

Mesa Verde Foundation

Stewards of an Ancient Treasure

SPRING NEWSLETTER

2024



LETTER FROM THE MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK SUPERINTENDENT

Signs of spring grow bolder each day. After months of driving into the Park in darkness, I am grateful for my sunglasses on the east-facing parts of my morning commute as the sun clears the mountains and illuminates Mesa Verde National Park. Dawn arrives earlier and dusk later each day, and the landscape soaks in the light and warmth. Soon, grasses will green up and the quiet of winter will make way for spring winds and birdsong, harbingers of long summer days and vibrant plant and animal life.



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 exciting new temporary exhibits and the Park's new film focusing on contemporary Pueblo and Tribes' connections to Mesa Verde as told by members of those communities. The Mesa Verde Foundation helped fund both of these projects. Our plans for all new exhibits in the museum are advancing—final design documents are due later this year. The Foundation is partnering with the Park to secure funding for fabrication and installation.

Visitors will appreciate the paving work that was done throughout the Park over the past two years. The Park road is smooth and well-marked, which is worth the disruption visitors and staff experienced in 2022 and 2023! The Wetherill Mesa Road will remain closed this season, but not for road repair. We're completing several large construction projects at the end of that road. The biggest of those projects is replacement of the Wetherill Mesa visitor contact station with a new structure. The construction activities don't allow for safe public access. Please check the Park's social media and website for 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.

The summer schedule of cliff dwelling tours is shaping up (keep the Wetherill Mesa closure in mind); 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.

We look forward to seeing you at Mesa Verde National Park whenever you choose to visit!

Kayci Cook Collins, *Mesa Verde Superintendent*

"Please check the Park's social media and website for closures and potential delays before your trip and again on arrival in case conditions change."

www.nps.gov/MEVE

Mesa Verde Foundation Kicks Off Campaign to Support a Comprehensive Overhaul of Galleries and Exhibits at Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum

The Mesa Verde Foundation is leading a campaign to obtain funding for a complete overhaul of the galleries and exhibits at Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum (CMAM). The museum, located inside Mesa Verde National Park, is one of the oldest in the National Park Service, constructed between 1922 and 1925. The museum was built using Cliff House sandstone, the same stone used by the Ancestral Puebloans to construct nearby Spruce Tree House and other cliff dwellings, in an architectural style known as Modified Pueblo Revival, inspired by the architecture of Mesa Verde's descendant communities.

The museum's current galleries and exhibits are outdated, telling the story of the Park from the lens of 20th century archeology. Not only has the field of archeology changed over the years, but the original exhibits failed to include the perspectives of the Native communities for whom Mesa Verde is sacred. In addition, the current exhibits are not accessible to all and don't meet today's curatorial standards. While there have been some changes over the years, the museum has never had a comprehensive upgrade and ... IT IS TIME.

From the start of this project, a primary goal has been to work closely with the 26 Pueblos and Tribes that have a special relationship to Mesa Verde. In 2019, Mesa Verde partnered with the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History (CU Boulder) to plan for the next century of the CMAM. Native communities, archeologists, and other stakeholders are engaged with the Park and MVF in a collaborative process. The redesigned museum will tell a comprehensive story about



Cliffs and Alcoves Gallery. Image by EDX.

Mesa Verde from multiple perspectives. Galleries and exhibits will honor the historic nature of the building, provide accessible, interactive experiences, and protect irreplaceable cultural items. An added benefit of this partnership is the involvement of university students who are gaining invaluable learning experiences while making substantial contributions to this project.

After years of planning, collaboration, and an in-depth content development process, the CMAM project moved into a schematic design phase targeted for completion in the fall of 2024, after which the project will move into fabrication and installation phases. Fabrication will then occur over several months concluding in early 2026. Once fabrication is completed, installation will begin with a goal of completion by the summer of 2026.

