

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE EVERETT/ TAYLOR  
PROPERTY NEAR CORTEZ, CO**

**The Mitchell Springs Community Survey at Magic Rock**

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## **Acknowledgement**

Through the generous support of Kim Everett and Barb Taylor, an important part of the ancient Puebloan community at Mitchell Springs has been mapped for the first time. With the consent of the property owners, the prehistoric archaeological components will be recorded with the Colorado State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. The efforts of concerned nearby land owners are providing the critical link to our understanding of this community and its importance in the central Montezuma Valley during the 8<sup>th</sup> through middle 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Carol Taylor played a vital role in assisting as our primary contact with the property owners. Without her help we would not have had this opportunity.

Contributors to this work graciously volunteered their time, expertise and careful efforts to complete this project and without them this survey could not have been undertaken. Thanks to you all.

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## Overview

*In the fall of 2010, several members of the Hisatsinom Chapter of the Colorado Archaeological Society began an intensive archaeological survey of a 36 acre parcel of property located just south of the town of Cortez, Colorado. The Puebloan features which lie on this property were part of the greater ancient Mitchell Springs community which is spread across roughly 2 square kilometers and centered on the Mitchell Springs main site group, located approximately seven hundred meters to the southwest. Prior to historic disturbance, this community included over 60 small pueblos dating from the Basketmaker III (ca. A.D. 500-750 )through middle Pueblo III (around A.D. 1230) periods. The size and chronological depth of this community center make it one of the largest and longest occupied in the central Montezuma Valley. McElmo Creek flows through the valley which was heavily populated during most of the Puebloan era.*

*The main site group at Mitchell Springs included at least three multi-story Chaco-like great houses, two or three large 10+ meter diameter kivas (Dove et al. 2009:120), several small towers, a tri wall structure, a reservoir and a multi-story tower kiva (Dove et al. 1997). Lewis Henry Morgan, a New York attorney and avocational archaeologist produced a simple map of the Mitchell Springs site and noted the great tower and the largest mound in the group during an 1878 trip through the Montezuma Valley (Morgan 1965 [1881]:215).*

*Given the close proximity of the prehistoric Mitchell Springs Community to the historic early settlement near the springs and the nearby town of Cortez, many if not most of the prehistoric features and structures have suffered significant deleterious impact from historic road construction and relic hunters. Fortunately, significant undisturbed portions of the site deposits remain intact.*

*Approximately 550 contiguous acres of the community have been surveyed and more work is planned.*

## Early Accounts

After Morgan passed through near the end of the 1870's the next mention of the Mitchell Springs ruins was by T. Mitchell Prudden. Prudden, a physician from Yale, recorded a number of ruins along McElmo Creek which runs through the Montezuma Valley (Prudden 1899). His account confirmed Morgan's observations and he provided additional detail on the main site group. Several years later Prudden returned to Mitchell Springs and with the assistance of Clayton Wetherill, he undertook some limited archaeological excavations (Dove et al. 1997:4). Also participating in the work was a Henry Hun of the Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University.

Their research efforts were directed toward an investigation of the “unit type” pueblo ruin and were part of Prudden’s work toward developing “an instructive comparison with the larger and more complex types in the same general district” (Prudden 1914:34). Many of the artifacts from these excavations are curated at the Yale Peabody Museum.

### **The Survey**

The subject property is located on southward tilting land rising from a low point to the south at McElmo Creek, to higher elevations on the north quarter of the parcel. Soils are generally shallow and bedrock is exposed on about a quarter of the property. Surface drainage follows the exposed bedrock in a northwest to southeast trending direction. Historic modification and water capture efforts inside this drainage have obscured evidence of prehistoric use. The opportunity to capture significant quantities of runoff water inside a large bedrock basin near the center of the property would not likely have been overlooked by prehistoric residents.

Prior to the current alignment of County Road 25, McElmo Creek was crossed at a point a short distance to the east and also to the west of the current bridge. The old stage route from Bluff, Utah to Cortez crossed at a point roughly 400 meters to the west of the current road (Fred Blackburn personal communication). Traces of this route are still visible in the terrace above the creek approximately 30 meters above the waterline. After the town site of Cortez was laid out in 1886, the center of commerce in the area moved about a mile up the hill from Mitchell Springs. One of the early routes into Cortez from the south was located east of the current location of Road 25 which placed it in a path running through the Everett/Taylor property. The visibility of the surface ruins undoubtedly contributed to the many incidences of unrecorded digging on the property. These disturbances occurred long before the previous property owner, Hank Hayne, acquired it in the mid 1990’s. He named the parcel “Magic Rock”.

The survey interpretation that follows recognizes the relationship of the prehistoric archaeological remains inside the study area with the greater Mitchell Springs community. As part of a long term effort to survey private lands in and around Mitchell Springs, the author was given the permission of the current property owners to include the “Magic Rock” neighborhood into this work.

This survey was performed by dividing the property into north-south bearing transects separated by roughly 3 meters. A three meter separation was chosen as the optimal distance because it allowed surveyors walking in adjacent transects to view all artifacts within their respective swath. As artifacts from prehistoric contexts were located, pin flags were placed at those locations. The pattern created by the pin flags was mapped and designated as the boundary of the respective archaeological site irrespective of any features present within the pattern. All potential features such as prehistoric earthen works, middens and masonry stones were mapped.

Potential subterranean features and historic disturbances, when apparent, were also recorded. Isolated artifact finds outside of the three recorded sites were not recorded.

