



THE MOKI MESSENGER

November-December 2026
San Juan Basin Archaeological Society
sjbas.org

SJBAS Monthly Meeting: November 11th

SJBAS Meeting – Our next meeting will be held in person and on Zoom on Wednesday, November 11th, at 7:00 p.m. in the Lyceum at the Fort Lewis College Center of Southwest Studies. After a brief business meeting, Tom D. Dillehay, Ph.D., an internationally recognized American anthropologist at Vanderbilt University, will talk about the “First Peopling of South America.” He was first involved with excavations in Monte Verde, Chile in 1977 and later proposed that humans arrived in the Western Hemisphere thousands of years before Clovis. His research has focused on how hunter-gatherers transitioned into settled societies.



A reception will start things off at 6:30 p.m. in the CSWS foyer. Or you may click the Zoom link on our home page at SJBAS.ORG [Photo by Puren Rodrigo Vidal Castro]

Presidents Message

Dear SJBAS Members:

Welcome to the latest issue of the Moki Messenger. As the season winds down, I want to look back on a remarkable year of activity. Our trip leaders gave us a full calendar, our lecture series coordinators presented some remarkable talks, and our social coordinators kept our spirits high with event snacks, picnics and the Saturday Farmer’s Market events. If you didn’t participate this season, it was a blast, but don’t despair, we think 2027 will be even better!

A Season on the Road

We began in March, when Joel and Tammie led us on a trip to the Southern Ute Cultural Center, and Susan led a trip to Zuni Pueblo. May was a busy month. I led the Champagne Springs dig, and Rusty guided a trip to Sand Canyon and Goodman Point. Professor Mario Borrero conducted his Fort Lewis College Field School giving our us a chance to participate in sherd identification, artifact classification and drone site analysis.

In July, Rusty returned to Ohkay Owingeh for the Feast Day, with visits to nearby sites, Valles Caldera, and the Volcanic Discovery Center. In Santa Fe, we visited the museums on Museum Hill. In August, Rusty led a group to the Pecos Conference in Mancos. In September, I led the Mitchell Springs Dig and Susan, Aztec Ruins cultural day. In October, Hunter led a trip to Paquimé in Chihuahua, Mexico. Our annual Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Park Service Day, scheduled for last weekend, was cancelled after more than four inches of rain. We hope to reschedule it for the Spring of 2027.

Taken together, these trips took us from ancient villages and canyon country to living Pueblo traditions and the sites where archaeologists gather to explore new findings. Thank you to Rusty, Mario, Susan, Hunter, Joel and Tammie for the time and care they put in, and to every member who came along.

Durango Farmers' Market: A Triumph!

This season, SJBAS had a booth at the Saturday Farmers' Market on Main Street in downtown Durango, and it was a tremendous hit! Members spent their Saturday mornings, sharing their love of archaeology with neighbors and visitors, answering questions, and introducing many people to the work we do.

A special thank you to Joel and Tammie Barger, who ran the booth this season, and to everyone who pitched in. We've added to our Membership through the Farmer's Market and other efforts, now at 170 Members!

Social Gatherings

Despite a busy calendar Susan Hicks managed to schedule two social gatherings where members new and "seasoned" could gather. Thanks, Susan.

Annual Meeting and Holiday Brunch

Join fellow SJBAS members at our Annual Members Meeting and Holiday Brunch (see details below). We'll also celebrate the year's programs and adventures and thank the volunteers who make them possible, including our lecturers, trip leaders, and Farmers' Market crew.

Your participation helps shape what comes next. You'll get a preview of upcoming field trips and speakers, hear about SJBAS's goals, elect officers, and share your ideas for future activities. Whether you're a longtime member or new to the group, this is a chance to make connections, find ways to get involved, and help build a vibrant year ahead.

Warmly,

Thomas Polich, President, San Juan Basin Archaeological Society

Annual SJBAS Holiday Brunch Set for December 5th

Celebrate, Connect, and Help Shape SJBAS!

Join fellow SJBAS members for our Annual Meeting and Holiday Brunch—a chance to reconnect with friends, meet other members, and discover what’s ahead for our organization.

Enjoy a festive meal, browse the silent auction benefiting the John Sanders Internship Fund, and hear firsthand how the internship supports meaningful work and learning. Together, we’ll celebrate the year’s programs and adventures and thank the volunteers who make them possible.

