



# "Rock Art" -ifacts: Cataloging and Contextualizing Collected & *in-situ* Cultural Materials at the Mesa Prieta Petroglyph Landscape, New Mexico



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### Project Purpose

For over two decades, volunteers with the Mesa Prieta Petroglyph Project has cooperated with private landowners to record petroglyphs on a remarkable landscape at the confluence of the Rio Chama and the Rio Grande. Petroglyph data is systematically stored in a recently modernized geodatabase application (the "PDA"), however this app is optimized for petroglyph records, not artifacts or features. In 2022, the MPPP archaeologist initiated an effort to establish a comparable artifact database app, optimized to better catalog artifacts and track their disposition.

### Scope

This small-scale artifact cataloging project is designed primarily to track artifact records for three broad categories:  
1 - artifacts recorded on Mesa Prieta and left in-situ;  
2 - artifacts volunteers delivered to the office for analysis;  
3 - artifacts from any context donated to MPPP.

As the cataloging project is still in progress (and for additional reasons), the third category is presently excluded. Analysis currently focuses on the second category, plus a nonrandom sample of the first.

### Database Methods

In addition to better classify archaeological objects, establishing a formalized artifact database importantly fulfills MPPP's obligations to link records with owner contact info, as well as to track chain-of-custody for any in the second category above. Two artifact database apps are in active development: a "main" app utilizing the Filemaker PDA's architecture, and an open-source (Base) clone. Both use a custom UI for data entry, with standardized landowner, repository, and classification values keyed to related tables. Hierarchical class values are selected from "drop down" boxes, and are exemplified in the chart below.

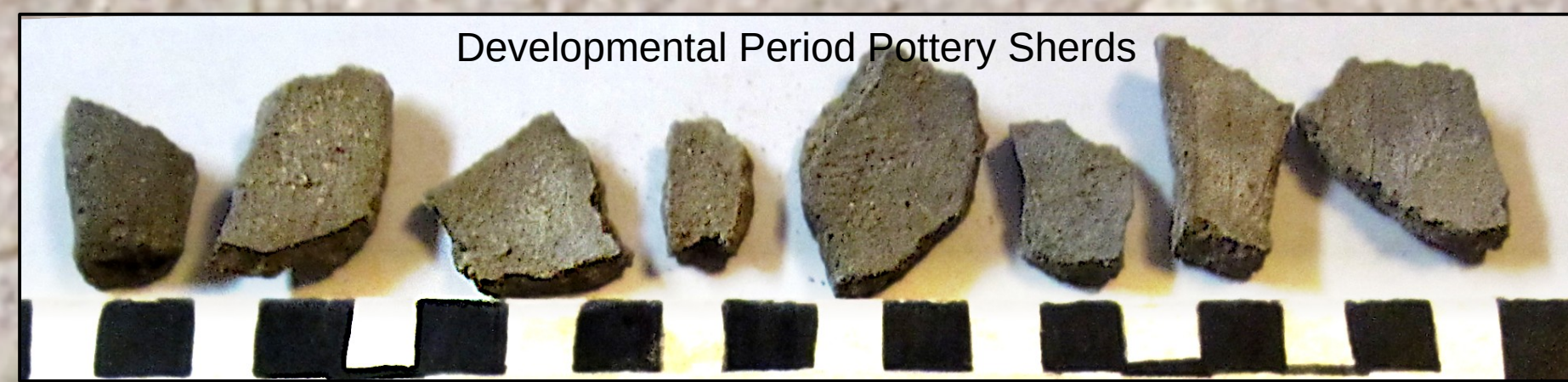
ArtClassKey	ArtClassTxt	ArtMaterial	ArtMatKey
0	Lithic - Flaked Stone	CCS: pedernal chert CCS: chert/chacony CCS: other silicate Volcanic: obsidian Volcanic: fine grain Volcanic: describe	0 1 2 3 6 7
1	Lithic - Groundstone	Other: sand, mica, etc. (describe) Igneous: extrusive (volcanic) Igneous: intrusive (plutons) Metamorphic: describe	10 11 12 13
2	Ceramic - Precontact	Sedimentary: describe Utilityware - corrugated Utilityware - micaceous Other - incised (gray/mica) B on W - Santa Fe B on W - Bandelier A B on W - Bandelier B B on W - Wiyuu B on W - any other Polychrome - all Terra Cotta	14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24
3	Ceramic - Postcontact	Porcelain Milk Glass Postcontact Pueblo(Apache) Other (describe)	25 26 27 28
4	Bone - Faunal	Avian Taxa Carnivora Taxa Lagomorph Taxa Ungulate Taxa Other or Unknown Taxa	29 30 31 32 33
5	Bone - Human	TOOL WORK, IN LATE NAGPRA Wood: saw cut stump or object Wood: milled lumber Wood: moulding, furniture, toy, etc. Flute/Whistle/Tube (wood, reed, etc.) Fiber: basket, cradleboard, etc.	34 35 36 37 38 39
6	Flora - Artifact	Maize cob Sample: botanical Sample: pollen, phytolith, soil	40 41 42
8	Textile - Plant-based	Cordage Fabric (cotton or other fiber) Hide: tanned	43 44 45
9	Textile - Fur or Hide	Hide: untanned/rawhide Woven: Fur Blanket Other (describe)	46 47 48
10	Glass	Clear Green Brown Amethyst Other	49 50 51 52 53
11	Metal	Coin Object Fastener(s) Hardware Copper: bells + all Precontact Other or oxidized conglomerate	54 55 56 57 58 59
12	Archival - Photo	Photo: print(s) Photo: negative(s) Photo: slide/transparency Film reel for projection	60 61 62 63
13	Archival - Literature	Book (published) Manuscript (unpublished) Field/Lab notes or memo	64 65 66
14	Other + Related	Describe	67



