

Scott-Hawkins Lecture Series

Dr. Jason LaBelle



The Mountains as Wilderness and as Home: The Ancient Practice of Communal Hunting along the Continental Divide of the Southern Rocky Mountains

The Southern Rocky Mountains of western North America are known for their jagged peaks, frigid lakes, and abundant wildlife. While many modern residents view the alpine country as wilderness and untrammelled by humanity, archaeological research provides a different narrative. Over 2200 prehistoric sites are known from Colorado at elevations greater than 3000m above sea level. Rather than conceptualizing the mountains as a barrier, research demonstrates that the highlands played a significant role within ancient Native American lives. For instance, communal hunting of large game such as bighorn sheep and elk was a major pursuit in the fall of the year, reflected in 96+ documented “game drives” and with many containing v-shaped rock walls that once funneled prey towards waiting hunters in shooting blinds. In this presentation, the author provides an overview of the alpine archaeology Colorado, focusing on these hunting sites, proposing reasons for their construction and continued use over several millennia, and arguing for their importance to the peoples of the past in the conceptualization of “home”.



Wednesday, January 28, 2015 - 5:00pm - McCord Auditorium

Dr. LaBelle is the Director of the Center for Mountain and Plains Archaeology and an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. His research interests include grassland and mountain ecology, hunter-gatherer site structure, communal hunting, hearth cooking, and the history of archaeology. His current fieldwork focuses on the foothills and mountains of Northern Colorado, but past fieldwork has taken him across the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains spanning from New Mexico to Montana. Jason is past President of the Colorado Archaeological Society and has actively worked with avocational archaeologists throughout the Plains in documenting collections. He has published numerous articles in journals in addition to book chapters and technical reports. His research efforts are supported by the Jim and Audrey Benedict Fund for Mountain Archaeology, a million dollar endowment established in 2011 to support alpine archaeology in the Southern Rocky Mountains. Dr. LaBelle was awarded the 2013 Stephen H. Hart award from History Colorado for his statewide efforts in archaeological research and teaching.