The work confirmed a substantial chronological depth of prehistoric and historic use. The western half of the subject property contains the bulk of the prehistoric features. Ten groups of surface structures and associated subterranean pit structures or kivas were recorded. All were configured in east-west oriented lineal or crescent shaped configurations. Evidence derived from surface ceramics is important but the reader should remember that intense historic use of the property may have impacted the current location of any remaining sherds on the ground. Having made that clarification, the ceramics and surface features do suggest a late Basketmaker III through the middle Pueblo III period occupation of this parcel or roughly A.D. 650-1230.

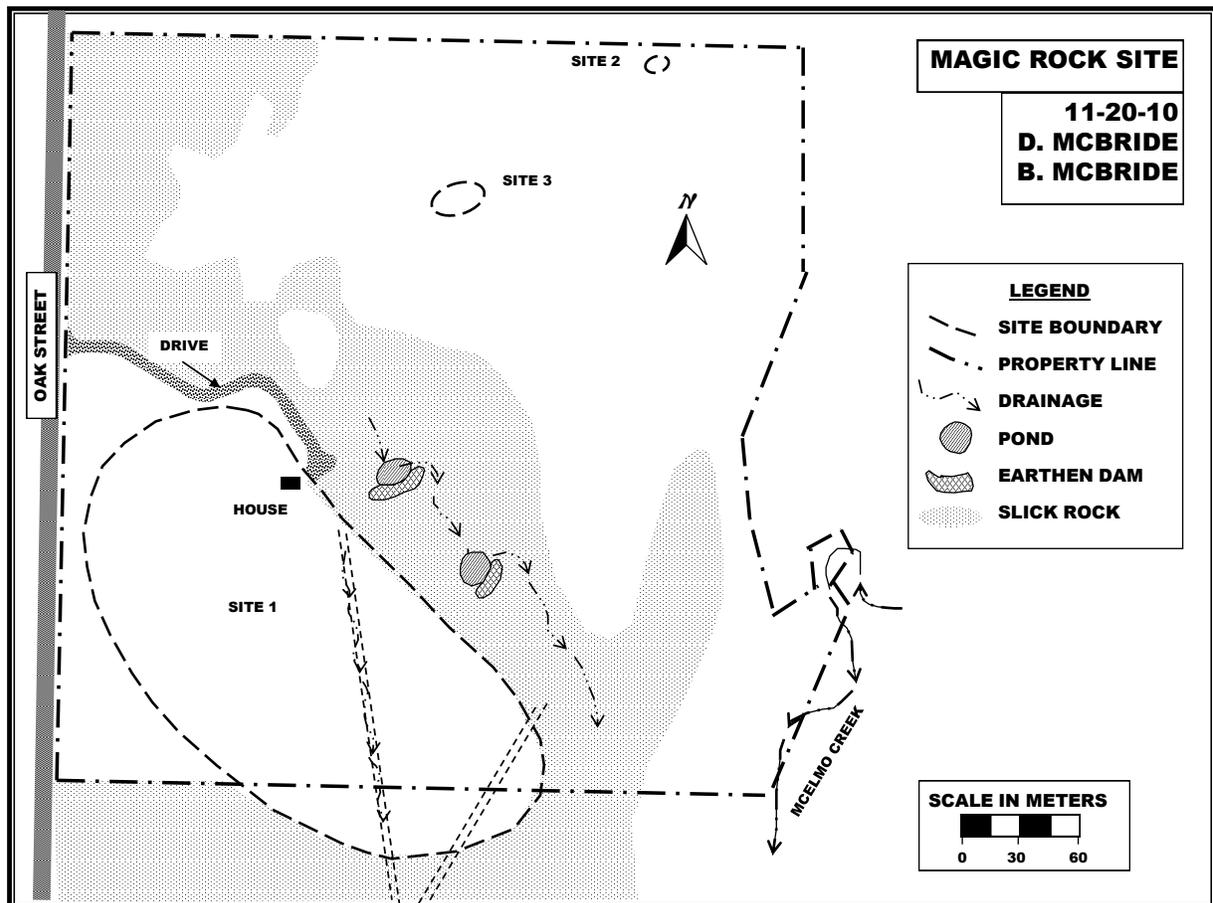


Figure 3: Overview of Everett/Taylor property

## Description and Interpretation of the Data

### Site 1, Feature 1

Prehistoric components discovered during the survey were grouped into three separate sites. Site 1 consists of seven to eight rubble or earth and jacal room blocks, middens and subterranean structures. Although they were not always visible, most of the surface room blocks likely do have associated subterranean pit structures or kivas. Without the aid of excavation, auger testing or non-invasive remote sensing instruments, there is no way to confirm their existence.

Portions of Feature 1 probably represent the latest and the earliest structural features in Site 1. More masonry was incorporated in the construction of this pueblo than any other and consequently it was also the tallest building standing in excess of 50 cm above the surrounding surface. The previous owner of the property allowed some archaeology students from an unknown out of state college to perform excavations inside this room block some time during