Your participation helps shape what comes next. Get a preview of upcoming field trips and speakers, hear about SJBAS’s goals, elect officers, and share your ideas for future activities. Whether you’re a longtime member or new to the group, this is an opportunity to make connections, find ways to get involved, and help build a vibrant year ahead.



Come for the brunch, stay for the inspiration—and add your voice to the future of SJBAS!

Send checks for \$28 for each attendee payable to SJBAS and mail them to Mary Moorehead at SJBAS, PO Box 3153, Durango, CO 81302. Please print out and include the [Brunch form](#) with your check. And e-mail Tammie Barger at tab2105@comcast.net to let her know how many in your party.

Silent Auction Tradition Continues at Annual Holiday Brunch

If you have any lightly used items you would like to contribute to the Annual Meeting Silent Auction to benefit the John W. Sanders Education and Internship Fund, please plan to come to the Brunch a little early and bring the items and a pen or pencil to fill out a silent auction sheet with item description, value, opening bid and incremental amount of bid raises. SJBAS will provide the bid sheets. If bidding on your item is slow, you are welcome to reduce the minimum bid as the brunch progresses. Note, in the unlikely event that your item doesn’t sell, despite any price reduction, it will be yours to take home. If you would like to contribute an item as a door prize, please bring it wrapped.

Be sure to bring cash or a check to pay for silent auction items and to pay your 2027 SJBAS dues.

Trip Report: Paquimé and the Casas Grandes World, October 14–18

SJBAS embarked on its first international trip in years last month when eight SJBAS members traveled from Deming, New Mexico, into northwestern Chihuahua to see the marvels of the Paquimé world. Our scholar and guide was Dr. Paul Minnis, a noted authority on Paquimé who co-led much of the field work over the past few decades that has helped shape our understanding of the region.



On the Road to Casas Grandes

Our trip began with a reminder that today's border tensions looked quite different in 1916 when Pancho Villa forces attacked a small military outpost in Columbus, NM and sparked an invasion of Mexico. Ten thousand US troops traveled this same road. [General Pershing's HQ was in Colonia Dublán, a suburb of the city of Nuevo Casas Grandes.] After crossing the border at Palomas, we followed Mexican Highway 2 through open desert to Ascensión, a town founded by Mesilla Valley residents who wished to remain Mexican citizens after the U.S. acquired the Las Cruces area in the Gadsden Purchase. Farther south lay Janos, which began as a Spanish military outpost, and then the Casas Grandes River valley, where Mennonite and Mormon communities are a familiar sight.

Cerro Juanaqueña: Archaic Trincheras

Our first encounter with deep antiquity came near Janos, where Paul pointed out Cerro Juanaqueña, a cerro de trincheras. We viewed it from a distance, but the scale was clear. Excavations by Robert Hard and John Roney decades ago showed that this 140-meter basalt hill, overlooking the Casas Grandes and San Pedro rivers, was covered by terraces spanning about 20 acres, with more than eight kilometers of terrace walls and 108 stone circles.

The surprise was the date. The terraced village was built roughly 3,000 years ago, in the Late Archaic, well before pottery appeared in the region. Hard and Roney argue that such sites are the earliest fortified villages in the area, and that they reflect early dependence on agriculture, collective labor and the first experiments with village life. Long before Paquimé, people here were already building on a monumental scale. At noon we ate lunch at the mission of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad de los Janos.



Paquimé's Two Great Eras

Paquimé, also known as Casas Grandes, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the heart of the region's later story. Archaeologists divide its prehistory into two main eras.



The Viejo period, roughly A.D. 700 to 1200, was a time of small farming villages. People first lived in pit houses, then in

surface structures and eventually adobe-walled rooms, and they made distinctive early pottery. The Convento site (picture right), near Paquimé, is a key Viejo community.

The Medio period, roughly 1200 to 1450, is when Paquimé became a regional capital. Contiguous, multistory adobe room blocks grew to about 2,000 rooms. The city had ball courts, ceremonial mounds, reservoirs, elaborate water-control systems, and extensive macaw breeding, along with imported shell and fine polychrome pottery. Charles Di Peso, who led the great 1958–61 excavations, credited outsiders from Mesoamerica with inspiring the city. Minnis and his colleague Michael Whalen see more local continuity: they found Viejo remains beneath Medio sites, including Paquimé itself, suggesting local people simply expanded on earlier settlement. Radiocarbon dating suggests Paquimé was abandoned between about 1420 and 1460, though the chronology is still being refined.



