

Chaco Archaeo-Astronomy Trip with GB Cornucopia, et al

Most people arrived on the afternoon of 26th and we met to discuss a possible agenda for the following day. GB Cornucopia and Dr. Cherilynn Morrow came by in the morning and we decided to visit Una Veda glyph panel and ruins. Kirk Peterson, a new member and former interpretative ranger at Chaco conducted the tour and explained some of the things we saw.



We returned to the visitor center to meet up with GB Cornucopia (Chaco Ranger for 34 years) and Dr. Cherilynn Morrow (NASA PUNCH outreach team) who led us to the sun site where Dr Morrow explained her extensive technical research on an odd sun petroglyph. It appears as a circular sun with the penumbras extending out from the perimeter, which could only be seen at an eclipse during the solar maximum. She consulted with astronomers who calculated the last time such an event occurred at Chaco and it was during the occupation. In addition, she found that a spiral on the back side of the boulder was split by shadows during other solar or lunar events and a nearby triangular promontory on a ridge also exhibited an interaction with the spiral during lunar and solar events.



Later that evening we attended an excellent performance by Jemez flute maker and player Marlon Magdalena. He also provided an explanation of the cosmology associated with the traditional symbols included on his instruments. His mastery of both the craftsmanship in making the instruments and in playing them was amazing. Our group left the performance and went to Pueblo Benito for a night hike into the structure where Dr. Morrow played a flute while GB told Hopi stories under an open sky filled with stars. The acoustics were excellent and we watched the amazing Chaco night sky as they performed. Soon Magdalena arrived and joined in with his flute. It was a magical experience that left the group without words.

The next morning, we awoke at 0-dark thirty and arrived at the gate before it opened at 7:00 AM to take advantage of the cool morning for the 3.8 mile hike to Penasco Blanco and the Supernova glyph site. The sunrise was spectacular and we stopped at several glyph panels. We also found several animal tracks including elk and a possible mountain lion. The recent wet monsoon produced a “second spring” and many plants took advantage to blossom.



By the time we reached the supernova site it was late morning and the heat was increasing. Dr. Morrow and GB provided some insights into the super nova event. Several members continued on to Penasco Blanco, seeing a huge plaza enclosed by curved walls of surrounding structures. There were examples of fine masonry, Kivas and (unfortunately) several museum rocks above the midden. Kirk pointed out a Chacoan road leading toward Pueblo Bonito. The hike back to the visitor center was a brutal 3.5 miles in the sun, but everyone survived.

After recovering from the mid-day hike, we returned to the visitor center where an astronomy club from Albuquerque had dozens of telescopes set up. After listening to a lecture on Chaco alignments and archeo-astronomy, we got to see various planets and other celestial bodies. Upon returning to our campsite a fire was built and people gathered for a while but soon faded away after a long day. The next day people broke camp and drove away to Durango, Albuquerque, Phoenix and Reno.