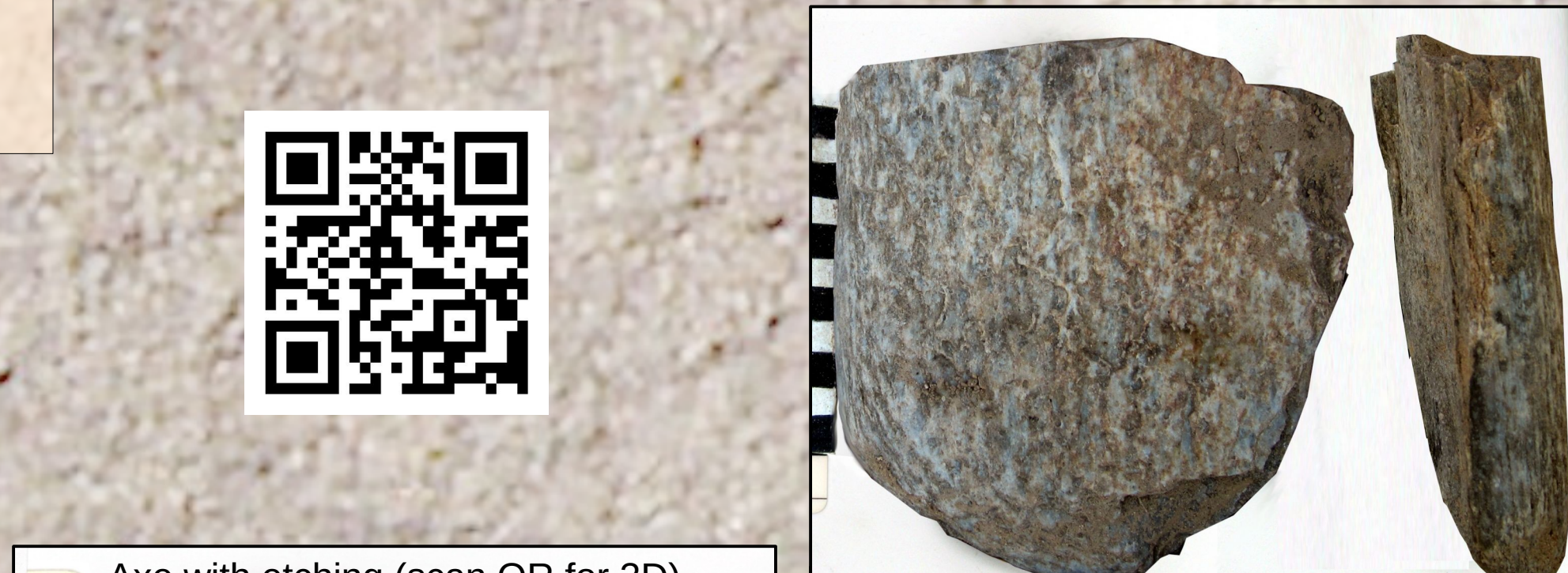
Polychrome Glazewares



Incised micaceous sherd



Developmental Period Pottery Sherds



Axe with etching (scan QR for 3D)



