

Mesa Verde Foundation

Stewards of an Ancient Treasure

SPRING NEWSLETTER

2025



LETTER FROM THE MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK SUPERINTENDENT

Often at Mesa Verde, the arrival of spring seems dramatic. We watch snowbanks shrink back each day, their solid white walls retreating and breaking into individual blocks that longer days sculpt into odd and angular shapes before they disappear altogether. This year, we've had very little snow, so signs of spring during my daily drive to and from the park have been more subtle, focused on wildlife activity. Coming into the park, I dodge ground squirrels that dash out in front of my car. Not coincidentally, ravens fly back and forth along the road to see if there might be roadkill for breakfast. Hawks sit atop trees with feathers fluffed out, warming up for a day of hunting. On my way home, I see golden eagles soaring above the North Escarpment cliffs, perhaps scouting a nesting site. Life sets up to refresh. Visitors, too, are starting to return as the weather warms.

Spring and summer are great seasons to visit Mesa Verde National Park. The Visitor Center near the park entrance is open daily, offering exhibits, information and interpretive sales items. The Chapin Mesa Museum, also open daily, is host to temporary exhibits and the park's film focusing on contemporary Pueblos and Tribes connections to Mesa Verde. The Mesa Verde



Foundation helped fund both of these projects. We continue working on our plans for all new exhibits in the museum and expect final design documents this summer. The Foundation is partnering with the park to secure funding for elements of this important project.

We plan to reopen the Wetherill Mesa Area of the park around Memorial Day weekend after a 2-year closure. The new visitor contact station looks great and will provide a starting point for folks to enjoy that part of the park, open only in summer.

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The summer schedule of cliff dwelling tours is shaping up. Tour tickets will be available at www.recreation.gov. Check the park website at www.nps.gov/MEVE and download the official NPS app for more detailed information, including videos, audio tours and podcasts. These can enrich your experience ahead of your visit, and help you get the most from your time in the park.

Please check on closures and potential delays before your trip and again on arrival in case conditions change. You can still

have a great visit to the park, especially if you plan ahead. We look forward to seeing you at Mesa Verde National Park this spring and summer!

Kayci Cook Collins, *Mesa Verde Superintendent*

Jesse Nusbaum

Photographer, builder, superintendent, archeologist

Editor's Note:

This is the first of a two-part story of Jesse Nusbaum, who first came to Mesa Verde in 1907 and over the next four decades made an indelible mark on not just the national park but archeology and antiquities in the Southwest.

By Ken McConellogue

The term “Renaissance Man” can be thrown around loosely, but it fit Jesse Nusbaum to a T. The lanky, 6-foot 4-inch Nusbaum drew on his varied skills and interests to transform Mesa Verde National Park while also honoring the Ancestral Puebloans who built it. His photographer’s eye, builder’s hands, superintendent’s savvy and archeologist’s curiosity made him a Renaissance Man at a time and place that needed one. Mesa Verde would play a significant role in his life, and his impact on the park and on Southwestern archeology lingers to this day.

As a photographer he took many of the earliest (and best known) photos of the sites and region. As a builder he used the skills developed at his father’s brick company in Greeley to rebuild some of the sites (including Balcony House) that had been ravaged by time and gravity. Nusbaum also built the first superintendent’s house inside the park and crafted most of its furnishings. He served three stints as superintendent (1921-31, 1936-39, 1942-46), professionalizing the park’s operations and enhancing the visitor experience. Nusbaum also maintained a keen interest in archeology, leading expeditions at Mesa Verde and elsewhere that yielded knowledge and collections for the park and museums.



Jesse Nusbaum self-portrait with his camera. Photo by Jesse Nusbaum, Courtesy of Denver Public Library Special Collections.

