

12/13/2020

## Laiken Interview-Border Wall

00:00:05 **Emily**

Welcome to the Women in Archaeology podcast, a podcast for, about, and by women in the field of archaeology. On this episode we're going to discuss the ongoing crisis with the construction of the border wall and the destruction of sacred sites, culture resources, and fragile ecosystems. I'm Emily Long and here with my fellow hosts Chelsi Slotten and we have a special guest who's an expert on this topic that we'll be discussing and we're very excited to have Laiken Jordahl from the Center for Biological Diversity on our podcast. Thank you for joining us.

00:00:39 **Laiken**

Yeah good to be here

00:00:41 **Emily**

Happy to have you and before we get into today's discussion, can you tell us about yourself?

00:00:47 **Laiken**

Sure. So my name is Laiken. I work with the Center for Biological Diversity based on occupied O'odham lands in Tucson, Arizona. I've worked with the center for just over three years now and before I join the center, I actually worked with the National Park Service, which was my dream job in so many ways. All over the intermountain West, basically putting together assessments of the biggest threats facing wilderness and wilderness character, which of course includes cultural, archaeological, and historic sites. So I was lucky enough to work at Organ Pipe, at Big Bend, at Grand Teton, and at Capitol Reef, but not long after 2016 after the new president came in office it became pretty clear to me that I was gonna have to take a more active role in fighting to protect these places if I really wanted to see them adequately protected. So I quit and now I work with the center for biological diversity, which is a great home for me in this current climate.

00:01:46 **Emily**

What was it that made you, specifically about this field of what needs to protect these places that you were just like I got to, I got to protect these places?

00:01:54 **Laiken**

Just a deep love for them. I think like so many kids right? It was just my dream to be a park ranger. The idea of getting to spend time in these beautiful wilderness areas and protect resources for future generations was really appealing to me, of course, you know a sense of adventure was also key to that desire for me. But yeah, I think from a very early age, you know, I grew up in Flagstaff, Arizona. I had a wealth of just beautiful public lands and outdoor spaces to enjoy and kind of find

myself in as a teenager and it was just so clear to me that I wanted to make sure that future generations have the opportunity to also experience that that glory. So yeah, I've always wanted to work in conservation also with a big focus on environmental justice and accessibility for people all across the country and not just wealthy white folks.

00:02:54 **Emily**

Yes, that's amazing. And I'm sure the Park Service hat, you know, it's pretty cool too, you know the park ranger stiff hat. I was a very sad I didn't get one when I worked for the parks.

00:03:13 **Laiken**

Totally, totally. Yeah, it feels like you're joining this really cool club, which I was honored to be a part of but by the time the current Administration took office, it was really clear there was a significant cultural shift happening in the agency's. I was directly asked to stop talking about climate change research in my reporting. You know, I think because people didn't want to have that in the spotlight. They feared that they would lose funding if it came to light that they were putting a lot of energy and time into climate change research. And yeah, it was kind of like a really serious reality check and yeah, not long into 2017 I ended up leaving for good

00:03:56 **Chelsi**

Yeah there have been a lot of paradigm shifts in the last three years.

00:04:01 **Laiken**

Yes, I still have a lot of friends who work for the agencies and I think they have endured the most difficult three years of their entire careers.

00:04:08 **Emily**

I believe it. It seems pretty across the board for a lot of the federal agencies that there's such a, not only just like cultural shift, but I mean as shift in the policy, in the language, and how things are done, that it seems to be moving away so much from the mission of those agencies to a point where it's really sad because it's like these places are meant to be protected

00:04:30 **Laiken**

Exactly

00:04:34 **Emily**

So I completely sympathize for sure. So it sounds like that's what really drew you to the Center for Biological Diversity. And if you can if you could tell us about the center, it sounds like a really unique place.

00:04:48 **Laiken**

Definitely. Yeah, it's an amazing home, essentially an environmental organization focused on protecting endangered species and their habitats and we got our start in the borderlands in southern New Mexico beginning to utilize The Endangered Species Act in a way that I think up until that point hadn't truly been utilized in order to protect habitat, win lawsuits, stop timber sales, stop development projects, and actually use The Endangered Species Act to the full extent that the law was intended to be used to actually protect these species and their habitats and we've since expanded. We work all across the country and even have an international office in Baja, Mexico. And yeah, we're absolutely committed to stopping the wildlife extinction crisis. And of course that also has a lot of justice work within it. We do a lot of environmental justice work as well.

00:05:43 **Emily**

It seems like you guys do a lot within the local communities within the environmental justice to help those communities. Is that right?

00:05:50 **Laiken**

Yeah, I would certainly agree with that. You know, we have an incredible team of attorneys and scientist, but we also have a lot of organizers on the ground that interface with the community that try and make sure people have representation and, and yeah it's a really dynamic organization that I'm honored to work with.

00:06:07 **Emily**

For the sake of our listeners, since we know there are multiple crises happening across the country and it's a shame because I think this topic is getting overshadowed by the million other crises that are occurring and this is equally as important, I was wondering if you could talk to what is happening along the border?