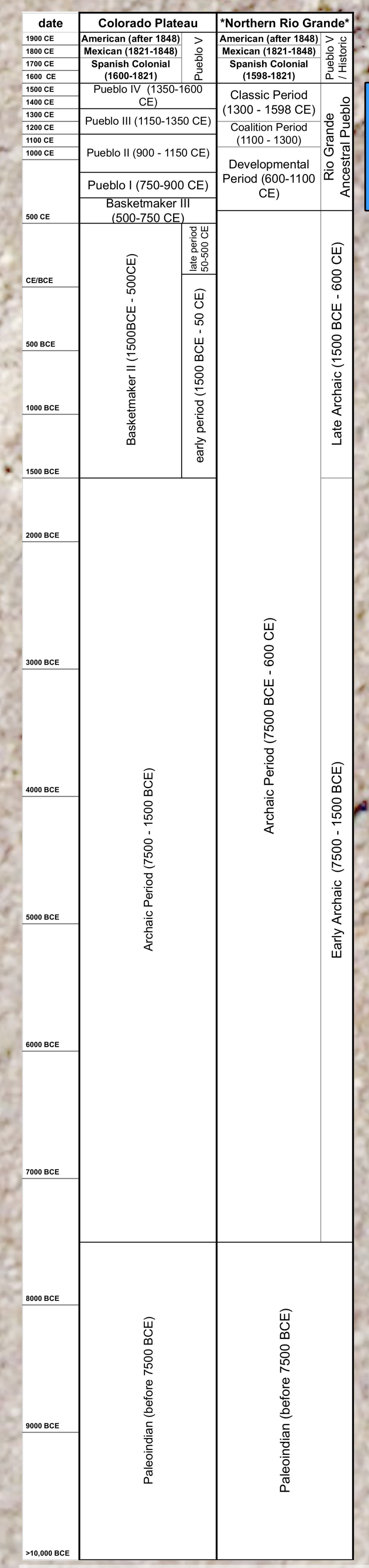
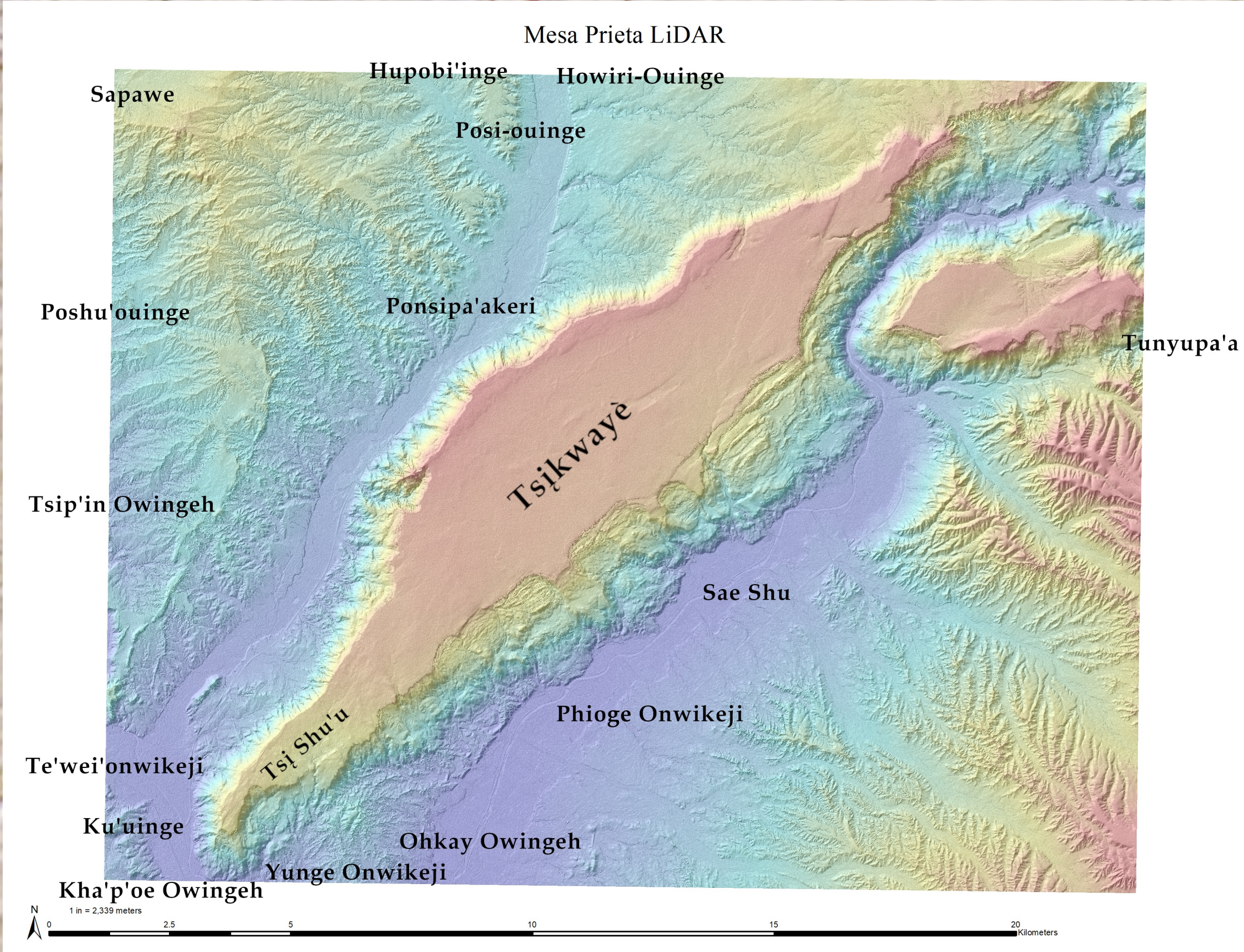
Axe with notches but no groove



