

History of Hawkins Pueblo

Hawkins Pueblo

Hawkins Pueblo, 5MT4469, is the largest prehistoric archaeological resource within Hawkins Preserve. Hawkins Pueblo appears to have been occupied for approximately 350 years, from about AD 900 to AD 1250. The pueblo was most intensively occupied between AD 1000 and AD 1150, during the Pueblo II period. It is thought that several related groups of people occupied areas of the site. Unfortunately, the site has been negatively impacted by pot hunting and looting activities by historic and modern peoples. The site and preserve stand as testaments to the importance of protecting cultural resources for future generations.

The site consists of the ruins of a habitation room block and associated rubble mounds, middens, and kiva depressions. The room block is covered by a metal roofed structure in an attempt by the Cortez Cultural Center to protect the standing walls of the pueblo from snow and rain.

Archaeological Work at Hawkins Preserve

From a report by Dale Davidson and George N. Ruebelmann:

The Hawkins Preserve area has been of interest to archaeologists and anthropologists for more than a century. As part of a longer trip through the American Southwest, Lewis Henry Morgan visited the Montezuma Valley in the late summer of 1878. He was not impressed with McElmo Creek, which was pools and springs when he saw it. While in the area he was guided by Henry Mitchell and made the first notes and map of the archaeological sites around Mitchell Springs. He described nine Pueblo houses of moderate size and also noted:

A mile below the ranch of Mr. Mitchell, in the bordering walls of the McElmo Canyon, are two cliff houses. The walls of the bluff here are about twenty feet high, with large cavities formed in them here and there. These houses, each of which consists of but two or three small chambers are built of stone, and stand but a few feet above the bottom of the canyon. They are narrow, and not very high, as the cavity in the rock is not very deep. Corrals for some kind of domestic animals are found by the side of these houses in the same hollows in the rock. This is proved by a mass of excrement, about a foot in depth, still there, weather of the goat or sheep cannot be stated, but this fact shows they were inhabited subsequent to the period of European discovery, although they may have been built and used before. The canyon, at this point, is from three hundred to five hundred feet wide (Morgan 1965).

The dung layer Morgan described is still in the alcove, which is on the Hawkins Preserve. The first professional archaeological fieldwork within Hawkins Preserve also has to do with dung, but in a more modern context. In September 1977, J.A. Halasi conducted an archaeological inventory along a proposed sewer pipeline route for the City of Cortez. In the course of that work, three sites were recorded: 5MT4467 and 5MT4470, both prehistoric lithic scatters; and 5MT4469 a large, prehistoric, rectangular rubble mound with two kiva depressions on its south side and midden deposits south and west of the rubble mound. Based on the presence of diagnostic potsherds, Halasi considered the site as belonging to the Pueblo II Period. She also noted the damage to two rooms that had been partially excavated and a trench that had been dug through one of the kivas. She concluded that 5MT4469 would require testing to determine if it was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

In May of 1998, a teacher and students from Mesa Elementary School in Cortez conducted excavations in the midden on the south side of Area A. This was done under the supervision of volunteers from the Cortez Cultural Center. However, other than the information written on the paper bags containing recovered artifacts, no documentation was produced for the work. The locations of the excavations are known from stakes and impressions in the ground.

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In 2000, Bruce Bradley conducted an archaeological survey in the area as part of a management plan for Hawkins Preserve. In addition to the three sites documented by Halasi, he described 21 more prehistoric sites or features within the boundaries of the Preserve and assigned them as follows: Basketmaker II (N=1), Pueblo II (N=4), Pueblo II/Pueblo III (N=1), Pueblo III (N=2), Unknown Pueblo (N=7), and Unknown Prehistoric (N=7). The sites or features included 4 habitation sites, a field house, 5 flake and sherd scatters, 3 check dams, 1 area with 2 hearths, a grinding area, an axe groove area, a rock alignment, a stone quarry, an isolated metate, and an alcove room with pictographs. Based on the extent of disturbance, Bradley concluded that none of the prehistoric remains within the Preserve was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Although not on the Hawkins Preserve, the Mitchell Springs Ruin Group should be briefly discussed here because of its close proximity to 5MT4469. As mentioned previously, Morgan roughly described and mapped the site complex in 1878 (Morgan 1965). A bit later, Prudden excavated several of the Mitchell Springs sites in 1899 and defined what he considered the unit Pueblo (an 'L'-shaped room block with a kiva depression on the south side). Over a hundred years later, Linda Honeycutt and Jerry Fetterman of Woods Canyon Archaeological Consultants formally recorded the site complex as part of a survey for a power line right-of-way. They believed the site had been continuously occupied from Basketmaker II through the late Pueblo III periods. They estimated that all of the buildings could have included 300 rooms, 35 additional kivas and towers, and accommodated a population of up to 1,000 people.

