This August, we completed our fourth excavation field school of the busy 2014 season. More than 100 participants from Hisatsinom and several other Chapters of CAS and the Verde Valley Archaeological Center participated this season. Over the next 6 months, analysis and report writing will keep us busy. Unfortunately we had to cancel the Champagne Spring Ruins field schools due to my back surgery that went awry.

The research design that is guiding our current investigations at Mitchell Springs, (see PDF file link at http://www.fourcornersresearch.com/Mitchell-Springs.html), explores the Puebloan pattern of constructing buildings atop earlier buildings. This is a phenomenon that has been recognized by archaeologists studying cultures throughout the world. Interpretation of the pattern as it pertains to the American Puebloan Southwest usually includes suggestions involving land tenure rights and the passage or the connection of those rights to one’s ancestors. Our current research investigates whether data can be gathered to support the hypothesis that, not only did the Anasazi routinely choose to build
in the same places where other Puebloan groups before them had built, but that the later buildings were constructed atop buildings that once performed similar functions or held similar levels of importance in terms of ritual significance. Sometimes these later buildings were built over structures that had already been abandoned for hundreds of years. Excavation data from throughout the Northern Southwestern suggests that such a pattern did indeed exist but our research questions investigating why it happened creates challenges for explaining the phenomena. Does it really matter why this occurred? In the big picture it may not, but such behaviors are part of that big picture. Are there methods or models that could be developed to better explain the evidence? Hopefully this research can help solve these questions.

At many Pueblo sites, later pitstructures were often built where earlier pitstructures existed and surface structures are most frequently built atop earlier surface structures. It’s possible that the pattern may manifest simply because of the desire of later occupants to preserve the previous village format. Portions of the earlier buildings were usually deliberately preserved when building later structures. The Sector 7 great kiva at Mitchell Springs was built in the last half of the 10th century, over the top of a large pitstructure containing more than 60 square meters of floor space. Built in A.D. 753, this structure contained roughly 40% of the 140 square meters of floor space of the later great kiva built over it. This may be due to a change in function of later integrative facilities or perhaps because the size of the groups using the earlier pitstructure had grown between the middle of the A.D. 900’s and the end of the Chacoan era in the early to mid A.D. 1100’s.

The implications of this pattern might reveal information about the prehistoric Puebloan view of the importance of specific physical space. There clearly was an effort by the ancients to gain a physical connection to the same physical space that was used by people who had built similar buildings in earlier times, sometimes centuries earlier. As mentioned above, during the process of constructing buildings where other similar buildings once existed, a deliberate effort was made to preserve portions of the earlier structures. Early accounts and ethnographic writings appear to confirm the concept that physical things in the world, whether they be physically alive or not, were all ‘alive’ in the Pueblo world. If the average person lived for 35-40 years, they may have had primary use of only two or three pitstructures during their lifetimes, depending upon whether or not they spent most of each year at one primary residence. The people who used these buildings may have grown to feel a connection with them.

To test the research questions as they pertain to the area under and around the small greathouse Pueblo A (see Figure 1), excavations in 2013 and 2014 at Mitchell Springs were designed to explore the chronology and types of buildings that were constructed around and beneath this multi-story structure. The importance of this physical space is assumed to be elevated because greathouses are believed to represent an expenditure of public labor. Because we knew of the presence of earlier buildings around and under Pueblo A, it was a good candidate to develop and test the research questions. Subfloor tests in Pueblo A - Rooms 11, 2, 12, and 13 revealed earlier walls beneath that were set at slightly different angles to the later walls. These walls were made of fine tabular masonry and were apparently reused as wall footings.
Structure 26 – Basketmaker III Pitroom, Abandoned around A.D. 700

During the 2013 field season, an excavation unit was excavated into an untested area immediately east of the NE corner of Pueblo A. This unit led to the discovery of a Basketmaker III era pitroom designated as Structure 26. These types of structures are not a common feature in most Mesa Verde region sites from this time and therefore excavation data on pitrooms are limited. They apparently served multiple purposes and were small, slab-lined and often used ramp entrances built into the south side of the building. Teri Hoff with Mary Gallagher directed the crew and they made sure we got the most out of the excavation and documentation of the work.