00:06:28 **Laiken**

Yeah, of course. So much is happening and it's really interesting because I talk to people across the country who still aren't even sure if the border wall is being built. It feels like there's a lot of confusion. Some people say Oh, I thought they were just replacing old wall. And that is totally not true. The reality on the ground in Arizona is that we are seeing massive industrial scale construction projects rip through wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, national parks and monuments, and through Indigenous sacred sites and this is happening almost across the entire Arizona border. All four states on the border have been hit with border wall construction and it's been devastating everywhere. But Arizona has really taken the brunt of the impact and that's because in this paradoxical crazy world that we're living in, Arizona has all of the protected federal lands along the border these, you know,

again are wildlife refuges and wilderness areas. Places that the government controls and is supposed to be the steward of. Specifically because they are so incredible, so biologically important, have so much cultural and natural history. And now in this current world that we're living these are the exact places where border wall construction has been fast-tracked because the federal government controls the land. So we're watching these places be destroyed precisely because they are so special and irreplaceable. They're the ones that are being plowed over first and these are places like Organ Pipe where I used to work, at the Coronado National Memorial, another National Park service unit, the San Bernardino Wildlife Refuge, the Cabeza Prieta wildlife refuge, and also a lot of national forest lands and Skyland mountain ranges in Arizona, which are the key remaining jaguar corridors that jaguar is used to cross between Sonora and Arizona. So it's yeah, it can't be, can't be overstated the impact of what's happening today as we're talking right now in Arizona

00:08:30 **Emily**

WOW,

00:08:31 **Chelsi**

I think that there's maybe some confusion when people think about the construction that's happening and say "well these are protected places. So why can't you do something like utilize the Endangered Species Act?" So I mean obviously there's legislation that allows construction to continue on anyways, I think part of that is the Real ID Act. Can you speak a little bit about what legal things are allowing this to happen.

00:09:06 **Emily**

Yeah because it doesn't make sense.

00:09:08 **Laiken**

It makes absolutely no sense. And that's a staple of every aspect with border wall construction, but specifically we're living in a world where none of the environmental and cultural resource protection laws apply to border wall construction. The Endangered Species Act does not apply, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act does not apply, archaeological resources protection act is just gone into thin air. And these are laws that I mean, you know how hard it is to pass a law through Congress- argued and deliberated and fought- like hell some of these laws were like, you know the centerpiece of an individual's political career and with this stroke of a pen they've been nullified in order to rush border wall construction. The administration is using what I would call effectively a legal loophole that was tucked into this 2006 law called the Real ID Act.

00:10:05 **Emily**

Real ID?

00:10:07 **Laiken**

The real ID Act is actually the same sweeping law that kind of determines how we get our IDs and it's you know about all that, but within that law, there's like three lines of legislative text that the Secretary of Homeland Security can waive any law deemed necessary to expedite border wall construction. And you know, we look back on the legislative history and the debate around this law. It was clear that nobody knew what they were actually voting on. A lot of people thought that this would just apply to one section of border wall. But this tiny provision tucked into this 15 year old law is now allowing border wall construction to happen all the way across the border with no adherence to federal law. It just has to be stated like the government can't waive laws to approve a mine, to build an Air Force base, to construct the highway. This is the only federal project that they can just cast aside any law they please in order to rush along and I think of course it's no coincidence that this is the project taking place on the U.S. Mexico border where underserved and underrepresented communities have been brushed aside for generations in order to score political points, and of course, these are also working class communities of color that now are not protected by the same laws that apply everywhere else across the country.

00:11:32 **Emily**

So with being a federal archaeologist, it just, it's mind-boggling to me because I can't even put in a fence post, just a regular little fence post for a barbed wire fence without going through the section 106 compliance system and through for the national register, sorry not National register, National Historic Preservation Act. Protect, net preservation. it's I can talk. NHPA(National Historic Preservation Act) so it just boggles my mind that like NHPA can be just overshadowed. Like you think you'd have to have some massive environmental impact statement or something for this border wall, and it's literally, it hurts and I can imagine how much it hurts everybody else that's like how does this not apply? With just this itty-bitty law and so has this been taken to court?

00:12:19 **Laiken**

Yes, many many times, you know as an organization we do a lot of litigation, a lot of the tools in our toolkit are these laws that congress has passed to protect places like Organ Pipe, but basically all the tools have been shaken out of our tool kit here and we have challenged the constitutionality of that waiver. Essentially the Supreme Court declined to take up the case. And as far as

00:12:47 **Emily**

Did they say why?

00:12:48 **Laiken**

No they did not say why. You know, they get like so many cases every year and I think end up taking like one to two percent of them. But as things stand right now the Borderlands remains a lawless place unlike anywhere else in the country, but we're going to continue fighting this and we have you know, some bold plans for next year. We can congressionally repeal this waiver authority and there have been bills introduced to do exactly that and I think you know, if there's one thing that's been made clear in the last last year is just how disastrous border wall construction is. I think people are finally waking up to the real-world impacts of the border wall. And I think there will be some momentum in the near future to actually repeal this act and make sure that nothing like this can ever happen to the Borderlands again.

00:13:37 **Emily**

One thing for me like looking at pictures of the construction the corridor is so much larger than I would have imagined for the wall because I think for a lot of people when they think border wall they think like of a space not quite that large for building a large wall and this it looks wider than like a four-lane highway. Yeah, and why do they need such a large corridor for the construction? Cause I can imagine if they're able to have a smaller footprint that might make a difference, but do you know why they have such a large range of construction?

