

Chimney Rock Interpretive Association
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October 2025 CRIA Newsletter

From the President of the Board of Directors

As the vibrant energy of summer begins to fade, a gentle transformation sweeps across Southwest Colorado, and nowhere is this more evident than at Chimney Rock National Monument. The winding down of the summer season here mirrors the broader shift in the natural world, painting a picturesque scene of changing colors, crisp air, and the quiet anticipation of winter.



Autumn's initial signs are already visible. The leaves of aspen, cottonwood in the surrounding mountains and valleys have begun their annual vibrant transformation, hinting at the majestic display soon to encompass the entire region. This natural spectacle, with its threads of gold, orange, and red weaving through the forests, offers a breathtaking setting for the ancient Puebloan structures at Chimney Rock, providing visitors with a distinctive experience of the site in its late-season splendor.

For those volunteering at Chimney Rock National Monument, or planning a visit with friends or relatives in the coming weeks, it's an opportunity to witness a truly special time of year. The crowds begin to thin, offering a more serene and contemplative experience of this sacred place. The interplay of changing foliage and cooler temperatures creates an unforgettable atmosphere, inviting reflection and appreciation for the natural and historical wonders that abound. As the season gently winds down, Chimney Rock continues to offer a powerful connection to the past, framed by the breathtaking beauty of the present.

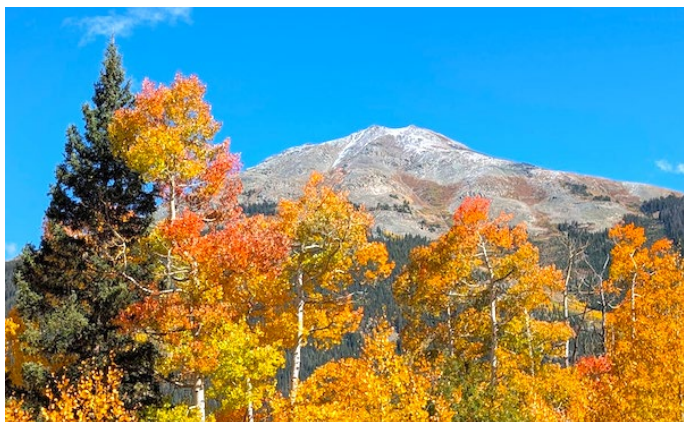


Photo by Mary Rose

My sincere gratitude goes out to the USFS and CRIA volunteers for their invaluable contributions to the two highly successful Major Lunar Standstill events on September 13th

and 14th. Despite the challenging circumstances presented by the flooding at Chimney Rock on Friday, September 12th, the USFS adeptly managed the situation, ensuring the site was fully prepared for the 150 attendees expected at Saturday night's MLS event. I personally attended the Sunday event as a guest and was thoroughly impressed by the seamless execution of parking, check-in, and the event itself. Despite the cold and late hour, this will be a memory I will take with me.

With a highly anticipated MLS event scheduled for October 11, this season promises to conclude with an extraordinary celestial spectacle. This particular MLS may very well be the last opportunity for many of us to witness such a rare astronomical alignment in our lifetimes. The next occurrence is approximately 18 years away, and while I hold out hope to attend it, I will be well into my eighties by then, making this upcoming event particularly poignant and significant.



Photo by Andy Butler

Jill Sutton, CRIA Board President

Office Notes

Hi Volunteers and Welcome to Autumn,

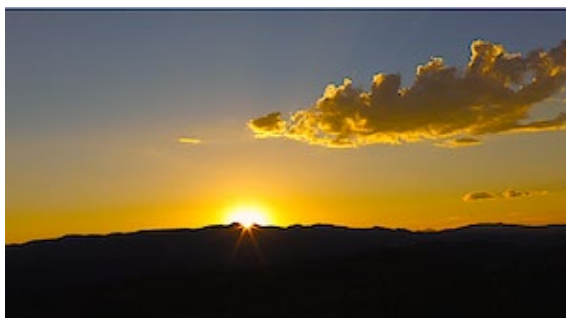


Photo by Howard Rowe

Well, it is that time once again.....time to turn in your volunteer hours and miles for Quarter 4 (July 1 through September 30). Your totals are due by no later than October 10th. Again, this is due to a new Forest Service requirement for us to turn in these hours. Also, I will be reporting total hours and miles for all of you collectively at our Annual Meeting which is scheduled for October 24th from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, 434 Lewis Street, Pagosa Springs. We hope all of you plan to make it to the meeting. It will be a lot of fun with a potluck and many announcements.

