

# TEXASCACHE

Winter 2025

Volume 28 #1

**Pre-Clovis  
OLDEST  
ICE AGE  
Artifacts  
from Texas!**

**Val Verde County  
Cave Relics**



**PREHISTORIC  
ROCK ART**

**Gault Site Film Debut:  
"The Stones Are Speaking"**





Gault Site  
Documentary  
Debuts in  
Texas

A new documentary film about the **Gault Site in Bell County** was well received at its big screen debut and is set to air on Texas PBS Stations this March. **The Stones Are Speaking** tells the story of the famed prehistoric site complex and the landowners and archaeologist who led efforts to maintain it. It's a fantastic movie about the extraordinary location on **Buttermilk Creek**, which boasts one of the oldest human occupation sites on the continent, and the commendable **Michael Collins**, who bought 30 acres of the site and donated it to the Archaeological Conservancy to preserve it. It's an excellent combination of contemporary cinematography, archival footage, and impeccable images from longtime National Geographic photographer Kenneth Garrett, who incidentally can be credited with sparking the initial interest of the film's Writer/Director/Producer, Olive Talley, of Dallas.

Through interviews of landowners Doris and Howard Lindsey, as well as individuals involved in the excavations, *The Stones Are Speaking* tells the progression over the last century of the Gault site from “potholer’s paradise” to “pay-dig” to “private property for personal collecting” to “neglected archaeological site” to “preserved conservancy area” to “one of the most significant and oldest prehistoric sites in North America”.



*Gault Clovis assemblage--a few of the millions of pieces from the site. Photos by Kenneth Garrett c/o Olive Talley.*

Michael Collins is the central character, and the film introduces him through old home movies as a kid in Midland, showing his introduction to archaeology and early involvement with sites like Monte Verde, the Pre-Clovis site in Chile. He tells some great stories about his early epiphanies—like watching a Permian Basin sandstorm cover and uncover a projectile point sticking out of the ground; another where he recalled excavating in Israel in 1969 during the moon landing and holding a 75,000-year-old stone hand axe while listening to Neil Armstrong’s “one small step” transmission from the lunar surface. His subsequent long career and extensive research at Gault eventually led to his wife, Karen, encouraging him to buy the land—despite great financial risk—and finally ensuring that the site will be studied by future generations in perpetuity.