00:14:14 **Laiken**

That's a great question and it's one that the agency Department of Homeland Security has completely failed to justify. Everywhere they're building the wall they are bulldozing at least 60 feet of earth north of the border. And again, this is a huge amount of ground disturbance with no archaeological or cultural resource preservation laws in place. We have seen dozens of archaeological sites at Organ Pipe literally bulldozed and of course, they've sent out archaeologists to try and salvage things, but once these sites are destroyed, we'll never get them back and there's just no way to keep up with the pace of construction. Department of Homeland Security says that they have archaeological monitors on site. I've been out there every week for the past year and I have yet to see a single monitor. And of course what good is a monitor if you know, even if they find something they don't have the authority through the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, the NHPA, and other laws to actually stop construction to salvage the site.

00:15:17 **Emily**

I'd hate that job. I couldn't do it. I just be like, I would just be crying all the time. Like "they just won't stop."

00:15:25 **Laiken**

Exactly. Yeah, and I mean there's just this huge dead zone, which is really ironic because border patrol says they're building what they call an enforcement zone on the north side of the wall, which

they're going to stake with ground sensors and blast with stadium lights, oftentimes into wilderness areas, which is really ironic right because the claim is that the border wall will stop people from crossing. So if the border wall is actually going to stop, why do they think they need an enforcement zone? None of this makes any sense, its destruction for destruction sake and it's it's just been heartbreaking across the board.

00:16:03 **Emily**

Well haven't even shown that like with a ladder you can get over it, or you can almost like climb it like a tree.

00:16:10 **Laiken**

Yeah. Yeah with the ladder, with an angle grinder you can just cut through the wall, you can tunnel under it. Within days of the new 30 foot tall border wall going up through Calexico. There were rope ladders hanging over it. I mean this is not a solution, this never was a solution

00:16:28 **Emily**

there's not even the excuse like but at least it's working.

00:16:32 **Laiken**

totally. I mean, I think people across the country, you know people in Iowa or whatever sleep better at night. Just knowing or thinking that there is some imposing physical barrier on the Border, but if they actually came down and saw the landscape for themselves, if they saw how rugged and vast and beautiful these places where there's no way they would still believe that the wall is the answer

00:16:55 **Emily**

right? It seems like that kind of landscape, lack of water. That in itself is a large deterrent anyway that it's not, it's not just a big welcoming corridor where people just zoom on in regardless.

00:17:11 **Laiken**

Exactly and you know historically our border policies have pushed people into these landscapes with the explicit purpose of inflicting death and suffering on these people. Essentially we built border walls and urban centers to push people to these desert areas. We thought that would deter them. Of course that fails to take into account that people who are fleeing violence, people who are walking across a continent to reach our borders are not going to be deterred by additional threats and violence. It's a life or death situation for them and they're definitely not going to be deterred by a tiny 30 foot wall you can climb over with a ladder in a matter of seconds.

00:17:53 **Emily**

And I mean that's another crisis beyond what we're even getting much into today with the humanitarian crisis of the border wall in terms of like you're saying how it pushes people into much more dangerous areas and highly recommend our listeners looking into research that's been done on that and there's also organizations that help migrants in those areas in terms of with water food resources and whatnot. But

00:18:20 **Laiken**

Definitely

00:18:21 **Chelsi**

We'll make a note of that in the show notes

00:18:23 **Laiken**

Oh, yeah, and these same policies that push people into the desert. They also push all this enforcement traffic into the desert. So now we have border patrol vehicles driving literally thousands of miles off road in designated wilderness through archaeological and historic sites ripping up sensitive soil biocrusts trying to chase the people that we pushed into these inhospitable terrains. So there's there's just there's so many impacts and I want to be clear the, especially the it impacts archaeological sites, to cultural history, that's far greater than just the wall and border enforcement actions at large have severe impacts on preserving cultural resources at Organ Pipe, Cabeza Prieta and other federally protected lands.

00:19:09 **Emily**

That's a really great point to end on for this segment. When we come back we'll be getting more into what the Center for Biological Diversity does, what our current issues going on at the border and we will be right back.

00:19:27 **Ad**

Looking for other archaeology podcasts? There's so many to choose from, why not try ArchyFantasies and bust myths surrounding ancient finds and people, or learn about the study of animal bones with ArchyAnimals. There's also the great Go Dig a Hole and the Arch and Anth podcast. Don't forget to rate review and subscribe to the Women in Archaeology podcast and all of these fun archaeology podcasts that are available on iTunes Spotify. All over the place. Thanks for listening.

00:19:59 **Emily**

Welcome back. We're going to continue our discussion about the border wall and destruction of sites ecosystems and so on with Laiken Jordahl. It's our understanding that just in the last couple

weeks a lot is occurring at the border. More than what's happened even in, even a few months that it's all kind of coming to a head recently. Can they can can you tell us about what's going on?

00:20:26 **Laiken**

Yes, certainly. So I think the main thing that is pushing all of these new protests, kind of this escalating activity between Indigenous activists and the Park Service at Organ Pipe is the fact that the border wall is quickly encroaching on a sacred spring, a spring that has 16,000 years of continuous human habitation, a spring that is the only real oasis in this whole region of the Sonoran Desert. A spring that's home to two endangered species the Sonata pupfish and the Sonata mud turtle and this miraculous place called Quitobaquito, which is in the middle of Organ Pipe right on the border, and the wall is inching towards the spring from both the west and the East and as the wall has gotten closer to that spring a lot more protests have erupted. Horrifyingly, we've seen in the last month, we've watched National Park Service Rangers arrest two Indigenous women for defending the land and the water at these springs and they actually threw these women in jail overnight during a pandemic after only charging them with misdemeanors. This was clearly a decision made by the Park Service intending to punish these O'odham women for speaking out for their spring and you know as someone who were used to work at Organ Pipe it just, it's horrifying. It breaks my heart and makes me sick to see some of my former colleagues and now acting as the enforcers of the border wall. Over the last year as wall construction has intensified at Organ Pipe people at the park have you know, very much remained neutral or passive. There's a lot of clear political constraints around speaking out against projects when you work for the federal government, but in the last month, we've seen Organ Pipe staff go from, you know, kind of somewhat complicit with construction to now being active enforcers and participants in the destruction and last week the superintendent signed an order to close this entire section of the National Monument to everyone including tribal members who now are unable to access their sacred spring and that closure