The roof was constructed by bending green tree limbs and lodging them between the upright slabs that lined the interior of the building. Then it was coated with brush, adobe and small flat stones. Structure 26 functioned as a small grinding room. A bell shaped pit set in the floor was probably used for short term storage of the materials being processed in the structure (see Figure 2). Lying face down on the floor along with the cover stone for the pit was a metate, manos, and a large floor polishing stone that probably also was used to grind products to a finer texture. A partial Chapin Black-on-white bowl used as a scoop and a large core/pecking stone was also on the floor.

Pitstructure 25 – Pueblo I Community Structure Abandoned around 825-850 A.D.

Two other crews led by Tom Hoff (CAS Executive Secretary) and Jim Graceffa (Verde Valley Archaeology Center cofounder) worked on nearby Pitstructure 25. It was also discovered in the May 2013 excavations. The sprinklers in my yard revealed a small depression which turned out to be a big pit structure with approximately 40 square meters of floor space. It is located a few meters to
the east of the northeast corner of Pueblo A, and was intentionally burned at abandonment. Associated tools, mats, pottery vessels, axes, awls and other essential items were left in the building when it was set ablaze. Its size suggests it would likely have functioned as a community building shared by a larger group of families. Some domestic activities were also performed inside Structure 25. Although only one functional metate was found in the portion of the building that was excavated, 16 manos were on the floor in the space south of the wingwall. We collected and processed over 300 tree-ring samples from the burned roof. Excavations in this building will continue in the summer of 2015.

Evidence developed as a result of the 2013 excavation session and this summer’s work suggests there was a large 9th century surface pueblo built around and beneath portions of Pueblo A. Structure 25 appears to date to the same time period as Room 27 which was connected to other surface rooms and is located about 5 meters to the northwest of the northwest corner of Pueblo A (see Figure 1). The manner in which Structure 25 was closed suggests it may have been ceremonially decommissioned. It would not be logical to leave perfectly useable tools, and high labor input items inside a building that was going to be burned down. A dog skull was found in the center of the structure in the fill. Animal heads or animal burials in decommissioned pitstructures probably represent part of the structure closing ritual. Very little time passed between the last use of this pitstructure and the time when it was set afire. Copious amounts of burned sage and pine needles were found on the floor in the south end of Structure 25 and appear to have served as an accelerant.

Room 27 – Pueblo I Surface Dwelling, Abandoned around 825-850 A.D.

Members of Hisatsinom and the Verde Valley Archaeological Center began the work on Room 27 during the May 2013 excavation session. It was continued this fall and led by Hisatsinom member Joel Brisbin. Although the excavation is incomplete, it is clear that Room 27 was a domicile that also contained features that are found nearly exclusively in pitstructures (see Figure 4).

A large shallow hearth provided heat, light and the means to cook food. Cylindrical sand filled small pits, sipapu, an embedded anvil stone and a slab lined rectangular pit probably used for special item storage, were spread across the floor. These features are not ordinarily found inside surface dwellings and their presence complicates the interpretation of the function of this building. Two storage bins and several floor pits could have provided short-term
storage space. The roof was evidently supported by full-height masonry and adobe walls and the top of the roof was used as a work area. Preliminary tests indicate the presence of attached rooms on the sides and back of Room 27. Associated pitstructures probably lie under Pueblo A. Two have already been documented but only tested by excavations. Work on the Room 27 floor features and final documentation will continue in the spring of 2015.

**Pueblo A – Multi Story Greathouse and Tri Wall, Burned down 1230-1240 A.D.**

Pueblo A is one of at least four greathouses that once existed at the Mitchell Springs Ruin Group. Attached to its west side is an unusual D-shaped Tri Wall structure that stood around 6 meters tall. Two greathouses were destroyed by a local pothunter with a bulldozer in 1977.

