

## RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON THE PATTERSON BUNDLE

### A CLASH/MEETING OF NATIVE AMERICAN AND ANGLO CULTURES

*Including an interview with the author, Bennie LeBeau and Woableza.*

By Merry Lycett Harrison

The Patterson Bundle is a leather wrapped assemblage of Native American artifacts that was discovered by Bryce and Margaret Patterson in the Book Cliffs of southeastern Utah in the early 1980s. Margaret has reported that she saw a leather strand under a knee - high ledge. She started digging and followed the strand through dirt and many layers of juniper bark until she found a bundle the size of a shopping bag which she took home with her. (Note, it is illegal to remove Native American artifacts from government lands.) After several years and Bryce's passing, she decided to turn it into the BLM in Moab. Carbon dating show the leather wrapping to be between 400-600 years old which predates European contact. Bruce Louthan, field archaeologist for the Moab office of the BLM inventoried it and wrote an article titled "The Patterson Bundle: A Ute Subsistence Kit?" that was published in *Canyon Legacy: A Journal of the Dan O'Laurie Museum - Moab, Utah* (1990 Fall).

My interest in the Bundle began in 1998 when I spied a small collection of old roots in the display case at the BLM in Moab. As a trained clinical herbalist, skilled in wildcrafting and knowing something of the therapeutic value of certain wild herbs, my heart skipped a beat when I recognized one of the roots to be osha (*Ligusticum porteri*) a very potent herb that grows between 7,000 and 10,000 feet elevation.

I asked for and got permission from BLM to examine the root bundle more closely. When I arrived for the appointment to examine it, Mr. Louthan presented a carton of artifacts and asked if I would take a look and see if I understood anything about them. I carefully took out one plastic bag after another that contained smaller leather wrapped bundles of roots, stones, feathers, bones, whorls of bark for basketry and more. I did not realize at the time that everything I was seeing along with the other artifacts in the display case (a necklace of seed and bone, a spoon of wood and horn, stone blades, delicate fringe of leather and seed, a strand of deer dew claws, moccasins. **etc.**) was from this old Native American bundle.

When I finally examined the root bundle from the display case, I thought, "This is not food.". I knew that I wanted to work to identify the other roots. Mr. Louthan was very helpful in offering pertinent articles, photographs and

suggestions. A feature article on my research has been published in *HerbalGram, the Journal of the American Botanical Council, issue #55*, along with twenty color photographs by Moab resident Jim Blazik. In it I describe my process, method and list an inventory of what I believe the plants to be.

When I began my study, which was supported in part by the Utah Native Plant Society, my intention was to only work to identify the botanical parts. I was stunned to learn that the root bundles were only part of this very rare collection. The thrill of discovery, however, quickly turned into recognition that there may be more to the meaning and of this collection than just some extra stash of supplies. Could there be more “medicine” here than we realize? I started contemplating what all this might have meant to the person or peoples to whom it belonged. Not that I could know, but this line of thinking broadened my perspective from the limited identification of the plant parts to the notion that maybe all this was important in its entirety. Perhaps every item is related to the next, and though we may never know its use, I regarded it all as a potentially rich and revealing representation of a people and culture that we know very little about.

My initial approach of insistency to know changed to that of patient observation. I would lay elements of the bundle before me in my temporary workspace at the BLM and try to pay attention to the larger context. Since I could not find any similar research or collections in museums in surrounding states, I set out to University libraries to read old ethnographic and botanical texts, herbariums to study plants, and I combed through my own extensive library to refine my search for plants that could be found near to where the Bundle was discovered.

I thought that more might be understood about the context of the Bundle if more were known about the rest of the contents. There were several small bundles that contained faunal material, and I got permission to take them to the University of Utah to be identified by Jack Broughton, Ph.D., associate professor of anthropology. He was able to determine that among them there were rabbit foot bones from a cottontail, arm and leg bones from a jackrabbit, the tail of a short-eared owl, the skin of a small mammal, the headless body of a native trout and an unidentifiable body part.

I know what it takes to find certain medicinal roots. In the case of osha, I have to go up in the mountains to a particular bioregion with a certain sun exposure in just the right month when the snow has melted to be able to see it in flower so I don't confuse it with several other plants that look very similar but can kill you if ingested. But, just how in the world does one acquire an owl's tail? What use or meaning does it have?

Throughout my solitary journey of discovery which lasted 3 years, I always kept in mind that I was looking at and handling a collection whose use, value, purpose and meaning were unknown. My eventual assessment of the botanical parts was that they were from some of the most potent medicinal plants the area had to offer. They would have been very effective against respiratory and bronchial problems that are common among people who spend their winters in the high, dry desert. Even if the contents were used ceremonially, the value and knowledge the bundle holds is very significant.