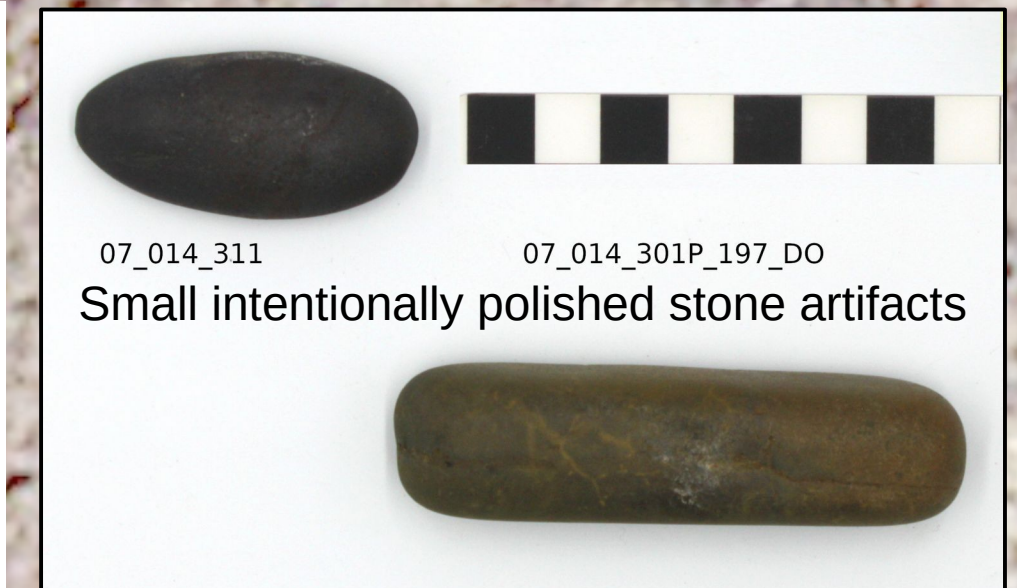
Unusual axe, material matches Developmental Period object