00:22:46 **Emily**

Legally are they allowed to do that? Because it's my understanding that tribal rights are quite different from just typical citizen rights in terms of access to Park Service. That they have a larger access to Sacred sites collection areas.

00:23:05 **Laiken**

That's a great question. And you know, the Park Service does have the authority technically to issue area closures for public safety, but it's really clear that this area closure has nothing to do with public safety because there has been construction going on in this location for more than a year. There's been dynamite blasting, there has been a huge amount of construction activity. Which certainly is a safety hazard both the people and to wildlife but the fact that the Park Service signed this closure

order just after all these protests started to erupt it's quite clearly intended to tamp down on these Indigenous led protests and to limit the media from documenting the damage as the wall goes up at Quitobaquito and this closure order was issued on Monday of last week and the wall started going up there on Tuesday. So it's just horrifying to see the Park Service now taking an active role in destroying the places that they have been the stewards of, the places that they're legally obligated to protect. So it's been an extremely distressing week and you know, we've heard from the superintendent at the park that they intend to have a permitting process which through a case-by-case basis they can give permits to allow for what he called the "legitimate cultural uses"

00:24:24 **Chelsi**

Oh god.

00:24:24 **Laiken**

of the spring but that is a horrifying thought, you know that we'd have this non-Indigenous superintendent approving or deciding what qualifies as a legitimate cultural use. That's bullshit through and through.

00:24:40 **Chelsi**

Yeah. No, that is a "you do what we want you to do and the way we want you to do it or we're not going to give you access." Like that's that's a threat.

00:24:49 **Laiken**

Precisely, precisely and the O'odham chairman was on a webinar this week and he quite clearly said that they were not notified of this in advance. The closure was imposed before there even was a system of permitting set up. So it's just, it's been disgraceful. I mean these are my former friends and colleagues. These are people that care about the resource, you know, I fully believe that their intentions are good. I believe that they've suffered through the worst years of their lives with this Administration, but that does not justify becoming an active enforcer of border wall construction, that does not justify throwing Indigenous women trying to protect their own homelands in jail during a pandemic. It's been extremely distressing and in many ways it's been like watching this agency and this National Park just fall from grace and my heart breaks, my heart breaks every day reading the news and watching the videos. Recently there was a video that came out of a Park Service ranger brutalizing peaceful protesters. He was taking swings at people, he reached for his gun and almost drew it and then instead went for his taser and pointed his taser at this crowd of peaceful protesters who were linked up in a chain on the ground. And again, these are mostly Indigenous folks who have had no choice but to go put their bodies on the line because they've done the stuff the right way. They have objected and all the the so-called "correct" ways to do so, they've had the right stripped away from them with these legal waivers and now they've had no choice but

to put their bodies on the line in order to protect their sacred sites, like Quitobaquito from border wall construction.

00:26:35 **Emily**

I do think it's sometimes hard for people to understand kind of like, I'm trying to find a somewhat similar analogy to Sacred Sites for non-Indigenous peoples. Like why putting a wall near it is so damaging and I mean for me it's hard to come up with something and I'm trying to think of like, think of your most beautiful cathedral and somebody decides to drive a highway through it and you have no choice. I just seeing the images and whatnot of these Park Rangers harming, physically harming people, seeing these near the Springs. It's just it's so shocking and I'm sure it's hard to express to other people why this is so damaging not only at the ecosystem level but at the heritage level for people who this is still living site and how have you guys tried expressing that to people who may not understand otherwise?

00:27:39 **Laiken**

Well, you know in terms of Quitobaquito I think the miraculous nature of this Springs is sacred in itself to anyone. Water in the desert, this natural oasis it's like a mirage in the middle of the hottest driest desert in Arizona. Also home to these miraculous turtles and pupfish that have weathered the storm and have evolved.

00:28:06 **Emily**

People should Google pupfish. They're the cutest little weird fish.

00:28:11 **Laiken**

They're so cool. And they turn this beautiful, sexy shade of blue when they're trying to mate. I mean, they're like, they can live in water twice as salty as the sea, they're incredible creatures and right now water pumping for the border wall, they're pumping millions and millions of gallons out of the ground in order to mix concrete for the wall. That is significantly depleting

00:28:33 **Chelsi**

From the spring?

00:28:35 **Laiken**

They're from the same aquifer that feeds the spring and there was a great report published this week that basically proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the drop in spring flow is not strictly from drought, it's not from agricultural water pumping in Mexico as the Park Service is often said. It's directly resulting from just extraction of huge quantities of ground water to mix concrete for the

border wall. And again, like no aspect of this wall construction would be legal if the normal laws like The Endangered Species Act were in place.

00:29:10 **Emily**

Or NHPA. I mean, they would have had to truck in water.

00:29:13 **Laiken**

Exactly.

00:29:14 **Emily**

And that's what I just I guess I assumed that's what they would do.