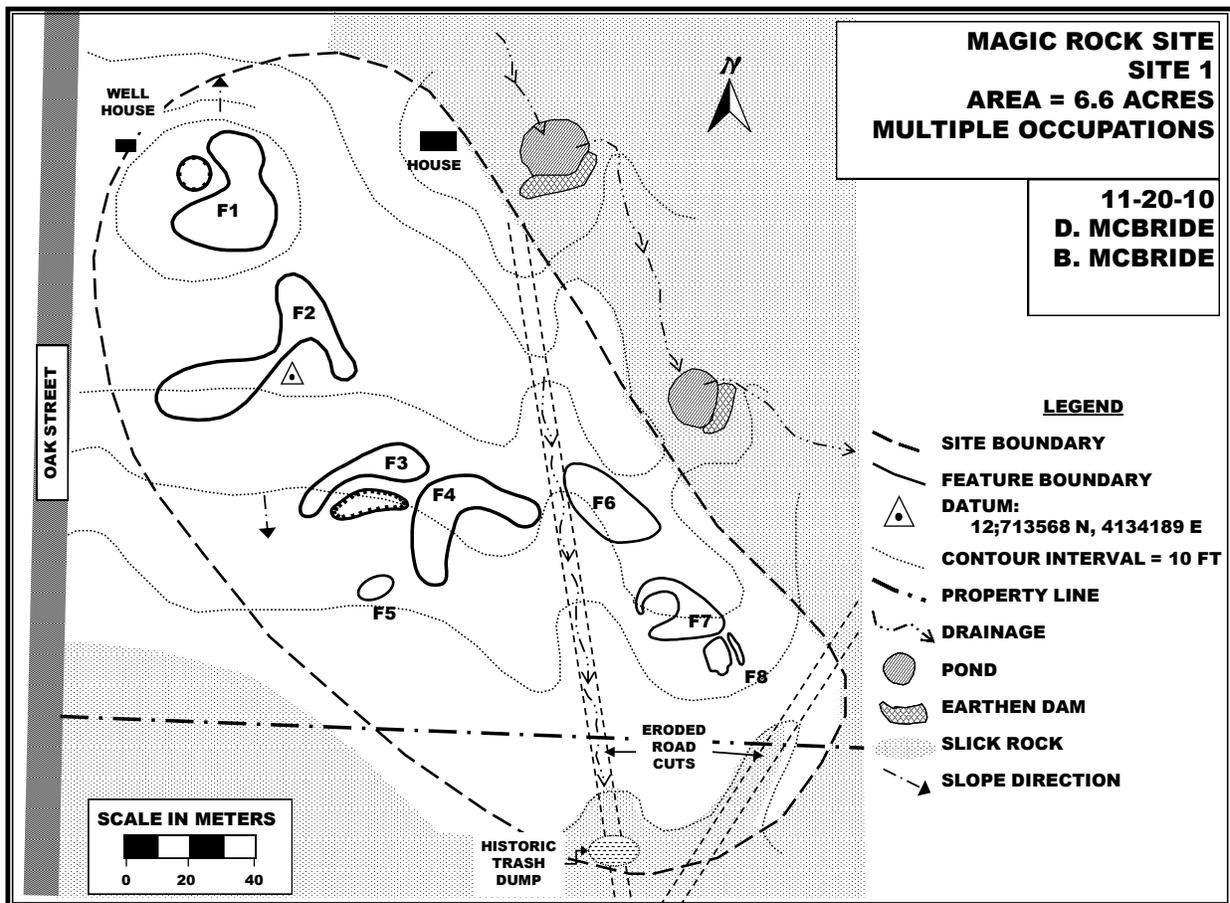
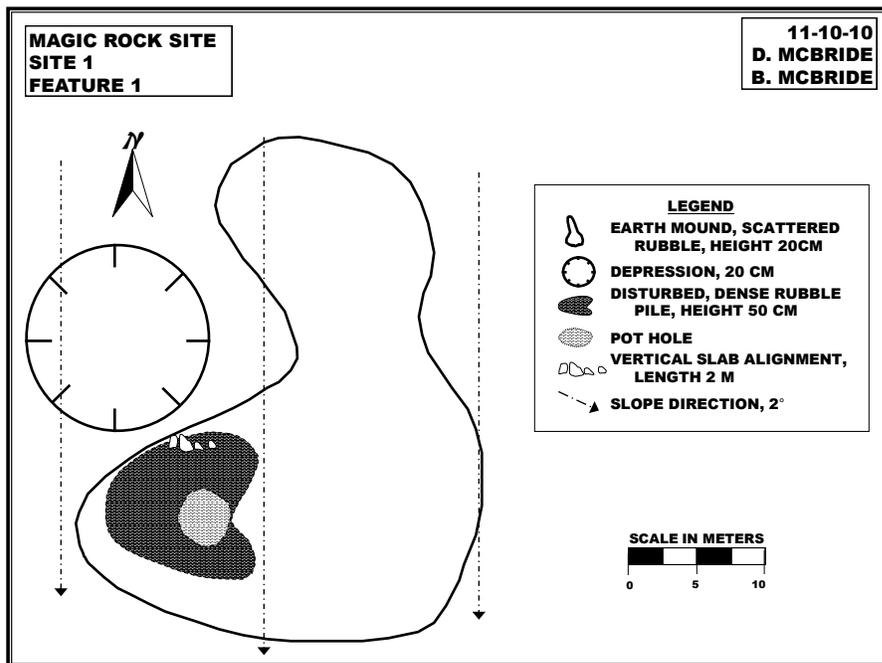


Figure 4: Room Blocks and Features of Site 1

the 1990's. I was given the opportunity to see the ceramics which were excavated during this work and most of the diagnostic sherds would be classified as Mancos Black-on-white with a few McElmo Black- on-white ceramics suggesting a late 1000's or early 1100's occupation. Most of this work was performed inside one room and was not reported. Some or perhaps all of the visible portions of the interior of this room were lined at the floor by large vertically placed sandstone slabs. The latest component is represented on the surface by large stones averaging 5-12" in diameter. This part of Feature 1 probably includes between four and six masonry surface rooms and one kiva.

The total surface area of the room block portion of Feature 1 measures approximately 60 square meters. The northern and eastern sections appear to represent an earlier component which probably dates to the late Basketmaker III to early Pueblo II period. Much of this portion of the feature stands approximately 20 cm above the surrounding terrain. It appears to extend to the



**Figure 3: Feature 1 of Site 1**

west beneath the later section of the pueblo in the southern half of this feature (see Figure 2). On the western side of Feature 1 there appears to be a large oval shaped depression which may represent the remains of a large pit structure. If indeed this depression is a pit structure, it was probably associated with the earlier component of

Feature 1. It measures approximately 13 meters east to west and may possibly indicate the existence of a large community building. There are two other known kivas inside the Mitchell Springs community that exceed 10 meters in diameter (Dove et al. 2009:120).

