



New Mexico Archaeology

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF ARCHAEOLOGY

MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO FOUNDATION

WWW.NMARCHAEOLOGY.ORG

NOVEMBER 2025

OAS LAUNCHES NEW TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ARCHAEOLOGY CREW MEMBERS

JOHN TAYLOR-MONTOYA
OAS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings, Friends. It is with great pride that I am writing to you about an innovative training program that OAS launched this fall in partnership with the Department of Agriculture. We can't claim credit for the genesis of the idea; that rightfully belongs to the legislative sponsors who stewarded the appropriation for the program across the finish line in the last legislative session. I can, nonetheless, shine the spotlight on the OAS staff who pulled together to develop and deliver a never-been-done-before program in the span of about three months. The fact that we were able to launch the program on schedule is a testament to the passion, skills, knowledge, and professionalism of the current OAS staff.

If you're not familiar with the program, I am happy to provide a brief introduction. The program offers an intensive training program for free, to citizens of New Mexico across the entire state. The program has two tracks. There is an entry level track for individuals who may be interested in working as field technicians and does not require prior education or professional experience in archaeology. The second

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TAOS SURVEY

OAS ARCHAEOLOGISTS HEAD NORTH

CAMERON C. TURLEY
OAS PROJECT DIRECTOR

A team of OAS archaeologists have spent much of the summer and fall surveying the ridges and canyons of Kiowa-San Cristobal on the Carson National Forest. Flanked by gorge and mountains, the rugged, beautiful landscape has revealed traces of Indigenous and Euroamerican lives spanning millennia.

The crew recorded a several-thousand-year-old Archaic lithic scatter on a ridge top overlooking the Rio Grande Gorge and the valleys leading to it—this was an excellent place to watch for game thousands of years ago and a place where contemporary elk hunters will do the same in just a few weeks' time. This was one of dozens of newly discovered archaeological sites on the 1,500-

acre patch of the Carson National Forest.

The OAS team will spend the next several weeks recording every stone tool and piece of production debris, every small piece of ancient ceramic, even familiar sardine cans from the early twentieth century, all the often-unnoticed physical traces of people who walked there long before them, all the things they have discovered while carefully combing the landscape.

This work is in preparation for the Forest Service's mission managing the landscape for wildfire hazards and sustainable productivity. But the agency best known for ecosystem management stewards more than forest products. It also conserves a deep cultural memory manifested in this vast collection of small things left on the rocky slopes and in the shady valleys north of Taos. In completing their archaeological site inventory, the OAS proudly contributes to that project. ❖

ATLATLS OVER OAS

OAS' Education Director
Ziggy Prothro spent a sunny
autumn morning showing the
home-school kids how it's done.



New Mexico Office of Archaeological Studies

The Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS) was the first museum program of its kind in the nation. OAS staff conduct international field and laboratory research, offer educational opportunities for school groups and civic organizations, and work to preserve, protect, and interpret prehistoric and historic sites throughout New Mexico.

Friends of Archaeology

The Friends of Archaeology is an interest group within the Museum of New Mexico Foundation that supports the OAS. To join the FOA, you need only become a member of the Museum of New Mexico Foundation and sign up. Visit www.nmarchaeology.org for information. We're also on Facebook, at www.facebook.com/FriendsOfArchaeologyNM. Friends of Archaeology's e-mail address is friendsofarchaeologynm@gmail.com

Mission Statement

The mission of the Friends of Archaeology is to support the Office of Archaeological Studies in the achievement of its archaeological services mandate from the State of New Mexico through participation in and funding of research and education projects.

FOA Board

Board Members: Barbara am Ende, Margaret Armstrong, Joe Benitez, Donna Coleman, Zella Cox, Greg Dove, Sherill Spaar, and Charlie Weiss

Contributors to the Board:

Melissa Martinez, Lauren Paige

DRIVING DISCOVERY

NEW 'SCHOOL BUS INITIATIVE' EXPANDS STUDENT ACCESS TO OAS

ZELLA COX
FOA TREASURER

The mission of the New Mexico Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS) includes sharing information about prehistoric and historic sites across the state. The mission of the Friends of Archaeology (FOA) is to support OAS through fund-raising initiatives and other activities so that OAS can accomplish its education and research priorities. Together, FOA members and OAS create opportunities that inspire curiosity, spark learning, and deepen public understanding of New Mexico's rich cultural heritage.