Walking the City

An afternoon walking tour brought the site map (picture to right) to life. We moved among the Plaza, the market area, the I-shaped and T-shaped ball courts, the Mound of the Offerings and the great room complexes with names such as the House of the Dead and the House of the Well. Standing among the adobe walls, with their T-shaped doorways, it was easy to picture a bustling trade center. The macaw pens are especially striking, since the birds were brought from far to the south for their feathers. There were also turkey pens.



Cueva de la Olla: Granaries in the Cliffs

A climb into the Sierra Madre brought us to Cueva de la Olla (picture to right), a cliff-dwelling site southwest of Nuevo Casas Grandes that dates to the earlier Viejo era, roughly A.D. 950 to 1060. Its namesake is a remarkable granary shaped like a giant jar, or olla. Standing about 3.5 meters tall and 2.5 meters across, it is built from rolled straw and clay, with a small original opening at the top.



This was a strikingly different way to keep the harvest from the one used by the Ancestral Puebloans to the north, who typically stored corn in stone-walled cists and masonry rooms or in ceramic jars. Here, an entire granary was modeled like a pot, in a style that echoes the highland storage structures known elsewhere in Mexico. It was a vivid reminder that farming communities in the Southwest and northern Mexico solved the same problem in very different ways.

Paul's Own Sites: 204 and 242

Two memorable visits were those excavated by Paul and Whalen's team as part of their study of Paquimé's hinterland. They surveyed and excavated Medio communities to learn how the region was organized, concluding that Paquimé directly controlled an area only about 30 kilometers across, with outlying communities beyond that. This is as opposed to SJABS members' experience with Chaco and its outliers spanning thousands of square miles.

Paul's Site 204 lies about 17 kilometers from Paquimé and is among the largest settlements near it. It has a ball court and substantial mounds, and excavation found pit houses beneath the Medio remains, dated to about A.D. 1030–1160, evidence of long occupation of the same farmland.

Site 242, about 27 kilometers from Paquimé, is the southernmost of the group. Its Casas Grandes–style architecture includes an I-shaped ball court with a stone-faced end mound, aligned to true north like one of the courts at Paquimé, and a residential mound of unusual height. Radiocarbon dates place it in the 1300s. Seeing these places with Paul, who could point out where he had dug and explain what each find meant, was a highlight of the tour.

The Potters of Mata Ortiz

The village of Mata Ortiz is famed for hand-crafted pottery inspired by ancient Paquimé ceramics (see ancient pot above and modern day one below), a tradition revived by Juan Quezada and now carried on by many families. We visited several galleries, and most of us bought pieces. We also had a local potter give us a demonstration of how he forms a pot from clay he has gathered and cleaned.

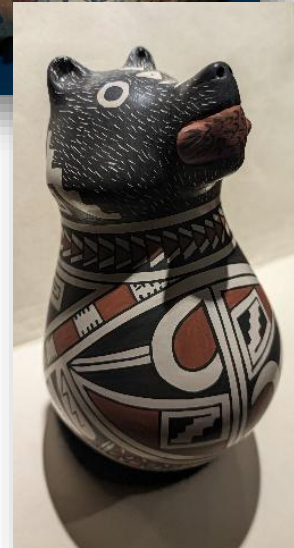
Reflections

While this trip was mostly about the archaeology it also offered a wonderful chance to interact with the people of Chihuahua. We



stayed in a local hotel where the small staff took very good care of us and fed us tasty local fare.

One evening we all had dinner at the home of a good friend of Paul's.



The trip tied together three thousand years of human history, from Archaic terraces to the adobe city of Paquimé to the living craft of Mata Ortiz. Thanks go to Cathy and Marshall Giesy of Fiesta Tours International for superb logistics and insights into the local communities and their warm-hearted residents. And to Paul Minnis for his expertise and good humor. We came home with a far deeper understanding of this remarkable corner of the Southwest's ancient world.



And lest you think that this trip wasn't physically demanding please note that one member

ended up in the ER, two turned around at the last minute due to health concerns and there was plenty of nasty barbed wire to crawl through.

Members on the trip were Tish Varney, Lynn Hughes, Jim Horn, Susan Hicks, Lorraine and Hunter McCleary, Lorie Hansen and Mary Moorehead. *Pictures by Lynn Hughes and Tish Varney.*



Field Trip Report: Digging a Great House at Mitchell Springs, October 9–11, 2026

Six members of the San Juan Basin Archaeological Society (SJBAS)—Lynn, Jim, Ken, Peter, Rusty and Thom—spent three October days excavating at Mitchell Springs, near Cortez, Colorado. The dig was organized and directed by Dave Dove (shown, far right), who owns and stewards the property and serves as the project's lead certified archaeologist.



