

## Becca Peixotto, Ph.D.

### Director and Research Scientist of the Center for the Exploration of the Human Journey



Becca Peixotto, Ph.D., remembers as a child finding artifacts around her grandparents' old farmhouse in Vermont and keeping them in a "museum" on shelves in the garage. However, it wasn't until Peixotto went back to graduate school after a career as an outdoor educator that her passion for archaeology flourished. She earned her BA from the University of Alabama-Huntsville, an MA from the Universiteit van Amsterdam, and an MA in public anthropology and her Ph.D. at American University in Washington, DC, where she later served as Archaeologist in Residence. In between, she

taught at outdoor science schools, managed high ropes courses, led wilderness expeditions in mountain and desert environments for youth and adults, and enjoyed many personal adventures in the United States and abroad.



Peixotto's circuitous route to archaeology has opened doors to exciting research in the field. For her Ph.D. research, Peixotto drew upon her years of experience traveling off-trail in wilderness areas to find traces of 18th and 19th century Maroon ("runaway slave") communities on small unmapped islands in the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia, helping to tell the story of one form of African-American resistance to enslavement. In 2013, when a call went out for archaeologists with caving and climbing experience to excavate hominid fossils deep in a cave in South Africa, she leapt at the chance to combine her skill sets to uncover what turned out to be a new-to-science ancient human relative, *Homo naledi*.

Peixotto relishes the intellectual (and physical) challenges of research in remote areas where finding, excavating, and analyzing sites requires new technologies and methods as well as adapting tried and true ones, and where the landscapes, artifacts, and bones often lead us to unexpected insights into our shared human history.