



Conservation Treatment of Ceramic Vessels from World Heritage Sites

Project update October 2015

Funded through the National Park Foundation



Figure 1 Ceramic vessels from CHCU currently undergoing examination

Funding was received from the National Park Foundation in the summer of 2015 to continue preservation of the prehistoric ceramics from two World Heritage Sites, Mesa Verde National Park and Chaco Culture National Historical Park (CHCU). These funds will be used to perform conservation treatments on the 19 ceramic vessels from CHCU pictured above (Figure 1). These objects include bowls, jars, ladles, and effigy pots selected to illustrate the variety of forms, decorative elements, and ceramic types used at CHCU in the new exhibits expected to be installed in 2017 in the CHCU Visitor Center.

This group of vessels is currently undergoing examination and photography prior to proposing treatment to the curator. The conservator takes a long slow look at the object, learning about the creation of the object and past repairs. In the case of these vessels the conservators are looking at the characteristics and the stability of the ceramic body and the previous reconstruction adhesives and fills. This information guides the conservator in describing the condition of the object and proposing conservation treatment steps to address instabilities



Figure 2 Examining CHCU 563

that may be present. Many of the vessels in this group were reconstructed in the early 20th century and the adhesives and fill materials used at that time have aged and deteriorated. Treatment will remove these older materials and replace them with new materials believed to have extremely low rates of deterioration over time.

The examination of CHCU 563 (Figures 3 and 4), a spherical bowl created from red earthenware and painted with black mineral pigment, shows extensive fills from the previous reconstruction and some of those materials were applied over the surface of original ceramic sherds. These materials can be observed in Figure 4 as lighter areas of reddish brown next to the original ceramic and as small dots across the surfaces.



Figure 3 Interior of vessel CHCU 563 viewed from above

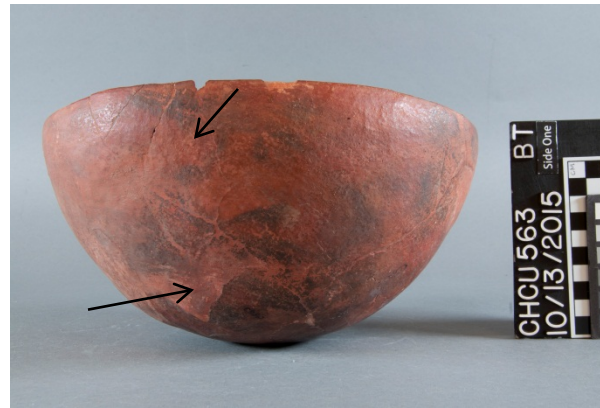


Figure 4 Side view of vessel CHCU 563 showing previous repairs

In the coming months this vessel, along with several of the others in the group, will be disassembled, the materials from the previous reconstruction removed, the sherds reassembled, and, where necessary, voids will be filled to improve structural stability and possibly provide visual information important for the exhibit of these objects.

The conservation is expected to be completed in the spring of 2016 in time for the exhibit designers and mountmakers to work with the objects in preparing for exhibit installation in 2017.