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PCAS Newsletter

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October PCAS Speaker

Dr. Hector Neff

*Fire, Salt, Ceramics, and
Commerce on the Pacific Coast of
Southern Mesoamerica*

Zoom Meeting

October 9, 7:30 pm. See p. 5.

Agricultural people generally require salt supplements in their diets. In coastal areas of prehistoric Mesoamerica, salt production based either on solar evaporation or brine boiling met this need. This talk will examine two examples of salt production by brine boiling. In southern Chiapas, Mexico, a long history of brine boiling set the stage for discovery of a unique alkaline glaze ceramic technology, that of Plumbate pottery, the quintessential Mesoamerican tradeware. Brine boiling sites have also been found in the Estero Real region of northwestern Nicaragua. In this case,



Dr. Hector Neff.

export of salt to the interior can be inferred from strontium isotope ratios in human dental enamel, which deviate from local environmental baselines, likely because of consumption of sea salt.



Salt boiling feature, Chinandega, Nicaragua.

Dr. Hector Neff is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at California State University, Long Beach. His research interests include the application of geochemical characterization to artifact provenance, archaeology of southern Mesoamerica, and paleoenvironmental reconstruction. He has carried out fieldwork in Chiapas, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and most recently in the lakes basin and on the Pacific coast of northwestern Nicaragua. He is the author of *Fire and Salt: Human Niche Construction and Holocene Landscape Evolution on the Pacific Coast of Southern Mesoamerica* (University of New Mexico Press, 2024).

**October is Archaeology Month.
Join our October Zoom meeting!**

September Speaker Notes

Maize Domestication and Dispersal in the Americas

By Albert Knight

The PCAS guest speaker on September 11, 2025, was Dr. Douglas J. Kennett. The subject of his presentation was “Maize Domestication and Dispersal in the Americas.” The talk was in-person, and it was also presented as a ZOOM program for those that could not attend. Dr. Kennett has a PhD from the University of California, Santa Barbara (1998), and is a Professor of Environmental Archaeology and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is also Director and Curator of the Repository for Archaeological and Ethnographic Collections at UCSB and the Director and Coordinator of the Central Coast Information Center. He has conducted field research in California, Polynesia, and Mesoamerica, and is the author of some 250 academic papers and three books, including *The Island Chumash* (2005). His current interests include “the origins of agriculture, the study of human sociopolitical dynamics under changing environmental condition, human impacts on ancient environments, and behavioral response to abrupt climate change in the past” (September 2025 *PCAS Newsletter*).

The subject for the September talk was corn—its origins, and how it became one of the most important food crops in the world. We all know that many important plant crops, like tomatoes, avocados, squash, cacao, vanilla, chilies, and many species of beans, were domesticated in Mesoamerica. But in terms of worldwide importance, no Mesoamerican species is as important as maize (*Zea mays*). The most common kinds of corn available in the United States include dent (or field corn), sweet corn, flour (soft) corn, flint corn, and do not forget popcorn. Choclo corn is used to make corn nuts, and heirloom corns with multicolored kernels are widely used in floral displays, especially at Halloween and Thanksgiving in the United States. And don’t forget to grab a bag of blue corn chips the next time you shop!

Note that the word *corn* references any “grain of a cereal grass.” Some people, especially in Great Britain, use the term *Indian corn*, to distinguish maize from other grain crops. The word *corn* can be used to describe the entire plant or the ears, cobs, seeds, and kernels of the plant. Corn is a very versatile plant and is used for both human and animal consumption. It can be consumed as a solid (e.g., corn on the cob, hominy, corn bread, masa—who doesn’t love a fresh hot corn tortilla?), as a gruel (e.g., grits, atole, pinole), or as a drink (e.g., champurrado, corn beer). The use of corn to make ethanol gets only a passing mention.



PCAS September speaker, Dr. Douglas J. Kennett, (left) with PCAS Board member Ivan Strudwick.

In any case, Dr. Kennett explained that maize was domesticated in western Mesoamerica. Progenitor species of a wild grass, teosinte, are found in both lowland and highland Mesoamerica. Genetic studies show that it is one of the lowland species (i.e. *Zea mays parviglumis*) that is the distant ancestor of the maize we use today. Archaeological studies show that people began to experiment with teosinte domestication almost as soon as they arrived on the coast of southern Mexico over 10,000 years ago. Today’s wild native teosinte species look like “big grasses” with multiple stalks, but the ancient plants which were domesticated are likely to have had only a single stalk. The most obvious changes during domestication are the increase in the size of the cobs and the increase in the number of rows. Studies of specimens from archaeological sites show that there were also improvements over time in starch content and sweetness.

