

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **January 22, 2014**

Destination: **Aztec Ruins, New Mexico**

Leader: **Jim Mueller**

Number of Participants: **18**

On January 22nd, eighteen SJBAS members went on a mid-winter field trip that was planned to help pass the short winter days. The group met early for the afternoon tour of the East Ruins, so that they could enjoy an excellent lunch at the Thai Style Restaurant in downtown Aztec. The tour started with a 20-minute video about Aztec Ruins' past and present, through both the archaeologists and modern Native Americans' perspective. Hopi, Navajo and others do not like to use the term 'ruins', because it is the current home of the spirits of their ancestors and considered a sacred place.

The tour, led by Ranger Cyresa Bloom, included a walk around the East Ruins, which are closed to the public. Earl Morris excavated this section between 1916 and 1922, during which time he was mainly focused on the West Ruins. The East and West Ruins are separated by a flat area that is believed to be a section of an old Chacoan Road leading up to an older kiva site on the mesa above the National Monument. We were told that the original Aztec site was much larger than what we see today, with sites not only on the mesa above, but in the surrounding farm land and subdivisions and even across the river in what is now downtown Aztec.

Construction of the West Ruins and East Ruins great houses started at the same time around 1103, but the progress and purposes were quite different. The West Ruins were built intensely over a short time frame of 30 years, and archaeologists believe that it was a ceremonial, gathering location and trade center. The East Ruins great houses, two separate structures, were built over a period of 170 years, but continuing on and off at a smaller scale. They were built more for habitation and included a great kiva larger than the restored great kiva of the West Ruins. Construction style started with Chacoan, but later transitioned to McElmo style to Mesa Verde style. There were remnants of some of the rooms and walls of these once three-story great houses, but mostly it was the usual mounds and depressions of dirt that indicated once great things to the educated eyes of the SJABS participants. By 1290 the site was deserted. Was it because of a drought, which caused agricultural problems? Native American's believe it was just time to continue their journey to other places. But whatever the reason, they moved on to sites in the Rio Grande valley and in the current Zuni and Hopi areas.

- Prepared by: Jim Mueller