

LAS April 2016 Headlines:

ANCIENT SOUTHWEST PUEBLO PEOPLE MARKED BY REPEATED PERIODS OF BOOM AND BUST

Heritagedailey - WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY



The heavily studied yet largely unexplained disappearance of ancestral Pueblo people from southwest Colorado is “the most vexing and persistent question in Southwestern archaeology,” according to the New York Times.
Ruins of Chetroketlin Chaco Canyon.

But it’s not all that unique, say Washington State University scientists. Writing in the journal *Science Advances*, they say the region saw three other cultural transitions over the preceding five centuries. The researchers also document recurring narratives in which the Pueblo people agreed on canons of ritual, behavior and belief that quickly dissolved as climate change hurt crops and precipitated social turmoil and violence.

“The process of releasing one’s self from those canons, the process of breaking that down, can occur very quickly and occurred very quickly four times in the Pueblo past,” said Kyle Bocinsky, a WSU adjunct faculty member in anthropology and director of sponsored projects for the Crow Canyon

Archaeological Center in Cortez, Colo. The article grew out of work toward Bocinsky’s WSU doctorate.

Funded by the National Science Foundation, Bocinsky, WSU Regents Professor Tim Kohler and colleagues analyzed data from just over 1,000 southwest archaeological sites and nearly 30,000 tree-ring dates that served as indicators of rainfall, heat and time. Their data-intensive approach, facilitated by climate reconstructions run at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, gives a remarkably detailed picture of year-to-year changes.

This is particularly important as droughts of just five or ten years were enough to prompt major shifts in the small niches where Pueblo people grew maize, their major crop.

The niches, said Kohler, were “woven together with a web of ceremony and ritual that required belief in the supernatural” to ensure plentiful rain and good crops. When rains failed to appear, he said, the rituals were delegitimized.

“Then there’s a point where people say, ‘This isn’t working. We’re leaving,’” he said.

That starts a period of exploration in which people look for new places to live and develop new ways of living, followed by a period of exploitation in a new niche with different behaviors and values.

“There’s a new period of wealth creation, investment in architecture and culture change,” said Kohler.

The researchers said the first period of exploitation, known as Basketmaker III, took place between 600 and 700 A.D. It ended with a mild drought and was followed by a period known as Pueblo I, in which the practice of storing maize in underground chambers gave way to storage in rooms above ground.



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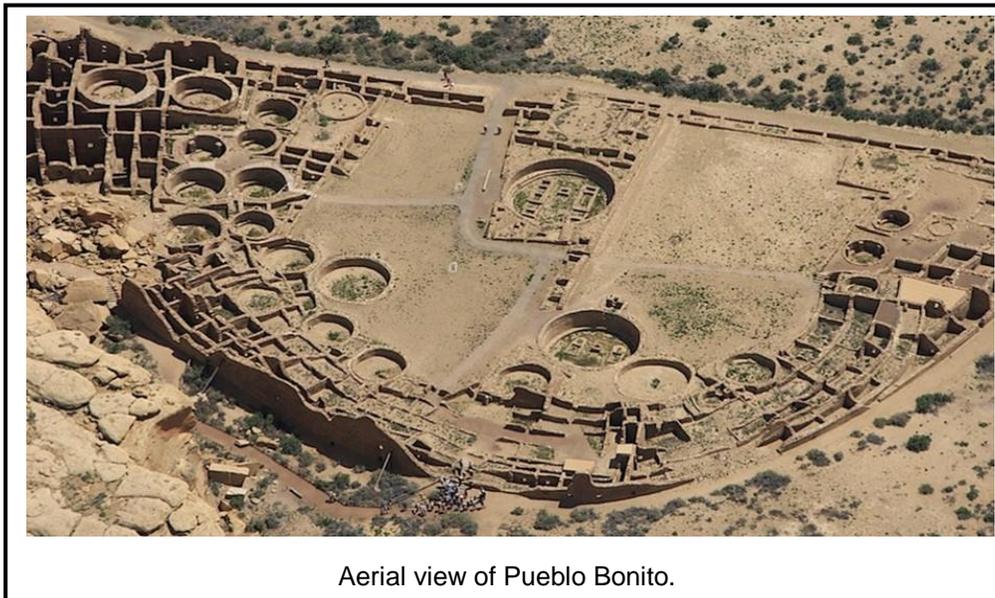
The researchers think this represents a shift from unrestricted sharing of food to more restricted exchanges controlled by households or family groups. The period ended around 890 with a slightly larger drought.

The exploitation phase of the Pueblo II period ran from 1035 to 1145 and was marked by large shared plazas and great houses—what we would today call McMansions—in the Chaco Canyon area south of Mesa Verde, Colo.

“We’re talking some of the largest—actually, the largest—prehistoric masonry structures in North America north of Mexico,” said Kohler. “These things are huge.”