In the summers of 1988-1992 tests inside Pueblo A revealed a multi-story structure with one central kiva, 20 ground-floor rooms and at least 9 second story rooms that had collapsed into the ground floor rooms. Only the two square shaped rooms were living rooms and the remaining rectangular rooms were used primarily for long term storage. Evidently, only two families occupied the building and they had the capacity to store huge quantities of products. It was abandoned when it catastrophically burned around 1230-1240 A.D. The Tri Wall structure was probably roofed between the outside and middle walls that stood about 20' tall. The space between the middle wall and the inner wall was probably also roofed while the inner wall was built to form a large unroofed elevated fire chamber. Multiple burning episodes inside this chamber suggest it was used for making smoke signals or for large cooking events. The paucity of animal bones in its fill suggests it was not used as a roasting receptacle. In the portion of the structure that was excavated, the space between the outer and middle walls and the middle and inner walls was featureless and probably stored food product. The collapse of Pueblo A due to fire, caused its outside walls and the Tri Wall to break apart and fall in an explosive manner.

**Pueblo A, Room 18 – Ground Floor Room Pueblo II-III, Abandoned around 1230 A.D.**

The west half of this ground floor room was excavated. A second story room collapsed into it and much of the space inside Room 18 was filled with fallen wall stones, burned wood and adobe. Although the work is not yet complete, we know that a doorway was built into the western wall that leads to another smaller room. This room was built into the

*Figure 5 - Pueblo A Room 18 doorway through west wall, McElmo B/W Bowl fell into Rm 18 from 2nd story*
interstitial space outside the northeast side of the central kiva and may be associated with it in some way. Hopefully we will take a closer look at this room one day. A room dividing single-course-wide wall was installed after the initial construction of the room. There are at least two floor features beside the dividing wall in the half of the room that we excavated. They have not yet been examined. Much of the upper fill and the south and west walls had been in direct contact with fire. Upper floor rooms burned thoroughly but the ground floor rooms under 2nd story rooms did not, and when they collapsed, a McElmo Black-on-white bowl survived the fall and came to rest in the corner where it was protected.

Pueblo A, Kiva A – Ground Floor Room Pueblo II-III, Abandoned around 1230 A.D.

The preplanned footprint of Pueblo A is symmetrical if the Tri Wall and N-S oriented rooms on the east side of the building are not considered, but these rooms were part of the original design. In general, inner walls are tied into the outer wall that surrounds all of the rooms within the pueblo. The ties are intermittent although most single story walls contained at least three ties into the outer wall which confirms the preplanned
design of the structure. Kiva A was shared by the inhabitants of the square shaped rooms that lie on the east and west sides of the kiva. It measures around 5 meters across from the back of the bench at the north end to the back of the bench on its south end. The excavation unit (see Figure 1) is 1.5 meters across and runs through the north-south axis of the kiva. The field session ended before we could get a solid glimpse of the bench but it was confirmed on the north end at 20 cm below where we finished the season. It was coated by 20 different coatings of various colors of clay or adobe plaster including bright whites and red (see Figure 7). The remains of a robust wall running roughly east to west, either fell down from the 2nd floor or was possibly built into the kiva. It would have weighed many tons and would likely break apart (see Figure 8) in a similar fashion after falling 10 or 12 feet. If this wall did come from the 2nd story floor, its east-west orientation across the Kiva A rooftop would likely indicate that a rectangular shaped room had been constructed above it. Such a room would have concealed any indication that a kiva had been built into Pueblo A.

A preliminary interpretation of the prehistory of Pueblo A as being catastrophically burned at about A.D. 1230-1240 is supported by the presence of many burned rooms (primarily single story rooms and second story rooms) and an unburied partially burned individual found lying face-down in a storage room. The processed remains of 10-12 individuals from the upper fill of the Sector 11 Great Kiva appears to date to the period when Pueblo A burned. These types of events support the hypothesis that some large sites with long histories that were built in locations that were not easily defended, would have been susceptible to raiding if the resident population dwindled to unsustainable levels. This clearly occurred at Mitchell Springs where the population is estimated at around 20 families during its last phase of occupation.