00:29:17 **Laiken**

Yep. Yeah, you would you would think that and that's just the biological wonder of this place, the cultural history of Quitobaquito is so incredibly rich. Up until the 1950s there is actually a O'odham family that still live there. They farmed there. It was this beautiful living landscape where we had, you know cultural use and farming, coinciding alongside with endangered species living at the spring, you know, the Park Service made life so difficult for that family that they were finally forced to sell their land to the Park with the intention of you know, protecting this place and now we're watching the place be destroyed and the Park Service be completely complicit with that destruction. It's a really interesting history of Quitobaquito and and right now the walls going up there and the light poles are going up there and this tiny spring which, it's about a hundred and fifty feet from the border. It's going to be blasted with flood lights all night long.

00:30:23 **Laiken**

It's going to destroy this habitat for nighttime pollinators, for bats and birds and of course the wall is going to go up along the south side of it which will stop all wildlife south of the border from coming to this spring to drink like they've done for millennia.

00:30:37 **Chelsi**

Yeah. So there was a photo that came across my timeline, from you know Twitter or Facebook, I can't remember which platform. It was really kind of heart-wrenching of, it was a deer who had died and it was just kind of lying against the border because they were trying to get to a water source and now there's just this giant wall in the way and animals don't recognize state borders or the difference between protected or unprotected land, you know, and I mean obviously all life is sacred, but the, I guess the PR impact of like a cute fuzzy animal

00:31:25 **Laiken**

Yeah, it's it's a heartbreaking picture and that picture was taken at Organ Pipe for folks who haven't seen it. I mean, it's this mule deer that is dead right in the shadow of the border wall and almost certainly it was hit by a construction vehicle as it was wandering back and forth along this wall. It was found dead in August, in the hottest and driest month of the year. We had almost no monsoons this year. So wildlife were extremely taxed and and often times at Organ Pipe we will see animals migrate south across the border during hot and dry weather in order to drink water. There's an agricultural field south of the border in Mexico and this deer was almost certainly doing what it does when it's hot and thirsty and wandering south as they've done for millennia without being impeded by this massive landscape scale obstruction. You know people say, oh wildlife will find a way around. That's ridiculous.

00:32:28 **Emily**

Cause they're being built to not let people, how exactly does wildlife get through?

00:32:33 **Laiken**

and we're looking at the situation where we're going to see the vast majority of the Arizona border covered by 30 foot concrete and steel wall and there are no wildlife crossings, the wall doesn't just end in certain places. I mean we're looking at hundreds of miles of contiguous barrier that will stop the migration of all terrestrial species bigger than a pocket mouse, dead in their tracks.

00:32:57 **Emily**

Has there been any appeal, and I'm sure there has been, just asking for my own edification, has there been appeal to senators or whatnot to come to the border and see what's going on or is it just because they're like, there's just so much going on. It's just for a lot of them a non-issue. I mean certainly there's got to be people who caret? Who are in positions of power.

00:33:25 **Laiken**

Certainly. Yeah, and we've done it a lot of congressional outreach, you know. We basically got congress to refuse to fund the border wall. They took a number of votes and they did approve about a total of five billion dollars for wall construction in the earlier budgets, which was devastating. But most of those walls were slated for South Texas. Some of them were going through wildlife refuges and really important areas, but congress, time and time again refused to fund border wall construction in Arizona, through wilderness lands, through National Monuments and at that point the president signed the emergency declaration and stole 15 billion dollars from Department of Defense budgets in order to build these walls. So it's a situation where Congress has no say. Also the courts have no say because all the laws that would typically apply have been cast aside so when it comes to the border wall this is like the definition of single branch of government. The executive branch is making all these decisions free of any consent from Congress and free of any of the normal

laws applying. So this is a prime example of autocracy and I think this is the framework that this Administration will apply everywhere else in the country as soon as they get the chance. I mean this is the dream of people who are against environmental protections. This is the blueprint for what they're going to do everywhere else as soon as they get the chance.

00:34:59 **Emily**

Hmm. And so really the only way to really put a halt to this would then be the Real ID Act?,

00:35:08 **Laiken**

Correct

00:35:09 **Emily**

I'm like, I just feel like I'm going in circle like okay, wait, how about this?

00:35:15 **Laiken**

Yeah, and so even the Senate has voted multiple times to terminate the bogus emergency declaration and a number of Republican senators have joined the Democrats for that. But they have not reached a veto-proof majority which would require two-thirds but we have a lot of Republicans who are also against specifically the pillaging of funds, of unappropriated funds. You know, there was a time when Republicans were very much against executive overreach, that time seems like it's past but there are still a number of folks who will go to bat for that.

00:35:56 **Emily**

This might be a topic for the next segment but we can always stop and start again. So I'm just kind of curious so with all of this material getting pushed to the side as they're busting through this land. What happens to the archaeological material the cacti the things that they're pushing away for this wall. What happens to all this material?

00:36:21 **Laiken**

Yeah. I mean, you'll see these giant piles of rotting cactuses, ancient ironwood trees, tons of dirt just bulldozed to the side of the construction area. Every time I go down there I see freshly butchered cactuses. We've seen hundreds if not thousands of saguaro and organ pipes just destroyed for this project and these are protected plants that are culturally significant plants, their critical critical for the function of the ecosystem and and you know in Arizona, it's illegal to harm saguaro cactuses, you could face jail time if you drive your car over a saguaro. So to watch the federal government come in and just slaughter this massive quantity of sacred cacti. It's devastating and of course, you know, they're destroying homes for thousands of different individual wildlife. And of course, you know, it goes without saying that these cactuses are deeply, deeply sacred to the O'odham and other Tribal

Nations. They're continuously used for ceremonies. And I know some of my O'odham friends have told me that they see these saguaro cactuses as the embodiment of their ancestors. So driving down to the border and seeing just these cactuses chopped up discarded with utmost disrespect. I mean, they told me it's like seeing a dead relative. It's devastating.