Please bring a main dish, a side dish, or a dessert. See you soon!

Kelly Ball, Office Manager

Silent Auction Fundraiser

CRIA's silent auction fundraiser was a **great success** with over 100 attendees and an assortment of gift certificates, art work and 35 different items ranging from dog goodies to two all day passes to The Springs Resort & Spa valued at \$320. The community, along with our volunteers, enjoyed an evening of fun, food and camaraderie as they perused the silent auction offerings.



Once the auction bidding closed, we were enlightened by the astounding work of lecturer and researcher, Anna Sofaer, and a showing of her new film, *Written on the Landscape: Mysteries Beyond Chaco Canyon*. After the film the audience viewed the intriguing “Sun Dagger Explorer” demonstration, followed by an informative Q & A.



Our sincere appreciation is extended to the businesses that generously donated to the event: Overlook Hot Springs Spa; Ooh La La Salon; Alta Studios, Silversmith, and The Springs Resort & Spa. Additionally, we thank the artists who donated their work: Kathie Disner, Lise Neer and Michele Turney. Thanks go to Laura Lundsford for donating a print by artist Cecilia Henle and Tom Hanchett for donating a Virgil Nez print. Our gracious monetary sponsors were: Kip's Grill; Bank of Colorado; and Jon Johnson at Sherpa Realty.

This event would not have succeeded if not for the CRIA Fundraising Committee including Jill Sutton, Denise Fisk, Susan Yalom, Gloria Bissmeyer, Rita

Peck, Bernadette Sikes, Joyce Hanchett, Lace Stevens, Rhonda Julian and Joanne Lucariello. We especially would like to extend our gratitude to the Silent Auction Committee members, Denise Fisk, Joyce Hanchett, Joanne Lucariello for their hard work and dedication in obtaining the numerous items for the auction, the organization, logistics and set up for the event.

Lastly, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our volunteers and community members who supported this endeavor and helped garner its success.

Joanne Lucariello

One More MLS Public Event: USFS and CRIA Agree to Host viewing on Saturday, October 11

In light of the strong public response to our September MLS events, USFS, CRIA, and our partners at Griffith and UC-Boulder have agreed to conduct one final MLS Viewing on Saturday evening, October 11. With the moonrise at 10:20pm and a 75% illumination of the moon, we expect another sizable audience for what will be the final public MLS event in the current 18.6 MLS cycle.

With the decision to proceed with the October 11 viewing, we now seek CRIA volunteers to assist with hosting that event.

Astronomers from Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles and Fiske Observatory at UC-Boulder will again be with us to inform our guests about the unique aspects of the MLS, as well as to capture the image of the moon rising between the pinnacles and transmit it to the amphitheater. Any volunteers willing to



accommodate the visiting experts from the observatories in their homes for October viewing would also be welcomed.

Saturday, October 11: This is now on recreation.gov and [local media](#)

7:30 pm: Volunteers arrive CRNM
8:30 pm: Gate Opens
9:45 pm: Program commences
10:20 pm: Moonrise

Since this event will be the final public one during this 18.6 year MLS cycle, we want to make them the best we can and can only do so with the full support of our great CIRA volunteers. Please let Office Manager Kelly know how you can assist.



Tony Aldwell

For the Birds ...

Thank you to tour leaders Jean Zirnhelt and Charles Martinez of Weminuche Audubon Society for leading birding tours for Chimney Rock visitors this season. On the September 20th tour alone, visitors and leaders spotted 21 different species, 59 individual birds. Included is a photo by Charles Martinez of a Northern Flicker, taken on September 20th.