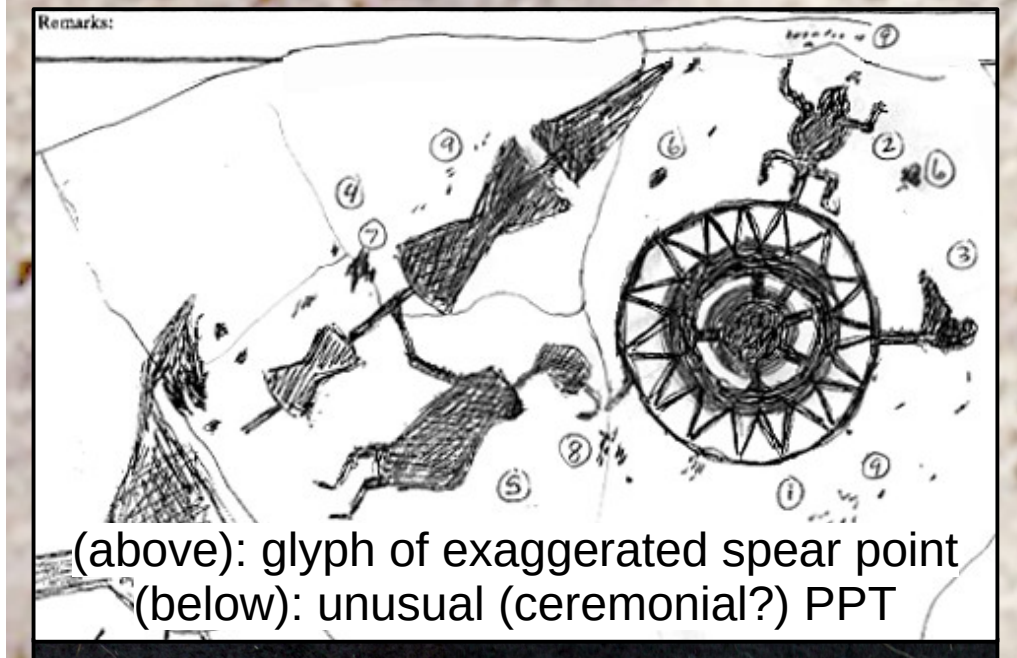
Axe with notches and groove



Artifact Frequencies:\*



Small intentionally polished stone artifacts



(above): glyph of exaggerated spear point (below): unusual (ceremonial?) PPT



Archaic Period Projectile Points



Archaic Period obsidian knife



Paleoindian biface with distinctive flaking

### Dataset Discussion

Preliminary results yield significant interpretive value for diachronic trends in ecology, ideology, and social relationships. For all periods, anticipated spatial patterns (e.g. slope, distance to water, etc.) for implied activities are unsupported and/or refuted.  
**Paleoindian:** Merely ~1% of the artifacts at the Mesa are Paleoindian. These are fluted point fragments, and "overshot" flaked bifaces. Spatially they span from low river terraces up to the rim, and along much of the Mesa's length.  
**Early to Middle Archaic:** Archaic nomads used Valles Caldera/Jemez Mountain obsidians. Lithics imply seasonal rounds included the Pajarito and Caldera. A gradual but constant increase in lithic frequency throughout the Archaic refutes any local Middle Holocene declines.  
**Late Archaic:** Reliance on Valles/Jemez obsidians remains consistent, implying some social and economic continuity. Gradual archaic frequency increase implies slow but consistent population increase.  
**Developmental:** The earliest arrow points mimic Late Archaic dart point forms and materials. Small household-scale settlements mark the onset of agriculture, but not community aggregation. Pottery is indicated.  
**Coalition:** A decline in artifact frequency may indicate sampling bias or decreased population. Affinities for Tiwa or Gallina are possible based on lithic sources, but unconfirmed due to a lack of temporally diagnostic pottery from this period.