00:37:51 **Emily**

I mean just thinking of the Saguaro in itself is such like an emblem of Arizona. That in itself I'm sure is it's hard to see everything. But I can imagine with the different connections to just Saguaro and itself and seeing it destroyed I can't imagine then at the larger scales of all the things. Like here you have just one type of plant. What about everything else too? I'm sure the combined destruction is just heartbreaking.

00:38:20 **Laiken**

Yeah, it absolutely is and you know last spring that was kind of when they were I guess inflicting the most damage in terms of clearing that land and there were dozens of saguaro that have been plowed over, that had their beautiful Cactus blossoms just about to open but they've been taken out before they could open and there's just there's just something so upsetting about seeing that

00:38:45 **Chelsi**

There's no reason.

00:38:47 **Laiken**

No reason, no reason at all and you know, they could be transplanting these Cactus.

00:38:53 **Emily**

Oh, they can be transplanted?

00:38:54 **Laiken**

They could be protecting them in place. Yeah in the Park Service did, they have transplanted some of them but the number that I've seen butchered and chopped up on the ground far outnumbers that the ones that I have seen transplanted

00:39:10 **Emily**

I just didn't even know that was a possibility for saguaro like that they can be transplanted

00:39:15 **Laiken**

mmm. It's a herculean effort. It's not always successful, the taproot takes a long time to re-establish and in a lot of cases the cactus can die a slow death after being transplanted. So all of the ones that

have been transplanted we need to monitor carefully for a number of years and some of the ones that have been transplanted are already standing dead.

00:39:36 **Emily**

Sadly on that note. We need to end with this segment, but when we come back we'll keep discussing these issues but also a call to action and try to figure out what can we do to hopefully make some positive change in this situation. We'll be right back.

00:39:56 **Ad**

Did you know that we have a Blog? Check out the Women in Archaeology website for a variety of blog posts as well as past episodes. Interested in supporting the podcast? From the website you can check out our patreon account about the different ways to help support the blog and podcast. We can give you some cool stickers in return. Again thank you for listening.

00:40:21 **Emily**

Welcome back. We're going to continue our discussion and we're going to start with the fact that there is, it sounds like there's a great deal of dynamite blasting that is occurring daily. And I found that so surprising. Laikan was telling us about it a little bit during the break and just imagining the level of ground disturbance on the cultural side of things just it's blowing my mind. And so Laikan if you could discuss a little bit about what's going on in terms of just like the daily blasting that they're doing?

00:40:57 **Laiken**

Yeah every day as we speak, even on the weekends and now starting 24 hours a day there's just a huge amount of industrial scale construction happening on the border and more and more that is including a severe amount of dynamite blasting. Mountains are being blown up literally every day and that's because a lot of the more flat areas where it's easier to build walls have already been completed. So now you know, now that it's October we're seeing wall construction push into some of the most remote, rugged, beautiful, and biologically diverse places along the border and there's some folks who are documenting this. There's one person named John Kirk who's flying his drone every day and trying to document the dynamite blasting because he's so horrified that this is taking place and I re-post a lot of videos on my Twitter.

00:41:54 **Emily**

How can people find you on Twitter?

00:41:57 **Laiken**

Just Google me or look me up on Twitter, Laiken Jordahl. I post photos and videos from the border almost every day. And that really is the platform that we utilize in order to get information to journalists and the public. I'm not a social media person, but I have really found a lot of value in using Twitter, really as an archive of all of the destruction happening and also the resistance efforts to the border wall

00:42:23 **Emily**

And so his drone and I'm sure other people are trying to document as well, it sounds like?

00:42:28 **Laiken**

Correct and we've been out there to film it. You know the first blasting took place last spring and that was when DHS was blowing up a place called Monument Hill in Organ Pipe, which is an O'odham sacred site with Indigenous burial grounds on this hill and the tribal chairman of the O'odham Nation said that he was not notified until the day that the blasting started

00:42:53 **Emily**

And they couldn't avoid the hill? Like, literally they couldn't just put it a few miles a different way or another?

00:43:00 **Laiken**

Like I said everything about this project defies logic, you know, it would be easy to not build on the hill if they were really trying to secure the border, which I don't think they're even trying to do. I don't think they even care about that anymore. All they care about is maximizing the mile count. If they really cared about that they could station agents, two agents on the hill in perpetuity and that would be exponentially less expensive than building a wall. So none of this makes any sense. But we're seeing a huge amount of damage. I mean every day I'm sent a new video of pristine wilderness land in eastern Arizona being blown up and these are like the explosions you see in the movies. We're watching entire hillsides crumble away and a lot of this debris flying into Mexico, you know, again, none of this would ever be legal if the normal laws were in place. I've never seen cultural resource monitors out there where they're doing the blasting.

00:43:57 **Chelsi**

What happened to the bodies?

