

Romuald Schild

FRED WENDORF, Jr.

31 July 1924 – 15 July 2015

**The Founder of the Combined Prehistoric Expedition
and for Several Decades its Guiding Spirit¹**

Prologue

Fred's curiosity in archaeology commenced in 1932 when walking over a cotton field near his home in Terrell, in East Texas, where he found an old Indian camp and collected a handful of stone arrowheads. This first discovery led to further cotton fields reconnaissances and more or less systematic surface collections and recording of sites. Fred planned to study archaeology at the University of Arizona at Tuscon, a dream that he began to fulfill. At the age of eighteen, however, in 1942, he enlisted in the army and two months later was ordered to report for active duty. Early in 1944, Fred was commissioned a second Lieutenant in the infantry and came forward to join the 10th Mountain Division in the Ital-

¹ This obituary also draws on some opinions expressed by the author in the *Introduction* to the *Desert Days* by Fred Wendorf, Dallas 2008, *Brothers in Archaeology* by Fred Wendorf and Romuald Schild (Before Farming 2005/1: article 9:1-28) and *Obituary, Fred Wendorf, Jr. (1924-2015)*, Sudan end Nubia 19 (2015):181-184. The author wishes to express his deep gratitude to Ms Anna Christine Bednar, a dear friend and his late brother's wife, who helped him to overcome several intricacies of written English.

ian front. A few months later, in early March 1944, while fighting the Germans in Northern Italy, near Bologna, he was critically injured by a shell fragment that entered his upper chest. As a result, he spent almost two years in army hospitals. Before leaving the hospital, though, he made arrangements to return to Tuscon. Thus, in early 1947, Fred returned to the University of Arizona at Tuscon and in mid 1948 received a BA degree with a major in anthropology and almost straight away entered graduate school in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard. In June 1949, Fred initiated his Ph.D. dissertation research project at the Petrified Forest National Monument in Eastern Arizona excavating the Flattop Site dated to mid 1st millennium AD. In March 1953, he defended the dissertation, which was published, also in 1953, by the Museum of Northern Arizona. However, already in July 1950, after concluding the Flattop Site field project, Fred became the Field Director for the first-ever salvage archaeology project carried out during the construction of a gas pipeline in New Mexico.

1. American antiquities

Fred Wendorf always believed that the most intellectually challenging research in his early professional years was the study, begun in November 1953 with Claude Albritton, Alex Krieger, and T. Dale Stewart, of a Final Pleistocene Paleoindian human burial at Midland, Texas, one of the oldest Early Man remains in the Americas. The associated extinct fauna certainly preceded the Folsom Paleoindian event (see the leading publication by Wendorf *et al.* 1955). The work at Midland led in 1956 to the five year Llano Estacado (Staked Plains) Project in the Southern High Plains of West Texas, which was devoted to the reconstruction of the Late Pleistocene and early recent vegetation and climatic history of the area (Wendorf 1961).

In the same year, Fred met Ralph Rounds, the owner of a large timber company operating in the mountains of New Mexico, near Taos, where the First US Dragoons' Cantonment Burgwin (1852-1860) had been originally located and whose remains Fred was able to pinpoint. The ensuing research eventually led to the reconstruction of the fort, the formation of the Fort Burgwin Research Center and finally to the setting up of the western campus of Southern Methodist University (Wendorf with Brooks 2007), where the *Fred Wendorf Information Center* was created in July 2004.

In 1970, the underwater exploration of a Spanish shipwreck near Padre Island concluded Wendorf's fieldwork on American antiquities. Several legal problems



Fig. 1. Fred Wendorf at the Combined Prehistoric Expedition camp at Nabta Playa, Season 2006 (photo: Maciej Jórdeczka)

resulting from this research led directly to the Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987 which protects historical shipwrecks in US waters.

