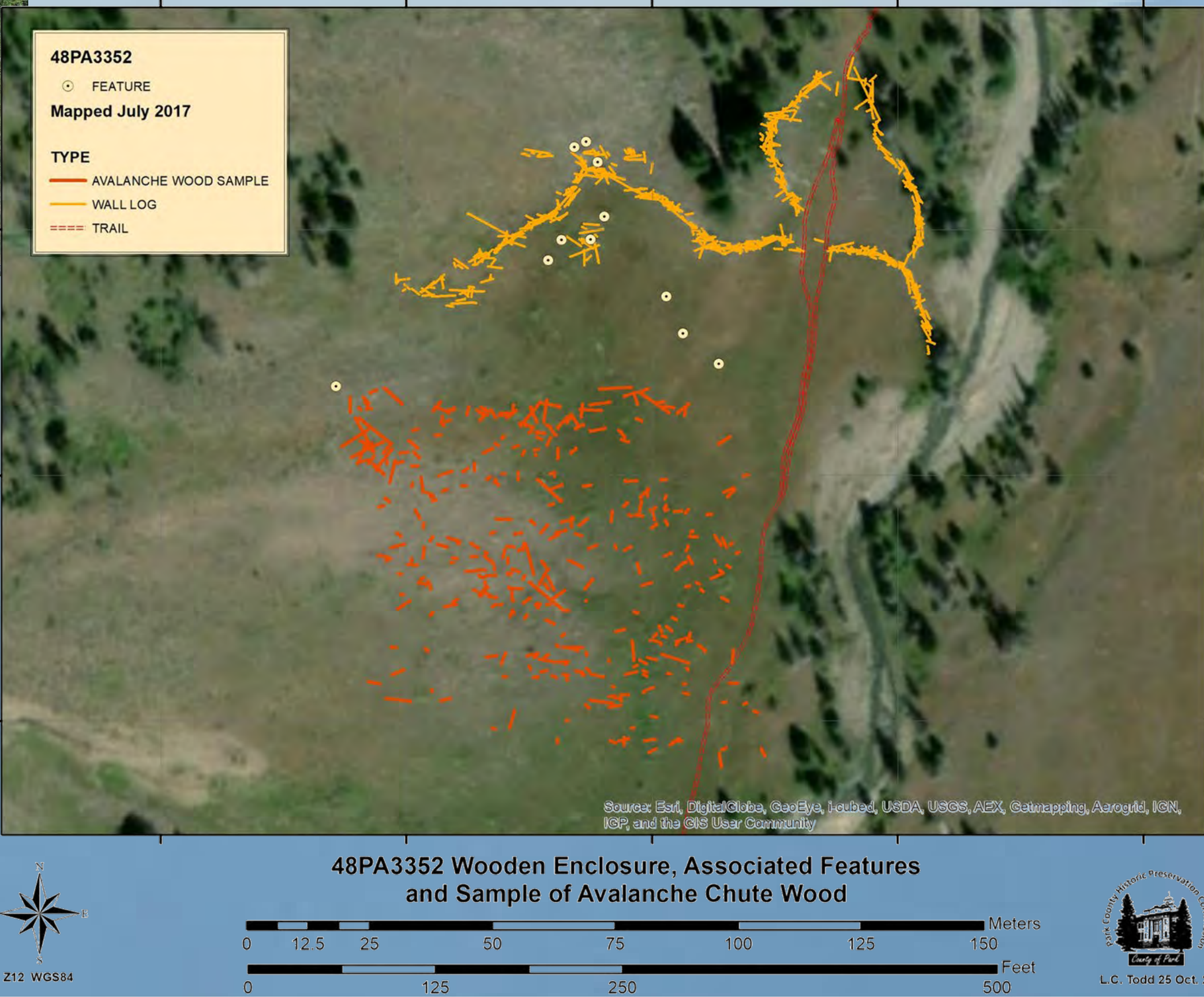
ABSTRACT

Sheeptraps, wickiups, and culturally modified trees are not uncommon types archaeological features in high elevation montane settings. Other combinations of wooden walls, stone alignments, and peeled trees provide much less clear-cut interpretive designations. Field work by the Park County Historic Preservation Commission, Shoshone National Forest, and GRSLE archaeology in 2017-2018 at several such localities (48PA258, 48PA1318, 48PA1319, 48PA1320, and 48PA3352) provides a good deal of additional basic descriptive data, but little in the way of interpretive clarity. Examples of the documentation protocols used for two of these, Stockade Lake (48PA258) and Cow Creek (48PA3352) are presented and possible uses of the wooden walled structures are reviewed. While the role these perishable features played in mountain landscapes is still