He was the oldest son of original members of the Union Colony (now Greeley, CO), a utopian agricultural community founded by famed 19th century newspaperman Horace Greeley. Nusbaum had sharp blue eyes, a deep, booming voice and a shock of thick black hair. When not in school or apprenticing at his father’s brick company, he combed the banks of the South Platte and Cache la Poudre rivers for arrowheads and other artifacts. He was captivated by Swedish scientist Gustav Nordenskiöld’s 1893 book, *The Cliff Dwellers of Mesa Verde*.

State Normal School President Zachariah Snyder called Nusbaum to his office in spring 1907. Edgar Lee Hewett, an alumnus of the college, was looking for “a young and agile man, skilled in photography and interested in archeology” to make a photographic survey of the sites. Nusbaum, a staff photographer for the college magazine, jumped at the chance.

Hewett had worked behind the scenes to push through Congress the Antiquities Act of 1906, which protected cultural sites on public lands. Along with his photographic duties, Nusbaum served as archeological assistant to Alfred V. Kidder, who would

become a lifelong friend and one of the titans of Southwestern archeology. The photographic and archeological record they produced helped Hewett recommend to the Secretary of the Interior that the government exchange 19,250 acres just south of the park for 12,670 acres that brought the major cliff dwellings inside park jurisdiction.

Nusbaum's black-and-white photographs were crisp and clear. He captured sites such as Cliff Palace, Balcony House and Spruce Tree House in all their glory. He took detailed shots of each from a variety of angles, leaving behind a rich photographic record of sites before they were restored and well before the many tourists came to see the homes of Ancestral Puebloans for themselves.

Nusbaum not only had a photographer's eye, but he also had an ethnographer's heart. In addition to his work at Mesa Verde, in subsequent years he took hundreds of photographs of people and places in Colorado, New Mexico and Central America. His photographs are important parts of museum collections across the West, including the New Mexico History Museum, History Colorado, the National Park Service Photo Gallery and the National Museum of the American Indian.

Yet photography was only one of his skills. Drawing on techniques he learned while apprenticing at his father's brick company, Nusbaum played an important part in the restoration of some of the park's

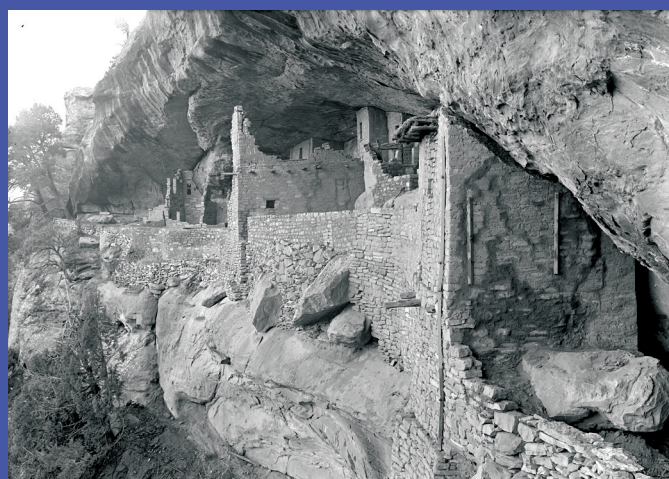
sites, which early in the 20th century had fallen prey to centuries of isolation and predations of the climate. Edgar Hewett (at the behest of the Smithsonian Institution) again recruited him, this time to restore Balcony House. The Colorado Cliff Dwellings Association, long a supporter of the park, paid \$1,000 for the project.

When he first photographed it in 1907, the site was cluttered with stones that had slid down the slope in front of the dwelling. The walls still standing were cracked and dangerously unstable. Nusbaum recruited his work crew in Greeley from some of his father's best masons. In October 1910, accompanied by Jesse's father, Edward (who kept a journal of the effort), they began the difficult work.

Water for mortar had to be lowered in 12-gallon buckets from the mesa top 50 feet up. In addition to refitting bricks first made by the Ancestral Puebloans nearly a millennium earlier, Nusbaum and his crew stabilized walls with steel rods, turnbuckles and angle iron. The crew maintained a breakneck pace set by their leader, with Edward Nusbaum writing "Jesse is everywhere and working all the time."