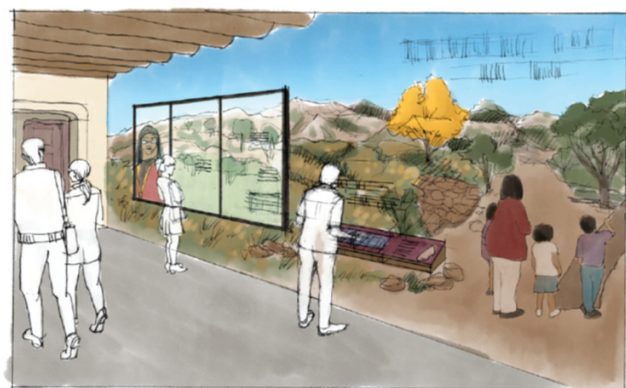
The museum's comprehensive update will include several galleries and cost an estimated total of \$1.5 million. The Park has earmarked funding to cover the cost of upgrades to the lobby, visitor

information area, the first large gallery, the movement room, the hallway, and the theater. MVF is working to secure funding for the remaining galleries including the Canyons Gallery, Cliffs and Alcoves Gallery and the Winter Room Gallery, as well as the production of immersive audio and visual elements.

The Canyons Gallery, estimated to cost \$107,250, will focus on the importance of MVNP's canyons as corridors for movement and migration of people and wildlife, and how they facilitated trade and the exchange of ideas. It will include exhibits featuring the Ute people (on whose land the Park was established) and others who hunted and gathered in this region.

The Cliffs and Alcoves Gallery, estimated to cost \$161,460, will use a combination of faux rock work and artistic murals to provide a feeling of immersion into this part of Mesa Verde's landscape. Exhibits will show home life and will also explain how cliff dwellings (and cultural items within them) drew early archeologists, leading to the creation of the Park and passage of the Antiquities Act, both in 1906.

The "Winter Room" Gallery, estimated to cost \$125,710, will show a dwelling as it may have looked when inhabited by Ancestral Pueblo people. Exhibits will focus on winter activities and highlight the importance of storytelling and oral tradition in Indigenous cultures.



Reverence and Respect Gallery. Image by EDX.

Immersive audio-visual elements, estimated to cost \$166,000, will play a large role in the new exhibits. Innovative audio-visual components will allow visitors to hear directly from members of tribal communities and other subject matter experts about the Park's natural and cultural history. Ambient sounds will contribute to the real-life feel of the exhibit galleries, and AV elements will allow visitors to experience how the Park changes through the seasons or the course of a day.

The Mesa Verde Foundation is kicking off a fundraising campaign to support the comprehensive overhaul of Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum. **YOUR SUPPORT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!** If you would like more information about how you can support this campaign, please reach out to our Executive Director, Shannon Clifford, at 303-321-3120 or shannon@mesaverdefoundation.org.



Winter Room Gallery. Image by EDX.

If you would like to make a donation to support this campaign, please send payment in the donation envelope located inside this newsletter or donate on our website at www.mesaverdefoundation.org.

Please indicate that your donation should be applied to the Chapin Mesa Archaeological Museum project.

We are Still Here at Mesa Verde's Visitor and Research Center

The Mesa Verde Foundation is pleased to partner with the Anschutz Foundation to obtain new Native items for the *We are Still Here* exhibit in the Mesa Verde National Park Visitor and Research Center. As part of this effort, the Mesa Verde Foundation commissioned two textile pieces from renowned Diné artist, Venancio Aragon.

Aragon is a Diné (Navajo Nation) textile artist who specializes in rare weaving techniques and polychromatic designs. He first learned to weave from his mother at the age of ten. He continued his education by earning two Bachelor of Arts degrees, one in Cultural Anthropology from the University of New Mexico and one in Native American Studies from Fort Lewis College. Aragon combines what he learned from his mother with his interest in archeology and anthropology to research ancient textiles and techniques and create beautiful, colorful cultural weavings. His work to revive and promote Diné weaving techniques helps to ensure that these traditions will continue.

The textiles created by Aragon for the Mesa Verde exhibit include *Doorway to the Mesa* and *Indigo and Cochineal Twill*. Aragon was happy to share his artist notes with the Mesa Verde Foundation, and we are happy to share them with you.