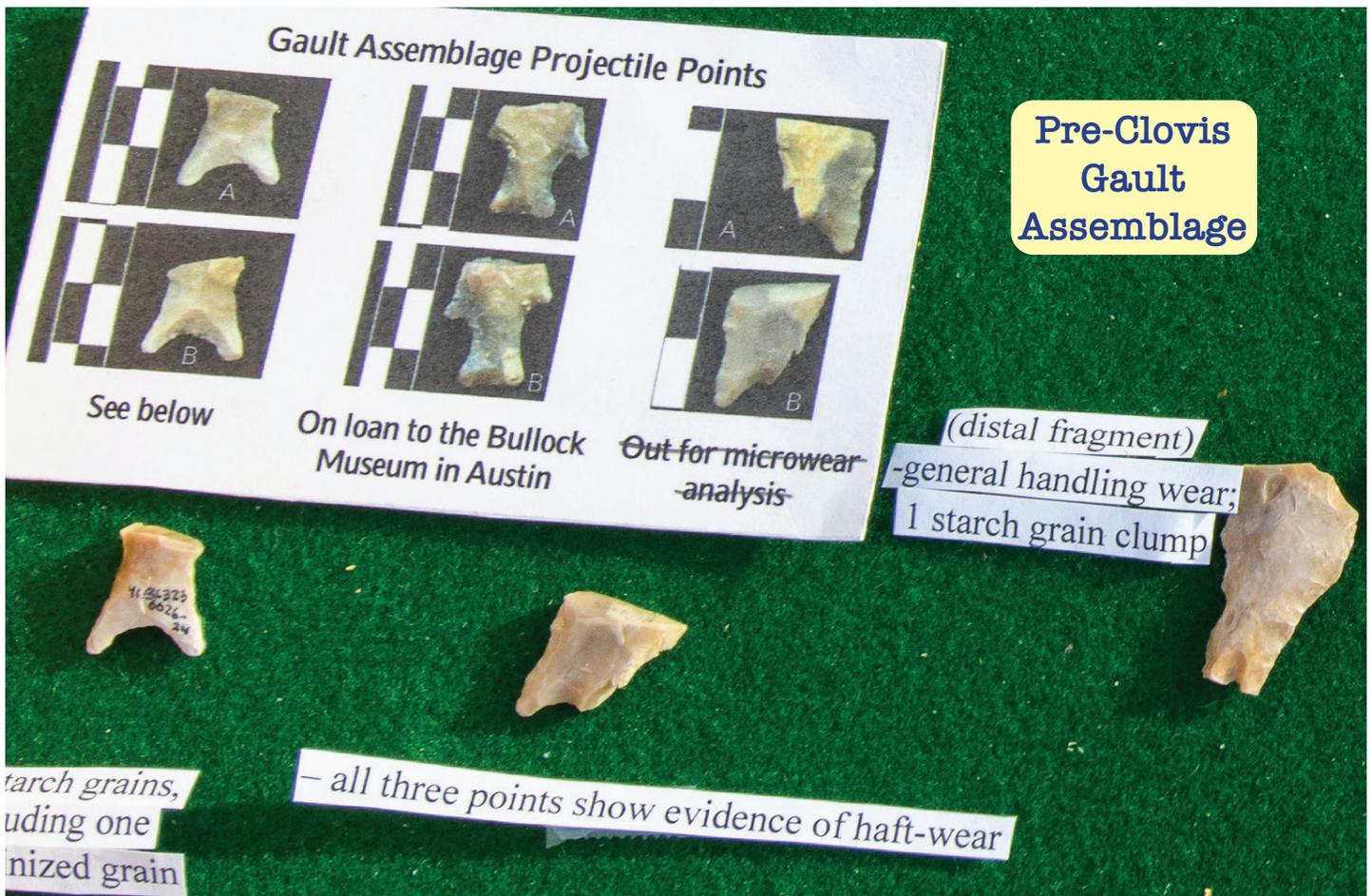
*L-R: Director of Photography/Cinematographer Matt Franklin, Olive Talley, and Mike Collins filming at their ranch near Liberty Hill. Photo by Ryan Goodrich c/o Olive Talley.*

If you watched WFAA in the Metroplex at any point over the last 40 years you probably saw anchor John McCaa break the nightly news. He lends his voice to the film, narrating the history and significance of the Gault site and describing some of the millions of artifacts that have been recovered there. Those include, perhaps most famously, Clovis-era incised stones. These early rock art pieces (some of which are on display at the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin) were discovered in association with Columbian mammoth bones, Clovis points, bifaces, blades, cores, and other artifacts. It's well-known that the Buttermilk Creek Complex has a huge assemblage of all types of Clovis technology. But it's the artifacts **below** the Clovis layer that raise a bigger question—were the Clovis people the first to set foot in North America or did someone come before them?

Indeed, artifacts were recovered under the Clovis occupation layer. Collins and the crews dug below the Clovis layer and found a sterile zone. They kept going deeper and uncovered a stratum of some 100,000 undisturbed artifacts—many of a different style and with different use-wear patterns from Clovis. Using Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) technology, which measures time passed since buried soil was last exposed to sunlight, Collins and his researchers claim the layer is from ~16,000 to 20,000 years ago, many thousands of years prior to the relatively short-lived 300-year Clovis culture that spanned most of North America and abruptly ended during the Younger Dryas period around 12,900 years ago.

“Clovis-First”, however, is a long-held notion that evidence of human occupation layers found below Clovis have been subject to natural ground shifts which have obscured the stratigraphic integrity over time. The film tells of the argument turning ugly after archaeologist Tom Dillehay presented evidence of Pre-Clovis from Monte Verde and was met with personal attacks and attempts to get him fired from the University of Kentucky. Collins defended him, and this was followed by a blue ribbon panel organized by David Meltzer at SMU-- to examine the evidence openly to see if they could build any consensus. Viewers of the film can see the evidence that Gault revealed and decide for themselves if the old paradigm still holds up, or if our entire understanding of the peopling of the Americas needs to undergo serious revision.





