

# SPRUCE TREE HOUSE, MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

## SURFACE FINISHES CONSERVATION

Cortez, Colorado  
2003-2011

Funded by: National Park Service  
and the Colorado Historical Society

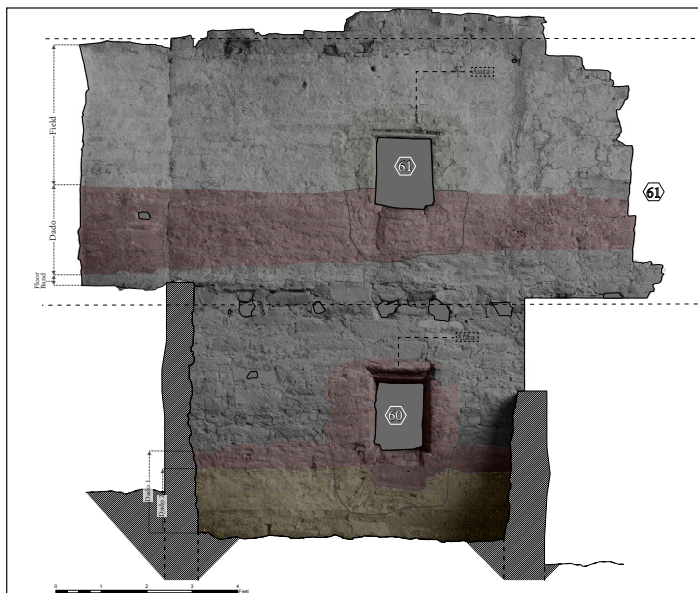


Discovered in 1888, Spruce Tree House is one of the largest and best preserved alcove sites in Mesa Verde National Park. Containing over eighty rooms and seven kivas and open areas with very complete surface finishes with geometric embellishments, Spruce Tree House provides a remarkable window onto the region's Ancestral Puebloan communities of the 13th century AD.



Above: Gelatin treatment of masonry wall (ACL)

Of particular importance is the intact architecture and the significant survival of plain and painted surface finishes in the form of colored plasters and painted washes of the masonry interiors and exteriors. While the site is sheltered, years of exposure to ground and atmospheric moisture as well as the stress from heavy visitor traffic have left the painted finishes in fragile condition. Since 1999, in collaboration with the National Park Service, the Architectural Conservation Laboratory (ACL) has implemented a conservation strategy based on the site's high physical integrity and its prominent location. Active research into documentation methodology has been paired with culturally sensitive conservation treatment techniques, as well as preventive preservation planning.



Above: Digitized surface finish reconstruction (ACL)

The methodology of documentation, analysis and treatment employed at Spruce Tree House was first developed at Mug House in 1996 and later applied to Cliff Palace and now Fire Temple. This was augmented by subsequent treatment research conducted at Long House. In 1998-1999 and in 2004, the team surveyed Spruce Tree House to document its surface finishes, to assess condition, and to conduct treatment. The survey identified 22 high priority areas in need of immediate conservation. The current fieldwork and research are focused on continued use of gelatin fixatives for the reattachment of earthen finishes, the use of multi-spectral imaging for non-destructive analysis of the mural paintings, and continued investigation of the techniques and materials of the architecture.

In collaboration with National Park Service and CESUCP. The results of all phases of the project may be accessed through the project's website at [http://www.conlab.org/acl/spruce\\_tree/index.html](http://www.conlab.org/acl/spruce_tree/index.html).