Since 1995, Donald Dove, the owner of the Mitchell Springs Ruins Group has directed testing and limited excavations of some of the sites in the complex. He described ten structures dating between the 11th and 13th centuries, fourteen more between the 10th and 11th centuries, and earlier structures. Of particular interest is the great kiva associated with the building referred to as Pueblo A.

Current work at the preserve, funded by the State Historic Fund Grant No. 2006-AS-003, is focusing on assessing the significance of the main site complex within Hawkins Preserve. In 2006 Mona C. Charles led a group of students from Fort Lewis College in surface topographic mapping and geophysical surveys. The site was mapped using Total Station and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) technology. The geophysical surveys involved electric resistivity and magnetometry technology used for detecting subsurface features in the soil. Test excavations of the site were performed to provide information about subsurface features, and were designed to cause as little disturbance as possible to the site. Artifacts from this test excavation and previous collections were analyzed at Crow Canyon Archaeological Center under the direction of Jonathan Till. Due to the recent work conducted at the preserve, it has been determined that the Hawkins Pueblo complex has considerable archaeological research potential, is considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the Colorado Historic Register because of its potential to provide important information about prehistory.

References

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Prehistoric Times (10,000 BP through AD 1300)

The region in which the Hawkins Preserve is located has been used by humans for thousands of years. The earliest inhabitants of the Montezuma Valley were hunters and gatherers who probably arrived about 10,000 years ago during what archaeologists have designated as the Paleoindian Period. Remains from this time period are all surface finds of diagnostic spear points, suggesting that big game hunting was a major focus.

Archaic Period hunters and gatherers, probably descendants of the big game hunters, occupied the region for the next 8,000 years hunting big and small game and foraging for wild plants such as berries, pine nuts, seeds, and roots. Their principal hunting weapon was the atlatl and dart, and grinding implements (manos and metates) were important plant processing tools. Archaic artifacts have been identified on two sites within the Hawkins Preserve.

About 3,000 years ago, at the beginning of the Basketmaker Period, the first farmers appeared in the region growing corn, beans, and squash they had acquired from neighbors to the south. Evidence of corn in this region has been dated to about 3,000 years ago in sites in southeastern Utah and near Durango, Colorado. Basketmaker peoples lived in small groups initially and constructed small shallow pithouses as dwellings. Hunting and gathering was still an important aspect of their life during much of the year, and the bow and arrow makes its first appearance in the area. Later, the Basketmakers lived in larger communities and constructed more elaborate pithouses; they also began making pottery. Basketmaker occupations have been documented in the vicinity of the Hawkins Preserve, and one scatter of surface artifacts on the property has been identified as dating to Basketmaker times.

About AD 700, the farmers began to construct their dwellings and storage rooms with stone and mortar, ushering in the Pueblo Period. At first, the buildings were arcs of masonry rooms with large upright sandstone slabs making up the first course of the walls. In front of the masonry rooms were jacal structures that served as living space. The pithouse had been transformed into a kiva that served as a ceremonial as well as a habitation structure. Pottery manufacture had become a major industry with various kinds of painted jars and bowls being produced for cooking and storage.