2. The Combined Prehistoric Expedition

2.1. Nubian salvage campaign

1961 was the year that Fred Wendorf's Great African Scientific Adventure was set in motion. It changed his entire life, both private and professional. From this point on almost nothing was the same. The new Fred Wendorf was born again. It began quite innocently in the summer of 1961 with the reading of a newspaper story about UNESCO's plans to save the archaeological remains, located where the Aswan Reservoir would be created, from annihilation and the earmarking by the US Congress of considerable funds to assist American involvement in the venture. Jim Hester, a colleague of Fred's in the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe, suggested to him that their experience in managing large-scale salvage projects in the US would be a great asset in applying for the funds and suggested that the prehistoric occurrences along the Nile in Lower Nubia would be the goal of their involvement in the project.

In November 1961, Fred contacted J. O. Brew, his Ph.D. adviser at Harvard and then a member of the UNESCO Commission responsible for preparation of the Nubian Salvage undertaking. Professor Brew was willing to help; however, he pointed out that several prehistorians whom he had contacted were very skeptical about the presence of valuable stone age sites in the Nubian section of the Nile Valley and/or had cast doubt on the scientific interest that those sites may stimulate if found. Fred, however, was not discouraged by these negative opinions and convinced Brew that he would accept the challenge. Finally, Brew asked Fred to write two grant proposals: one concerning Egypt and the other for the Sudanese part of the future reservoir. The first would be addressed to the Foreign Currency Program at the U. S. State Department, acting under Public Law 87-332 voted by the Congress, and the second to the National Science Foundation. In June 1962, the funds were awarded. These were the first of a very long sequence of grants awarded to Fred Wendorf in the course of dozens consecutive years.

In the intervening time, in the winter season of 1961/1962, a group of very experienced prehistorians and Quaternary geologists directed by Ralph Solecki and Rhodes Fairbridge made an initial reconnaissance around Wadi Halfa, in the Sudanese section of the reservoir area. However, the leaders of the group, having

important scientific interests in other parts of the world, decided not to pursue fieldwork in the area, and Solecki left the discovered Paleolithic sites at Fred's disposal. He also suggested that some of the members of the survey group might join the missions being organized by Fred, then director of research and associate director of the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe.

Finally, three expeditions were allotted for work on the Paleolithic in the Aswan Reservoir area: the Combined Prehistoric Expedition (CPE), until September 1965 officially called the New Mexico Museum Expedition; the Yale Expedition, conjointly supported by the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, and the Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin; and the third formed by the National Museum of Canada and the University of Toronto. A small group composed of three prehistorians on the staff of the University of Colorado also worked on the Paleolithic and Epipaleolithic localities on the west bank of the Nile in Wadi Halfa, Sudan.

The field concessions assigned to the CPE in Egypt extended on the west bank of the Nile from the New (High) Dam in Aswan to a point opposite Korosko and from Aniba to the Sudanese border. In Sudan, the concession on the east bank reached out from the Second Cataract to the Dal Cataract. On the opposite bank, it ran from the frontier to the head of the reservoir, close to the Dal Cataract.

At the invitation of Fred Wendorf, several scientists from seven countries (Belgium, Egypt, France, Poland, Sudan, United Kingdom and the United States) took part in the expedition. After the Lake Como conference in 1965 on the Prehistory in Aswan Reservoir, the mission began to be called the *Combined Prehistoric Expedition* (CPE). In 1964, Fred Wendorf left the Museum of New Mexico and joined the staff of Southern Methodist University. Later, in the late 60s, the American, Polish and Egyptian scientists formed the core of the Expedition; however, a score of researchers from around the world still participated in the venture, both in the fieldwork and the resulting laboratory studies. Respectively, three institutions: Southern Methodist University, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, and Geological Survey of Egypt, jointly sponsored the work of the CPE. Essentially, the NSF and US State Department provided financial support in the field throughout most of the seasons till 1999. In recent years, up until 2016, considerable support has come from the Combined Prehistoric Expedition Foundation, a private body of donors. In 1972, Romuald Schild became the Associate Director of the Expedition, serving in this role until the retirement of Fred Wendorf in 1999, who then assumed the Honorary Directorship of CPE, while Romuald Schild began to serve as the Director of the Expedition up to his retirement in 2007.