During the 2015 field season, excavations inside Kiva A will continue down to the bench and the floor. It is hoped that this work will provide additional evidence for interpreting the final days of the Mitchell Springs Community and how this central kiva may have functioned for the individuals who once called Pueblo A home. During the 2014 field schools, I estimate that the crew removed approximately 30,000 lbs. of wall rubble from inside Kiva A. Although evidence of burning was found in the upper fill of the kiva, it was insulated enough from the most intense heat of the fire by the bulk of materials above and around it. Air to fire is essential if the goal is to burn down a building, and Kiva A probably did not have access to enough oxygen to fully ignite.
Pueblo A, Room 7, abandoned around A.D. 1230-1240

This ground floor rectangular shaped room is located at the northwest corner of Pueblo A. A second story room had collapsed into the fill of Room 7. It was suspected that this room had been systematically shoveled out by pot hunters sometime over the last century and a quarter and our excavations confirmed that much of the floor had been exposed and destroyed. Shovel gouges in the plastered floor indicate that looters had indeed reached the floor. In the northern half they missed by about 10 cm. No floor features were found in the room and it’s likely there never were floor features in this storage room.

In the northwest corner of Room 7, the builders and designers of Pueblo A constructed a rounded room corner. According to Joel Brisbin who led this excavation, the East Haynie Ruin (a large multi-story greathouse in the Lakeview Group located approximately 6 miles to the northeast of Mitchell Springs) was also built with rounded corners at the inside of the outside corners of the pueblo. Perhaps there was a meaning attached to this architectural trait that may have symbolically illustrated ties the occupants of Pueblo A had with each other. The symbolism of a receptacle that contained two cooperating groups who may have been members of the same lineage or society is easy to envision but not so easy to prove.

EU 37 – 5 meter x 1.5 meter Excavation Unit on the North Side of Pueblo A

To gain a better understanding of the prehistory of Pueblo A, EU 37 was excavated so that we could examine the surfaces that were associated with the use of the pueblo as well as any evidence that would indicate how this part of the site was used before the construction of Pueblo A. On top of this surface, many stratified layers of ash, trash and melted adobe which may have come off the exterior of the pueblo walls were laying on this surface.

This test was very revealing because it gave us a close look at the construction methods used to build Pueblo A. A wall footer was built into a trench and copious amounts of gray mortar was laid under and around the two double coursed footing stones. This may have been a required feature when attempting
to build structures that stood 20 feet tall. The mortar used between the wall stones above the footing is different in color and texture. When Pueblo A collapsed, stones from the structure fell at least 5 meters from the building. The front rooms in Pueblo A were single story rooms but they stood over 3 meters tall. The back wall of the pueblo was 2 stories tall and much of the material from the walls fell into the structure whereas the front
of the pueblo fell away from the building in a single event.

Beneath the surface associated with Pueblo A, trash containing large amounts of Early Pueblo Gray jar sherds along with Piedra, Cortez, Mancos and McElmo Black-on-white, Bluff Black-on-red and Abajo Red-on-orange, Mancos and Moccasin Gray and Corrugated Gray was mixed in with the powdery brown loam soil. In general the earliest sherds were nearest to the undisturbed subsoil horizon. Rodent or activities related to the use of Pueblo A probably caused the later ceramics to find their way beneath the Pueblo A surface. A series of events created the complex stratigraphic profile beneath the Pueblo A associated surface. Most strata events appear to have been associated with activities of the Pueblo I roomblock occupants who resided immediately to the north of EU 37.

**Great Kiva – Sector 11, Built in last half of the 10th Century and Abandoned around 1130 A.D.**

In preparation for the backfilling of the open excavation units inside this building, Joel Brisbin and Gay Ives volunteered their time and expertise for the purpose of creating a detailed profile of the east side of these open units. Upon close examination, it is clear that the abandoned great kiva became a trash receptacle that received material from different directions throughout the filling process. The number of complete artifacts, particularly beads that were found in the fill of this structure suggests that offerings were routinely made to it as it accumulated trash and debris and eventually completely filled up.
Figure 13 - Members of the CAS Executive Committee working on Structure 25

Figure 14 - Gail LaDage, Larry and Sandy Tradlener and other members of CAS Chapters screening
Figure 15 - Teri Hoff and Mary Gallagher working the floor of Structure 26 Pitroom

Figure 16 - Nancy Evans w Mary G and members of the Cottonwood Gulch Foundation