

## THE TFAHR INTERNATIONAL FIELD SCHOOL

by  
**Eulah Matthews and William Neidinger**

The Texas Foundation for Archaeological & Historical Research was founded in 1986 by a small group of Texans with a passion for archaeology and a desire to promote and enliven the study of history in Texas classrooms. To this end TFAHR has been providing educational opportunities abroad for Texas teachers and students for more than two decades. During that time TFAHR has excavated at twelve different sites in five countries (France, Italy, Israel, Bulgaria, and the Republic of Macedonia), making available 362 positions for teachers, students, archaeologists, and volunteers on archaeological excavations.

For the 2007 excavation at Vardarski Rid (Gevgelija, Republic of Macedonia) TFAHR established for the first time the TFAHR International Field School. The idea was, by posting a request for applications on the internet, to bring together teachers, students, archaeologists, and volunteers from all over the world to work together on archaeological and historical projects. That year TFAHR sponsored 31 people from nine different countries.

In January of 2008 Mr. Boban Husenovski, an archaeologist with the Museum of Gevgelija, relayed an offer from Mr. Aleksander Danev, Director of the People's Museum of Sveti Nikole, to Mrs. Eulah Matthews and Dr. William Neidinger of TFAHR. That offer was for a cooperative venture to excavate an archaeological site (Bylazora) near Sveti Nikole, in the Republic of Macedonia. One of Mr. Danev's desires was to develop the site as an archaeological training school for aspiring students and teachers. This dovetailed nicely with TFAHR's already established International Field School.

All too often dig participants are, unfortunately, required to pay exorbitant fees to participate in an archaeological excavation and are often seen as nothing more than a source of unpaid labor or as a source of funds for some professor's archaeological project. We have heard from our students of their experiences paying large fees but getting very little in the way of archaeological experience, their activities being confined mainly to pushing wheelbarrows or clearing brush. The TFAHR International Field

School is different. All participants pay their own way to the excavation site; TFAHR pays for their room, board, and equipment. TFAHR also pays for the transportation on weekend field trips to other sites of historical interest; participants pay their own room and board on such trips. There are no fees, tuition, or registration costs to participate in a TFAHR dig.

In the three short years of its existence the TFAHR International Field School has changed dramatically. Our objective has always been to enable participants to gain hands-on experience in the manner in which historical evidence is uncovered, interpreted, and published. To that end we try to involve everyone in as many aspects of the excavation as possible. All are required to keep a daily field notebook and, at the end of each week, the students themselves (with their supervisors) prepare the official documentation of the site. Everyone is required to participate in all aspects of digging, from the heavy drudgery to the fine detail work. No one is pushed aside



Field school participants breaking topsoil, and doing fine work with hand tools.

when a discovery is made, so the “expert” can come in to do the final uncovering. On some excavations, once discoveries are made, the finds disappear into the dark recesses of a museum basement, where only a select few ever see or study the material; the man-in-the-field, then, never gets to see the end product of his labor. But in the TFAHR International Field School all team members wash the pottery finds daily and attend pottery analysis; and many, who show an inclination or talent to do so, are involved in the restoration and drawing, or lead the afternoon pottery analysis discussions.

One of the more recent developments of TFAHR International Field School has also been the one of which we are proudest, that is, allowing more participants more authority in the excavation process. Veterans from our earlier digs serve as trench supervisors and are given the responsibility to train new members. And in the 2009 season at Bylazora we had team members give lectures and conduct workshops in pottery analysis, field documentation, pottery drawing, and site measurement and drawing. TFAHR International Field School members also have contributed to the TFAHR annual reports on the excavation work. We make it possible for students and teachers to further their careers by publishing the results of the team’s work in professional journals, or using it for term papers or advanced degrees. Many receive college credit from their own universities for the work on our digs.

So many have expressed to us their thanks for the opportunities that TFAHR has made possible for them; we would like to pass those thanks on to those of you who have made TFAHR’s work possible by your generous donations and contributions.

#### **MEMBERS OF THE TFAHR INTERNATIONAL FIELD SCHOOL, BYLAZORA**

Pablo Aparico (Spain), 2009	Diane Mattly (California, USA), 2008 and 2009
Lucie Broncova (Czech Republic), 2008	Sonia McLaughlin (Canada), 2008
Viktoria Chystyakova (Ukraine), 2008	Nick Moignard (England), 2009
Tomas Davidov (Slovakia), 2008	William Neidinger (Texas, USA), 2008 and 2009
Amy Donaldson (Australia), 2008 and 2009	Sarah News (Canada), 2009
Adela Dornakova (Czech Republic), 2008	Joseph Noffsinger (Texas, USA), 2008
Padraic Empanan (California, USA), 2008 and 2009	Nikolas Noffsinger (Texas, USA), 2008
Ivy Faulkner (Arizona, USA), 2008	Rose O'Sullivan (Australia), 2008 and 2009
Gail Gant (Texas, USA), 2008 and 2009	Simon Oswald (New Zealand), 2009
Kenneth Gibson (Canada), 2009	Matej Pavlacky (Czech Republic), 2008
Jody Goldberg (California, USA), 2009	Magnus Persson (Sweden), 2008
David Hodo (Arkansas, USA), 2009	Molly Saville (New Jersey, USA), 2009
Boban Husenovski (Macedonia), 2008	Nicholas Shelden-Setten (Washington, USA), 2008 and 2009
Marianne Jansen (Norway), 2009	Paul Sirota (Texas, USA), 2008
Nikita Johnston (Canada), 2009	Adela Soukupova (Czech Republic), 2008 and 2009
Nicholas Johnstone (Scotland), 2009	Teresa Southwell (Texas, USA), 2008 and 2009
Jenny Jurica (Texas, USA), 2008	Jo-Simon Stokke (Norway), 2008 and 2009
Jana Kopackova (Czech Republic), 2008	Ola Svensson (Sweden), 2009
Veronika Kristofova (Slovakia), 2008	Slawomir Szyszka (Poland), 2009
Karel Kut (Czech Republic), 2008	Petra Tuslova (Czech Republic), 2008
Jana Lohnicka (Czech Republic), 2008	Tatiana Votroubekova (Slovakia), 2008
Francis Malec (California, USA), 2008	Jakub Zezule (Czech Republic), 2008
Mari Malmer (Norway), 2008 and 2009	
Eulah Matthews (Texas, USA), 2008 and 2009	

# TFAHR INTERNATIONAL FIELD SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

## FIELDWORK



Discussing a stratigraphic problem.



Measuring to produce site plans.



Scanning a trench with a metal detector.

## TFAHR INTERNATIONAL FIELD SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

### WORKING WITH FINDS



Discussing a pottery find in the field.

Every afternoon the Field School participates in “Pottery Reading,” the analysis of pottery. In this photo (right), the session is conducted by a Field School veteran.



Pottery is washed daily.



Practicing conservation and restoration of pottery.



Significant finds are drawn.



Sorting and cataloging artifacts for storage in the Sveti Nikole Museum.

## TFAHR INTERNATIONAL FIELD SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

### DOCUMENTING THE EXCAVATION



Photographs are taken daily in the field.



Producing official excavation documentation.



Producing site drawings and groundplans.

### EVENING LECTURES



In 2009 evening lectures and workshops on measuring the site (left) and drawing pottery (right) were presented by Field School participants.

### FIELD TRIPS



TFAHR provided transportation for weekend field trips, including these to Bargala (left) and Kokino (right). Our group was guided by experts from local Macedonian museums.