

73.3° - ENE, 3.0 mph

DurangoHerald.com

THE DURANGO HERALD

Since 1881

The First National Bank of Durango
We pay attention! [Click Here](#)
 (970) 247-3020 www.fnbdurango.com

Navigate Site

News

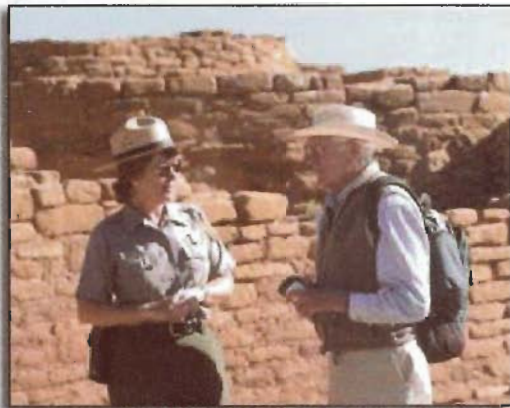
Keyword Search **GO**

[Email this article](#)
[Printable version](#)

[A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

Mesa Verde's 'Pioneers' honored

By Shane Benjamin
Herald Staff Writer



TOM FERNANDEZ / Special to the Herald

Ken R. Wright, an engineer who led a study of Mesa Verde's reservoirs, talks with Linda Towle, Mesa Verde National Park chief of research and resource management, at the Far View Ruins on Sunday.



TOM FERNANDEZ / Special to the Herald

From left to right, Patrick J. Natale, Ken R. Wright and David Breternitz admire the plaque that has been presented on behalf of The American Society of Civil Engineers Historical Engineering Landmark Program

MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK - Prehistoric reservoirs and ditch systems that supported them were dedicated as Historic Civil Engineering Landmarks on Sunday, joining ranks with the Golden Gate Bridge, the Eiffel Tower and the Washington Monument.

The landmark designation, one of about 230 in the world and the fifth in Colorado, recognizes Mesa Verde National Park's ancestral Puebloans for designing, constructing and maintaining at least four reservoirs for domestic water-storage between 750 and 1180 A.D.

"Without so much as written language, the ancestral Puebloans that populated the riverless mesa top conquered the impossible by creating a water system to sustain their domestic and agricultural needs," said Patricia D. Galloway, president of the American Society of Civil Engineers, in a news release. "They are truly civil-engineering pioneers."

About 35 people gathered Sunday morning at Far View Reservoir, formerly known as Mummy Lake, on Chapin Mesa, for the dedication ceremony. Speakers included the park's chief archaeologist, representatives from the American Society of Civil Engineers and many of the researchers who unlocked the mystery of the reservoirs. Two men from the Hopi tribe, one with the water clan and another from the snow clan, blessed the Far View Reservoir before the formal dedication.

CLICK HERE
 Win a Durango Vacation

Pat Stull
 Wells Group

Durango Restaurant Guide

Michael Nargi Homes

for the Far View Reservoir at Mesa Verde National Park on Sunday morning. "This is one I'll remember for the rest of my life," said Patrick J. Natale, executive director of the American Society of Civil Engineers, after the dedication. "Putting the blessing on it brings it back to its roots. ... The prayer and blessing mean a lot."

Far View Reservoir is a walled-in hole, 90 feet in diameter, constructed by ancestral Puebloans more than a millennium ago. Until recently, the circular ring was so poorly understood that park officials installed an interpretive sign at the ruin suggesting two theories for its use.

One theory was that the hole was used for water storage - with no known source of water. Another was that it was a ceremonial dance pavilion or amphitheater.

Now, after nine years of research, scientists know the hole was used for storing domestic water between 950 and 1100 A.D. At least three other reservoirs in the park were used for the same purpose. They are located in Morefield Canyon, Prater Canyon and on an unnamed mesa.

A multidisciplinary team led by Ken R. Wright, president of Denver-based Wright Water Engineers Inc., studied soil samples, water run-off, pollen deposits, past flooding and past fires to determine the true nature of the formations. Scientists also did extensive trench excavations to reveal the buried past.

It was learned that an elaborate system of ditches carried the water from about five storms a year to the reservoirs. The stone circles outlining the reservoirs did not hold water, but rather prevented sediment scooped from the bottom of reservoirs from re-entering the water, Wright explained Sunday.

The trenches and reservoirs were well-maintained, he said. The Puebloans had modest expectations for water, but their willingness to pay for it through labor was high. "The ancient people were well-organized and disciplined or they never could have kept a system like this going for 350 years," he said.

The American Society of Civil Engineers has issued Historic Civil Engineering Landmark designations since 1964 to recognize and encourage preservation of landmarks. To be selected, the site must be of historical civil engineering significance, structurally or technically unique, at least 50 years old and accessible to the public.

Three of the five landmarks in Colorado recognize sites dealing with water. In addition to the prehistoric reservoirs at Mesa Verde, other Historic Civil Engineering Landmarks in the state are:

- The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, dedicated in 1968. The railroad is considered an example of the important role civil engineering played in developing the West.
- The Gunnison Tunnel, dedicated in 1972 for being the key to the first major trans-mountain irrigation system in the United States.
- The Cheesman Dam, which was the world's highest gravity stone arch masonry dam when completed in 1905, was the first major dam in the United States to incorporate the gravity arch concept. The landmark was dedicated in 1973.

- The Moffat Tunnel, located 60 miles west of Denver. The 6.2-mile tunnel was the largest railroad tunnel in the Western Hemisphere when it began service in 1928 and demonstrated new tunnel construction techniques. The landmark was dedicated in 1979.

Reach Staff Writer Shane Benjamin [here](#) .

DURANGO & SILVERTON NARROW GAUGE RAILROAD

▲ top

[Cortez Journal](#) | [Inside Outside](#) | [SW Colorado Home](#) | [WebDurango](#) | [SW Colorado Guide](#) | [Herald Store](#)

Contents copyright © , the Durango Herald. All rights reserved.

[Home](#) | [Search](#) | [News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Outdoors](#) | [Business](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Technology](#) | [Education](#) | [Police](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Health](#) | [Religion](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Columnists](#) | [Weather](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Event Calendar](#) | [Capitol Report](#) | [Ad Rates](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Order Products](#) | [Links](#) | [Coupons](#) | [Site FAQ](#) | [About Us](#) | [Write the Editor](#)