They completed the project in a remarkable 44 days. To this day, the Balcony House restoration has required minimal follow-up repair. Yet Nusbaum came in for some criticism of the project, not in his work but in his failure to adequately document the

(Continued on page 4)



Balcony House North Plaza before (1907) (left) and after restoration (1910). Photos by Jesse Nusbaum, Courtesy of the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Negative #'s 006314, 060523.

(Continued from page 3)

process with a site report, a routine task for archeological projects. The lack of a report was likely due to Nusbaum's lifelong antipathy to paperwork, which he referenced regularly when he became the park's superintendent and later director of the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe. Still, his skill as a builder, particularly the Balcony House restoration, spoke for itself.

Nusbaum's builder's skills lent themselves to another, more modest project in the park. When he became park superintendent in 1921, he made the controversial decision that he would live in the park, not in the gateway town of Mancos, where previous park leaders and staff lived. He built the small house overlooking Spruce Tree House in the Southwestern style he loved. He also built most of the furniture in the house.

To have the superintendent live in the park was significant even beyond eliminating the torturous and dusty 30-mile journey from Mancos. It allowed Nusbaum to fully embrace the role of superintendent, a role he would define in many ways, in turn defining how Mesa Verde National Park would serve the cause of archeology and the millions of visitors who would come to marvel at the place that historian Duane Smith described as home to the "shadows of the centuries."



A crew of masons from Greeley works on the restoration of the North Kiva, Balcony House.
Photo by Jesse Nusbaum (1910), Courtesy of the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Negative #060513.

Continuing the Legacy of Mesa Verde National Park



Todd Bacon, MVF
Board Member

The Legacy Society of the Mesa Verde Foundation is comprised of individuals who have included the Foundation in their estate plans. My wife, Nancy, and I are members of the Society simply by virtue of having named the Foundation as a beneficiary of part of the proceeds of our estate.

I have been asked why we joined the Legacy Society, and the answer is simple: it is because of the people whom I have met in my time on the Foundation Board and because of others who support the Foundation and the work that the National Park Service staff does to preserve and promote the lasting culture of the Ancestral Puebloans and the descendant tribes. **The federal government cannot fully fund our national parks and Mesa Verde's needs go far beyond what can be accomplished with federal dollars, which means that the private sector needs to step in to help.**

Once Nancy and I got over our preconceived notions that one had to be wealthy to do a planned gift, and that it was difficult and expensive to set it up, our intention became a simple, feel-good thing to execute. **Designating the Mesa Verde Foundation as a beneficiary in our estate plan was an easy decision for us to make, easy to implement, and did not cost us anything.** We initially made a simple codicil to our wills, and then we formalized it when we updated our wills.

There are many forms of qualifying gifts, including bequests, charitable trusts, life insurance, charitable gift annuities, retained life estates, and naming the Foundation as a retirement plan beneficiary, as well as other types of arrangements. Please let the Foundation's Executive Director Shannon Clifford know if you have already included the Foundation in your own estate plan. And if you haven't yet done so, please contact Shannon when the time is right. She can send you a brochure and put you in touch with a member of the Legacy Committee to help make the process extremely simple and straightforward.

Fall Tour and Scholarship Opportunity: Looking Back and Looking Forward

For the past three years, thanks to the generous support of one of our MVF board members, the Mesa Verde Foundation has awarded a scholarship to one participant for our Fall Tour.

In 2024, the scholarship was awarded to Gordon “Boz” Bosworth, a public-school teacher for 30 years. Prior to teaching, he volunteered at Hovenweep National Monument. He then worked for the Bureau of Land Management as a river ranger and completed a nine-mile canyon photo inventory project. After retiring from teaching, Boz and his wife headed the beaver reintroduction project on the Aquarius Plateau from their home in Boulder, Utah.

