

Michael B. Barber, PhD, State Archaeologist

I would like to state at the onset that this writing gives me no pleasure. In fact, I have been negligent in my official duties as State Archaeologist in ignoring the issue for several years. At first the Arkfeld phenomenon (Hranicky 2013) was an annoyance, a minor blip of ill-conceived nonsense which I was under the impression would soon flame out with no negative consequences. My opinion changed radically at the 2014 MAAC meeting when Hranicky (2014) made a presentation on the material and I saw that the audience, particularly the undergraduates, believed that the images shown were actually artifacts and, even more bizarre, portable art effigies of baby mammoths, tigers, and birds. Citing Share and Ashmore (1979), Williams (1991:8) maintains that professional archaeologists have the responsibility to refute “pseudoarchaeology,” an archaeology which bends the evidence and denigrates the real achievements of the past. Carl Sagan (196:13) speaks to instances of pseudoscience to “purport to use methods and findings of science, while in fact they are faithless to its nature – often because they are based on insufficient evidence or because they ignore clues that point the other way.” The report on the Arkfeld locus is a prime example of misused science, flawed logic, and lack of scientific technique and rigor.

The Arkfeld “locus” in Frederick County, Virginia, has been presented by Hranicky (2014) as a Paleoindian Pre-Clovis “site” based on a water-worn “artifact” assemblage composed largely of shale and limestone “tools.” The supposed occupants of the site were big game hunters using an Old World technology who dispatched mammoths in the Shenandoah Valley. The basic problem with these interpretations is that not a single tool or artifact has been recovered at the locus, all being natural pieces of rock. As shale and limestone are notorious for not holding edges, the evaluation of these objects as tools is suspect from the onset. In addition, art objects / effigies should unequivocally look like the things they represent. It is undisputed that Native Americans were extremely talented in creating works of art. It is also my belief that effigies should resemble the images for which they mimic. Not hold your head this way or get the light from a 67 degree angle. As Boyd (2014:212) indicated for the “petroglyphs” at Spout Run, if these effigies were made by humans, “then they were the worst artists in prehistory!” Sift through a thousand natural rocks and you are bound to see something that looks like something. The phenomenon is a prime example of modern pseudoscience where the rules of true science are abandoned in favor of flawed reasoning, a mis-use of logic, baseless speculation, and erroneous conclusions.

The situation is further complicated through the use of ASV/DHR/COVA Certification students in the work. To attempt to teach archaeology on a locus with no artifacts is unconscionable. None of the sponsors in question can support such an approach. We all maintain an open mind with regard to new discoveries and, through an accumulation of evidence, embrace new paradigms. However, when claims are so outlandish that verbal repetition becomes the only supporting factor, the situation can be a teaching experience for no one. Certification students are obviously free to make their own decisions on where they use their time but to present Arkfeld as a site is an abuse of their commitment to understanding the human past. The activities at Arkfeld are not science but a hoax which conveniently ignores all the tenets of modern science in order to create an imagined pre-Clovis site that never was.



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