Olive Talley wrote, directed, and produced the five-year project. It began on a National Geographic boat trip to Antarctica, and during an on-board presentation with photographer Kenneth Garrett, Talley first learned of the Gault Site. This led to her interest in writing an article about it, but soon it grew to a full-length film. Such caverns often lie in the depths of the rabbit holes of the history seeker!

A seasoned journalist with an award-winning career in newspaper, radio, television, and film, Talley kindly took time from the editing room to chat for this article on a December morning. She explained that she started writing with about 32 Terabytes of footage, photos and interviews and eventually cut a 99-minute theatrical version that aired at the Austin Film Festival. That was reduced to an hour that Texas PBS offered to air in March. "I'm delighted to share it with the world," Talley says about the final product, adding "and I'm grateful for several major foundations, and more than 200 donors, and The Williamson Museum, who served as the fiscal agent for the film, for helping make it all happen... And I learned a lot about archaeology along the way!"

The movie won an Audience Choice Award among Texas Feature Films at the Austin Film Festival in October and two screenings quickly sold out the theaters. "If we could all be like Mike Collins, the world would be a better place," adds Talley. "He gave selflessly to others, to share his knowledge, educate students, and ultimately save precious history for the benefit of all of us."

Judging from the amount of inquiries sent to Texas Cache about Gault, readers will not want to miss this movie! It's a masterpiece that pieces together the big picture of the fractured fables we've all heard about Gault over the years.

# HOW TO WATCH “THE STONES ARE SPEAKING”

The film is scheduled to air on **Texas PBS stations** in March as part of the “**Made in Texas**” series. See the trailer at [thestonesarespeaking.com](http://thestonesarespeaking.com) and check there for updates on how and when to watch. Check your local PBS station or the social media accounts of The Gault Film, Williamson Museum, the GSAR, or the Texas Cache Instagram page for air dates and times.



Above: Clovis point and incised stones from Gault; L-R: Karen Collins, Olive Talley, and Mike Collins at the big screen premiere. Photos by Kenneth Garrett, c/o Olive Talley.



**Location: about 5 miles northeast of Florence (Bell County) on FM 2843.**

If you would like to take a tour of the Gault site, you must make a reservation through either

**The Bell County Museum in Belton**

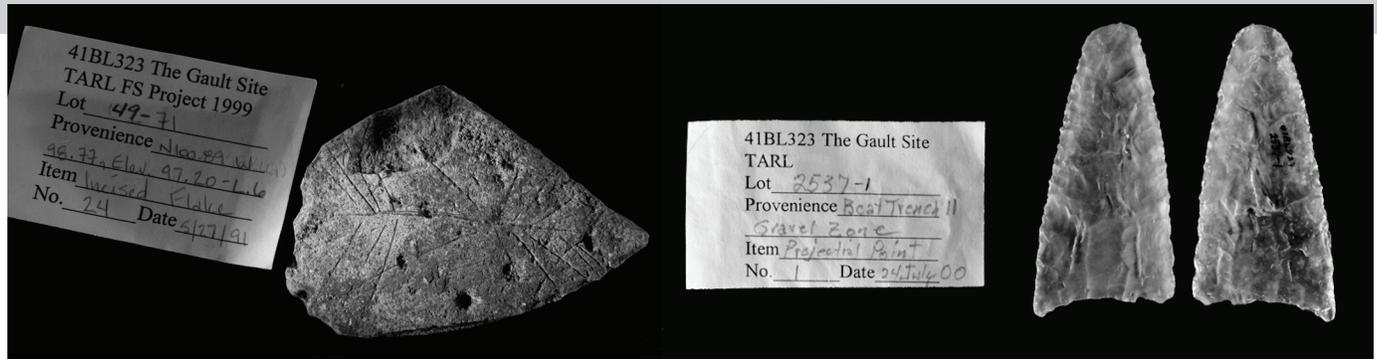
[bellcountymuseum.org/254-933-5243/museum@bellcounty.texas.gov](http://bellcountymuseum.org/254-933-5243/museum@bellcounty.texas.gov).

