

Archaeological Institute of America – Jane C Waldbaum Scholarship Final Report

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From alpine habitats to river floodplains, the New Mexico landscape supports one of the most diverse ecoregions in the United States, covering a wide range of elevations and climates. During the summer months, the Northern Rio Grande River Basin is lush and green with piñon pines, juniper trees, and towering cottonwoods. Drought tolerant purple Broom Dalea and fiery orange Skyrocket flowers dot the landscape. Broad-tailed humming birds, whiptail lizards, and jackrabbits are frequently encountered. At an altitude of 5,689 feet, the sun is hot and intense in the summer months.

Located roughly one hour north of Sante Fe, New Mexico, the village of Estaca can be found along the west bank of the Rio Grande River, surrounded by stunning mesas and mountain ranges. Situated on Ancestral Tewa lands, the village of Estaca itself is a Colonial-era site that was established in the early 18th century. Though, archaeological evidence indicates that Ancestral Tewa use of the surrounding area dates back to the 1300s and into the 1600s. In Tewa, this place is referred to as Namponuu, which translates to “down at the holes in the earth.”

The context of this site is unique and involves complex interactions between Ancestral Tewa, detribalized Indigenous peoples, and Spanish and Anglo settlers. In 1703 the Sebastian Martín Land Grant claimed land along the Rio Grande, the land where Estaca is currently located was included in this grant. While Estaca was the primary site, the field school also excavated at the Rancho de los Lopez, a family hacienda established in the early 18th century only a few minutes

away from Estaca. Working with the current landowner, we discovered that the Lopez family ran a large sheepherding business at the hacienda.

In collaboration with Estaca's current residents, the University of Colorado Boulder and Northern Arizona University co-directed this community-engaged field school. The project was four weeks long and included eighteen days of excavation and a few days of survey depending on the person. My day would begin around 6:30am as we had a go time of 7:30 or 8am depending on what site we were traveling to. We broke for lunch around noon. The daily menu was lunchmeat sandwiches or peanut butter and jelly with a rotating assortment of fruits, vegetables, chips, bars, and cookies on the side. After lunch, field work resumed until 4-5pm.

Learning took place on and off-site and I gained competency in a variety of skills. I learned excavation basics like how to open an excavation unit, the techniques for excavating, screening, how to manage paperwork, recording sediment descriptions, cleaning and cataloguing artifacts, drawing stratigraphic profiles, and how to take detailed personal field notes. I also gained experience conducting pedestrian survey. We learned our individual pacing and surveyed in 15m transect intervals. Geospatial data was recorded using Geode receivers and entered into ArcGIS Field Maps.

Both survey and excavation taught me how to identify artifacts such as ceramic types, lithics, rock imagery, and, my personal favorite, faunal bones. I also learned to identify historic materials including different kinds of glass, metals, cans, nails, plastic, and modern ceramic wares. I was taught how to identify various features in the unit or on the landscape such as

hearths, acequias (irrigation ditches), and structures. Additionally, we learned the methods for sampling pollen, phytoliths, and macrobotanicals.

Outside of field work, our program arranged a four-day camping trip to the four corners region to learn more broadly about the history and archaeology of the region. We visited sites including Chimney Rock, Hovenweep, Sand Canyon Pueblo, Yucca House, Bluff Great House, Butler Wash, and various site in Chaco Canyon. We also spent one day touring the nearby Mesa Prieta with the Mesa Prieta Petroglyph Project. Additionally, the field school had the privilege of spending two days attending traditional dances at Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo.

Participating in archaeological field work for the first time was an immensely rewarding experience. The knowledge and skills I learned are already translating into the lab and classroom. Given that my research will be based on the faunal bones recovered by this field school, the Jane C Waldbaum scholarship not only enabled me to attend my first archaeology field school, but it directly supported my future research by allowing me to directly participate in the recovery process. In addition, receiving this scholarship gave me the opportunity to connect with tribal members, Estaca residents, and faculty and students from other institutions.

This was a life-altering experience both professionally and personally. I look forward to returning to this area to continue field work next summer!



Figure 1: Estaca, New Mexico. Photo of me excavating at the Lopez site.



Figure 2: The entire field crew during our camping trip touring Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon.



Figure 3: Estaca, New Mexico. Excavating an articulated ungulate spine (likely sheep). One of the highlights of the field school for me!