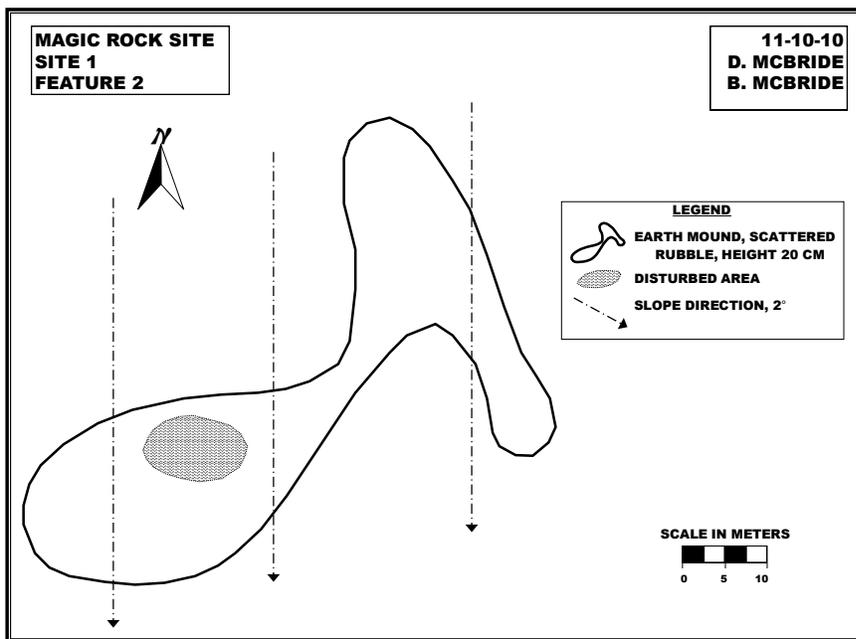
Just south of the masonry portion of Feature 1 is a slight depression which is the remains of household kiva. There appears to be at least one subterranean kiva or pit structure just east of this

kiva. The mounded surface area of the early component is sufficiently large to suggest that more than one associated pit structure exists nearby.

Surface artifacts included several Chapin Gray sherds as well as corrugated jar body sherds. The Chapin Gray pottery is probably associated with the earliest component of Feature 1. The density of building and refuse mounds inside Site 1 made it difficult to segregate surface artifacts by feature. Intensive historic use of the property made the usefulness of this exercise questionable. Several sherds of McElmo and Mancos Black-on-white were also recorded.

### Site 1, Feature 2

Sometime around 2006, a fire consumed most of the vegetation above Site 1. It had a positive impact on our ability to see surface features and artifacts. Feature 2 is a large odd shaped earthen mound over which are some scattered occasional small 4-7" sized stones. Most of the feature would fit into a 60 meter x 40 meter area and may be more accurately described as two attached



**Figure 4: Feature 2 of Site 1**

ovoid shaped 20-30 cm tall mounds; the westernmost of the two is oriented in an east to west direction while the easternmost mound is oriented in a north to south direction. A 30 meter by 10 meter disturbed area was noted on the western portion of Feature 2. These disturbances were apparently made many years ago by relic hunters with mechanical equipment. The high level of disturbance throughout

Feature 2 complicated our efforts to define the eastern portion of this feature. The 'bulge' on the north end of the eastern side is unusual and it is not entirely clear if we were able to accurately define it. It is possible that equipment was used to remove a large chunk of the mound on the south end. If this scenario is accurate, the orientation would conform more closely to the common east to west configuration favored by Anasazi builders in this part of the Montezuma

Valley. The condition of this feature makes a room/pit structure count estimate difficult but it is probably safe to assume there were between fifteen and forty rooms. Its size suggests that several pit structures are present to the immediate south of the mound but none are currently detectable.

Ceramics were dominated by gray ware jar sherds. Several of these were classified as Chapin Gray. Small quantities of San Juan red ware were also present. The ceramics and architectural evidence suggest a late Basketmaker III to early Pueblo II occupation.

### Site 1, Feature 3

This 40-50 cm tall, 40 meter long soil and rubble mound was designated Feature 3. As is the case with most of the prehistoric deposits inside the survey, it experienced extensive historic disturbance. There is evidence at the northeast end of Feature 3 that this mound represents the collapsed remains of an early Puebloan room block. A 2 meter long alignment of vertically embedded sandstone slabs may represent the rear (north) wall of a storage room. This feature