A Village at the Center of Things

The site holds an earlier Pueblo II occupation, but the crew worked mainly in Pueblo III areas dating from about A.D. 1207 to 1275. Those labels come from the Pecos Classification, the



framework archaeologists use to sort Ancestral Pueblo history: Pueblo II runs roughly A.D. 900 to 1150, Pueblo III roughly 1150 to 1300. The Ancestral Pueblo people, forebears of today's Pueblo communities, lived across the Four Corners region, where Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico meet, and had largely left the region by the end of the 1200s.

The team worked in a great house complex—a large, multi-room masonry building that served as a community hub. Over three days they excavated three rooms and two kivas, the ceremonial and gathering chambers typically built partly or fully underground.

Slow Digging, Careful Records

Excavation proceeded layer by layer. Soil was screened through mesh to catch small artifacts, and every find was recorded by its precise location and context, meaning the surroundings in which it lay. Digging destroys that evidence, so the record is the only way to keep it.



Unlike the society's spring dig at Champagne Springs, this one produced relatively little redware, the red-surfaced pottery common at some sites. Instead, members learned to recognize and compare three painted pottery styles: Mancos, McElmo and Mesa Verde, all black-on-white wares decorated with dark painted designs on a pale background. Broken pieces of pottery, called sherds, help archaeologists date the layers where they turn up, because styles changed over time.

Among the most memorable finds were bone awls and medallions in a kiva, interpreted as offerings. The discovery sparked talk about why context matters: not just what an object is, but where it was placed and how it relates to everything around it.

Hard Work, Lasting Impressions

It is demanding work. Shoveling, troweling, screening and hauling buckets of earth wear a person out. Yet uncovering traces of people who lived more than seven centuries ago, the group found, brings an immediacy that books and lectures cannot.

Participants camped on the property beneath a Fremont cottonwood reportedly identified by the state arborist as the second-largest of its kind in Colorado; some commuted about 40 minutes from home. Each morning began with work assignments from Dove.



Dove will present on Mitchell Springs and Champagne Springs at a lecture in 2027.

For the six participants, the lasting impression was less a single find than the shared work of examining a sherd, debating an emerging wall or floor, and imagining how the rooms and kiva fit into the lives of the people who built them. The trip reflects SJBAS's mission to learn, preserve and share the archaeological heritage of the Four Corners region.

Submitted by Thomas Polich, President and Trip Coordinator, San Juan Basin Archaeological Society

Field Trip Report: Aztec Ruins Indigenous Cultural Arts Festival, September 13

On September 13, 2026, San Juan Basin Archaeological Society members Susan Hicks and Sandy Hoagland traveled to



Aztec Ruins National Monument for the 2026 Indigenous Cultural Arts Festival. The event brought together artists from several Southwest nations, who demonstrated their techniques and sold original work ranging from traditional to contemporary, including pottery, jewelry, and basketry. Dances were also held throughout the day.

The pair arrived just before the first performance, by the Acoma Family Dance Group, a fourth-generation group from the Pueblo of Acoma. They watched the dancers perform outdoors beneath the cottonwoods and again inside the reconstructed Great Kiva. Acoma Pueblo, in New Mexico, is often described as one of the longest continuously inhabited communities in North America, so the performance connected a

living Pueblo tradition to a site built by their ancestors. The Great Kiva makes a fitting venue. It was reconstructed in the 1930s under archaeologist Earl Morris, who had excavated at the site in the early 20th century, and it remains the only fully reconstructed Great Kiva of its kind in the Southwest.

After the dances, the two toured the artists' exhibits and then followed the monument's self-guided trail through the ancient structures. The park describes Aztec Ruins as having some of the best-preserved Chacoan structures of its kind. The site's name is a misnomer: nineteenth-century settlers assumed the Aztecs of Mexico built it, but it was actually constructed by ancestral Pueblo people in the late 11th and 12th centuries as a northern outpost connected to Chaco Canyon, roughly 55 miles to the south. The monument, established in 1923, is part of the Chaco Culture UNESCO World Heritage designation, and its West Site Complex once held around 400 rooms.



