

Chimney Rock Interpretive Association  
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## December-January 2025 CRIA Newsletter

### From the President of the Board of Directors

As 2025 draws to a close, it's a natural time for reflection on the year's beginning and the significant uncertainties our organization faced. I began the year with doubts about whether my new role as board president would successfully guide our association forward. Additionally, there was the considerable question of whether Chimney Rock would be able to open and operate as it had in previous years. The year concluded on a very positive note. Although total monument visitation was down 14% from last year, reaching 19,201, CRIA's programs maintained their popularity, with attendance only slightly lower (a 1.67% decrease) at 3,506 attendees compared to 3,673 last year.



The two sold-out Major Lunar Standstill (MLS) events in September were significant contributors to these statistics, and I must acknowledge them. We were fortunate that the USFS prepared the monument after torrential rain caused considerable damage. Then the clouds cleared just in time for the moon rising. In contrast, Mother Nature was uncooperative for the planned October MLS event, which was a great disappointment to the event organizers.

While writing this from California, I'm truly inspired by the landscapes my husband, dog, and I recently explored in southwestern Wyoming. Previously, we'd always just drive straight through this area on the way to other destinations. This time, however, we stopped to check out Boar's Tusk, the White Mountain Petroglyphs, and Fossil Butte National Monument—and all three were worth the detour.

Boar's Tusk is a dormant volcanic neck composed of lamproite, a rare and durable rock, and like Chimney Rock, it was exposed by erosion. Though I was disappointed to see some vandalism at the White Mountain Petroglyphs, it was exciting to find the handprints scooped into the rock, which provided a tangible link to people who lived there 1,000 to 2,000 years ago. Finally, the Visitor Center at Fossil Butte National Monument showcases a stunning array of fossils, which their website aptly describes as an "aquarium in stone."

Like Chimney Rock National Monument, access to these culturally significant sites was strictly governed by their location on public lands. This distinction is crucial, as any historical or archaeological sites situated on private property would have been legally inaccessible without permission from the landowner. The ability to explore these national treasures—to walk the same ground and witness the remnants of past civilizations—is a direct benefit of their protected public status. I, therefore, feel a deep sense of privilege and gratitude for the existence of public lands and the wealth of cultural and natural history they safeguard, making these irreplaceable treasures accessible and available for all visitors to experience and appreciate.



While I still have reservations about my ability to successfully lead the association and fulfill my role as board president, I am absolutely certain of this: I could not do it without the support of the people of CRIA. Your generous giving of time and energy inspires me to continue in this role. Thank you for your faith in me, and I wish you a wonderful holiday. I look forward to seeing everyone next year.

**Jill Sutton, CRIA Board President**

## Office Notes

**Hi Volunteers,**



December is here and thankfully we have a little snow on the mountains!

As the year closes, thank you to all of our hard-working volunteers who make Chimney Rock National Monument a success! We could not do this without you!

Just a friendly reminder that the CRIA office will be closed the week of December 22<sup>nd</sup> and the week of December 29<sup>th</sup>. We will reopen on Tuesday, January 6, 2026. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! And remember to pray for more snow!

**Kelly Ball, Office Manager**

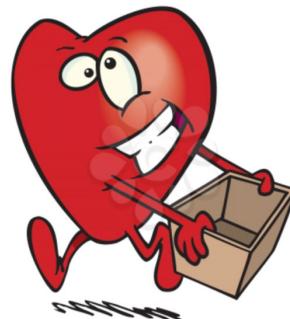
## It's Charity Time!

In 2025 CRIA was able to obtain grant funds from the Pagosa Tourism Board (for Life at Chimney Rock), and from LPEA (for the Jr. Archaeology booklets and for the Lecture Series) – and CRIA really appreciated this support! CRIA also received funds for volunteering at the Durango Wine Experience. And CRIA received a wonderful \$1,200 donation to support bringing the Native American dancers to Life at Chimney Rock.

This sounds great, doesn't it? Yes - but we have a big problem: expenses were still greater than income. LPEA does not fund two years in a row so we can't count on their support next year. So, where does that leave us? **We need your help for 2026!** Remember – CRIA gets no money from the Forest Service. Even small donations help and you can specify what you want the funds to go for: Jr. Archaeology booklets, public lecture series, operational costs, etc.

Please send checks to CRIA, P.O. Box 1662, Pagosa Springs, CO 81147.

**Many thanks!!!!**



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## Forest Service

The last year of this Major Lunar Standstill cycle, 2025, is ending. Years of planning with partners CRIA, Tribes, Fiske Planetarium, CU Boulder, Stonehenge, and Lowell Observatory amounted to



tremendous and priceless public education and documentation. The Forest Service and CRIA worked together to produce well-attended and well-appreciated events observing the phenomenon, sharing with the public our knowledge and adoration for the site's history and night sky's mysteries. For many people, observing the Major Lunar Standstill was an impactful, once in a lifetime event, and I'm proud that the USFS and CRIA were able to provide that opportunity to so many.

Thanks, as always, for your partnership.

**San Juan National Forest  
Forest Service**

## Did You Know?



Native American winter solstice celebrations vary by tribe, but many mark the event with ceremonies, storytelling, feasting, and community gatherings to honor the sun's return and the natural cycles of renewal. The Pueblo people have a long history of astronomical observation and sun-watching as part of their calendrical system. The **Zuni** Pueblo holds the sacred, multi-day *Shalako* festival. Shamans dress as giant bird deities to ask for rain and blessings for the upcoming agricultural year. This is considered a private and sacred ceremony. The **Hopi** celebrate the

Winter Solstice holiday of *Soyal* with rituals of purification, rejuvenation, giving thanks, dancing and gift-giving. The Hopi honor kachinas, protective spirits from the mountains. Shamans dressed as kachinas and kachina dolls grace the ceremonies, as do prayer sticks. The **Acoma** Pueblo celebrate *haamaaha* at the Winter Solstice with storytelling of the coyote, stories of heroes, stories of the animals, sharing of knowledge and praying with prayer sticks. **Taos**'s winter solstice celebrations are part of the larger Yuletide season, featuring traditions like a farolito (lantern) lighting of streets and historic sites, particularly on Ledoux Street and the Taos Plaza. While there are many secular events around the solstice, a significant cultural event is the Taos Pueblo's Procession of the Virgin Mary, which includes bonfires after evening Mass on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The Winter Solstice is the primary yearly ceremony for the **Lagunans**, observed near December 21st. The specific date is considered arbitrary but typically falls a few days before or after the 21st, corresponding to the sun reaching its southernmost point, which they call *Kú wa mi Shu ko* ("the south corner time").



**Happy Holidays to Everyone!**