Two hundred years later, Pueblo peoples began constructing larger villages containing complex multi-story houses with numerous incorporated kivas, towers, great kivas, and water containment structures. Around the countryside were numerous farmsteads and small buildings for storing corn and other crops. Pottery manufacture had become an art with elaborately painted jars, bowls, pitchers, ladles, and effigy figures being traded over a large area. The largest sites on the Hawkins Preserve may have been constructed at this time.

About AD 1150, Pueblo peoples began to build many of their villages at the heads of canyons and in the cliff walls below them. The villages were compact structures with multi-story rooms, towers, and kivas, all conforming to the dimensions and shapes of the cliff overhangs in which they were built. Areas farmed were on top of the mesas above the cliffs; sometimes stairs were constructed between the villages and the fields. The most spectacular examples of these cliff dwellings occur in Mesa Verde National Park about

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five miles southeast (and upslope) of Hawkins Preserve. Pottery manufacture continued and became even more artistic with delicately painted mugs, pitchers, and bowls predominating.

By AD 1300, the peoples who had created the villages and farmed the land where they had lived for over a thousand years abandoned the Four Corners area. Archaeologists believe they left for a combination of reasons: prolonged droughts, resource depletion and competition, increased social tension between groups, and possibly invaders. The descendants of these people are believed to live along the Rio Grande River in northern New Mexico and in eastern Arizona.

Historic Times (AD 1800 through 1950s)

Historical activities within and adjacent to the Hawkins Preserve have had a major impact on what we see there today. Livestock grazing, coal mining, urban sprawl, and vandalism have altered plant and animal communities and traces of the prehistoric past. Slightly east of the Preserve, Henry L. Mitchell and his family were first historic residents of the area; they settled sometime in the 1870s across the creek from the springs that bear their name. Mitchell's little settlement grew to include a saloon and a store supplied with goods freighted from Mancos, and for a time, there was also a post office that went by the name of Toltec. According to Lewis Henry Morgan (1965), who visited the place in 1878, "a Mr. Mitchell was successfully cultivating, at the time of our visit, wheat, oats, maize, and the garden vegetables."

Mitchell Springs was the first water source for the settlement of Cortez located about a mile to the north. When the town was founded in 1886, water was collected from the springs and hauled into town. This continued until 1893 when water from the newly developed Montezuma Valley Irrigation Canal reached Cortez.

Coal mining below the rim of McElmo Canyon and adjacent to the Hawkins Preserve began with the settlement of Cortez and continued into the 1930s. Early on, coal was mined from small shafts dug into the cliffs and was used for home heating and cooking purposes. Later, coal from the same deposits was used to power the first electrical generation station in Cortez.

Native Plant Master Program

A Native Plant Master receives special training and certification from Colorado State University Cooperative Extension and then volunteers to educate the public using information gained from the program. The Native Plant Master program is also open to members of the public who want to take courses but prefer not to volunteer. The mission of the Native Plant Master Program is to educate the public about the biological and human values of Colorado plants in order to foster stewardship and sustainable use of plant resources.

To be certified as a Native Plant Master, participants must take three courses in different months and/or locations. If participants can't take all three courses in one year, they may apply in future years to take courses still needed for certification. After successfully completing three courses and the public contact requirement, participants are awarded the Native Plant Master certification and a special uniform patch.

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Certification may be maintained by teaching at least 30 people per year about native plants in public programs and reporting quarterly on those contacts.

Visitors to the Hawkins Preserve readily note that there are several distinct associations involving plants, soil, geology, topography, and wildlife. These associations are also referred to as vegetation communities, plant communities, habitat, phytosociology, or biotypes. Within the preserve seven vegetation communities have been classified, as described below. Collectively they make up a 120 acre natural museum with well over 200 species of plants and wildlife as well as variations in soils, geology and topography. Even though the Hawkins Preserve area has been inhabited or used by humans since prehistoric times, its current protected status gives visitors an excellent opportunity to observe or study the recovery process.