**Classic Pueblo:** Sharp increases in petroglyphs (75%) and artifacts (50%) reflect the Tewa migration. Pedernal chert points demonstrate strong and lasting ties with the Chama Basin. Pottery types and frequencies match surface finds at Phioge, Posi, and other nearby pueblos. Some Tiwa pottery types are also evident. Farming extends from the river banks to the top of Mesa. Ceremonial objects plausible.  
**Spanish Colonial (Misison):** A gradual shift from farming to livestock grazing is indicated, however temporarily diagnostic artifacts from this time are few. Metal projectile points in all stages of manufacture may be from this Period.  
**Mexican National (Rancho) & US Territory:** Excluding artifacts from the Taos Rebellion, most materials from these brief periods are glass. Dendrochronology of in-situ juniper lumber may be worth pursuing. Ranching is strongly inferred.  
**American Statehood:** A proliferation of early-to-mid 20th C glass shows rapid changes in consumption and discard practices. Grassland depletion across the Mesa leads to a collapse in ranching at the onset of Statehood times.

### Acknowledgements

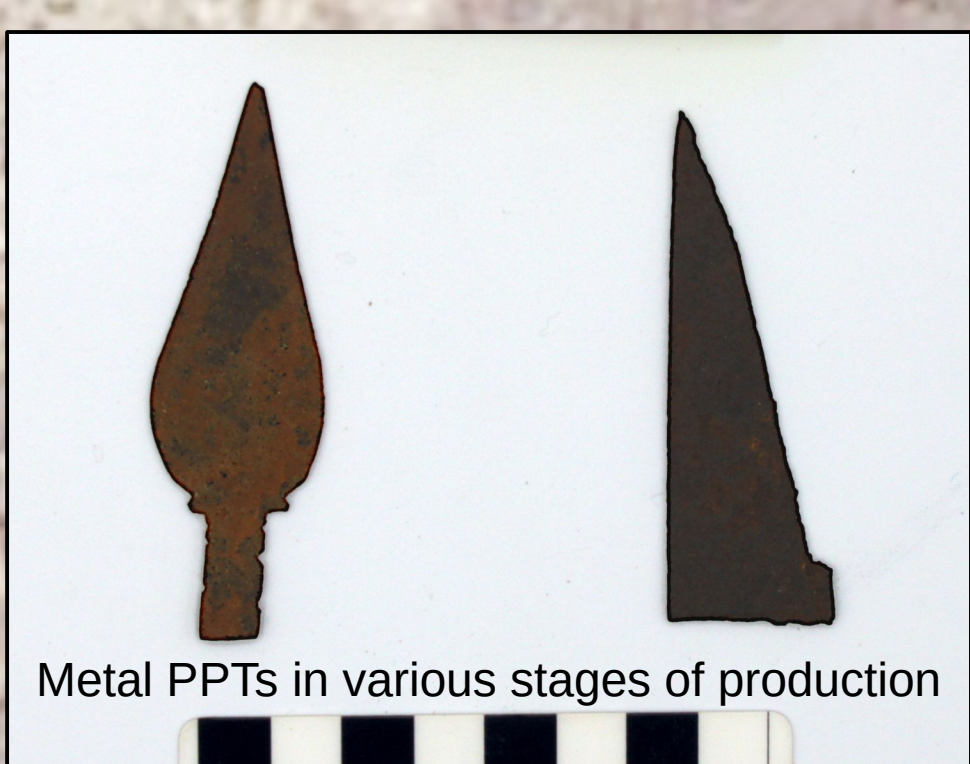
Many thanks are owed to Matthew Martinez for providing support and encouragement to undertake this inventory project. I also want to extend gratitude to volunteers Donna Berg, Kit Ruminer, and Dottie Merrigan for their assistance sorting and inventorying artifact collections. Additionally, some recognition should be given to our private landowner partners whose support and curiosity has led them to grant us access and to pursue some degree of artifact analysis.