00:44:03 **Laiken**

In terms of Monument Hill I believe the grave sites were not directly within the vicinity of the blasting but there are archaeological sites up there and they had failed to do the proper surveys before going in with the dynamite. So we don't know the degree of what's been lost. But we do

know that the cultural record, archaeological record now has just a massive gaping hole in it and at Organ Pipe and other places along the border, I mean only 8% of Organ Pipe has actually been surveyed so we don't know what we're losing.

00:44:38 **Emily**

And that seems largely an issue for most federal agencies. Most of the ones I worked for, I worked for a forest that was 1.4 million acres and I think they said less than 1% had been surveyed. So it's not an uncommon issue have no clue what's fully out there.

00:44:55 **Laiken**

There's something that just seems so wrong that we're able to destroy a place before we truly know the value of the historical record there and yeah you know, we have laws that stop that from happening but they don't apply here in this situation.

00:45:13 **Emily**

And I think for those who may not be familiar as familiar with the archaeology of Arizona, like how insanely culturally archaeologically rich some of these areas are, like just such unique cultures and ways of living in the desert and then there was contact with mesoamerica, and it's like ball courts and irrigation, I mean it's just like there's stuff everywhere. It's amazing

00:45:41 **Laiken**

and I'm not an archaeologist. But you know,

00:45:44 **Emily**

That's okay I guess

00:45:45 **Laiken**

But being out there and walking through Organ Pipe, I mean, you see flakes, you see cores like even to someone who is untrained. It's such a rich place with cultural history.

00:45:57 **Chelsi**

Well, I think it's also worth noting, I mentioned earlier that you know animals don't necessarily follow borders or know where borders are but it's also a border that jumped people. There are cultural groups, there are families on either side that are one. That historically would have been Mexican, part of Mexico and it's not just... it's keeping people from their heritage on the other side of an artificial construct of a modern Western nation state.

00:46:40 **Laiken**

Exactly, and it's also slicing through traditional ceremonial routes. Every year there's a pilgrimage that they take called the salt run and they crossed the border and they run all the way to the Sea of Cortez in Sonora and they gather salt from the Salt Flats there and they bring it back for ceremonial uses and oftentimes this is like a coming-of-age ceremony for O'odham youth and they run across the border at Quitobaquito Springs. and they've done this as they say from time immemorial and this is the first time there's going to be a wall in their path as they make that annual ceremonial pilgrimage and it's hard to describe just how deeply offensive that has to be. It's just enraging and the tribes asked for gates in the wall the tribe has asked, you know, the Park Service, the Tribes The Fish and Wildlife Service have have offered so many mitigations. They pleaded with the Department Homeland Security to make even the smallest mitigations or deviations in the walls path and every single one of those requests has been completely ignored.

00:47:57 **Emily**

Unfortunately, I think that just highlights again a very long history of injustices towards Indigenous peoples in the United States that it's still an ongoing issue.

00:48:09 **Laiken**

Yeah, absolutely agree.

00:48:12 **Emily**

To turn hopefully towards a more positive direction. For you what does justice look like in the future for these areas?

00:48:23 **Laiken**

Well, we've got a long list of grievances. Let me tell you what, you know, first and foremost I think the US government will owe a great debt to Indigenous Nations who have had cultural resources obliterated and destroyed along the border to make way for the wall.

00:48:43 **Emily**

Yeah, there's so many ARPA cases. It'd be amazing. Take the government to court.

00:48:49 **Laiken**

I want to. We were already working on some some legislation that would restore these lands and effectively provide reparations for tribal nations in border communities as well as rip down sections of wall in Wildlife Refuge, national monuments, and places where the wall is causing the most damage. I think one thing that has happened this year is that the whole concept and the idea of the border wall, like the veil has been pulled off and I think the American public is seeing it for what it is, which is a symbol of racism, of vitriol, a total non-solution for the crisis of wealth inequality. I think

there will be the political will to get justice for the borderlands. I think there will soon be the political will to actually rip down these sections of wall and repurpose all that steel. I think especially with you know, the Black Lives Matter movement that arose this summer, it's been really inspiring to watch the public at large start understanding these deeper causes of injustice and wanting to address them. So I, despite such a severe amount of destruction and heartbreak and heartache I do have hope for the future and I think that all of us need to continue raising this issue into the future and and reminding everyone like we can't forget about these injustices and we have to right these wrongs. And finally, finally, finally give border communities and Tribal Nations on the border that respect that they deserve.

00:50:30 **Emily**

It's like you're saying with raising awareness. What can we do on our end to help you and your organization continue raising awareness?

00:50:42 **Laiken**

Well for one, I think we can't turn away or attention from the borderlands. Border injustice has long predated this President, border wall construction for a long time had total bipartisan support and still we see a lot of politicians who we considered to be more progressive advocating for border security technology when in reality that's also a non-solution, and even so-called smart walls have their own set of environmental impacts and lots of impacts on civil rights and civil liberties of border communities

00:51:22 **Emily**

What's a smart wall?

00:51:24 **Laiken**

It's kind of like... what people call a smart wall which is certainly not smart nor is it a solution

00:51:30 **Emily**

It's like "Alexa open wall"

00:51:33 **Laiken**

You have we you know, it's all these virtual surveillance towers and it's like a system of technology that detect people who are moving through the landscape and for all intents and purposes we already have that in place. We spent billions of dollars on surveillance technologies, infrared sensors, and cameras and that already is playing a role in pushing migrants to their deaths, militarizing the land, and also destroying the environment but I think you know in the long run we need to take a hard look at this country's Immigration policy and really come solutions, not distractions, which is

what this border wall is but solutions that help people practice the right not to migrate, you know, people don't walk across Mexico and through the desert because they want to it's because they've been forced to in many cases by our own country's foreign policies that fail to respect local economies and autonomy. Yeah, and I think you know just continuing to talk about this issue and advocate for restoration and reparations into the future when it comes to that.

