

# A Well-Kept Secret



Leigh Haeger

In the 1940s, a young cowboy named Waldo Wilcox stumbled upon an ancient treasure in a remote area in Utah called Range Creek Canyon.

He found an elegant woven basket of grass and willow in an old stone-walled house. When he looked around some more, the young cowpoke couldn't believe his eyes. Pottery, weapons, and other ancient houses dotted the area.

"I thought, this stuff has got to be protected," he told *The Washington Post*. Wilcox was afraid that if word got out about his discovery, tourists, collectors, and vandals would ravage the site, as they had done other ancient sites of the Southwest.

So Wilcox protected the 4,200-acre area the best way he knew how: He didn't tell a soul. He even bought the land in 1951 to raise cattle. He and his family went to great lengths to keep the secret. They even built gates to keep people out.

When Wilcox decided to sell his land, he wanted to make sure that whoever bought the property would preserve the site. To do that, he sold the ranch to a local preservation group. The group then transferred the land to the state of Utah.

Scientists immediately knew that the site was littered with historic relics. Once Wilcox's secret was out of the bag, they began visiting the remote canyon. Scientists hoped to unravel the mysteries of an ancient Native American culture that had roamed Utah thousands of years ago. Those Native Americans were called the Fremont people.

## Meet the Fremont

The Fremont were hunter-gatherers and farmers who inhabited the high-desert Book Cliffs in present-day Utah from about A.D. 500 to 1300.

In the canyon, the ruins of small villages are spread out along a 12-mile stretch of Range Creek, about two hours southeast of Salt Lake City.



*Ellen Sue Turner*

The Fremont people once lived in Range Creek Canyon.

"We've documented about 225 sites, and it's just scratching the surface," said Kevin Jones, a state of Utah archaeologist.

Almost all the sites include **granaries**, beehive-shaped storehouses for grain. Some granaries are the size of cupboards. Others are several yards across. Many of the granaries are perfectly preserved. Some were still filled with grass seed and corn--just the way the Fremont had left them.

Archaeologists also found granaries on cliff ledges. They suspect the Fremont put the granaries there to protect the food supply from rodents and raiders. Scientists say the granaries are evidence that the Fremont moved from place to place, leaving stashes of food at each stop.



*Ellen Sue Turner*

These pottery fragments were found at Range Creek Canyon.

Arrowheads, pottery fragments, and other artifacts lie on the ground at other village sites. Most of the homes are intact too, although the roofs of the houses in which the Fremont people lived collapsed long ago. The dwellings were once "warm and snug in the winter and cool in the summer," Jones said.

### **Where Did They Go?**

Scientists say the Fremont people disappeared about 800 years ago. No one knows exactly why. Jones guesses they might have starved to death or joined other tribes.

Archaeologists hope to unravel the mysteries of the Fremont, but it could take many years of research. Only some scientists, college students, and government officials are now allowed to visit the Fremont village sites.

Meanwhile, government officials are trying to decide how to allow public access to Range Creek without damaging the ancient village sites. "If everyone in Utah came down here," Jones said, "it would be loved to death."

Scientists say if Waldo Wilcox had not kept his mouth shut all these years, the ruins would have been ransacked.

"I was cussed all my life for locking those gates," the 74-year-old Wilcox told a reporter. "Now the archaeologists tell me we were heroes for doing that."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. According to the passage, when did Waldo Wilcox first find Range Creek Canyon?
  - A 1950's
  - B 1840's
  - C 1940's
  - D 1330's
  
2. According to the passage's description, which of the following items did archeologists NOT find at Range Creek?
  - A granaries with seed and corn
  - B arrowheads and pottery
  - C homes that people lived in
  - D bones of ancient animals
  
3. Why did Wilcox most likely sell his land to a local preservation group?
  - A He is good friends with the people in the preservation group.
  - B He believed the local preservation group would respect the land.
  - C The local preservation group offered him a fair price.
  - D The local preservation group had done him a favor.
  
4. Read the following sentence and answer the question below: "Wilcox was afraid that if word got out about his discovery, tourists, collectors, and vandals would ravage the site."

As used in this sentence, **ravage** means

  - A to visit
  - B to respect
  - C to damage
  - D to photograph
  
5. What is this passage mostly about?
  - A how one man helped preserve ancient villages in Range Creek Canyon
  - B how one man bought land in an ancient village of Fremont
  - C how to raise cattle on a farm
  - D the story of the cowboy Waldo Wilcox's life

6. What are three ways Wilcox helped protect Range Creek Canyon?

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7. According to the passage, did the Fremont people only eat the food they farmed? Why or why not?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Government officials want to allow visitors to Range Creek, \_\_\_\_\_ they are worried about damaging the ancient village sites.

- A but
- B because
- C so
- D after

9. Answer the questions based on the sentence below.

Waldo Wilcox wanted to protect the ancient ruins in Range Creek because he was worried that vandals would destroy it.

