

2025 NMAC Annual Meeting Abstracts and Speakers

“Archaeology of the Middle Rio Grande”

The Middle Rio Grande is rarely highlighted in Southwest archaeology despite having experienced a brief period of early research excavations at sites such as Paako, Pottery Mound, and Kuaua after the destruction of large portions of other pueblos and sites in the early twentieth century. Over the past nearly sixty years, mostly only cultural resource management professionals operate in the region with key technical reports providing a far richer, but less integrated regional understanding than Cordell's 1979 widely cited work. This conference highlights recent archaeological and historic findings with an emphasis on how CRM projects in the Middle Rio Grande have broadened our understanding and interpretation of the region's extensive, multicultural history. As part of this, we strive to address what has been learned from recent investigations and how they can inform research directions for projects.

1. Cultural Resource Management and the Archaic Period on Albuquerque's West Mesa

Adam Okun (Okun Consulting Solutions, LLC)

Archaeological Research in the Middle Rio Grande has understandably focused on the large Coalition and Classic Period Pueblos and early Hispanic Villages of the Albuquerque Basin. However, most of the CRM projects in the region have taken place on the West Mesa, where archaeological sites more commonly date to the Archaic Period and later village sites are absent. A long history of development projects on the West Mesa has resulted in one of the most intensively studied regions and time periods in New Mexico. This paper summarizes the contributions of CRM to our understanding of the deeper prehistory of the Middle Rio Grande Region and discusses the complex relationship between Archaic surface artifact scatters and buried structures on the West Mesa.

2. New “New Perspectives” on Pottery Mound: Pueblo of Isleta Preservation Projects and the Ancestral Pueblo Landscape of the Lower Puerco Valley

Michael Bletzer (Pueblo of Isleta Cultural and Historic Preservation Department)

In 2008, Pottery Mound was the subject of a comprehensive edited volume entitled “New Perspectives on Pottery Mound Pueblo.” Much of the information in that volume was based on records of fieldwork conducted under the auspices of the University of New Mexico in the 1950s and later. Since the Pueblo of Isleta received ownership of Pottery Mound in 2013, the

Isleta Cultural and Historic Preservation Department (CHPD) has undertaken a number of projects in preparation for stabilizing the remaining parts of Pottery Mound. By means of extensive pedestrian and geophysical surveys, LiDAR mapping, limited archaeological testing, metal detecting, and GIS work, these projects have substantially expanded and altered the 2008 “perspectives” on Pottery Mound’s occupation history and that of its surrounding landscape.

3. A Discussion of Colonial-Period Ceramics along the Rio Grande

Alexander Kurota (Office of Contract Archeology, University of New Mexico), Thatcher Seltzer-Rogers (Chronicle Heritage), Garrett Lloyd (Office of Contract Archeology, University of New Mexico), and Jack Young (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish)

This paper offers a detailed description of Colonial-period ceramics which are often poorly understood in the archaeological community. These ceramics include the Casitas Series bichromes and polychromes as well as utility wares (such as Carnue Plain) and polished graywares (also called Kapo Gray/Black or Manzano Black). We draw the data from two primary sources – Area D of the Alameda Village Site (LA 50240) in Albuquerque and the Casa Colorada Site (LA 50261) in Belen, New Mexico. A diversity of vessel shapes, forms and size as well as their slip/paint applications are presented. Previously undefined ceramic types of the period are introduced here with their new type names. We also briefly address the disputed origin of this ceramic tradition comparing it to some historic Puebloan Matte paint polychromes. Finally, we present a picture of a fragmentary Guanajuato Polychrome plate recovered from Casa Colorada. This Colonial-period tradeware from Mexico is rarely found in the United States.

4. Ceramic Research at Kuaua Pueblo

Hayward Franklin (Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico)

This presentation is based on several years of pottery analysis at Kuaua Pueblo.