The day ended with lunch at Rubia's Fine Mexican Dining Restaurant in Aztec before the drive home. The report suggests a well-spent day of art, culture, and archaeology, with the artists' work and the dances clearly leaving an impression. —*Submitted by Susan Hicks*

Another Social Success at the Union Social House

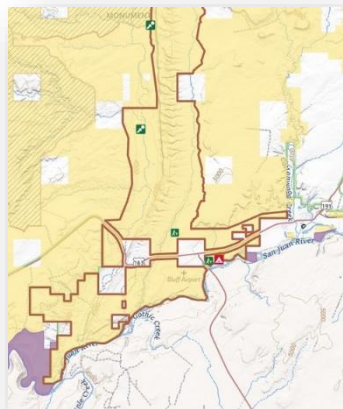


SJBAS hosted another social gathering on October 20th. This time at the Union Social House. An estimated 20 new and veteran members attended. Susan Hicks organized this one, as well, and it looks like they will be a regular part of our Event calendar.

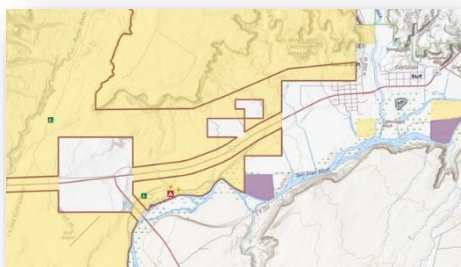


Bluff Bears Ears Boundaries Survive Re-Shrinking

In 2017 Trump shrunk Bears Ears back to Butler Wash and the top of Tank Mesa. Biden put Obama's boundaries back. This time in July 2026 Trump left the Bluff boundaries alone meaning the SE boundary of Bears Ears is as Obama declared it.



This is very important for our members who like to hike especially up Cottonwood Wash. –Submitted by Andy Gulliford



Upcoming SJBAS Events for 2026

[Contact trip organizers for details.
See sjbas.org for the latest version of the full-year calendar.
Dates and event descriptions may change]

November 11	SJBAS Meeting —"The Peopling of the Americas," presented by Tom Dalton Dillehay, emeritus professor of Anthropology, Vanderbilt University. 7:00 PM Lyceum at Center of Southwest Studies.
December 5	2026 SJBAS Holiday Brunch. At the FLC Student Union. Details to follow.

Educational Opportunities on Southwest Archaeology

September–October 2026

[If not offered nearby they can be seen on Zoom.

Prepared by Betsy Moore, Education/PAAC Coordinator]

Tuesday, Nov 3 5:30 – 7:30 PM MST	"Neither Mischievous nor Mysterious: Humans Hooked on Devil's Claw," a free Archaeology Café lecture presented by Archaeology Southwest. Presenter is Edward A. Jolie, PhD. You may register for the Zoom here .
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Thursday November 5 4:00–5:00 PM MST	“From Archaeology to Hollywood: A Conversation with Ernie TsoieTools for Exploring the Past,” presented by Crow Canyon Archaeological Center. For more information and to register go here .
Thursday, Dec 17 7:00 – 8:30 PM MST	“Employment of Historic Human Remains Detection Dogs in Archaeology,” Old Pueblo Archaeology Center’s Third Thursday Food for Thought presentation. Presenters are Karen Paquette and Mark Paquette. You may register here .

SJBAS Elected Officers and Board Members

President	Thomas Polich
Vice President	OPEN
Secretary	Susan Hicks
Treasurer	Mary Moorehead
Communications chair	Byron Kellogg
Membership chair	Elena Piazzisi
Field Trip Program coordinator	Rusty Chamberlain
Education/PAAC representative	Betsy Moore
<i>Moki Messenger</i> editor	Hunter McCleary
Programming chair	Janice Sheftel
Publicity chair	Rusty Chamberlain
Social chair	Tammie and Joel Barger

Webmaster	Lyle Hancock
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SJBAS Membership renewals are due by January 31st each year. Individual dues drop to \$15 after June 30. To renew your membership, please complete the SJBAS Annual Membership Form, make your check for \$25 (\$50 family, \$10 student) payable to “SJBAS” and mail with the printed Annual Membership Form only to: SJBAS, Attn: Treasurer, P.O. Box 3153, Durango, CO 81302.

If you would like to join SJBAS or need to renew a lapsed membership, just print and complete the Annual Membership Form; sign the membership form, Liability Waiver and Proper Etiquette forms; write a check payable to “SJBAS” for the appropriate amount; and mail the Annual Membership Form, the signed liability form and your check to our Society Treasurer. Please keep your signed *Proper Etiquette forms* for your records.