**or The Williamson Museum in Georgetown**

[williamsonmuseum.org/512-943-1670/info@williamsonmuseum.org](http://williamsonmuseum.org/512-943-1670/info@williamsonmuseum.org)

Tours for groups of 12 or more available by special appointment. Weather determines tour availability so check the forecast first! Tours are family-friendly, last about two hours, and involve walking on gravel paths. The GSAR website also mentions “Additionally, some tours can be tailored to include atlatl dart technology and flint knapping demonstrations.” Regular admission price is \$20 per person and \$10 for kids aged 9-12. Tours are free for educators and school groups and all children ages 8 or under, so think about making a class field trip! To contact GSAR, email them at [gaultschoolofarchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:gaultschoolofarchaeology@gmail.com)

# Brief Timeline of the last 20,000 years of the Gault Site



Above: Artifacts recovered from the Gault Site (41BL323). Photos by Kenneth Garrett, c/o Olive Talley.

## ***\*End of Pleistocene Epoch:***

Countless generations live for thousands of years in this lush land with abundant water, game, vegetation, and superior flint quarries for weapon and tool making.

## ***\*About 90 years ago:***

Landowner Henry Gault allows UT Professor J.E. Pearce to excavate 3,000 artifacts; Pearce urges preservation of the site but it fails to materialize.

## ***\*Mid-twentieth Century:***

Next landowner Elmer Lindsey operates a pay-dig site. It's also frequently looted by fence jumpers for decades. Digger/collector David Olmstead finds an Alibates Clovis point sandwiched between two incised stones and eventually word of this gets the attention of Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory (TARL) and archaeologists including Collins. At this point in the film, Dr. Tom Hester, who served as TARL director in 1991, arms crossed, with his dry wit recalls hearing over the phone, "Do you Texas archaeologists know what the hell is going on down there?" Elmer allows a short archaeological excavation (for a fee) which reveals the significance of the site. Funding runs out, the pay dig continues, and the site is somewhat written off by Collins et al.

## ***\*1998:***

Elmer's nephew Howard and wife Doris Lindsey had purchased part of Elmer's estate with plans to collect artifacts privately and supplement payments by selling some. Doris finds a Clovis point in a new hole, sparking their excitement. They continue digging and uncover more artifacts, then mammoth bones. Collins returns to the site with renewed interest, which he impresses on the Lindseys. They agree to a five-year excavation lease. Volunteers from across the country join.

## ***\*Early Aughts:***

When the lease ends, the Lindseys first decide not to renew. Some time passes and they have a change of heart and tell Collins they think he should buy the property. Collins is "floored" and agonizes over funding obstacles and the fate of Gault. Karen Collins finally tells her husband to "just buy the damned place". They mortgage everything they personally own and acquire the site. Collins transfers the property to a New Mexico-based nonprofit, The Archaeological Conservancy, securing the site for protection for the foreseeable future. He establishes the Gault School of Archaeological Research (GSAR), a nonprofit organization to promote archaeological research and education.

## ***\*2008-2016:***

Crews dig below the Clovis layer and find a sterile zone. Collins decides to dig below that; his team finds a deeper layer of artifacts with OSL dates from ~16,000 to 20,000 years old, effectively establishing the Gault as one of the oldest occupation sites in North America. Around this time, researchers in White Sands, NM present evidence of human footprints found along with extinct Pleistocene-era megafauna dating to ~23,000 years old. Clovis-First theory, however, still has prominent adherents.

## ***\*First quarter of the 21st Century up to right now:***

GSAR continues research, inviting groups of all ages to come see and participate. Olive Talley's Documentary film *The Stones Are Speaking* tells the story. Texas Cache Magazine runs this article about it, which you are currently reading with your mind blown.