Prior to his full-time artistic career, Aragon worked at multiple National Parks and Monuments, including Mesa Verde National Park. It is our pleasure to welcome Aragon back to Mesa Verde through the inclusion of his artwork in the *We are Still Here* exhibit located inside the Visitor and Research Center.



Venancio Aragon, *Doorway to the Mesa* rug.
Photo by Gwenn Gallenstein

Doorway to the Mesa

In this textile, I attempt to interpret the history of the Mesa Verde region with elements of Ancestral Pueblo architecture. The T-shape doors are stacked on each other and are separated by roof vigas, reminiscent of multi-story Pueblo buildings. The central design of the textile is bordered by black, white, and grey geometrics, influenced by Ancestral Pueblo black on white ceramics. The inner design is a pictorial scene of the Sleeping Ute Mountain. This geologic feature is an important landmark and has many meanings to contemporary Native Nations. The Ute Mountain is also important because it is the backdrop of the Yucca House part of Mesa Verde. The textile was woven on a Navajo upright tapestry loom with over 250 colors of weft.

Plan your visit to view *We are Still Here* at the Mesa Verde Visitor & Research Center

Hours: 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, DAILY

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day



Venancio Aragon, Indigo and Cochineal Twill rug. Photo by Gwenn Gallenstein

Indigo and Cochineal Twill

This textile makes use of the ancient diamond twill technique. The yarns were handspun by the artist and dyed using two primary compounds: indigo and cochineal. The reflective fibers are synthetic and were added to the wool during the spinning process. The textile reflects the rich weaving traditions of the Southwest and highlights the evolving nature of Navajo textiles with the combination of ancient techniques and modern materials.

Mesa Verde National Park License Plates



Visit mesaverdefoundation.org and make a one-time \$30 license plate donation. Once the donation is processed, you will be issued a PIN number that you will use when registering your vehicle with your county motor vehicle office. Please be aware that to issue the plate, the state will charge an additional (one-time) \$50 fee to process your order.

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Did You Know?

Mesa Top. Photo by Todd Bacon.

Mesa Verde National Park was established in 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt, to “preserve the works of man.” To this day, it is the only cultural park in the NPS system.

- The name “Mesa Verde” translates to “green table” in English. This name reflects the juniper trees and other foliage that thrive in the area. Sometimes in the spring and early summer, when the plants are blooming, the mesa does appear as a green table.
- Mesa Verde spans over 52,000 acres and includes more than 4,700 archeological sites.
- Mesa Verde is not actually a mesa but is instead a “cuesta,” a ridge with a steep face on one side and a gentle slope on the other.
- In 1978, UNESCO designated Mesa Verde as a World Heritage Site, recognizing its immense cultural value. Mesa Verde was one of the original twelve World Heritage Sites.
- In the tradition of the global explorers of the day, Swedish geologist and scientist Gustav Nordenskiöld named the two prominent mesas in Mesa Verde during his 1891 visit: Wetherill Mesa for his guides and host family, and Chapin Mesa for the author and lecturer, Frederick Chapin, who had published a magazine article on Mesa Verde in 1890 and then two years later the book, *The Land of the Cliff-Dwellers*.

- After getting turned down by the Smithsonian, the Wetherill family sold the 1,300 ceramic, stone, bone, and textile artifacts that they had collected from Mesa Verde during the winter of 1888-1889 to the Colorado State Historical and Natural History Society (today’s History Colorado). The price in 1890 was \$3,000. That was twice the State’s appropriation to the Society for that

year, so three Society members took out banknotes for the additional \$1,500 needed.

- The doorways in the cliff dwellings are small by today’s standards, but at the time, the average male was 5 feet 4 inches tall, and the average female was 5 feet even. The average lifespan was 32-34 years.
- The average room in Mesa Verde measured 6 feet by 8 feet.
- “Middens” are piles of discarded materials that formed on the slopes below the cliff dwellings. They have been a treasure trove for archeologists of broken pottery, old tools, food scraps, and textiles.
- Some of the finest basketries from the Colorado Plateau were created before people learned to make pottery around 550. They were decorated baskets made from split willow, rabbitbrush, skunk bush and yucca. Baskets were water-proofed with pitch and were used for cooking by putting heated rocks in the water.
- A crack monitor, like the one used in Mesa Verde, is a tool that is affixed to a wall and is used by structural engineering teams to gauge the horizontal or vertical movement of a crack. As a crack opens or closes, the cursor moves relative to a calibration scale, and the movement is recorded.

