

## CHACOAN EXPANSION OR EMULATION OF THE CHACOAN SYSTEM? THE EMERGENCE OF AZTEC, SALMON, AND OTHER GREAT HOUSE COMMUNITIES IN THE MIDDLE SAN JUAN Project Summary

How did the Aztec and Salmon communities develop in the final stages of the Chacoan world in the late 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries? What factors account for apparent Chacoan influence in the Middle San Juan region? Do the data support Chacoan migration or are specific patterns in architecture and material culture better explained by invoking exchange and local emulation of Chacoan traits? These questions have been the subject of inquiry for nearly 100 years. Earl Morris worked at Aztec Ruins in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, recognizing its importance for understanding Puebloan history of the greater San Juan region. The work of Cynthia Irwin-Williams and her colleagues in the 1970s explored Chacoan colonization of and migration to Salmon Pueblo, and provided preliminary answers to these questions. But, the work of these archaeological pioneers only began the process of understanding these complex issues.

Current studies by researchers affiliated with the Center for Desert Archaeology and Aztec Ruins National Monument have begun to address the primary research question outlined for this project. This research indicates Chacoan influence in the Middle San Juan region by the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, with initial construction and settlement at Salmon Pueblo, and later settlement of a larger group at great houses constructed in the Aztec Community. Beyond these largest sites in the region, a number of "second-tier" communities exhibit evidence of Chacoan influence, including Jaquez, Flora Vista, and the Holmes Group (along with many other sites not proposed for study).

On-going research by project team members includes studies of architecture, ceramics, textiles, basketry, and other perishable artifacts from Aztec, Salmon, and smaller communities in the region. Drawing upon prior research on the differences between low- and high-visibility artifact and architectural traits, we propose specific methods to discriminate the processes of migration and emulation in the Middle San Juan. To collect data relevant to the primary research questions, we will use existing data collections and conduct new fieldwork to:

- explore Chacoan influence, presence, or both at the great house communities of Aztec and Salmon and a group of smaller communities in the late 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries
- specifically examine two processes that could account for the presence of Chacoan traits: 1) migration by groups from Chaco Canyon; or 2) local emulation of Chacoan architecture and other material culture by local Middle San Juan groups
- track the development of Aztec and Salmon into regional sociopolitical, economic, and ritual centers as Chaco Canyon declined

Research proposed under this project will be undertaken by a team with more than a century of relevant experience in the theory, methodology, and execution of studies central to answering our primary research question.

The results of this project will be widely disseminated to the professional community and the general public. Databases generated during the project will be made available, upon request, to professional researchers. All artifact data generated by this project will be available on-line at the Center's website. For the professional community, a number of publication outlets will be pursued. A conference including project participants and independent scholars will be convened at the conclusion of the project, culminating in an edited publication. Scholarly presentations will be made at national meetings including the Society for American Archaeology and the American Anthropological Association. In addition, articles in professional journals such as *American Antiquity*, *Journal of Archaeological Research*, and *Kiva*, will be pursued. To make project results and findings accessible to the general public, a traveling exhibit focusing on Aztec and Salmon is planned. This updated exhibit is critical in bringing interpretation of a historically poorly understood area to the greater public. In addition, a dedicated issue of *Archaeology Southwest* (the Center's quarterly magazine) will feature results from the project.

Several of the sites (particularly, the Flora Vista complex) to be studied as part of this project are currently threatened by development and the activity of looters. The detailed documentation, recording, and mapping of threatened sites proposed here will provide the dual benefits of data for research and collection of data that would disappear with site destruction. Lastly, cooperation with the Archaeological Conservancy and other state agencies is underway to develop other means of site protection and preservation.