The CPE Nubia Campaign extended from the field season of 1962/1963 to the short season of 1967 at Jebel Sahaba, Sudan. The resulting two volumes, a monumental account of the CPE mission in the reservoir published in 1968 (Wendorf ed. 1968), is the first summary of the earliest prehistory of the Nile Valley between the High Dam, in the north, and the II_d Cataract, in the south. Until the research of the Nubia Salvage Campaign, the area was considered to be developmental boondocks. On the contrary, the study of numerous sites of various stylistic and technological affiliations, extending in time from the middle Holocene all the way back to the Lower Paleolithic, helped to define entirely new time/space entities with a distinctive approach to the surrounding ecological niches. On the other hand, a profound study of the local geomorphology helped to outline the chronological and environmental places of the prehistoric units. In addition to the studies in the Nubian Nile Valley, a few Middle Paleolithic and several early Neolithic occurrences were investigated, under the direction of Jim Hester (Hester and Hoebler 1969) in the small oases of Dungul and Kurkur in the South Western Desert of Egypt (1962-1965).

2.2. Upper Egypt and Fayum

After the Campaign, Fred Wendorf decided to continue the work in the Nile Valley downstream from Aswan. At the very beginning of the 1967 field season and on the very first day of the survey, the CPE found extremely numerous Paleolithic sites, partially buried in the Nilotic and eolian deposits in the lower Wadi Kubbania, a structural left bank tributary of the Nile Valley, located some 20 km downstream from Aswan. The sites contained frequent and large intriguing grinding stones. Fred decided to return to the wadi at a later time. However, the outbreak of war in June 1967 and the subsequent setting up of military installations in the vicinity of Wadi Kubbania closed the area to excavations until 1977. In 1978, the first field season was completed. The season appeared very promising and discoveries of supposed barley grains in Paleolithic beds seemed to be sensational (Wendorf *et al.* 1979; assembled by Wendorf and Schild, Close, ed. 1980) A later, direct AMS radiometric aging of the grains indicated that they were intrusive (Wendorf *et al.* 1984) and, at two standard deviations, early Predynastic to Dynasty I in age (about 4050 to 3000 calibrated years BCE). Obviously, a continuation of the work in the wadi was strongly advised. The CPE returned to Wadi Kubbania in the field seasons of 1981-1984.

Meanwhile, the CPE spent four field seasons in Upper Egypt, near Edfu and Esna (1967) and north of Luxor, at Dandara, Makhatma and Dishna (1968). A year

later the CPE Mission carried out two field seasons on the northern ancient Lake Fayum shores (1969). Here, the CPE, for the first time in the Egyptian Stone Age research, reconstructed the Holocene fluctuations of the Holocene Lake Qarun and correlated them with human presence. The results of the Upper Egypt and Fayum research were published in 1976 (Wendorf and Schild).

Particularly, the CPE studies in stratigraphy and absolute chronology of the Late Paleolithic sites embedded in Nilotic sediments and the associated desert deposits in the Wadi Kubbania and Esna areas, north of Aswan, brought about new chronological placement of several Late Paleolithic entities and reversed our understanding of the Late Pleistocene Nile dynamics. On the other hand, the discovery of abundant charred floral macro-remains, and fossil faunas in the mouth of Wadi Kubbania have opened up exciting new vistas of Late Paleolithic economies. Results of the research conducted in the Esna and Wadi Kubbania areas were presented in several detailed reports (assembled by Wendorf and Schild 1986; 1989a; 1989b; Wendorf *et al.* 1997).

2.3. *The Western Desert*

Political circumstances developed in the aftermath of the six-day war between Israel and some of the Arab countries in June 1967 closed off most of the areas in the Nile Valley to foreign archaeological expeditions. The South Western Desert, however, was more or less open to work and except for brief excavations (1930-1932) in the Oasis of Kharga by Caton-Thompson and Gardner and in Kurkur and Dungul by Hester, it was still an uncharted territory as far as the Stone Age archaeology was concerned. Fred Wendorf decided to take the chance.