uncertain, they are unique, high visibility evidences of the diversity of human uses of high elevations that are the focus of considerable public interest and merit preservation and additional investigation.



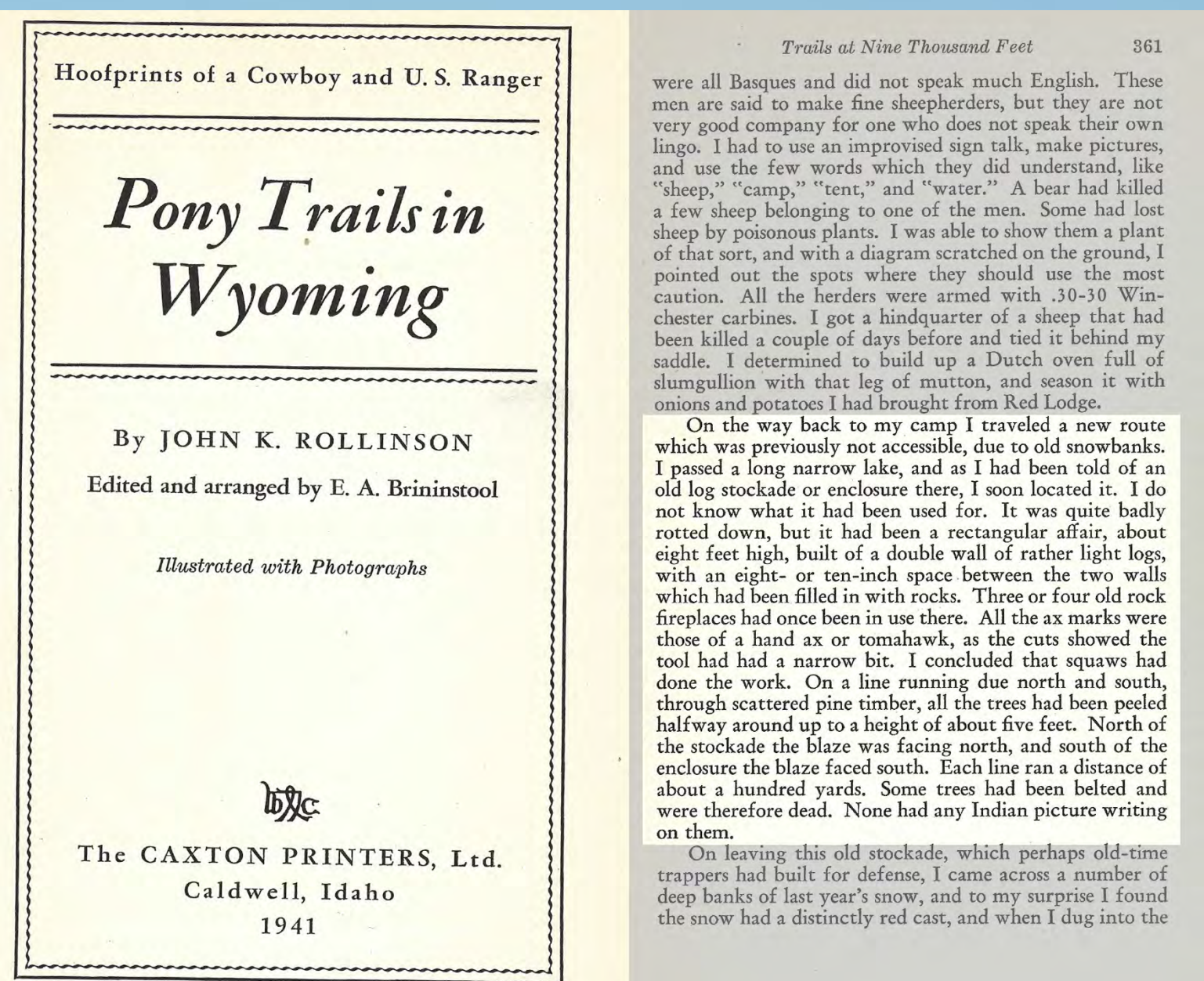
Prehistoric wooden structures are not uncommon in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and include a range of types from conical lodges (wickiups) to game traps with drive line complexes and catch pens (e.g., Kornfeld et al. 2010:304-312; 402-406). Natural deterioration coupled with the increased intensity, extent, and severity of wildland fires put all such perishable features on the high priority list of Wilderness sites meriting immediate documentation. Recent work at two such sites, while adding to our basic observational data, has not answered key questions about use of either the Cow Creek or Stockade Lake wooden features.