Piñon-Juniper (PJ) Woodland or Pygmy Forest

This prominent community is characterized by the presence of both piñon and juniper trees. In recent years, nearly half of the piñons have been killed due to drought and a bark beetle infestation. The understory consists of sagebrush, prickly pear cactus, grasses (blue grama, sand dropseed, and Indian rice grass), Gambel's oak, Mormon tea, yucca and serviceberry. Soils are made up of wind-deposited sands mixed with abundant organic material. This is overlain with a cryptobiotic crust. This woodland serves as a major habitat for a variety of wildlife including mule deer, squirrels, grey fox, and ground squirrels. This is also the main nesting and feeding area for many bird species.

Sagebrush Steppe

Interspersed with the PJ woodland are the pocket communities dominated by big sagebrush. Since many ecologists believe that this community was originally derived from native grasslands, it is commonly referred to as a sagebrush steppe. The soils in the sage steppe are deep and sandy with very little understory except broom snakeweed and cheatgrass. Some native grasses (galletagrass, sand dropseed, Indian ricegrass, and blue grama) are coming back. There are indications that this community will eventually transition to piñon-juniper as seedlings of these trees become established. The sage steppe is part of the habitat for black-tailed jack rabbits, grey fox, cottontail rabbits, kangaroo rats, deer mice and mule deer.

Slickrock-Pothole

One of the largest communities in the preserve is easily identified by the exposed Dakota Sandstone formation with its characteristic cracks, potholes, and "slickrock" which gives this community its name. Vegetation in this community is limited to the potholes and cracks where detritus, seeds, and sands are deposited by the winds. Some of the more common plants that find a home here are sideoats grama, sand dropseed, prickly pear, hedgehog cactus, and little bluestem. The more stable sites often develop into miniature rock gardens and can support yuccas, piñons, junipers, bitterbrush and goldenaster. The deeper potholes also provide habitat for aquatic wildlife. After a summer rain, look for water beetles, fairy shrimp, mosquito larva, earth worms, and water skimmers.

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Rimrock

Paralleling the southern edge of the preserve is a large fracture in the Dakota Sandstone, causing a broken rock formation and 40 ft-high cliffs. Structures within this community include the exposed rim, spillways, large boulders, shaded soil deposits, exposed shale and coal deposits, deep cracks, alcoves, and caves. Some very unique vegetation occurs here including poison ivy, chokecherry, skunkbush, hackberry, singleleaf ash, cottonwood, gooseberry and Gambel's oak. This is also the habitat for several species of lizards, chipmunks, bats, and swallows. Foxes, skunks, and coyotes find this an ideal area for dens.

Alluvial Bottomland

The alluvial bottomland is a former flood plain that lies below the rimrock. It is incised by McElmo Creek and its tributaries. The soils in this alluvial bottomland are deep clays and are highly alkaline. Prior to 1910 this area was considered prime crop land and produced both wheat and alfalfa. Periodic flooding of McElmo Creek has cut deep arroyos, lowered the water table and left a highly unstable, disturbed soil surface. The vegetation reflects these conditions where drought and saline-resistant perennials coexist with many weedy annuals. Characteristic species include greasewood, four-wing saltbush, thistles, seepweed, pepperweed, horehound, tumble mustard, Russian thistle, and salt grass. This area is quite fragile so visitation is highly restricted.

Riparian Corridor and Intermittent Streams (Wetlands)

Although this community consists primarily of McElmo Creek and the current narrow floodplain, the description also applies to intermittent streams, seeps and wetlands found above the rim. There are many birds and mammals that utilize this corridor as part of their habitat. This is also the community that is most severely affected by the invasive saltcedar, also known as tamarisk. Other identifying plants include coyote willow, cottonwood, cat-tail, sedges, rushes, poison ivy, rabbitbrush, salt grass, and common reed.

Post-disturbance and Dunes

This is a catch-all community designation for those areas within the preserve that have a recent history of intense disturbance. Disturbance is caused by excavation of archaeological sites, burning vegetation, dunes, former ranching facilities and activity related to the trails. These sites are often devoid of native plant species and are highly susceptible to erosion. Some of the species that do occur include wolfberry, greasewood, four-wing saltbush, stork's bill, cheatgrass, purslane, and snakeweed.