

TAOS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

A History

1999

THE HISTORY OF THE TAOS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY¹

Dedicated to our first president, George W. Zopf

THE TAOS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Beginning²

There is no doubt in my mind that there would have been no Taos Archaeological Society if Annette Grubiss hadn't made me do it. I had participated in many of the earlier informal field surveys, and would have been content to keep on doing it without a formal organization, but Annette, who, along with Susan Hill, Paul Williams, and John Roney, seemed to be along on most of our expeditions, called me late in 1987 and told me to form the TAS. She supplied me with names, numbers, and suggestions, and I had no choice but to go ahead.

I called Herb Dick several times for general advice, and also called several people at the Archaeological Society of New Mexico for specific information and counsel, notably Richard Bice, Gordon Paige, and Bill Sundt. All of these were helpful and encouraging, and supplied me with the documentation and procedures I needed.

Using the bylaws of the state organization as a model, I drafted a set of bylaws for TAS and a code of ethics, subscription to which was to be a condition of membership. I also drafted a schedule of membership fees, including affiliate membership in the state organization.

I presided at the first and constitutive meeting of TAS, so I can make a tenuous claim of being its first president, though the honor was brief; the fledgling organization immediately proceeded to the election of officers, with Alex Fletcher as our first elected president.

I have never had cause to regret my mildly coerced participation in the founding of TAS.



Dorothy and George Zopf

Activities and Interest Prior to TAS

The Taos Archaeological Society was not the first archaeological group to become active in the Taos area. A whole episode of avocational archaeology occurred in Taos in the 1950s, when Helen Blumenschein helped stimulate a great deal of interest in archaeology in the Taos area. She states in her book *Sounds and Sights of Taos Valley* (Blumenschein, 1972) that "in 1950 Dr. Bertha Dutton was persuaded by twenty archaeology enthusiasts in Taos to give a ten-lesson course which started a group of us digging at Pot Creek ruin". Over the next decade or so Helen supervised the "Taos Archaeological Association" on numerous projects including the excavation of several pithouses in the Hondo Valley and near the Lawrence Ranch. Helen attended many of the early meetings of the present archaeological society, and was always very interested in the latest research in the area.

Over two years of activities led up to the formation of the Taos Archaeological Society in 1987. In 1985 Paul Williams, Archaeologist for the Bureau of Land Management in Taos, advertised in *The Taos News* for volunteers to help inventory and record archaeological sites on BLM lands. The first project consisted of backpacking into the Rio Grande Gorge within the Wild Rivers Recreation Area near Questa. Five archaeological sites were located and recorded. The project was highlighted by the discovery of the Big Arsenic Springs Petroglyph Site, which was recorded for the first time. In 1986 the volunteer group returned to the Rio Grande Gorge and located and recorded another twelve archaeological sites including campsites, hunting locations, a lithic quarry, and petroglyphs dating to the Archaic and Early Pueblo Periods. During the summer of 1987 a growing number of volunteers helped BLM archaeologists map two pueblo sites, La Caja Pueblo and Pueblo Sarco, in the Santa Cruz Reservoir area near Cundiyo. Another project recorded a series of sites along Punche Arroyo near the Colorado-New Mexico border east of San Antonio Mountain. The Punche Lake Teepee Ring Site, which was located during this survey, was mapped during a two-day project later in the summer.

These projects provided the BLM with very important archaeological data in areas not previously studied. The common bond among the volunteers who participated in these projects was that they had always wanted to take part in archaeological studies, but until now had not been given an opportunity. Many of these volunteers were the driving force in the creation of the Taos Archaeological Society. They included George and Dorothy Zopf, Susan Hill, Annette Grubiss, Caleb Smiley, Pat Corral, Bill and Peggy Stevens, Thurston and Peggy Toeppen, Robert Drum, Jean Muste, Christine Ponko and Steve Eskeback. This wonderful volunteer spirit led to a Take Pride in America National Award presented to the Taos Archaeological Society by BLM Director Cy Jamison in 1989.

TAS Newsletter

In the winter of 1988-89, Paul Williams suggested to John Muste that TAS was mature enough and had sufficient funds to begin regular publication of a newsletter and urged that Muste take responsibility for originating such a publication. The first issue of the TAS Newsletter appeared in April, 1989, carrying stories having to do with the activities of the group, past, present and future, as well as activities of ASNM. The Newsletter, during the past ten years, has appeared somewhat irregularly, usually three times a year. It has reported on rock art recording, on field trips to various sites in the Four Corners region, and related activities; alerted members to upcoming events; and reported such group ventures as the Llano Quemado Rim excavation and the now-fabled San Juan River rafting trip of 1989, as well as news of the various awards presented to TAS by federal and state governments. Bill Stevens, Trudy Mozee, and Joan Phillips have succeeded John Muste as editors of the Newsletter; other members, including George Zopf, Tucker Heitman, Annette Grubiss, Paul Williams and Janet Butler, have contributed to its continued success.



The inspiration for the
Taos Archaeological Society logo

Rock art recording