While a construction date for one (Stockade Lake) is now available, the Cow Creek system is still problematic where some modification of the walls and structure has clearly occurred in the last 150 years, notably at the trail crossings of the walls, when it was originally built is unknown. Function of neither site has been clarified by searching for associated artifacts and the basic questions of "what was it used for" are still open.



Composite map of individual structural logs, other features, and sample of wood in near-by avalanche chute. The wood used in the structure seems to have been collected from the accumulation of logs and stumps carried downslope (avalanche wood sample). This readily available source of material may have been one of the reasons for selection of the location of this wooden structure, but also makes a definitive construction date difficult.

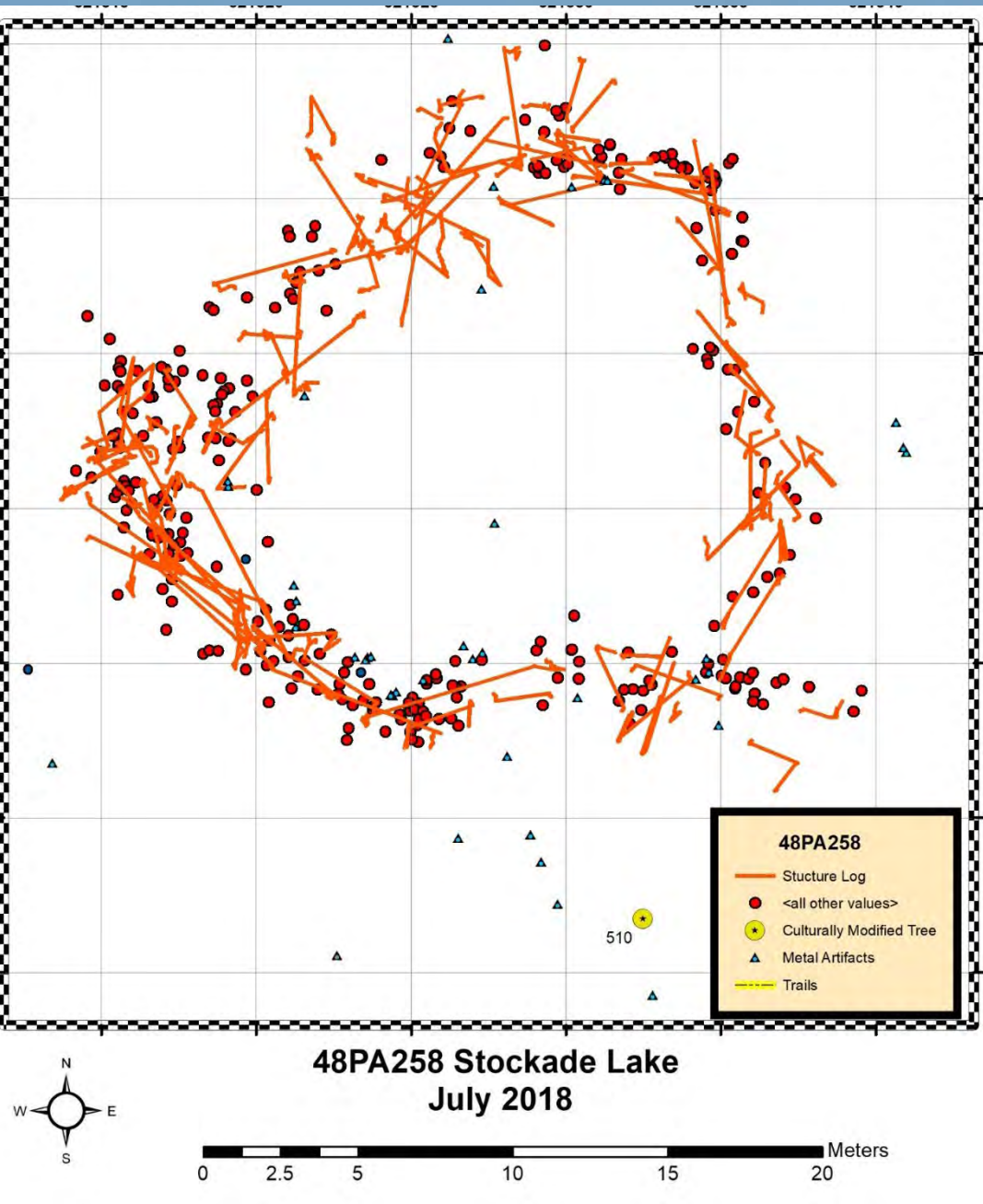
1907 Description



Fascination with the wooded structure at Stockade Lake has been a long history, but while we now have a more detailed descriptions, who built it, and why are still uncertain.

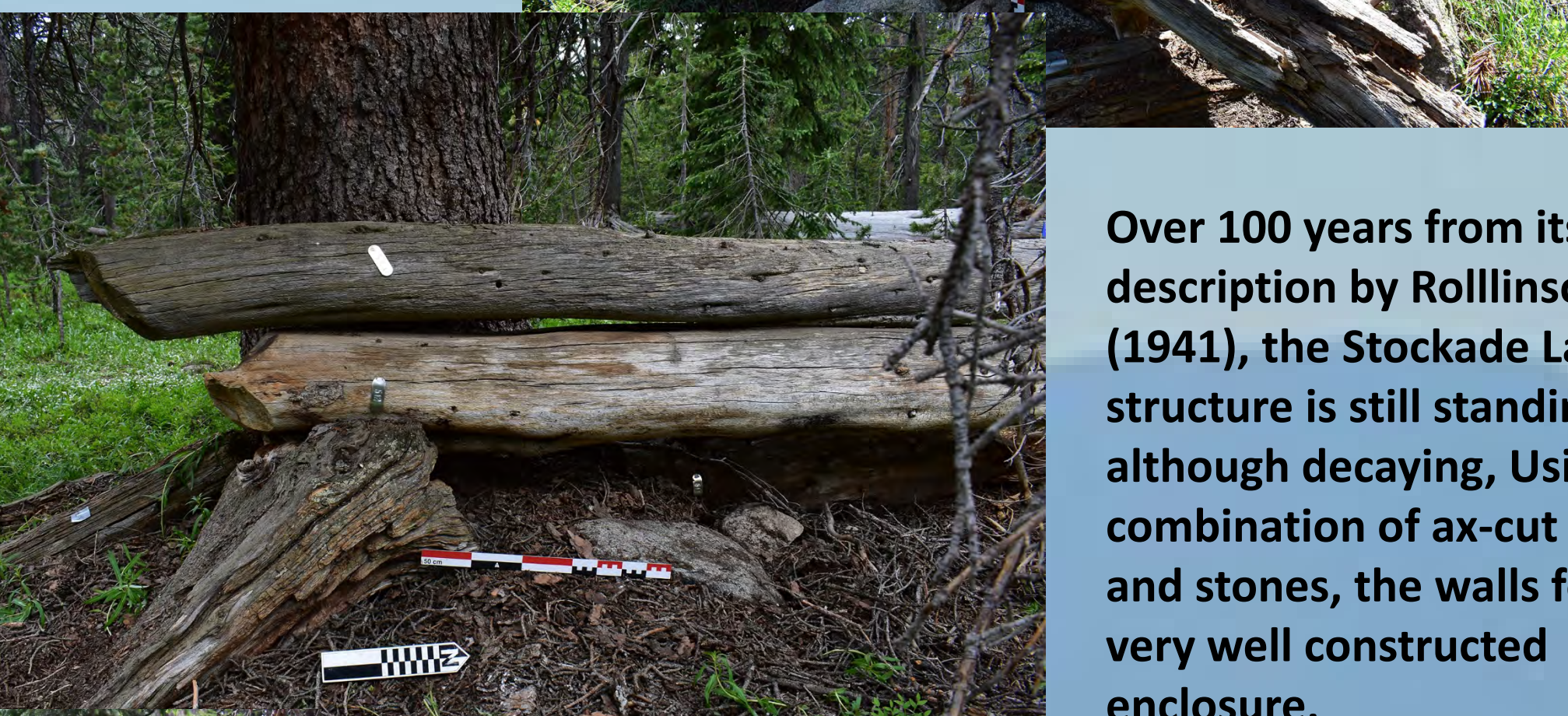
Since the early 1990s some of the logs with presumed rifle ports have deteriorated and no longer exhibit the modifications.