### Select References

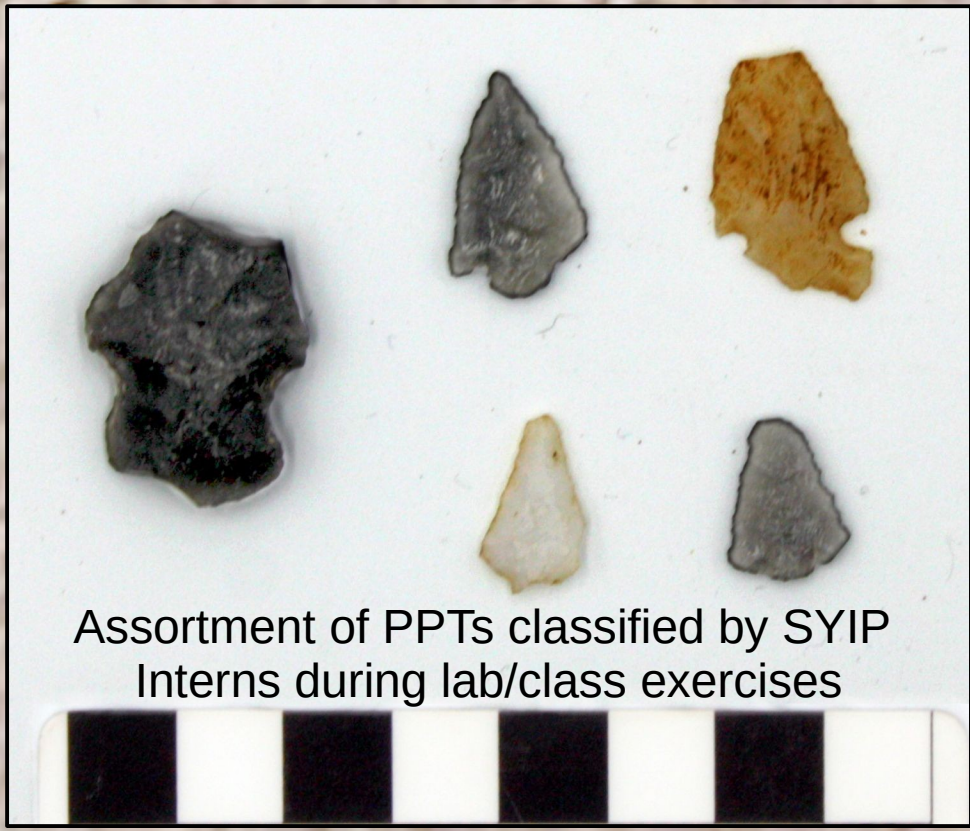
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Postcontact game piece made from Modified indigenous pottery sherd



Metal PPTs in various stages of production



Assortment of PPTs classified by SYIP Interns during lab/class exercises



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\*left (blue) also includes artifacts sorted no finer than "Postcon," "Pueblo," "Archaic," "Paleo"; right (orange) excludes these "crude sort" time period values (except for Paleoindian).