Who? Waldo Wilcox

What? \_\_\_\_\_

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

**10.** Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

**Vocabulary Word:** preserve (pre · serve): to make it last.

**10a.** Read the five sentences below and underline the word **preserve** in each sentence.

1. Museums don't allow people to touch important artifacts in order to preserve them for many years.
2. Wilcox helped preserve the Fremont artifacts from thieves who might steal them from the site.
3. In order to preserve your teeth, make sure you brush them often, so they don't get cavities.
4. You can help preserve the environment by not littering when you visit national parks.
5. We had more strawberries than we could eat, so we preserved them by making them into jam to eat in the winter.

**10b.** What is something that needs to be preserved?



**11.** What are some ways in which museum visitors can help preserve ancient artifacts when they visit?

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 890

**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

**Passage Summary:** This passage describes artifacts found in ancient villages of the Fremont people located in Range Creek Canyon, Utah. Waldo Wilcox discovered these ancient villages and preserved them for many years.

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- C **1940's**
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2. According to the passage's description, which of the following items did archeologists NOT find at Range Creek?

- A granaries with seed and corn
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- C homes that people lived in
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3. Why did Wilcox most likely sell his land to a local preservation group?

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- C The local preservation group offered him a fair price.
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4. Read the following sentence and answer the question below: "Wilcox was afraid that if word got out about his discovery, tourists, collectors, and vandals would ravage the site."

As used in this sentence, **ravage** means

- A to visit
- B to respect
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5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A **how one man helped preserve ancient villages in Range Creek Canyon**
- B how one man bought land in an ancient village of Fremont
- C how to raise cattle on a farm
- D the story of the cowboy Waldo Wilcox's life

6. What are three ways Wilcox helped protect Range Creek Canyon?

**Suggested answer:** The three ways Wilcox helped protect the Canyon were: he did not tell anyone about his discovery, he bought the land to raise cattle and built a fence to keep people out, and he later sold the land to a local preservation group. [See paragraphs 4 & 5]

7. According to the passage, did the Fremont people only eat the food they farmed? Why or why not?

**Suggested answer:** No, because the passage says that they were also hunter-gatherers, which means they hunted for animals and gathered fruits and vegetables. Also, the passage mentions that they found weapons and arrowheads, which can be used to hunt. [see paragraphs 2 & 7]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Government officials want to allow visitors to Range Creek, \_\_\_\_\_ they are worried about damaging the ancient village sites.

- A but
- B because
- C so
- D after

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Waldo Wilcox wanted to protect the ancient ruins in Range Creek because he was worried that vandals would destroy it.

Who? Waldo Wilcox

What? **wanted to protect the ancient ruins**

Where? **in Range Creek**

Why? **because he was worried that vandals and collectors would destroy it**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

**Vocabulary Word:** preserve

**Step 1:** Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (pre-serve)
- b. Teacher says: "This word is preserve. What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "preserve."]

**Step 2:** Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: "Preserve means to make it last. When you preserve something you make sure it stays the same and doesn't get damaged over time."
- b. Teacher says: "You can help preserve ancient artifacts, like in museums, by treating them carefully and not touching them. Wilcox wanted to preserve the artifacts in Range Creek Canyon because he was worried that people would damage them."
- c. Teacher says: "What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "preserve."]

**Step 3:** Practice the word

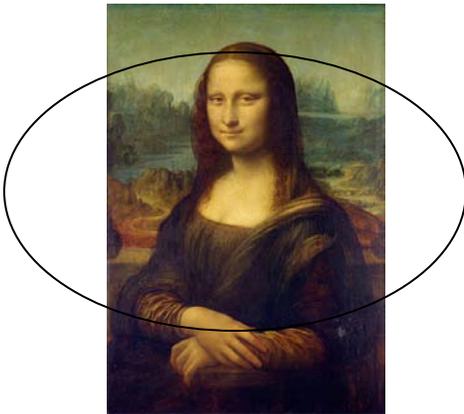
Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

- 10a.**
1. Museums don't allow people to touch important artifacts in order to preserve them for many years.
  2. Wilcox helped preserve the Fremont artifacts from thieves who might steal them from the site.
  3. In order to preserve your teeth, make sure you brush them often, so they don't get cavities.
  4. You can help preserve the environment by not littering when you visit national parks.
  5. We had more strawberries than we could eat, so we preserved them by making them into jam to eat in the winter.

**Step 4:** Check for student understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** What is something that needs to be preserved?



- 11.** What are some ways in which museum visitors can help preserve ancient artifacts when they visit?

**Suggested answer:** Museum visitors can help preserve ancient artifacts by not touching or stealing anything so other people can see them in the future.

*Suggested Additional Vocabulary:* stumbled, elegant, vandals, ravage, ancient, documented, ransacked