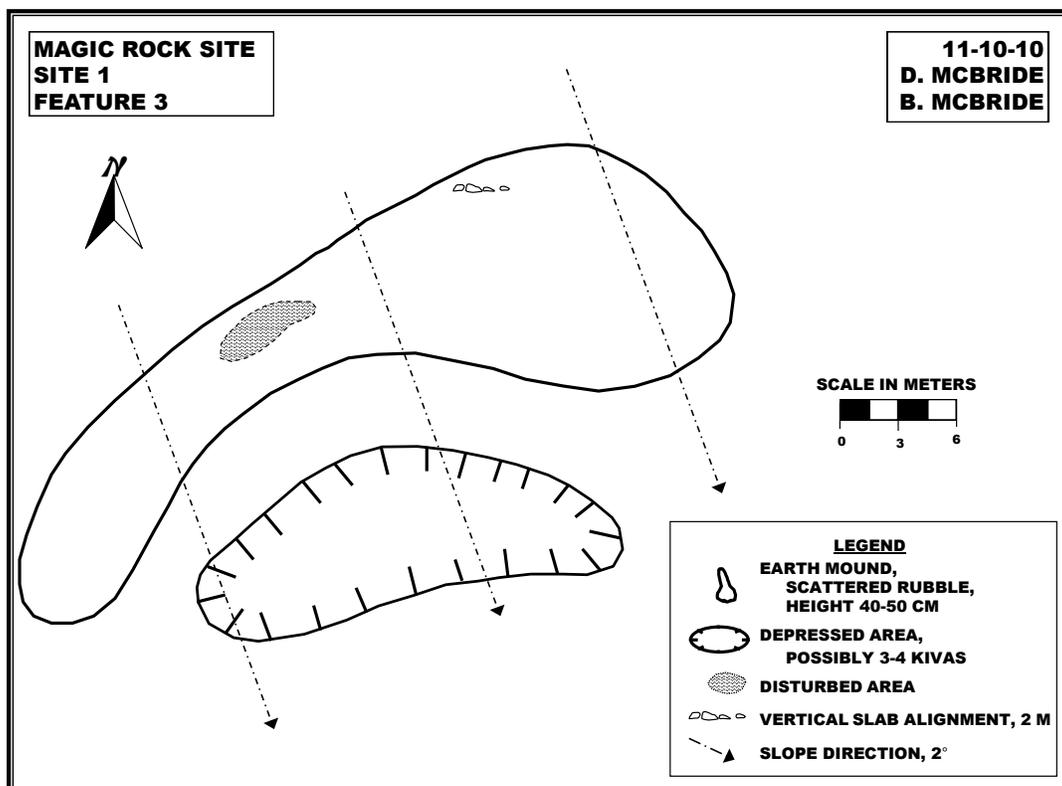


Figure 5: Feature 3 of Site 1

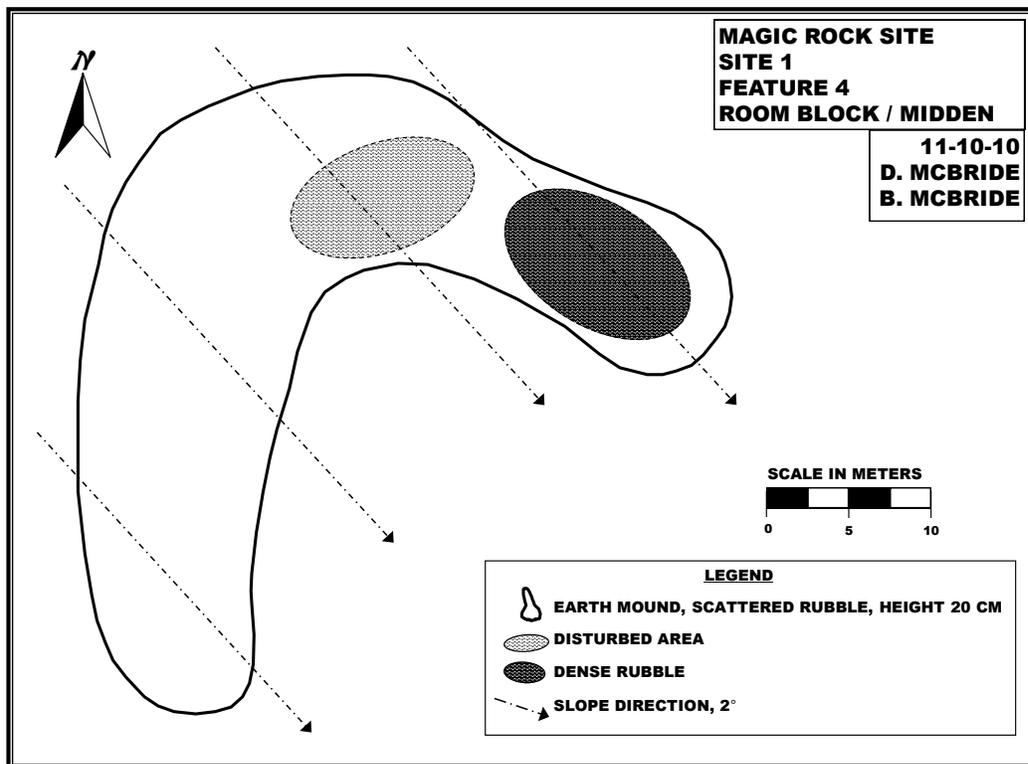
probably dates to the Pueblo I period when house mounds often contained a contiguous double row of rooms with larger rectangular habitation rooms at the front (south) attached to storage rooms on its north side (Lightfoot 1994:7). Room blocks from this period in the middle Montezuma Valley can range in size from a few to over fifty attached rooms. If Feature 3 is the remains of a room block, rather than a midden, its dimensions indicate it contained between 20 and 30 rooms and pit structures.

At the center of the Feature 3 there is an oval shaped disturbed area measuring approximately 5.5 meters by 2.5 meters. Most of the remaining portions of this feature also experienced extensive historic disturbance.

A few meters to the south of the room block, there is an east to west oriented oval shaped slightly depressed area which probably represents the remains of two or three pit structures. Throughout this surveyed parcel, most of the kivas and pit structures appear to have escaped the ravages of relic hunters.

#### Site 1, Feature 4

Feature 4 is a large 20 cm tall crescent shaped house mound which likely dates to the Pueblo I



*Figure 6: Feature 4 of Site 1*

or early Pueblo II period. The north side of the mound measures over 70 lineal meters. This room block probably contains between 30 and 60 surface rooms and pit structures. Pit structure or kiva depressions are not visible to the south of the mound but the large size of this mound suggests there could be between three and six of these buildings there.