At the beginning, in 1972, only a few signs suggested that a new archaeological dreamland was buried there in the sands, spring vents, lacustrine carbonaceous deposits and clays of perennial and seasonal lakes. The Oasis of Dakhla was the first shot, promising, but not so exciting to us. Although the bases of two ancient, eroded spring vents yielded a huge, the largest in Egypt, lithic assemblages of the Late Acheulean stylistics (Schild and Wendorf 1977), that was not very unusual in Africa. A brief reconnaissance trip from Dakhla to the high, real desert south of Dakhla, led to the discovery of exposed numerous Early to Middle Paleolithic and Holocene sites. A trip to Bir Sahara East and Bir Tarfawi, which are small, uninhabitable oases, found a year or so earlier by one of the first desert geologists, our friend and co-worker Bahay Issawi, unveiled archaeological riches glittering in the sun on the exposed shores of ancient deep-water lakes in the Br Sahara and Bir Tarfawi areas.

There, in the heart of the South Western Desert, in the driest region on earth, laid uncovered and buried lithic artifacts, stones and bones of animals that today live thousands of kilometers to the south. Subsequent detailed work (1973, 1974, 1985-1988), disclosed a complex sequence of perennial lakes and springs with embedded archaeological and faunal remains (Schild and Wendorf 1981; Wendorf *et al.* 1993). Very many dates obtained with the help of an array of methods placed the lakes in the wet episodes coinciding with interglacials and interstadials of the Middle and Late Pleistocene, namely in the warm phases in Marine Isotope Stages 11, 9, 7, 5, and 4. These ages have shown for the first time that the Saharan so-called *pluvials* are not coeval with glacial advances in the Northern Hemisphere, a theory so much favored by archaeologists and Quaternary geomorphologists during most of the last century. The archaeofaunas, fish bones and copious remains of small vertebrates have proved the richness of the lake environments, which hosted crocodiles and Nilotic fish, while the surrounding savanna supported herds of antelopes, giant buffalos and rhinoceroses. No comparable materials have ever been recovered from the ancient lakes of North Africa.

In 1973, a casual stop on the way from Bir Sahara East to Abu Simbel in the Nile Valley led to one of the most important discoveries in the history of prehistoric archaeology of the Sahara, the discovery of Nabta Playa, a paleolake basin with hundreds of stone age sites, tumuli, stone structures and stelae, all associated with intricate stratigraphy and geomorphology. The evident richness and importance of the discovery convinced Fred to switch the CPE main efforts to the Nabta area, at least for some time. The early excavations at Nabta (1974-1975, 1977) and the successive surveys of most of the South Western Desert resulted in the excavations of numerous Neolithic sites at Kharga Oasis (1976), along the Kiseiba Scarp (1979-1980), at Bir Safsaf and Wadi Arid (1984-1985, 1990, 1991). A return of the CPE to Nabta (1990-1994, 1996-2000, 2002-2009) and the work at the foot of the nearby Gebel Ramlah (2001, continued until today with a team lead since 2009 by Jacek Kabaciński) completed the picture (Wendorf and Schild 1980; Banks 1984; Wendorf *et al.* 2001; Nelson and Associates 2002; Kobusiewicz *et al.* 2010).

The geoarchaeological research of the Combined Prehistoric Expedition along the Main Nile and in the South Western Desert established that after a long period of hyperarid climates roughly coeval with Marine Isotope Stages 4, 3 and 2, extending from about 70,000 years ago to about 14,000 years ago, the first human settlers appeared in the desert areas about 11,500 cal. years BP and, except for the minor hyper-arid spells, remained in this zone up to about 5500 - 5000 cal. years BP.

Perhaps the most important discoveries of the CPE in the Eastern Sahara are the ones linked to the prehistoric sacred places: astronomic installations as well as fields of offering and remembrance with various tumuli, groups of stelae and lines of menhirs. All of these extend in time from about 9000 cal. years BP to about 5000 cal. years BP and are concentrated in the area of Nabta Playa, the largest inland drainage basin in southeastern Egypt.