As part of its information sharing activities, OAS provides the opportunity for various public and tribal school children to visit the OAS facilities and see first hand the work that is being done, how it is accomplished, and who is involved in getting it done. FOA has stepped in to provide funding in the amount of \$5,000 to pay for school bus transportation services for those children interested in visiting OAS. Your participation and support truly make this support possible.

The individual who has been the primary coordinator of these educational outings is Ziggy Prothro, OAS's education coordinator. She has a background in archaeology education and developed her love for public outreach while volunteering with schools and community organizations. Her master's thesis, "Archaeology in Education: Public Outreach for Archaeologic Awareness and Educational Enrichment" cemented her desire to work in outreach, bringing exciting aspects of archaeological research to the public.

These bus trips to take school children, usually elementary and middle school students, to OAS will be scheduled as soon as the effort can be coordinated with classroom teachers. Another effort will be undertaken by FOA to fund other bus trips



Santa Fe ATC students visited OAS earlier this year.

in the spring during the regular school year.

If you would like to contribute to this important and worthwhile funding initiative that FOA has made a commitment to support, simply send your check to MNMF in whatever amount you feel comfortable. Just know that the decision by FOA to provide the funds necessary to enable school kids to visit OAS and see the wonderful work being done is part of its overall mission. The educational programs that OAS offers include hands-on activities as well as simply observing OAS staff performing important work to answer questions about archaeology, history, and the heritage of New Mexico.

Thank you for your interest in and support of both OAS and FOA. Your involvement helps expand access to archaeology education and strengthens the impact we can make together. If you would like to learn more about the programs and activities, please go to the FOA Facebook page or YouTube site.

Consider becoming more involved with FOA by joining its Board; the organization is always interested in having members help with marketing, programming, fund raising, and event planning. ❖

BROWN BAG LECTURE

CERAMIC TYPES FROM MOGOLLON- MIMBRES COUNTRY

A free lunchtime talk, "Some Ceramic Types from the Mogollon-Mimbres Country: Culture, Clay, Change, Connections, and Classification," will be presented by OAS Research Associate C. Dean Wilson at the Center for New Mexico Archaeology.

Characteristics of the defined pottery types for the long sequence of occupation documented for various native agriculture groups in the Mogollon Highlands reflect influences from surrounding "Ancestral Pueblo" groups as well a technology adapted to the distinct geography and geology of this region. This presentation will focus on descriptions and discussions of the changing sequence of Early Mogollon Decorated Ware, Mimbres White Ware, and Mogollon Brown Ware. The distinct characteristics noted for pottery assigned to these wares seem to be the result of a long-lived technology adapted to the distinct temper, paste, clay, and slip resources associated with the volcanic fields and alluvial deposits in this region. In particular, the distinct nature of pottery produced in the region results from the use of ubiquitous high-iron, soft, low-firing, porous, and extremely moldable clay sources. The use of such resources resulted in very distinct pottery forms as compared to that associated with pottery long produced by Ancestral Pueblo groups in the Colorado Plateau to the north, who utilized low-iron, marine-derived geological clays with very different characteristics.

The lecture will be held in the OAS library at the Center for New Mexico Archaeology. Seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis. This talk is set for **Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2026, at noon.** ❖





TENDING TO TAOS

Forest Service survey work in the Carson National Forest kept OAS archaeologists busy through the summer and autumn months.

The crew encountered lithic tools, lithic tool production debris, ancient ceramics, and a few sardine cans. Photos by Scott Jaquith.



SUPERNOVAS, COMETS, AND ROCK ART

RECONSIDERING CHACO CANYON'S 'SUPERNOVA' PICTOGRAPH

MARVIN ROWE
OAS RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

In July of 1054 CE, observers around the world witnessed a dazzling new star in the sky, brighter than Venus and visible for nearly two years. Modern astronomy recognizes this as the explosion of a supernova that produced the Crab Nebula, a remnant still visible today. Written records of this event exist from China, Japan, and Arabia, but some scholars have argued that Native peoples in the American Southwest also recorded it in rock art. In particular, a pictograph panel at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, has been thought to depict both the 1054 supernova and the later 1066 appearance of Halley's Comet. This article summarizes my contribution to research that reviewed earlier claims about possible supernova images found across the western United States and Mexico, to evaluate whether they could genuinely be connected to the 1054 CE Crab Nebula event.