Two large areas of historic disturbance measuring approximately 20 square meters each were recorded in the central and eastern portions. Scattered rubble around the eastern looters pit appears to confirm the presence of surface rooms. Diagnostic ceramics in the immediate area are sparse. Most are from gray ware jars but a few San Juan red ware sherds are also present.

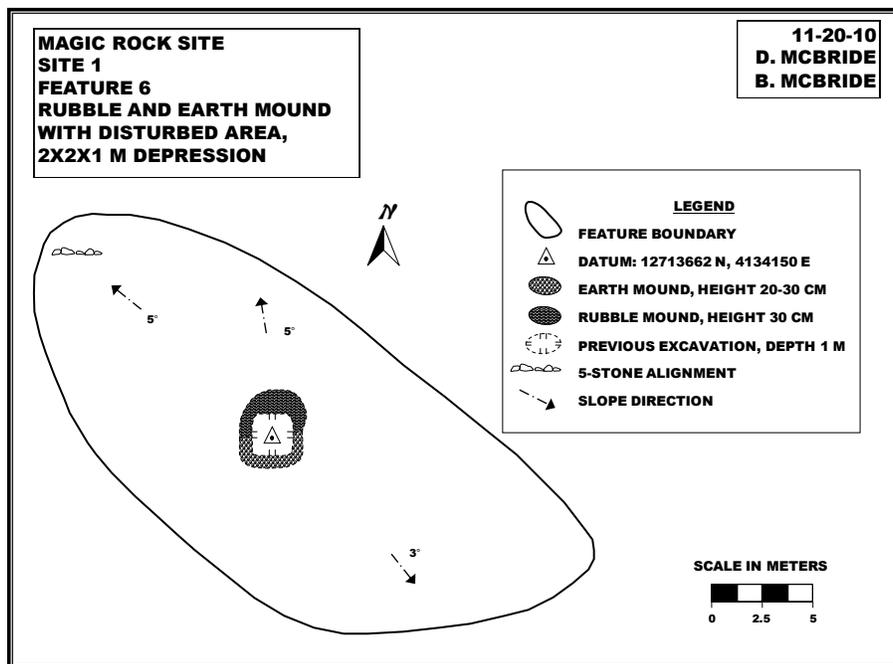
### **Site 1, Feature 5**

Feature 5 is a small rubble and earth mound measuring approximately 7 meters by 6 meters. It rises an average of 15 cm. above the surrounding terrain. It was interpreted as a room block due to its common orientation in the typical east to west configuration and because there is no obvious association as a midden to Feature 3 which is located a short distance to the north. Although none are visibly evident, one or two pit structures may be present to the immediate south of this mound. Again, historic use of the property has severely impacted the surface artifacts in and around the prehistoric cultural features. Other than an occasional San Juan red ware sherd, gray ware jar sherds are all that remain of the ceramics which may have been associated with this component. The morphology of this feature and the surrounding ceramics suggests that it dates to the Pueblo I or early Pueblo II period. It may have contained between one and five rooms. There is no evidence of historic digging in or near this mound. If indeed Feature 5 is a small group of surface rooms, it would likely accommodate no more than one extended family. Feature 5 is shown in the Site 1 overview map (Figure 2) but there is little to show in a detailed sketch other than what was described above.

### **Site 1, Feature 6**

Approximately 10 meters east of Feature 4, the surface room mound designated as Feature 6 is oval in shape and trends in a north to south orientation. An historic road cut heading in a generally north to south direction was cut through the space between Feature 5 and Feature 6. It may have destroyed portions of both and it would have obscured a possible architectural connection between them. Since it is not possible to make that determination without excavation, both are treated as separate features.

During the middle 1990's, the previous property owner allowed a graduate student from an unknown university to perform some limited excavations inside this feature. Her work exposed some surface room walls which, from an architectural perspective appear to date to the late Pueblo I or early Pueblo II period. Though few in number, ceramics in the immediate area of Feature 6, support this date estimate. The southern half of the mound probably represents an associated midden. Artifacts are sparse here and probably do not support this interpretation. Rubble is concentrated in the north half of the mound and ranges in size from 5"-12' in diameter. Some of the scattered rubble was apparently unearthed and dispersed during the previous excavation. Several stones which may be linearly organized, lie at the north base of this feature and may actually be associated with Feature 4 to the immediate west. Because they do not appear to be well anchored in the soil, these stones may have slid downhill after the 1990's excavations. There are an estimated 2-6 contiguous surface rooms inside Feature 6 and although no kiva or pit structure depression is visible, it is likely that at least one exists on the south side of the feature. Given its proximity to the historic road heading toward Mitchell Springs, this feature appears to be relatively intact.



*Figure 7: Site 1, Feature 7*

### Site 1, Feature 7

Feature 7 of Site 1 is a C shaped house mound with an extensive midden attached to its south side (see Figure 7). The open center of the C is depressed 10-30 cm and is the location where

one would ordinarily find a kiva or pit structure. There is significant disturbance throughout the house mound. Scattered dense rubble on the surface of the mound was apparently churned up by historic disturbances. The midden of Feature 7 is taller on the western end than it is in the central and eastern side.

The C or U shaped rubble mound was a very common orientation for surface buildings during the Pueblo I (A.D. 750-900) period through the early or middle part of Pueblo III (circa A.D. 1230 or 1240). Inside the Mitchell Springs Community during this time, room block mounds were quite numerous. Smaller contiguous structures were either laid out linearly trending east to west or, as is the case with nearly all of the larger structures, in arcs opening toward the south or southeast. Depending on the number of surface rooms in the surface building, from one to many pit structures may be located a few meters to the south. The largest surface buildings from this era will sometimes have what is commonly referred to as an over-sized pit structure in the courtyard. They are believed to be the place where community-wide integrative functions or rituals were performed.