5. Past Lifeways and Patterns on the Far West Mesa of Albuquerque

Thatcher Seltzer-Rogers (Chronicle Heritage)

Chronicle Heritage recently conducted a survey of approximately 2,500 acres crossing the West Mesa of Albuquerque for a transmission line, enabling an opportunity to assess and expand existing understandings of historical patterns for this area. Whereas prior investigations of the West Mesa have primarily focused on the area including and directly surrounding Petroglyph National Monument, in this paper, I discuss areas farther to the west

and a wider array of resources spanning the Paleoindian Period through the mid-twentieth century.

6. The Developmental and Coalition Periods of the Middle-Middle Rio Grande: A Reevaluation of Time and/or Process

Robin Cordero (SWCA)

Since first developed by Wendorf and Reed in 1955, the Rio Grande Sequence has been the cultural-historical framework for most research conducted in the eastern Pueblo region north of Isleta. While this sequence has seen significant refinement over the past 25 years in the area around Santa Fe and Espanola, much of the region south of La Bajada has not been systematically reevaluated and synthesized. This paper will attempt to synthesize excavation data from this region with an emphasis towards characterizing the Late Developmental phase and the transition to the Classic period, and culminating in the question “Where/What is the Coalition?”

7. Historical and Archaeological Investigations on the San Antonio de las Huertas Land Grant, Sandoval County, New Mexico

Karen K. Swope, Evan Giomi, Phillip Leckman, and Rebecca Wells (Statistical Research, Inc.) and Moises Gonzales (University of New Mexico)

In 2023 and 2024, a collaborative team led by Statistical Research Inc. (SRI) conducted research within the San Antonio de las Huertas (SADLH) land grant, a Middle Rio Grande vecino community with roots in the mid-eighteenth century. Research was tailored to meet SADLH priorities, and included pedestrian survey, documentation of two historical cemeteries and the community acequia system, a historical overview of the SADLH and village of Placitas, oral interviews, and excavation and archaeomagnetic testing of a lime kiln. Newly-documented sites included pre-contact structures as well as historical features. After more than 250 years, descendants of the original grantees continue to live and thrive on this land, as reflected in the public interpretive materials SRI developed detailing the results of the investigations.

8. Early to Mid-Twentieth Century Life along Historic Fourth Street in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque and Isleta Boulevard in the South Valley

Heather Seltzer-Rogers (Chronicle Heritage)

In 2022, PaleoWest, now Chronicle Heritage, documented historic resources along a 1.5-mile stretch of historic Fourth Street in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, and, in 2023,

documented historic resources along a 3.7-mile segment of Isleta Boulevard in South Valley, New Mexico for road improvement projects. These historic streets have seen significant transformation from the prehispanic Ancestral Puebloan through Hispanic occupation and modern development as now part of the Albuquerque Metropolitan area. The documentation efforts included survey, ethnographic, and archival work to assess changes of resources over this lengthy period of use. Although PaleoWest conducted these efforts for compliance purposes, these projects resulted in the documentation of 206 newly recorded historic resources including buildings and ditches, which further shape our understanding of the historic North and South Valleys of Albuquerque. I present the results of these efforts with respect to historical patterns for these areas and emphasize investigating settlement patterns and changes in landscapes over time.

9. Four Thousand Years along the River: The Archaic to Ancestral Pueblo Transition in the Middle Rio Grande Valley

Matt Schmader (Department of Anthropology, University of New Mexico)

The middle Rio Grande valley has been occupied for many millennia but for much of that time it was not the center of high population density. Surrounding areas have, at various times, had greater numbers of sites during the middle Archaic, late Archaic, and Early Ancestral periods. However, the continuity of occupation, the visibility of sites, and both the quantity and quality of CRM work in the area presents an ideal case to discuss issues of cultural development, social and economic change, and stability versus rapid growth. Results of nearly 20 years' work on projects in the Rio Rancho area are presented. These results show that there was unbroken cultural continuity during a span of more than 4,000 years from the middle Archaic to the early Ancestral Pueblo periods. This paper discusses settlement patterns, population size, residential mobility, and development of early horticulture and animal domestication. Results of 70 excavated domestic dwellings are presented. Trends in architecture, ceramics, groundstone technology, and storage are all discussed. Finally, a reconsideration of Wendorf and Reed's chronological scheme is offered.