Boz was a welcome and enthusiastic participant in the Fall Tour and really immersed himself in the experience. When asked for his feedback, Boz said, “It was double my expectations! Andy and Chris definitely complement each other. Really thoughtful back and forth. They made each of us feel we could contribute to the discussion. Both were always available to us. Chris’s hands-on basket presentation was



Boz joins the group for a VIP tour of the Mesa Verde museum collection.

fantastic – even better than I could have imagined.” In summary, Boz said he loved the people, the staff, the science, the cultural integrity of the process, the personal connections, carpooling and (of course) the PLACE.

Fall Tour 2025: September 19-22, 2025

This year’s Fall Tour is scheduled for September 19-22, 2025. Returning tour leaders are Dr. Andrew Gulliford, Professor of History and Environmental Studies at Fort Lewis College, and Christopher Lewis, Master Fiber Artisan and Native scholar of Zuni Pueblo.

The tour includes:

- guided visits to some of Mesa Verde’s iconic sites
- lodging (based on double occupancy) and six meals
- a reception with the Park Superintendent
- *History of Mesa Verde* presentation by Dr. Gulliford
- Native plants presentation by Mr. Lewis about Zuni traditional uses, with selected tastings
- a private viewing of objects from the park’s collection

Tour cost:

- \$1,275: MVF Fellow, per participant
- \$1,375: Non-member, per participant
- \$75 per night single supplement (for guests not sharing a room)
- 50% advance deposit required to register
- **Early Birds who register by July 1st will receive \$100 off the registration fee**

To register, or for more information, call the Mesa Verde Foundation at 303-321-3120 or email kim@mesaverdefoundation.org. The tour typically sells out well in advance, so make your reservation soon!

Scholarship available again this year

A scholarship is available again this year. Anyone wishing to apply should write one to two paragraphs about who they are, why they want to participate in the tour and why they believe they are the best candidate for the scholarship, and send it to MVF Executive Director Shannon Clifford at shannon@mesaverdefoundation.org.

Getting Batty at Mesa Verde National Park

by Nathan Brown, Biologist/Wildlife Program
at Mesa Verde National Park and Yucca House
National Monument



Townsend's Big-eared Bat in Spruce
Tree House. Photo credit NPS.

Bats are extremely important to modern society. They serve as pollinators and reduce insect populations, which often are vectors for diseases that affect humans. Since bats need lots of insects and depend on reliable water sources, they may serve as a bio-indicator species for monitoring changes in an ecosystem.

A comprehensive on-the-ground bat survey was conducted at Mesa Verde over a two-year period from 2006 to 2007. Researchers from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) identified and surveyed roost sites, conducted mist-net trapping and utilized acoustic methods to detect bat species in the park. At that time, researchers detected sixteen species of bats via mist nets (bats in hand) and one additional species via acoustic monitoring. These species represented every bat species known to occur in western Colorado. Their efforts serve as the basis of our bat knowledge in the park today.

With the detection of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in eastern Colorado and the Grand Canyon over the last few years, the park staff has been sampling bats within the park for *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* or Pd, the fungus that causes WNS. WNS can cause the localized collapse of bat populations. Mesa Verde has been assisting our valued partners at Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to sample bats

from multiple sites across the park for Pd every year since 2021. A total of 102 bats have been sampled, and thus far all samples have tested negative.

Beginning in 2022, park biologists have performed stationary audio surveys for all bat species for the purpose of measuring species diversity and abundance within the park. Twelve sampling sites were selected to optimize the likelihood of capturing audio of the full diversity of bats, as well as to investigate differences that may exist between bat diversity and abundance in areas closed to the public as compared to areas open to the public (see Figure 1). We sampled sites that we anticipated would be utilized by bats, sites which included features such as natural sources of water, sewage lagoons, alcoves and cliff dwellings.

During late June and early July 2022, we deployed six bat recorders with ultrasonic microphones. Because clutter such as foliage impedes recording quality and affects bat calling behavior, we located microphones in open spaces away from trees, cliff edges and man-made structures. We installed microphones on posts that were a minimum of 1.4m above ground. The audio recorders were programmed from thirty

minutes prior to sunset until thirty minutes after sunrise for frequencies of 8 kHz and higher. The trigger frequency of 8 kHz was chosen to detect spotted bats, which emit lower-frequency calls and were found in a previous study to have at least one maternal roost in the park.