Mapping of Stockade Lake used a protocol developed at Cow Creek where each log is recorded as a line attribute with associated descriptive and metric attributes systematically captured using high accuracy Trimble Geo7 GNSS receivers.

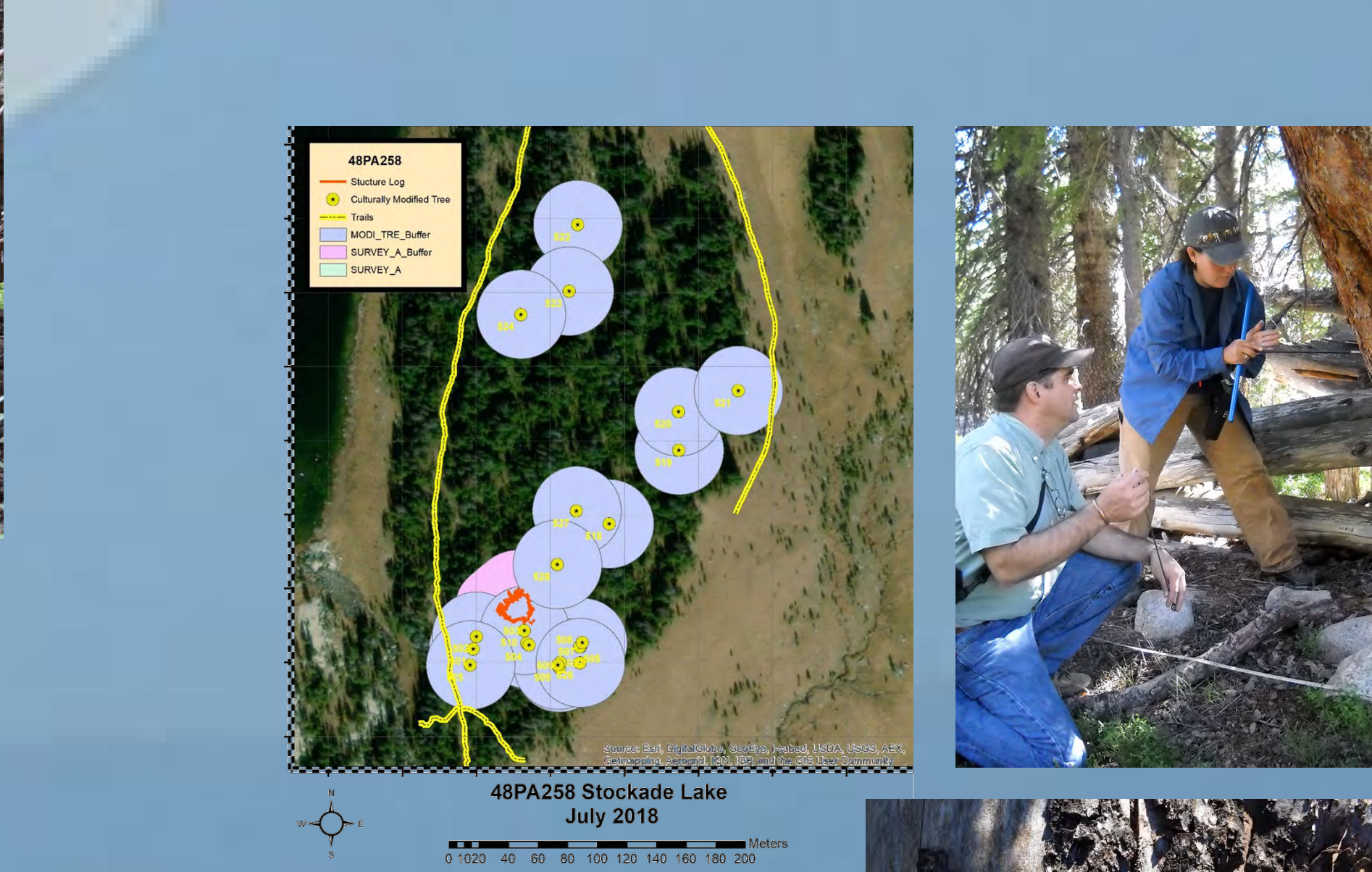


Seeking additional evidence about use of the enclosure, in 2018 a systematic metal detector survey of the interior and up to 20m from the walls of the structure was completed. None of the identifiable metal items corresponded to the 1860s construction age and add little to our interpretation of use of the stockade.

In 1891, Benjamin Greenough, a cowboy from Red Lodge, Montana, stumbled upon a dilapidated wood and stone structure high atop the Beartooth Plateau in the northwest corner of Park County, Wyoming. Surrounded by remnant glacial lakes and not far from the confluence of Little Rock and Bennett Creeks, the structural remains were assumed to be that of an old stockade. This observation was based on the roughly circular shape of the enclosure, the large, heavy logs used to form the walls, and the ax-cut notches carved into the elevation logs for rifle ports (Rollinson 1942: 138). J.K. Rollinson, a forest ranger and friend of Greenough, and Harry W. Thurston, the then Supervisor of the Shoshone National Forest, visited the site in 1907 and made similar observations regarding the defensive nature of the enclosure. Dendrochronological work at the site (Reiser 2009) indicates construction in the early 1860s.



Over 100 years from its first description by Rollinson (1941), the Stockade Lake structure is still standing, although decaying. Using a combination of ax-cut logs and stones, the walls form a very well constructed enclosure.