Wood for roofs had to come from 50 to 75 miles away, requiring an unprecedented level of coordination. The mix of large and small buildings also suggests a more hierarchal social structure with someone in charge. (1)

Pueblo III, which peaked around 1250, featured restricted access to civic and ceremonial spaces and has some of the greatest evidence of social inequality. This period ended with the largest and most widespread of the four droughts. By contrast, the ensuing Pueblo IV period had big rectangular pueblos with apartments surrounding large shared plazas and civic ceremonial spaces.



“It’s as if everybody has equal access to where all the important stuff happens,” said Bocinsky. “That’s been interpreted as being far more egalitarian in how people were organizing themselves as a society than what we see during any of the previous periods.”

“There’s a total reorganization,” said Kohler.

The researchers hope their analysis of societal expansion and collapse, as well as periods of exploration and

exploitation, can be applied to other Neolithic societies whose economic, organizational and ritual practices collapsed when they failed to meet expectations.

To varying degrees, Bocinsky and Kohler also draw parallels to the current dissatisfaction among people who have yet to recover from the last recession.

“A lot of the nation has not recovered since 2008, and what you’re seeing is a populist movement to radically reorganize the way that politics is done in this country,” said Bocinsky. “We’re seeing that need to reorganize four times in the Pueblo record.”

Bocinsky and Kohler collaborated on their paper with Jonathan Rush of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Keith Kintigh of Arizona State University.

The work is in keeping with WSU’s Grand Challenges, a suite of research initiatives aimed at large societal issues. It is particularly relevant to the themes of sustainable resources and advancing opportunity and equity.



THE LAKOTA WINTER COUNT

Akta Lakota Museum and Cultural Center

A winter count is a record of history. For generations, Plains Indians drew pictographs to document their daily experiences. The Lakota term for winter count is wniyetu wowapi. The word Wowapi translates as “anything that can be read or counted.” Waniyetu is the Lakota word for year, which is measured from first snow to first snow.

Usually drawn on buffalo skin or deer hide, Lakota winter counts are composed of pictographs organized in spiral or horizontal rows. Each pictograph represents a year in history of a Lakota community. The pictographs were organized in chronological order so that the winter count provided an outline of events for the community’s Keeper or oral historian.

Winter counts were also used by individuals within the tribal community to record specific events in their own lives. Tribal communities made up of members of extended family or tiyospayes also recorded their story and experiences on a winter count so it was not uncommon to have multiple copies of winter counts within a community.



Kills Two, Brule Sioux Medicine Man, is painting on a deer hide the “Big Missouri” Winter Count the pictorial record of their tribe from 1876-1926. Photography by John A. Anderson, c. 1923.

Winter counts were dynamic documents of recorded history. Variations between similar counts occurred if a community historian chose to emphasize a different aspect of an event or select another event all together. Differences among winter count narratives may also be the result of inaccurate translation from Lakota to English. The winter count, like history, is selective representation of a people’s past. The narratives usually reflect both the community’s history and culture.

Sources: Carkeek-Cheney, Roberta; *Sioux Winter Count: A 131-Year Calendar of Events*, Naturegraph Publishers, Inc., Happy Camp, CA, 1998.

Horse Capture, George, P., Vitart, Anne, Waldberg, Michel, West, Richard W., Jr.; *Robes of Splendor: Native North American Painted Buffalo Hides*, The New Press, New York, NY, 1993.

(Story provided by Darrel Wilson, Kansas Archaeological Society Membership Coordinator and Secretary)



LAS Find of the Month, April 2016:

Members can bring an artifact to be entered into the competition at the monthly meeting, which will be judged based on the following rules:

1. Must be a member of LAS in good standing.
2. The artifact must be a personal find.
3. It must have been found within the specified time frame, i.e., within the month prior to the meeting.
4. The artifact doesn't have to be a Colorado find—all that matters is that it was found in the last month.

The Find of the Month for April 2016 was made by Shelly Bennett.

Type: Agate Basin
Material: Petrified Wood
Location: Weld County, South Platte River



LAS News and Upcoming Events:

- Ongoing: Univ of Colorado Museum of Natural History. "Unearthed: Ancient Life in the Boulder Valley" exhibit featuring the Clovis artifacts from the Mahaffy Cache found in Boulder, Colorado in 2008. The exhibit will run through September 2016. Cost is free.
- May 3, 2015 May meeting. Program: Andy Coca and Ray Lambert will give a presentation on Allen and related obliquely-flaked transitional paleo points. Bring your Allen, Frederick, Anderson, Angostura, and other diagonally-flaked artifacts and share your favorite hunting stories. Let's have plenty of examples on hand!
- June 7, 2016 June meeting. Program: Tom Westfall will give a presentation on Lithic Casting of artifacts and how casts help students and collectors learn about point types and lithic technology. Tom will also demonstrate how a point is cast once the mold is made.