



# Daniel G. Roberts Award for Excellence in Public Historical Archaeology: The U.S. Forest Service Passport in Time Program

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The Daniel G. Roberts Award for Excellence in Public Historical Archaeology was created to recognize outstanding, sustained accomplishments in public historical archaeology by individuals, educational institutions, for-profit or nonprofit firms or organizations, museums, government agencies, and private sponsors. Public archaeology entails a commitment to broad dissemination of the lessons learned from archaeology and the importance of preserving the archaeological record. The 2019 Roberts Award was presented to the U.S. Forest Service Passport in Time Program (PIT) at the 52nd Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology in St. Charles, Missouri (Fig. 1).

PIT is a volunteer cultural heritage resources program first sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service, and which now includes partners such as the Bureau of Land Management, some state parks, and the nonprofit HistoriCorps (<<https://historicorps.org/>>). PIT volunteers of all ages work with professional archaeologists and historians on public lands throughout the United States on such diverse activities as archaeological survey and excavation, rock-art restoration, archival research, historic-structure restoration, oral-history gathering, and analysis and curation of artifacts. The professional staff of archaeologists,



**Fig. 1** William G. Reed, who serves as national program coordinator for the Passport in Time Program and regional heritage program leader for the U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region, with the PIT banner in February 2019. (Photo courtesy of David Cushman.)

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historians, and preservation specialists host, guide, and work alongside the volunteers.

On the PIT Website (PIT's History <<http://www.passportintime.com/pit-s-history.html>>), former PIT national coordinator Jill Osborn provides some background on the origins of the program. According to retired Forest Service employee Gordon Peters, the founder of PIT, the program grew out of his experiences teaching the University of Minnesota Duluth archaeological field school at Forest Service sites. The field school included volunteers working alongside students and was very successful. But, when no one signed up for a field school offered in 1988, Forest Service staff offered to recruit volunteers if Gordon would agree to continue archaeological research. Volunteers soon helped Gordon test excavate at two sites on the Superior National Forest in Minnesota.

The formal idea for the program came from the Ontario Archaeological Society's Passport to the Past Program. Building on the Ontario idea, Peters convinced a few of his Forest Service colleagues to host volunteer projects on their forests. In 1989, archaeological projects on the Nicolet and Chequamegon National forests in Wisconsin and on the Chippewa National Forest in Minnesota were completed, to be followed in 1990 by projects on forests in Michigan, Georgia, and Utah. By 1991, Forest Service leaders in Washington, D.C., were convinced that PIT played a valuable role for heritage and the agency, and it became an official national program. From its humble beginnings in the Great Lakes states, PIT has grown to include 117 national forests in 36 states. The PIT Clearinghouse, currently hosted by the SRI Foundation, handles signup logistics and publicity for the program and maintains the program Website, e-newsletter, and historical data for the program. Jill Osborn, now retired from the Forest Service, was instrumental in laying the foundation for the program. Upon her retirement, Will Reed took over management and coordination of the program and continues in that role.

Statistics on the program as of 27 November 2018 illustrate the lasting and sustained impact of PIT.<sup>1</sup> Since the program's inception, there have been 2,885 projects; 35,386 volunteers; and 1,656,656 volunteer hours donated, with the volunteers' time

valued at \$27,644,956. Sixty-two percent of the total number of projects have focused on historical archaeological and related topics. Thirty-five percent were archaeology related (excavation, survey, oral history, archival research, and analysis and curation of artifacts), and twenty-seven percent involved rehabilitation of historic buildings. Volunteers cover their own costs, and some travel great distances to participate. But the Forest Service also dedicates staff and resources to the program, providing volunteers with a well-rounded archaeological and historic-preservation experience. Members of the staff, who serve as project leaders, oversee PIT projects along with their other job commitments.

A perusal of the "Previous Projects" tab on the PIT Website, <<http://www.passportintime.com/index.html>>, illustrates just a few examples of the program's commitment to historical archaeology:

- Digging Out West: Exploring Chinese Mining Sites (Boise National Forest, Idaho)
- Search for the Carson-Mormon Trail (Eldorado National Forest, California)
- Exploring Historic Farmsteads at Midewin (Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, Illinois)
- Excavations at the Rattlesnake Charcoal Kiln (Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Montana)
- Curation & Analysis of Artifacts from German Gulch Historic Mining District (Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Montana)
- Historic Copper Mines and Logging Railroads Documentation near the Grand Canyon (Kaibab National Forest, Arizona)
- Search for Shawnee Town (Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Arkansas)
- Scull Shoals Historic Mill Village (Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, Georgia)

The volunteers who participate in PIT projects contribute a great deal to the conservation and preservation of the nation's cultural and historical heritage. A recent quote from a PIT volunteer who participated in PIT's longest-running project (over 20 years!), the Savenac Historic Nursery Restoration Project on the Lolo National Forest in Montana, provided a post-project comment that sums up the importance of the PIT Program from the volunteer perspective (<<http://www.passportintime.com/srif%2D%2D-windows-on-the-past.html>>):

<sup>1</sup> Program statistics were provided by Terry Klein of the SRI Foundation, with assistance from the PIT Clearinghouse.

PIT is absolutely the best volunteer program in the United States. Volunteers learn archaeology and preservation techniques; get invested in “ownership” of these national gems; and then become the stewards of historic sites for the rest of their lives. Perfect balance from beginning to end!

The PIT Program is a worthy Roberts Award recipient because it broadly disseminates the lessons learned through historical archaeology by providing opportunities for public participation in all aspects of the discipline, from fieldwork to research to curation. Because of their experiences, volunteers become potential advocates for heritage preservation and protection. It is significant that projects are carried out on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service as well as the Bureau of Land Management. Lands managed by these agencies have multiple uses, and archaeological sites are often at great

risk. Volunteers see firsthand the effects of agency activities that have the potential to impact archaeological sites. The Forest Service employees who work on PIT projects have the opportunity to gain firsthand understanding of the relationship between stewardship and public service. Finally, PIT is a collaborative program, working with other federal and state agencies, as well as with non-profit organizations.

SHA congratulates the PIT Program for its outstanding work and looks forward to many more years of this innovative and important endeavor.

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