

Digging in the Southwest

Ann Axtell Morris, Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., Garden City, New York 1941, 301 pages. illustrated with 51 Black and White photographs and drawings. First edition, 1931.

by **Paul R. Duncan**

Book Review

Author Ann Axtell graduated from Smith College around 1920 and signed on for a year in France with the American School of Prehistoric Archaeology in Europe. She met, Earl Morris, in her words a “very excellent archaeologist” and married him in 1923. They honeymoon at Earl’s research site at Mummy Cave in Canyon del Muerto near Chinle, Arizona.

She immerses herself in Earl’s archaeology world and becomes an accomplished archaeologist in her own right. In 1931, she published the book ***Digging in the Southwest***. Around the same time, she published another book titled ***Digging in Yucatan*** that deals with their 1924 archeological excavation of Chichen Itza on the Yucatan (Mexico). At that time archeologists were aware that Man had entered into the Americas at least 10,000 years ago. She comments about American and European historians: *“It never seems to occur to them that facts would be far better served if they took a sturdy stance on America’s already well-populated and highly civilized land and, from that vantage point viewed those three little Spanish ships as nothing but the trio of immigrant tourists that they were. Columbus did not discover America.”*

Early in the book she introduces the reader to **“Old Joe,”** a 1917 Touring Model T Ford that she calls: *“the most willing car we ever owned.”* She also writes: *“In a bygone age the Model T Ford reigned supreme. No self-respecting Southwesterner would think of attempting a really heavy bit of going in anything but one of them.”*

In the ‘teens’ and 1920’s archeologists in the Southwest needed reliable cars to carry equipment and supplies for months of field work. Their vehicles needed to have a high road clearance, be light weight enough to be pushed by two men and repaired in the field. Earl Morris was not the only renowned field archeologist of the period to use a Model T. His good friend archeologist A. V. Kidder owned a 1910 Model T, named “Old Blue.” Kidder used his T at his Pecos, NM excavations.

The author includes several sections relating to technical details of archaeological techniques and cultural classifications. All scientific chapters are well written and researched. She also includes many

sections about their personal experiences especially relating to their Model T.

One Chapter (V), ***“On the Banks of the Eduardo”*** is noteworthy. In 1923, three carloads of archeology professionals left Gallup, NM for a 60 mile drive to Chaco Canyon, NM where Neil Judd, directed the excavation of Pueblo Bonito. The next day they set out driving from Chaco to Aztec, NM, where Earl had an excavation. It was raining ***“cats and dogs.”*** The two Model T’s, **“Old Joe”** and **“Old Blue”** continued driving and the third car went back to Gallup. Three days later, the two Model Ts finally arrived in Aztec, NM (45 miles). The driving group had encountered flash flooding and spent two days in an unoccupied cabin situated between several flooded arroyos, -one named **The Eduardo**. The T’s performed well with some coaxing. Ann and Earl played an important role in the completion of the **“tree ring calendar”** dating system that was developed at the University of Arizona. Their daughter Elizabeth later obtained her Ph. D in

archaeology at the University of Arizona and also worked on the calendar.

In 1929, Anne and Charles Lindbergh were visiting the Pecos archeology site in New Mexico with their airplane. They decided to fly over to the Morris excavation site in Canyon de Chelly and dropped a bag of mail. Several days later Ann and Earl had left their camp to pick up train visitors and were stranded in Chinle by a flood in the canyon. In the meantime, the Lindberghs decided to fly back to the Morris camp, landed on the Canyon rim and hiked down a trail and spent the night and another day there.

The Morris book ***Digging in the Southwest*** is the subject of a recently-completed feature film produced by Tin Lizzie members **Coerte Voorhees** and his brother **John** titled ***Canyon del Muerto***. Model Ts feature prominently in the movie and a group of Tin Lizzie members have been involved during the filming. See story on page 9.

