

Trip Report: SJBAS Archaeological Field Trip and Dig – Cortez, May 2025

From May 2 - 4, 2025, ten members of the San Juan Basin Archaeological Society (SJBAS) participated in an enriching archaeological dig at an ancestral Puebloan site located south of Cortez, Colorado in collaboration with Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, Mitchell Springs Ruin Group, (privately owned by Dave Dove, the Site Steward) and regional professional and amateur archaeologists.

Excavation Activities

Over the course of three days, SJBAS volunteers joined a diverse and enthusiastic crew carefully excavating multiple rooms and features within a Puebloan settlement complex of great houses, kivas and rooms. Participants worked in clearly defined excavation units, known as “PD”s for Provenience Designations, employing trowels, brushes, and screens to methodically remove soil while documenting context and stratigraphy.

The excavation uncovered several intact wall segments and floor surfaces. These architectural features provide evidence of room construction and use over multiple occupational phases. Many volunteers also assisted with mapping, photography, and labeling, ensuring detailed recording for analysis.

Educational Value

In addition to excavation, participants received informal lessons on stratigraphy, artifact typology, and local Puebloan history. Artifacts initiated discussion regarding why, when and speculation on how these materials were left in-situ. Rooms for previous generations are often buried (intentionally filled in) and collapsed with relics, such as an offering to a child or kiva goods; the roof burned and collapsed, with a portal, adjoining wall or window opened to the past ancestry, for the subsequent generations, related or otherwise.

Discussions focused on the region’s cultural sequence, including Basketmaker and Pueblo I, II and III periods, evidenced by the Site, and the broader implications of recent discoveries in the Four Corners area.

Conclusion

The SJBAS field trip south of Cortez was a meaningful success, both scientifically and socially. Participants left with a renewed appreciation for the labor and precision involved in construction of these truly wonderful ancient structures, archaeological skills, as well as a deeper connection to the past. Our findings, once analyzed and catalogued, will remain part of the collection at the Site, and contribute to the long-term understanding of ancestral Puebloan lifeways in the Mesa Verde region.

We thank the organizer, Mr. Dave Dove, crew chiefs, and fellow archeology aficionados, for making this experience possible, and we look forward to returning for future seasons of exploration and learning. The love of archeology lies in these explorations, examinations and wistful thinkings. Archeology Builds Connections.