The acoustic data from the 2022 and 2023 seasons was then analyzed by our partners at the Colorado Natural Heritage Program in Fort Collins. The results revealed that all sixteen species originally detected by the USGS in 2006 and 2007 via mist netting and acoustic monitoring were still in the park. This data suggests that a stable suite of bat species occupies most of the habitat across Mesa Verde. (Note: our 2024 bat acoustic data has not yet been analyzed.)

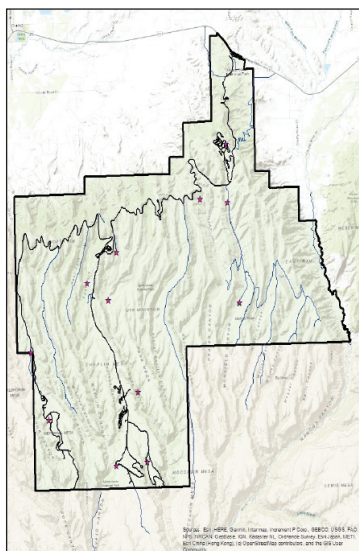


Figure 1
Bat Acoustic
Monitoring Stations
in Mesa Verde
National Park:
2022, 2023 and
2024 (stars=acoustic
recording units).

The park will continue to monitor its bat species via year-round acoustic monitoring in 2025, 2026 and 2027. We are collaborating with researchers from the Southern Colorado Plateau Inventory and Monitoring Network in Flagstaff, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA. Additionally, all acoustic data collected has been uploaded into the North American Bat Monitoring Program's online server, where bat researchers and conservationists have access to our study data, so that the scientific community can include the bats of Mesa Verde in their research, if appropriate.

Join us in congratulating Mesa Verde's recent retiree *We are grateful for her service to the park*

Sue Johnson-Erner, Concessions Management Specialist at Mesa Verde National Park, retired March 3, 2025, after nearly 54 years of federal service, 46 of which were spent at Mesa Verde National Park.

Sue's federal career began in the United States Air Force serving at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, DC. In 1979, Sue moved sight unseen, with her children, to work at Mesa Verde National Park. Sue worked in Administration (HR) until 1991, when she became the Concessions Management Specialist.

When asked what she'll miss about Mesa Verde, Sue says she'll miss her "thinking time" driving to and from the park to her home in Mancos, Colorado. She'll miss seeing the park's wildlife – bears and mountain lion cubs. And, of course, her many coworkers, both at the park and around the National Park Service in the Concessions and Housing Management Programs.



Sue received an Albright-Wirth grant to attend customer service training at Disney World. It was Mickey Mouse himself who presented Sue with the certificate of completion.

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Heads Up! *Can you assist?*

The Mesa Verde Foundation has been experiencing a whirlpool of emotions since the park staff requested that we help raise funds to support the emergency stabilization of the **Rock Springs Ranger Station Outhouse**.

Built in 1928, this historic two-seater outhouse is located at the Rock Springs Cabin on Wetherill Mesa and is the only historic wooden outhouse still standing in the park. Mesa Verde staff members had already requested funding from the National Park Service to rehabilitate the outhouse, but, unfortunately, the funding will not be available until at least 2027. The outhouse is in serious need of repair and may not be standing in 2027. **Nature is calling! The outhouse needs our help!**

Funding will be used to support emergency stabilization of the wood-framed building, including lumber to brace it up and three days of the

stabilization crew's time. These efforts will help preserve the building until the larger rehabilitation project can get rolling.

We, at the Foundation, are working to flush away the worries and drain the tensions around the potential loss of the outhouse. **You can help us to get the funding flowing by donating in the enclosed envelope or on our website at www.mesaverdefoundation.org.** Thank you very much for your support (and for your patience with the outrageous number of potty puns in this article).