Mr. Louthan told me that the appropriate Native Americans had been notified of the bundle's existence. It has not yet been claimed by any tribe, which usually requires a long process of paperwork and providing proof that it is of a their culture.

I am aware that Native Americans do not permit or endorse the removal of artifacts of their cultures from where they are placed or buried. It nagged at me that I was handling something of potentially sacred value and nothing had been done to care for it on that level. Having determination but no qualifications of my own to deal with this, I hoped this dimension would somehow come into the process. Help came when my friend Shirley Tassencourt, who knew of my research, called me from her straw bale house in the Arizona desert to say two Native Americans were coming to look at the rocks where she lived. They were Bennie LeBeau, a Shoshone elder from the Wind River reservation in Wyoming, and Woableza, a Lakota Souix medicine man and storyteller. Their work, she said, is to document Native American sacred sites that have been forgotten, defaced or misused so they can be recognized and protected. Their hope is that through education a greater understanding and respect between cultures can be established.

I drove to southern Arizona with three photographs of the bundle and my report to Utah Native Plant Society in hopes the men would talk with me. By the time I got there, Shirley had already informed them of my work. I met with Woableza and, though our conversation was brief, I felt as if I had finally been able to deliver a heavy load that I had been carrying.

We all agreed to meet the next day to talk together about the Bundle. Fortunately, we were in a friendly setting with supportive friends around us because the discussions did not start off well. They were furious! They expressed what I suppose is generations of frustration and anger that once again, one of their sacred items had been ripped from the earth where they believe it had been meant to remain. Mr. LeBeau explained that the area

from which it came was probably a vision quest area and that the “knowledges” the bundle holds could be learned by someone only as long as it remained buried there. He likened it to our encyclopedia. If all the pages get torn out, the knowledge is gone.

I tried to remain calm, and with the help of the beautiful weather and several glasses of cool iced tea from our host, Allegra Ahlquist, we moved forward. I reminded them that I did not dig up the Bundle. I explained that I thought the bundle was a very important piece in its entirety, and I was concerned that without attention it could become fragmented as different caretakers put some of the contents on display and others in storage. Sadly, several substantial pieces of its contents have already been stolen from the display case.

The men acknowledged that the spirit of the bundle had been disturbed and this was not a good thing. They maintain that ignorance is no excuse in these matters and that mishaps could come to people who disturb or deface Native American artifacts and rock art. This is what they believe. In spite of the fact that we would be working toward the same goal of protection and proper treatment of the Bundle, it was made very clear to me that though my intentions were good, it is really only for Native Americans to understand and care for it. I was invited to join a sweat lodge that they were going to lead that evening. This is a sacred and prayerful ceremony that has a way of clearing confusion and intentions.

Within a few weeks time Mr. LeBeau traveled to Moab to visit Margaret Patterson and the area where the Bundle was dug up, and he saw the large, restored, rock art panels in Sejo Canyon. Then we went to the BLM office to see the Bundle. By this point, he was very certain that a ceremony was necessary. Thus began the process of gaining permission to have access to the bundle to do so. After a mutually frank discussion with Mr. Louthan where both men spoke of their cultural prophets, how best to learn from the past, and a meeting in the board room to make sure that Mr. LeBeau was in no way laying claim to the Bundle, he was given permission to sing his songs (in the parking lot) and afterward stand by the display case and use sage smudge and feather fan to pray for and bless the spirit of the bundle while the work of land management went on all around us.

In writing this I wanted to include Mr. LeBeau’s and Woableza’s voices and was able to conduct a phone/email interview with them when they happened to be in the same place at the same time. Then they turned the tables on me and asked me a few questions.

(Note: While finishing this article, I learned that the Bundle has been moved to the BLM office in Vernal. I don't have all the details, but according to Donna Turnipseed, archeologist for the BLM office in Moab, they are considering beginning the process by which Native Americans may be able to participate in deciding the future of the Patterson Bundle.)

### **My questions to Mr. LeBeau and Woableza:**

*1) Why did you take an interest in the Patterson Bundle?*

Bennie: Because it was within our tribal linguistic groups migrational areas of people called the uto-aztecan groups of tribes

Woableza: Because there have been many sacrilegious unearthings of these types of medicine bundles and being a selected spiritual leader, I would like to compile all the information I can on such instances.

*2) What do you think are the differences between the Native American and Anglo's points of view when dealing with Native American artifacts?*

Bennie: The difference between Native American spiritual side is not understood by most Anglos on their spiritual side of the unseen knowledges which is not sacred to most of them. The Anglo point of view is not understood in the same direction and attitude of the spiritual consequences as Native Americans. Many sicknesses are taking place in the Anglo communities who have collected these artifacts and have infected their families and close associates with sicknesses and diseases because of these artifacts.

