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Abiquiú Library's Archaeology Dig



Darian Reyes (left) and Annie Danis discuss soil color at the Abiquiú Library and Cultural Center archeology dig

If you've visited the Pueblo de Abiquiú recently you may have noticed some outside activity around the library's west side.

From June 1 through 20, a group of archeologists from Berkeley, Calif., led by professor Jun Sunseri, along with a group of adventurous local youth from

Abiquiú, spent their days digging up the area in anticipation of the library/cultural center expansion.

"We've found quite a few interesting things," graduate student Annie Danis enthuses. Danis developed a software program to digitally catalog all the findings, which are sent daily to the

library so a copy is available. "Because of the history of long occupation of this site we have ceramics going back far before the Spanish settlement here. We've found the old foundations of the room blocks. A lot of faunal material, which is animal bone, which is colonial era that can tell us about what people were eating and what kinds of animals

were being kept domestically. Pottery sherds from all different eras up to the relatively contemporary time. Lithic materials — stone flakes — which would have been part of the process for making stone tools. Wood beams and construction materials that help us understand how the buildings were constructed. We're finding different



Abiquiú local Jesus Montoya (left), Dr. Heather Atherton, Berkeley graduate student Alexandra McCleary, Jun Sunseri

kinds of adobe bricks, which can help us tell what time periods different walls were made. The earlier adobe is relatively clean — meaning it doesn't have a lot of other stuff in it besides the mud. The later adobes have things like pre-contact pottery sherds. We've located the well in that small area back there (she gestures)."

Danis says that although the group has a lot of experience and can identify various finds, the artifacts collected will be sent back to Berkeley for further, more strenuous analysis.

"This (the dig) is important for a lot of reasons." Danis said. "Abiquiú is known for a variety of reasons, but this location has history going back to pre-contact times (before Spanish Colonial exploration of the area) and then as the site of the Pueblo de Abiquiú land grant. So it has a lot of importance for the community in understanding what that history is and how these spaces have been used over the years. Having physical materials and special understanding of what this area looked like and this area evolved over time."

Sunseri conducted his dissertation work in El Rito and has, over the years, been building a relationship with communities in the area. Conversations between the library board and the Merced del Pueblo de Abiquiú board and Sunseri brought the professor and his group to Abiquiú to begin excavation of the old *plazuela*.

"As we collect information, whatever we recover, we take photos of every layer, she records that and it also goes instantly to the library so there's always a copy here. They know every day what's been done and what artifacts have been recovered." Sunseri said. "These little tiny sherds by themselves don't tell us much of a story, but when you put them into context, the patterning, and you do an analysis of all of these small pieces, (you see a larger cohesive picture) and her software is generating that data set for us."

Danis is sitting with her iPad on her lap next to Diane Reyes, a local youth from Abiquiú. Reyes is holding a book of what looks like paint swatches on her lap as she talks with Danis. It's a "Munsell Soil Color" book and as Sunseri explains, is just one tool used by the team.

"The book is a geologist tool. It's a soil chart because we're trying to identify the interior space versus the exterior wall, for instance, or even a portion of a room being used differently, such as a *banco* and the floor. Different uses produce different colors of soil. Because the book gives standardized numbers for a color, then one person's eyes don't have to be the same as another person's, so two people can talk about the same color." Sunseri says. "We're such an interdisciplinary science, we borrow tools from geologists, from zoology, the mapping instruments we use here are from a

survey. Before we even set trowel to dirt we used ground-penetrating radar. We want to be very careful not to disturb any of the... oral traditions give us a pretty good idea that that isn't going to happen, but we use the radar to double check. We use two different kinds. I used a very high-resolution 900 mhz antenna so we can identify cobbles that make up a wall and things like postholes. But then you can use a 400 mhz antenna that can penetrate up to three or four meters, which is good for exploring the kivas and other pre-contact stuff elsewhere on the pueblo."

As with many areas with long histories, there are stories that have been told over the years to how an area came to be, and sometimes the oral histories are not totally accurate. Sunseri gives an example.

"Another thing we are finding here is these interesting construction sequences." Sunseri says as he gestures toward the excavated area he is standing near. "Supposedly the 1700s Abiquiú community was settled on top of a pre-contact pueblo, but as far as we can tell materially, that isn't so. That in fact, as you see in this layer here, we have a non-cultural matrix, as in a Pleistocene lakebed, clay deposit that the first settlement probably prepared."

There were also different perceptions to where the old well used to be. Sunseri said that when the library finally re-encloses the excavation area

with the new west wing, they want to clean out the old well space and put some sort of marker where the well used to be. To remind people why this was an enclosed space, which was to make it a defensible area from potentially hostile visitors.

The community involvement was important to the community and also to Sunseri, and he particularly loved working with the area's youth.

"We've had some fantastic youth working along with us. They're picking up stuff about our digital data collection protocols, they're learning how to use our instruments, they're learning about what animal bone looks like, and what part of the animal it comes from, all of that stuff, and that's part of our mandate, too. And you should see them with the tablets." Here he makes a beep beep beep sound and mimics fingers (evidently youthful fingers) flying across an iPad keyboard. 12 youths, split up into four per week, helped and were paid via a grant from United Way of Northern New Mexico.

Originally planned to be a field school during the months of July and August, those plans were curtailed with the impending arrival of Sunseri's first child scheduled for early July, but he says he would be very excited to be asked to return and continue work at the site.

"I hope so." he said enthusiastically, when asked about the possibility of returning. "You can't be any luckier than this."

Although there were no Indiana Jones kinds of monumental discoveries unearthed, it's fascinating to know about local history. Since the records of the dig up to this point are also at the Abiquiú Library, they are available to peruse if you are interested in finding out more about what the archaeologists found during their brief stay.

Essentials

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