00:52:54 **Emily**

You bring up an excellent point of, it is definitely a multi-tiered situation where it's not just not having a wall It's not just fixing immigration policy. It's not just fixing International policies. It's like there's so many components of it

00:53:11 **Chelsi**

it's complicated.

00:53:12 **Emily**

Yeah, it's not just one easy solution and I'm guessing this administration was just like build a wall.

00:53:19 **Laiken**

Yeah. Well, that's the beauty of it, right? It's like the most simple solution to the most complex problem and I think that you know specifically appeals to simple minded folks who want simple solutions to complex problems. That's not the world that we live in and I think more and more people are waking up to that fact and realizing that collectively we need to do some serious soul searching and and we need to redefine our values as a country and orient them towards towards justice in terms of recognition of all of the injustices that this very country and these very systems that we're in were founded upon

00:53:59 **Chelsi**

I do see a lot of folks, like you mentioned earlier with the Black Lives Matter movement and the awareness that people are starting to have of what's going on at the border, but also that the border is a very lived in space because I certainly known, granted I was in elementary school a couple decades back, but a lot of that kind of early school curriculum, at least, you know when I was younger- which was a while ago, but not that long ago- very much talked about

00:54:32 **Emily**

You're 97, right?

00:54:34 **Chelsi**

Yeah, right. I'm approaching my centennial! No, I'm 32, you know but [school curriculum] talking about these Indigenous cultures as if they were historical, as if they were in the past. So recognizing that there are lived Indigenous cultures that are vibrant and exciting and harmed by what's happening.

00:55:04 **Laiken**

Yeah. Yeah, they're still here. And I think, I mean I'm deeply inspired by so many of my Indigenous activist friends. I am invigorated by the land back movement. I think, you know my future vision my dream for Organ Pipe is that it becomes an International Peace Park, which is co-managed with Pinacate which is across the border. It's this stunning wilderness area in Mexico that actually is just as incredible, if not more so than Organ Pipe itself and that Tribal Nations play an equal role to both federal government's in management and all management decisions. Like we could make that happen. And I think that's what justice looks like, right and that's what we need to shoot for and settle for nothing less.

00:55:53 **Emily**

Hmm. Would it be hard to create something... like I've honestly never heard of that. An International Peace Park,

00:55:59 **Laiken**

So there is an International Peace Park on the Canadian border Glacier walk. You can backpack across the borderline and you don't have to talk to any customs agents. It's yeah, it's spectacular and it's this sign of goodwill and it's a sign of recognition that we share the same resources. We depend on the same environment to survive and I certainly think that we're going to need to look at solutions like that in order to repair our relationships with Indigenous Nations like the O'odham and also with our friends across the border in Mexico. There's going to be a huge amount of reckoning to do in the coming years and like we talked about earlier that the Park Service actually stopping Indigenous people from accessing their sacred sites, arresting them, throwing them in jail. I'm deeply concerned that all of this is going to set Organ Pipes relationship with the tribes back decades and I think the park now owes the tribe of a great debt and it's really pull through for these folks in the future to make up for the atrocities that they've participated in and perpetrated against these people

00:57:09 **Emily**

Moving in a little bit of a different direction, are there ways that we can help support the Center for Biological Diversity in terms of following your guys programs, do you take donations? Are there other organizations we should consider supporting and donating to as well?

00:57:26 **Laiken**

Absolutely. Yeah, so certainly follow the center's work. We do a lot of amazing cross campaign work ranging from fighting utility shutoffs during a pandemic and making sure people have access to the heat, to protecting endangered species across the country and the world. So please follow our work, please follow me on Twitter. I post updates every day from the Borderlands and while we would gladly accept your donations, I would plead with people to actually donate directly to the Indigenous activists that are on the ground fighting border wall construction and you can follow them on Instagram or Facebook. The Facebook account is called the O'odham Anti-border Collective. I'm sure you guys can link to these accounts. The Instagram account to follow is called defend O'odham Jewed and jewed is spelled J E W E D and that means land in O'odham

00:58:26 **Chelsi**

I would also say, I think has become reoccurring theme of my own at least at the end of all our episodes, but go vote. You know, we're recording this about a month before the next general election and if you are as infuriated and incensed as we are about this, if you are a fraction as infuriated or incensed about this as we are vote for change,

00:58:55 **Laiken**

Absolutely,

00:58:56 **Emily**

that is an excellent, excellent point to end on. Laiken, thank you so much for joining us today. This has been an amazing discussion and we definitely hope you can come back and talk with us again.

00:59:09 **Laiken**

Yeah heavy stuff but it's really a joy to talk with you both. Thank you.

00:59:14 **Emily**

Important, important information. And if you enjoyed listening to this podcast, please follow us. You can find us at [www.womeninarchaeology.com](http://www.womeninarchaeology.com) where our podcasts and blogs are. You can follow us @WomenArchys on Twitter and if there are any other topics you would like us to discuss or if you yourself would like to come on our podcast, please contact us at [womeninarchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:womeninarchaeology@gmail.com). This has been a wonderful discussion. Thank you both for being on here and until next time everybody stay safe and healthy.