Woableza: It is my own feeling that the differences are #1. Our Native American elders and spiritual leaders who are very knowledgeable would never purchase or sell these sacred native artifacts. #2. The knowledgeable people would never expose the public to these inappropriately acquired sacred bundles which have certain powers that were only for the keeper. There is certain protocol if the sacred bundle is to be passed to someone other than the original keeper.

*3) In your view, what was the most important thing that helped to bridge this process and bring two very different cultural perspectives together?*

Bennie: Bridging the officials of the BLM management in the archaeology and upper level management on the cultural resource areas that have been impacted on Native American knowledges of these areas. Representatives of tribal entities need to have their input within their regulations and guidelines. Without these kinds of people being invited, a great imbalance can take place in the environment of where these artifacts are dug up. The land becomes sick. Droughts can happen. Sicknesses fall upon the animals, plants and humans, and much death takes place in the environment. Educating these governmental agencies and other educational institutions on Native American perspectives helps them to

understand Native American perspectives on the importance of protecting our sacred sites, including burial sites.

Woableza: In the case of the Patterson Bundle, it was respectful that Mrs. Harrison thought it best to make the connection to Native Americans. She traveled long distances, spent a lot of time on the project, and tried to build a bridge of respect among the races. In her observations, she respected that we all have spiritual origins and that these spiritual ways still exist among the native peoples. I am glad that she did not base all her writings on published books.

4) *One of the most important things I learned from working with you, Mr. LeBeau, is how to regard and treat Native American sacred sites. From Woableza I learned about the power of storytelling. Did you learn anything from me?*

Bennie: What I learned from her was that she had been affected by her search to find what each plant represented and the sicknesses that they helped. An obsession had entered into her mind and took her on a long journey, causing a great imbalance within the mind, body and spirit. Within the family and every day living circumstances, we can be affected by these certain bundles that have been taken out of the ground disrespectfully. She did not take that out of the ground, but by coming in contact with it and studying the many plants, rock artifacts, owl feathers, fish, jewelry including ochre paint, had certain consequences to be dealt with spiritually. This person's belongings showed that this was a powerful medicine bundle of the person that was buried there with it who doctored their people.

Woableza: What I learned from Mrs. Harrison is that she is an herbalogist and has many gifts to offer. She has opened a doorway to another dimension of thinking that will always have to be updated and carefully discussed to respect all cultures.

5) *How would you like to see the Bundle cared for in the future?*

Mr. LeBeau: "I would like to see the bundle treated with the greatest of respect in educating both the Native Americans and the public. On this point, that the plants are very important to us as humans and that the information be used to protect our heritage as Native Americans in the future with the Native American Graves Protection Agency. Also to stress the importance of strengthening new legislation in the laws to protect our sacredness within this situation and others that will arise in the near future. Also, if the tribes are going to be invited to Vernal to talk on this there, I would hope this would be the place to generate this kind of message to governmental agencies and tribal agencies also. "

### **Mr. LeBeau's and Woableza's questions to me:**

1) *What has the Bundle taught you on a personal level?*

First of all, as an herbalist, I feel privileged to see and study these very old medicinal plants. Up until this point most of my herbal education information could be found in books. This experience has added a new and welcome dimension that will make me a better teacher. It is an affirmation of botanical medicine not to be taken lightly because whatever knowledge is here must have been handed down through generations and has contributed to what we know today about how to use the plants. There is very much that is indeed personal about my experience with the bundle. There were several years before I met Mr. LeBeau and Woableza that I spent in quiet, solitary research. Because it seemed like such a positive thing to be recognizing the identity and potential value of these roots, it was certainly disillusioning to be told, however kindly, that really my work was an invasion of the rights of Native American culture that they had no obligation to share.

*2) How has the Native American perspective helped or changed your life?*

Before we met, I was feeling really stretched. Adding the Native American perspective brought better balance to everything, including me. Mr. LeBeau told me I needed a ceremony and I gladly took him up on his offer more than once. Afterwards, I was more at ease about the Bundle and my work. As I shared what I knew of the Moab area with them, they shared some of their points of view and interpretations of rock art and sacred sites with me. I certainly see and travel in such places differently now in ways that are more respectful by their standards.

*How have the stories you have learned tie in with the Bundle?*

My view has greatly expanded as a result of my work and our association. What began as a limited study of the botanical parts of the Bundle grew into a wider understanding and appreciation that there are Native American cultural connections that can be drawn between the Bundle, the landscape, rock art and more.

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