Thank you also to the volunteers who assisted on the tours by sharing the importance of birds in the ancestral Puebloan world. Diane Stockwell, Mary Meuser, Melanie Oles-Graham, Michael Lopez, Les and Shelley Johnson were all part of the team.



After each visit, Jean and Charles report their sightings to eBird.org, an online database of bird observations which is helpful to scientists and other birders. E-Bird was developed by the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Thank you also to Keith Bruno, Southwest Colorado Community Naturalist for Audubon Rockies, for your leadership and involvement in birding at Chimney Rock.
Dottie George

School Visit

I received a request, on September 5th, from Pagosa Elementary School to do a presentation about the Major Lunar Standstill. This would involve speaking to each grade level on the following Friday, September 12th. This didn't allow much lead time to prepare. Explaining the MLS to adults is challenging, so I was a bit concerned about explaining it to children in kindergarten through fourth grade. It also meant being at school from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm, with no break. But, as CRIA always does, we rose to the challenge. I knew I could not do this alone and fortunately Denise Fisk and David Bouquet came to the rescue.



Each grade level came into the gym for about 45 minutes. David found the Griffith Observatory video, which we were able to show. I tried to demonstrate the movement of the sun and moon. Denise provided additional information and worksheets. Not sure how well they understood, but maybe we will see some of them on October 11th.

Susan Yalom

Forest Service

Hello CRIA,



Chimney Rock experienced a tremendous flash flood on the afternoon of September 12. A few



the site to the public on make the site safe. With the firefighters, our trails crew, shovels, rakes, ATVs, and just in time for the Standstill live event in the amphitheater. The events on Saturday and Sunday night went beautifully. Thanks to all the staff and volunteers for putting on some terrific shows. One more to go, on October 11!



hours of significant rainfall resulted in heavy debris flows, thick mud, impassable sidewalks, and a wrecked parking lot. The determination was made to close Saturday, to clean the mess and help of more than 20 wildland staff and volunteers, we used a tractor to make the site usable September 13 Major Lunar

Thanks, as always, for your partnership.

**San Juan National Forest
Forest Service**

Middens = \$\$\$?

Last night on the quiz show Jeopardy, the term “midden” was the correct answer to one of their clues. Prior to becoming a volunteer with CRIA, “midden” was not part of my vocabulary. I learned, of course, that it refers to a trash-dump mound that can be a gold mine of artifacts for archaeologists who are studying the daily lives of a bygone civilization. There is a prominent midden that’s visible on the Mesa Village Trail. When Ken Jennings presented the clue last night, I immediately shouted out the correct response, “What is a midden?”. The three on-screen contestants all stood there with blank looks on their faces. I was totally smug. CRIA volunteers should realize that our experiences at Chimney Rock have the potential of yielding massive financial rewards.

Howard Rowe

Did You Know?

Did you know that a whole book was written on the Stone Circles and Basins at Chaco Canyon (Stone Circles of Chaco Canyon, Northwestern New Mexico by Thomas Windes (1978); Reports of the Chaco Center, No. 5, National Park Service, Albuquerque)? The term “Stone Circle” refers to the short, circular or oval, masonry walls around a stone basin. At Chaco, all of them were built upon bedrock along the high cliff-edges that overlook Chaco Canyon. Forty-six of the basins are circular, with a mean diameter of 11.5” and a mean depth of 3” (the Chimney Rock basin is 12.6” in diameter and 5” deep). However, the diameters occur in a bimodal distribution, allowing grouping them into “small” and “large” diameter clusters. The basin bottoms are not flat, with the edges being slightly curved. Three basins have been found that are rectangular in shape. Possible astronomical alignments with structures, kivas, roads and other basins have been extensively investigated, but no alignments have been discerned. Interestingly, great kivas and shrines are visible from every stone basin. Very few artifacts of any type have been found associated with stone basins. Thus, after extensive measurements of all kinds, Thomas Windes concluded that, while they are likely religious in nature, the function or use of stone basins is completely unknown.

