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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Colorado Archaeologists Discover Clues to Ancient Past in Residential Area

(CORTEZ, Colo.)—May 19, 2011—Amidst a scattering of homes in a southwestern Colorado residential development called Indian Camp Ranch, archaeologists from the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center are unearthing clues to the distant past. In a unique cooperative agreement with Indian Camp Ranch landowners, Crow Canyon is embarking on a new research project this year titled the “Basketmaker Communities Project: Early Pueblo Society in the Mesa Verde Region.” The project will shed light on a pivotal, but underinvestigated and poorly understood, time in Pueblo Indian history: the Basketmaker III period.

“We’re really excited about the project,” said Shanna Diederichs, supervisory archaeologist for the project. “There has been a lot of focus on the ancestral Pueblo people who built the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde and their migration from this area in the late 1200s. What we are focusing on with Basketmaker III is the first migration into the area. It’s the first chapter of the book.”

The Basketmaker III period (A.D. 500 to 750) saw the earliest substantial occupation of the Mesa Verde region by Pueblo peoples. (The term Basketmaker derives from the exceptionally fine baskets found at some archaeological sites inhabited during this time.)

The period was one of rapid population growth, great technological advances, and social change. Farming became increasingly important and pottery and the bow and arrow were introduced at this time—technologies that would serve the Pueblo people for hundreds of years. And, for the very first time, the people of the Mesa Verde region began to build large, public structures called “great kivas” where community members could gather for important events.

The centerpiece of Crow Canyon’s Basketmaker Communities Project is the Dillard site, located within Indian Camp Ranch. The site, which includes a great kiva, is an ancestral Pueblo ceremonial center believed to date from the seventh century A.D. Crow Canyon will also excavate at a number of pithouse (a semisubterranean residence) sites surrounding the Dillard site. Together, these settlements constitute the most extensive and best-preserved Basketmaker III community known in the central Mesa Verde region.

As it has for the past 28 years, Crow Canyon invites the public to join its staff of archaeologists and educators to contribute to the Center’s understanding of the innovative and resilient Pueblo people who made their homes in the Mesa Verde region. By excavating in the field and processing artifacts in the lab during Crow Canyon’s Archaeology Research Program or Family Archaeology Week, lifelong learners can fulfill their passion to experience what it is like to be an archaeologist. Crow Canyon also offers camps for middle and high school students, field trips and overnight programs for school groups, and travel programs for adults in the American Southwest and around the world. For information on all Crow Canyon programs, call 1-800-422-8975 or visit www.crowcanyon.org.

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