Presumably associated with the stockade, with 1860s peel dates, comparable to cutting dates for logs in the structure, the stand of timber still evidences a group of culturally modified trees (CMT). These include both full circumference peels that killed the tree, and partial peels that have subsequently been partially grown-over. Building on work in historic cabins (Riser 2010), Reiser has collected core samples from most of the CMT's.

REFERENCES CITED

- King, Calvin L. 1992. *History of Wildlife in the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming*. Pioneer Printing and Stationary, Cheyenne, Wyoming.
- Kornfeld, M., G. C. Frison and M.L. Larson. 2010. *Prehistoric Hunter-Gatherers of the High Plains and Rockies*. 3rd ed. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA
- Reiser, M. 2009. A Preliminary Report on Tree-Ring Crossdating of the Stockade Site, 48PA256 and Nearby Peeled Trees in the Beartooth Mountains. GRSLE Report Submitted to Shoshone National Forest, Cody, Wyoming.
- Reiser, M. 2010. *Tree-Rings, Historic Documents, and Interpreting Past Landuse and Environments in the Upper Greybull River Watershed, Northwestern Wyoming*. MA Thesis, Anthropology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins.
- Rollinson, J. K. 1941. *Pony Trails in Wyoming: Hoofprints of a Cowboy and U.S. Ranger*. Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho.
- Rollinson, J.K. 1942. How, When and Why the Old Beartooth Stockade. *Annals of Wyoming*, 14(2): 138-140.
- Todd, L. and J. L. Hofman. 2018. Cow Creek Section 110 Inventory 2017: Shoshone National Forest. Park County Historic Preservation Commission Technical Report PCHPC18-1, On File Shoshone National Forest, Cody, Wyoming.

Copies of this poster available at:
http://www.grsle.org/Conferences/GRSLE_Enigmatic_2018.pdf