Over the years, researchers suggested more than 20 North American rock art depictions might represent the supernova: crescent-and-circle symbols, star-like designs, and comet-like streaks. Early enthusiasm led to many attributions, but careful analysis has shown that most do not withstand scrutiny. For example, the Lava Beds National Monument panel in California was once claimed as a supernova image, but radiocarbon dating of its charcoal figures revealed that the paintings were created centuries later. Likewise, panels from Tenabo in Nevada, from Abo and San Cristobal in New Mexico, and from El Parral in Baja California fail to align with the expected astronomical configuration or belong to much later cultural contexts. In many cases, images once presumed to be celestial inspired rock art depictions have been reclassified as more likely symbolic or ceremonial than a literal record of a celestial event.

Out of all the sites examined, only the Peñasco Blanco pictograph at



The star-like figure and crescent at Chaco Canyon is generally considered an image of the 1054 CE supernova. Image courtesy of Randy Langstraat, Adventure Blog.



Crab Nebula image taken by NASA.

Chaco Canyon stands out as a plausible candidate. This panel shows a crescent shape next to a star-like figure in the correct relative orientation. Nearby, concentric circles with a trailing streak suggest a comet consistent with the 1066 appearance of Halley's Comet. Taken together, these images fall within Chaco Canyon's major period of occupation (1020–1120 CE), when astronomical

observation and ceremonial activity were central to community life. Chaco's architecture itself demonstrates careful attention to solar and lunar alignments, reinforcing the idea that its inhabitants were attuned to unusual sky phenomena.

Still, doubts remain. Some scholars argue that Pueblo peoples were less likely to record singular, dramatic events like a supernova, focusing instead on recurring cycles such as solstices and lunar phases. Others caution against projecting modern expectations of "skywatching" onto cultures separated by centuries. At best, the Peñasco Blanco panel is circumstantial evidence, not proof.

The question arises: Should we attempt radiocarbon dating of the Peñasco Blanco images to resolve the issue? While dating could potentially rule out the 1054 CE supernova interpretation—if the paintings proved much older or younger in age—it

See **Supernovas**, on Page 8.

FOA SURVEY RESULTS

MEMBER INPUT MORE CRUCIAL THAN EVER

This fall, the Friends of Archaeology (FOA) conducted a membership survey to learn more about what inspires our community and how we can shape future programs to meet your interests. We are deeply grateful to the dozens of members who shared their thoughts. Your input provides an invaluable road map for our next chapter of engagement and growth.

The majority of respondents are long-time supporters over age 65, reflecting the depth of experience and commitment within our membership. Nearly 60 percent of members attend at least one FOA event each year, while 20 percent are frequent participants. Another 20 percent said they have not yet attended an event but would like to, an exciting opportunity for outreach and inclusion. When asked about preferred programming, respondents overwhelmingly favored archaeology lectures, both in-person and online, followed closely by guided hikes, tours of OAS, and hands-on workshops, such as flintknapping and pottery making. In terms of subject matter, most members checked "All of the above," confirming the community's wide-ranging curiosity, from Puebloan history and rock art to the science of archaeology, including

FOA NEEDS BOARD MEMBERS

FOA is looking for volunteers with an interest in Southwest archaeology to join this dynamic group's board and support the OAS through educational and cultural archeology-focused activities such as field trips, lectures, and research. If you're interested, we would really love to hear from you! Please send a short statement of interest to friendsofarchaeologynm@gmail.com.

archaeomagnetism and geology.

Most members are willing to travel up to 100 miles or more for programs, demonstrating remarkable dedication. Many also noted accessibility considerations such as mobility challenges or transportation needs, feedback that will help FOA and OAS plan inclusive, accommodating activities for all participants. Email remains the most popular way to stay informed, with nearly

90 percent of respondents preferring digital updates. We are now exploring a digital newsletter format to meet this request. Others value the print newsletter for its thoughtful recaps and photographs, a reminder of the importance of keeping multiple communication channels open to serve our diverse membership.

Your feedback reinforces FOA's mission: to foster a deeper understanding of New Mexico's archaeological heritage through education, exploration, and community support for OAS. In the coming year, the FOA Board will use these results to guide programming, refine communications, and expand opportunities for participation across the state and beyond.