Feature 7 is believed to contain between 5 and 10 surface rooms and at least one pit structure.

### **Site 1, Feature 8**

During the initial phase of this survey, this feature was noted (see Figure 2) as a large pit structure depression. I took another long look at this part of Site 1 and concluded that the evidence to support this interpretation is not strong. While it may actually represent a large pit structure, there are compelling reasons to doubt that it does. There has been considerable historic disturbance in the immediate area and the eastern side of this possible feature does not appear to be tall enough to create the usual topographically enclosed zone that is normally associated with such features. It may instead represent the remains of an historic road cut.

After further consideration, it was decided that the sketch of Feature 8 would be withheld from this report unless or until more evidence to support the presence of a subterranean pit structure is developed. A simple auger test would settle the uncertainty.

### **Site 1 Discussion**

Throughout Site 1, red ware pottery is consistently found in association with the features described. Most of these sherds were from unslipped red bowls and jars but Bluff Black-on-red ceramics are fairly well represented as well. In this part of the Montezuma Valley, these types are most common during the Pueblo I and early Pueblo II period (A.D. 750–975). The relative abundance of Chapin Gray jar sherds and general lack of neck banded gray wares (Moccasin and

Mancos Gray) is an indication that the red ware ceramics were probably imported here during the late Basketmaker III period when they appear in very low frequencies and neck banded gray ware pottery was generally not yet produced. The problem caused by historic disturbance and surface collecting has undoubtedly skewed the ceramic profiles of the remaining surface pottery. Given the architectural evidence, it is likely that subsurface testing would reveal that neck banded pottery was present in greater numbers than our survey indicated.

Artifact surface collections were not made during this survey. As sherds or lithic artifacts were discovered, pin flags were placed at those locations and after each was identified and catalogued, they were returned to the same general area from which they were found. For the most part, the ceramic profiles support my interpretations that Site 1 represented a multi component large habitation village which was centered on the main Mitchell Springs ruin group to the southwest. The northern most end of Site 1 may have been where the latest and the earliest components were built while the remainder of the site was likely built and inhabited during the Pueblo I and early Pueblo II times.

### Site No. 1

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8
Chapin Gray	2	12	4	3	2	4	3	
Piedra			3	2			1	
Early Red						1	4	
Cortez B/W						1		
Mancos Corr	6			1	2		1	
Late Red								
Chapin B/W	3	2				1	2	
Mancos B/W	5	3						
McElmo B/W	6		1		1			
Abajo		8	1	3			2	
Bluff	1	6		8	2	2	6	
Moccasin				1				

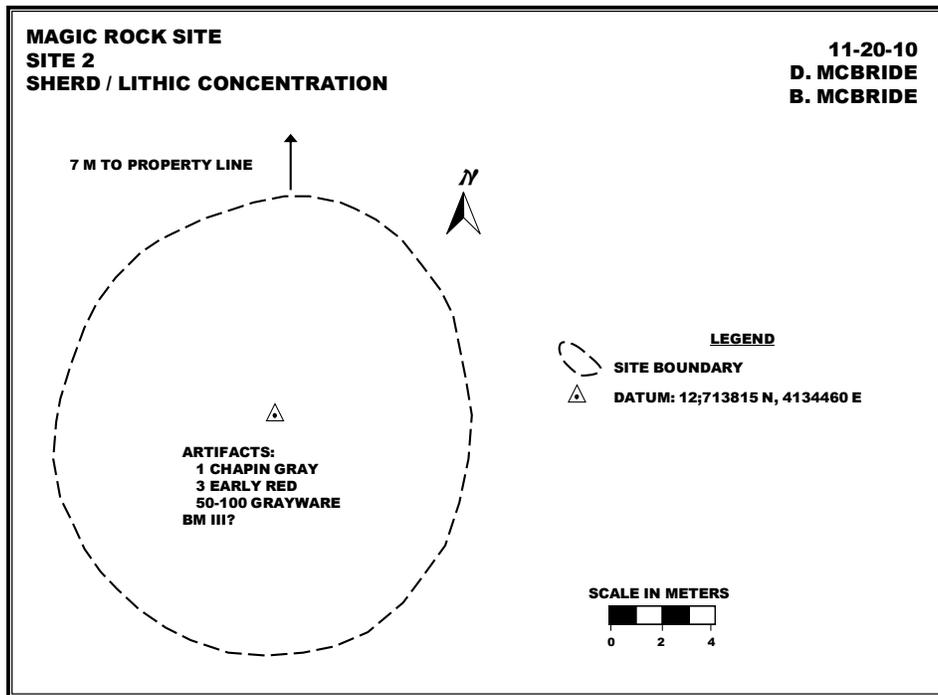
*Table 1: Site 1 Ceramic Tallies*

### Site 2

Site 2 is located on the northeast end of the survey and appears to represent a small Basketmaker III artifact scatter or small habitation. No subsurface structures are apparent but the high quantity of surface ceramics is an indication that they may exist here. A total count of gray ware

sherds was not made but we estimated that they numbered between 50 and 100. Other than these, only 3 red ware sherds were identified.

The pattern created by the surface artifacts is roughly circular and measures approximately 15 meters across (see Figure 9).