It is also the work in the South Western Desert that brought about a hotly debated hypothesis regarding the early domestication of wild cattle in the Early Holocene (e.g., Gautier 2007). In this vein, the CPE research has also led botanists working with the CPE teams to propose that the intensive collection, and perhaps the early domestication, of sorghum occurred in the upper Early Holocene (Wasylikowa *et al* 2001).

2.4. Ethiopia and Sinai

It seems obvious that in the account of various scientific achievements of Fred's and the CPE one cannot omit the investigations in East Africa and the studies of a multilayered Middle Stone Age sites in the Ethiopian Central Rift Valley, near Lake Ziway, which disclosed a long sequence of Middle Stone Age camps, the oldest of which, at Gademotta and Kulkuleti (1971-1973 seasons), dated to about 300,000 years ago, and are amongst the few most ancient Middle Stone Age occupations in the world. The report on these works (*Middle Stone Age Sequence from the Central Rift Valley, Ethiopia*) was published in 1974 (Wendorf and Schild). One also should remember Fred's initiatives leading to a two-season (1995-1996) salvage project in eastern Sinai, focused on Middle Paleolithic sites as well as Neolithic and Bronze Age villages and sacred constructions. A detailed report of these efforts was published in 1999 (Eddy and Wendorf, eds.).

3. Teaching, administration and honors

Nearing retirement, Fred Wendorf generously donated his vast collection of prehistoric artifacts from Sudan and Egypt to the British Museum. Besides the materials stored in facilities in Sudan and Egypt, the Fred Wendorf Collection is the world's largest assortment of Stone Age relics and human remains from the upper Nile Valley, the Aswan Lake reservoir, the Northern Fayum Depression, and the Eastern Sahara. In most cases, these archaeological areas have been almost completely wiped out by the ever-expanding reclamation.

Beyond the field and scientific writing, Fred Wendorf was a talented teacher and administrator. From 1956 to June 1976 he served as director of the Fort Burgwin Research Center as well as associate director of the museum and associate professor of anthropology at Texas Technological University at Lubbock (1956-1958). In September 1958, he accepted the position of director of research and associate director of the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe (1958-1964). In August 1964, Fred commenced his teaching and administrative employment at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, which ended with his retirement in 2002, when he became the Henderson-Morrison Professor of Prehistory, *Emeritus*. He is widely acknowledged as the founder of SMU's Anthropology Department.

In 1974, Fred was elected treasurer for the Society for American Archaeology and in 1978 became its president. From 1983 to 1987 and by appointment by President Ronald Reagan, he became a member of the Secretary of the Interior's Board for the National Park Service; in 1985-1987 he served as its chair. A year later he was appointed, again by President Reagan, to the Cultural Properties Advisory Committee (1988-1989). From 1995 to 1997 Fred served as president of the Society of Professional Archaeologists. In 1980, Fred was voted into the presidency of the International Commission of the Later Prehistory of North Eastern Africa.

The archaeological world has acknowledged Fred's outstanding ability for doing archaeology and bestowed upon him several numbers of its honors of great magnitude. Of all these, Fred was always proudest of his membership in the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America. For my part, I am delighted with his membership in the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. One needs to also add to this record the Lucy Wharton Drexel Medal for Archaeological Achievements; an honorary Doctor of Sciences presented by SMU; and the Egyptian Geological Survey Award; to list but a few.

4. Closing remarks

As early as the 1980s, the renowned late African archaeologist Desmond Clark, enumerating Fred's archaeological accomplishments in the prehistoric archaeology of Africa, wrote that: 'There are few who can match his achievements' (Clark 1987). Twenty-eight years later another eminent prehistorian, John Yellen, founder and president of the Paleoanthropology Society and program director for archaeology at the National Science Foundation, stated that Fred Wendorf stands as a giant in his contributions to Northeast African archaeology and that "his contributions and insights also constitute a guiding framework." Fred's scien-

tific approach to fieldwork, involving the support of many disciplines in order to understand the human settlement in the deserts and savannas of North Eastern Africa will continue to strongly inspire the methods of doing Stone Age archaeology for a long time to come.

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