We also invite members passionate about archaeology to join the FOA Board of Directors. New board members bring fresh perspectives, expertise, and enthusiasm, helping us turn these survey goals into action. We are looking for folks with experience in marketing, technology, education, history, and archaeology. Please email friendsofarchaeologynm@gmail.com. Together, we can shape the next era of discovery and connection for the FOA community. ❖

DIRECTOR

Continued from Page 1.

track is an advanced course that is for individuals with degrees in archaeology/anthropology or a related field and prior experience. The program is intended to provide these individuals with focused training and experience as a field supervisor and, hopefully, spur them on into careers in public archaeology.

The current program is a pilot program. We knew there was a demand for something like this in the field but we were not sure what to expect. The response has been overwhelming. We had room for 30 participants in this pilot program and received well over 150 applications. The program has garnered interest across the nation from both academic archaeologists and cultural

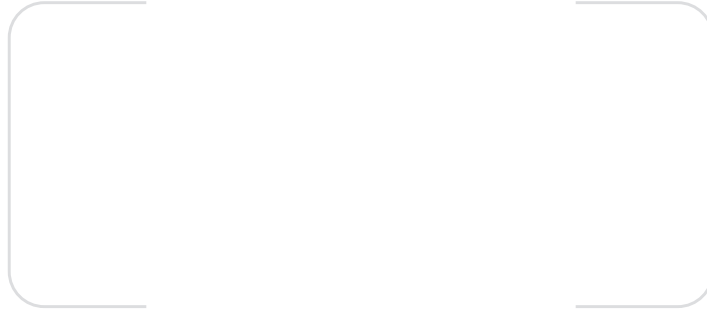
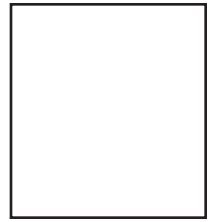
resource management professionals.

This kind of a program has the potential to bolster the heritage preservation workforce capacity across New Mexico and in underserved communities like the Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos here in New Mexico.

The program has gained enough momentum and demonstrated such a clear need in the industry that we are requesting that the legislature extend the program for another year. If you would like to know more about the program or feel called to help advocate for this initiative, please contact me. I'll be happy to provide more information.

While we are on the topic of education and outreach, I would like to recognize the current FOA board for their continuing generosity in supporting our education program. In their last

meeting, the board voted to make a seed money donation to our School Bus Fund. This is a game changer for us and for archaeological education in New Mexico. I am extremely proud to say that, thanks to the hard work and seemingly unstoppable energy of Education Coordinator Ziggy Prothro, OAS can boast having provided in-person outreach to 28 of New Mexico's 33 counties. The School Bus Fund makes travel to our facility in Santa Fe feasible for schools for rural or underserved communities that may otherwise not be able to travel. Effectively expanding our reach by providing the means for some of the counties to come visit us. We want to thank the FOA for the generous gift and their work in helping OAS fulfill our mission and bringing archaeology to life for the people of New Mexico. ❖



SUPERNOVAS

Continued from Page 6.

cannot conclusively prove that the panel depicts a celestial feature. Furthermore, even a small sampling would cause visible damage to a nearly pristine and iconic work of rock art. I, therefore, conclude that even such small damage to the image is not justified.

In the end, whether or not the Peñasco Blanco pictographs represent the supernova and Halley's Comet may matter less than the broader cultural and scientific questions raised. If accurate, the paintings would demonstrate that Chacoans, like cultures worldwide, marked extraordinary celestial events. If not, the images still reflect a society deeply engaged with the sky, embedding astronomical symbols into ritual and artistic life. Either way, the debate highlights the challenges of interpreting ancient imagery and the limitations of physical dating methods when cultural meaning remains elusive.

The story of the 1054 CE supernova

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in the Southwest thus remains unresolved. Most supposed depictions are "busted," but the Chaco Canyon panel persists as a tantalizing possibility—perhaps the closest we will come to seeing how the Ancestral Puebloans may have painted the heavens.



This work has been accepted for publication in a book to be published by the University of New Mexico Press, edited by Jennifer (Huang) Rilk.

MAKE YOUR MARK ON NM ARCHAEOLOGY!

Please consider supporting the Office of Archaeological Studies by making a gift to education or research by check, credit, stock, IRA rollover, or planned gift. Your tax-deductible donation through the Museum of New Mexico Foundation will have a lasting impact. One hundred percent of your donation will be directed to the OAS. No administrative fees are charged. Give online: museumfoundation.org/give/. For questions, or to donate, contact Lauren Paige at (505) 982-2282, or via e-mail at lauren@museumfoundation.org.