*Figure 8: Site 2*

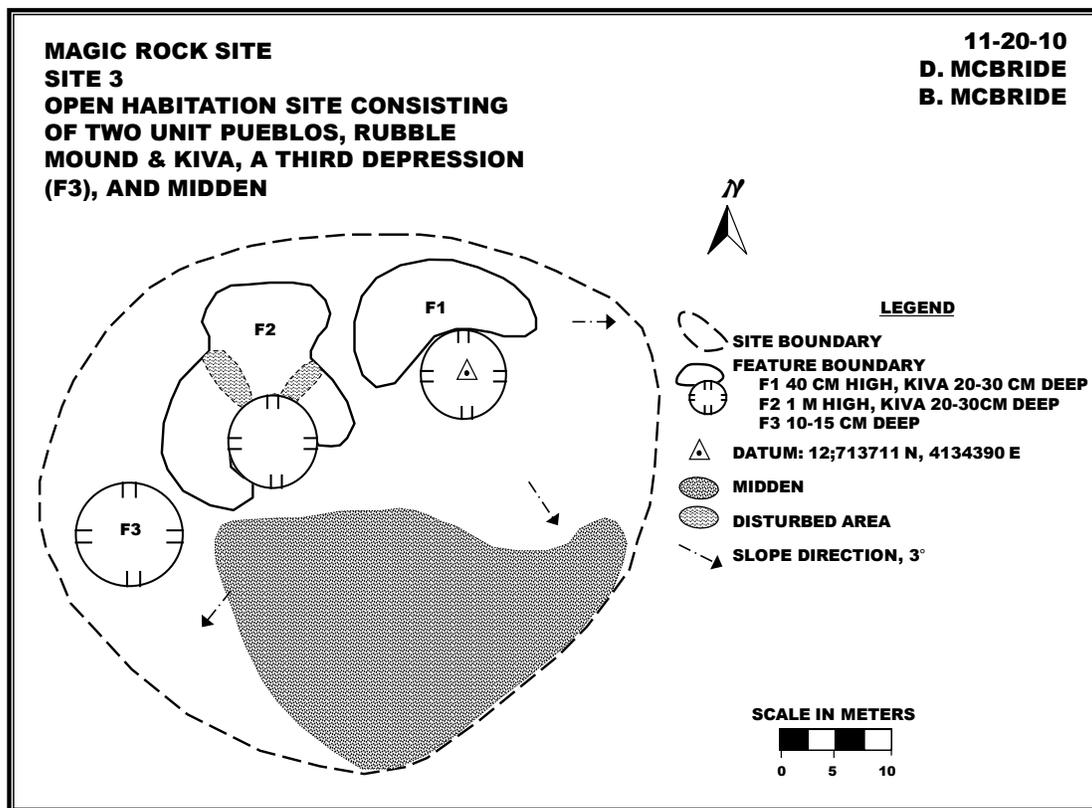
### Site 3

Like the north end of Site 1, Site 3 are the remains of some of the latest features on the subject property. From an architectural perspective, the house mound in the center of this site (Feature 1 of Site 3, see Figure 10 below) was probably built the latest while the eastern house mound (Feature 1) evidently predates Feature 2. It is possible that the smaller relief of the eastern mound component was somewhat deflated as a result of ‘stone robbing’ by subsequent builders or by historic gathering. It may also have been built somewhat earlier when structures were constructed with less stone and more wood and soil. We identified a third feature (Feature 3)

which may represent the remains of a kiva. After taking another look at Site 3, it isn't clear if Feature 3 exists. Once again, a simple auger test would clear this up.

To the south of these features is an extensive midden which appears to be relatively deep and undisturbed. Given that a large percentage of the historic disturbances on the survey probably occurred over fifty years ago, there are probably many disturbed areas which can no longer be detected without excavation.

Feature 1 is a slightly arced room block with the open end facing to the southeast. To the immediate south of the surface rooms are the remains of a single kiva. A total of 4-8 rooms are inferred.



*Figure 9: Site 3*

Feature 2 was built in the common C or U shape. There are probably between 6 and 10 surface rooms surrounding what appears to be a single kiva to the south. It stands approximately 40-50 centimeters above the surrounding surface and incorporates some of the largest masonry stones

seen on the property. Ceramic evidence indicates a late Pueblo II to early Pueblo III construction and occupation (Figure 10).

Although there are obvious disturbances of the architectural components of Feature 2, Site 3 is probably in the best condition of any of the Puebloan features on the subject property.

**Sites 2 & 3**

	Site 2	Site 3 East, F1	Site 3 West, F2
Chapin Gray	1	1	2
Piedra			1
Early Red	3		1
Cortez B/W			
Deadmans		1	
Mancos Corr			
Late Red			6
Chapin B/W			
Mancos B/W		3	4
McElmo B/W		2	
Abajo			
Bluff			
Moccasin			
Estimated Graywares	50-100		

*Table 2: Sites 2 and 3 Ceramic Tallies*

**Recommendations**

There are no recent disturbances on the Everett/Taylor parcel. Regular appearances by the owners and the watchful eyes of surrounding land owners have discouraged further incursions. I would recommend installing several warning signs around Sites 1 and 3 as an additional deterrence.

Further minimal archaeological testing would shed a large quantity of light on the subsurface archaeological remains. The incorporation of some well placed auger tests would confirm the existence of the postulated pit structures and would likely lead to the discovery of additional features. This type of testing is minimally invasive and might produce a better ceramic record which would be of great use in clarifying the occupation dates of these remains.

There are a few historic disturbances that should be backfilled to avoid further damage. The more visible ones have been mapped during this survey. If it is the intention of the property owners to undertake this task, it is recommended that records be made whenever soils are added for this purpose. Time can quickly obscure any subtle changes to the ground surface.

Despite significant destructive historical disturbances, many of the prehistoric features in the survey are still intact. The Mitchell Springs Community was densely populated in the Pueblo I and early Pueblo II period and many if not most of the Puebloan features here probably also date to this time.

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