The Wild Turkeys of Mesa Verde and Their Feathers



Turkeys at Mesa Verde. Photo NPS.



*Turkey Feather Blanket at Penn Museum.
Photo by Christopher Lewis.*

If you have visited Mesa Verde, it is highly likely that you came across a wild turkey or two. This was not always the case, since wild turkeys were absent from the Park for many years. Thanks to the work of the National Park Service, wild turkeys were reintroduced to Mesa Verde in the early 1990's. This successful reintroduction means that visitors to the Park will see these impressive birds near the Park entrance, in Morefield Campground and in the Park's Administrative District, where they can sometimes be viewed walking along the top of the Spruce Tree House dwelling.

The turkeys of Mesa Verde tend to live in small flocks and spend their days foraging for foods like nuts, seeds, and insects. While turkeys look like they can't fly, wild turkeys can actually reach fast speeds for short distances, which makes it possible for them to lift off forcefully and reach treetops, where they roost with their heads tucked inside their feathers.

Speaking of feathers, turkey feathers were very important to the Ancestral Pueblo people, and turkeys were important in Puebloan communities. It is believed that the people of Mesa Verde

domesticated turkeys during the Basketmaker II period. Rather than using turkeys as a primary food source, they collected their soft, downy feathers painlessly during molting phases. Sustainable collection of turkey feathers could occur multiple times a year over the course of a turkey's life.

Feathers were used to create warm items that trapped pockets of air and prevented heat loss. In fact, turkey feathers, woven with yucca fiber, could be used to create blankets, robes and socks, which were especially important to surviving the cold Mesa Verde winters. Some turkey feather blankets included more than ten thousand turkey feathers! It is believed that that every member of every family likely had their own blanket. While there are not many well-preserved turkey feather blankets, there are a couple of remarkably intact blankets in museum collections including at the Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum and the Penn Museum.

While we consider the time, artistry and feathers it would have taken to create the items necessary to survive a Mesa Verde winter, let us also acknowledge the enduring legacy of the wild turkey.



Mesa Verde Foundation
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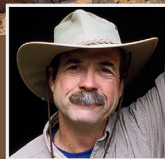
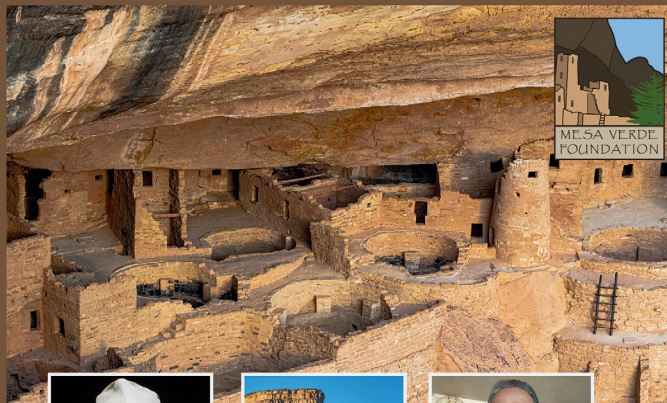
MESA VERDE FOUNDATION FALL TOUR

EXCLUSIVE VIP TOUR OF
MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

SEPTEMBER 27TH - 30TH, 2024

Cost
\$1,350 : Nonmember
\$1,250: MVF Fellow
\$75 per night single supplement
50% deposit required at registration

Early Birds who register by July 1st
will receive \$100 off the registration fee.



TO REGISTER, OR FOR MORE INFORMATION, PHONE: 303-321-3120
EMAIL: SHANNON@MESAVERDEFUNDATION.ORG

DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS INCREDIBLY ENRICHING EXPERIENCE!