One of the other fascinating points made by Dr. Kennett was that there is ample archaeological and genetic evidence that there was a considerable amount of human traffic moving along and between the west coast of Mesoamerica and northwest South America and that earlier progenitor maize species and types were being “swapped” back-and-forth between the two subregions as early as 6,500 years ago. Indeed, the “backwash” of people and proto-maize species, from south to north, has been shown to precede the origins of intense farming in the Maya region. Although this movement along the west coasts of Mesoamerica and northwest South America occurred well after the initial peopling of the Americas, it does strongly suggest that human traffic and trade was quite common in those littoral areas long before many of us would have expected it.

This and other past lectures are available on the PCAS YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@pcas-pacificcoastarchaeolo9403>.

PCAS Board of Directors Election

Open positions on the PCAS Board of Directors will be filled in this November election. PCAS members will receive ballots for the election of Directors by email in mid-October. These ballots must be returned by November 13, 2025, and can only be returned electronically or by USPS mail. To vote in this election, one must be a 2025 PCAS member by October 9, 2025 (date of record). Newly elected Board members will be announced in the December newsletter and will take office in January 2026. **Please return your ballot—we need a quorum for this election!**

The PCAS Nominations Committee presents the following nominees:

Stephen Dwyer recently retired as an engineering manager at a large aerospace corporation. He has an aerospace engineering degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo, a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from UCLA, and is a licensed glider pilot. He has been a volunteer driver for community college geology field classes for 40 years, helping students discover the natural sciences. He developed an interest in archaeology, attending conferences and classes to learn more, which led to his joining PCAS. He has visited and explored numerous rock art sites in California and Nevada. He has served previously as a PCAS Board member, as the PCAS President, as the PCAS Field Trip Chair, and is currently the PCAS Zoom Coordinator.

Irene Arce Barnett Foster has a BA (2003) in anthropology with a focus on archaeology and an MA (2005) in anthropology with a focus on ethnology from California State University, Fullerton (CSUF). Her thesis topic was the early missions of Baja California Sur, Mexico, with an ethnography of her family in Baja California, one of the founding families from 1697. She completed a field school class on San Nicolas Island in the fall of 2004 under the direction of Dr. Steven James, CSUF. She has excavated with Dr. Henry Koerper and Paul Langenwalter of Cypress College in San Juan Capistrano (CA-ORA-855) and at Bolsa Chica (CA-ORA-83). She also worked with Dr. Steven James, CSUF, at Honanki near Sedona, Arizona, in the summer of 2004. She has volunteered at Arch in the Park, coordinated refreshments for PCAS meetings, served on the PCAS Board as secretary, and volunteered at curation workdays and outreach events. Irene is currently on the Board of the Society of Hispanic Historical and Ancestral Research (SHHAR), a genealogy society in Orange, where she has been a member for the past 12 years.

2025 Archaeology Month Poster



www.facebook.com/pacificcoastarchaeologicalsoc

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2. Call 800-576-4377 for assistance.

Thank you for supporting PCAS!

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Lectures

In Search of the Qin Empire: Archaeological Discovery of Early Qin, by Dr. Feng Li (Columbia University). Bowers Museum, October 4, 1:30 pm. Fee: \$20, members \$15. Information and ticket purchase: www.bowers.org/index.php/programs.

Networks, Negotiations and the Hyksos, by Dr. Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek (University of Chicago). An ARCE/Bowers Museum onsite lecture, October 11, 1:30 pm. Fee: \$15; Bowers and ARCE members free. Recorded lecture available one week after onsite event: \$10; Bowers and ARCE members free. Ticket purchase and information: www.bowers.org.

The Archaeology of Dreams & the Inland Chumash Past, by Dr. David S. Whitley. A Zoom lecture of the Ventura County Archaeological Society, October 14, 7 pm. Information: venturacountyarchaeologicalsociety.com. To request Zoom registration email vcas.arch@gmail.com.

The Dazzling of Ra: Sun Worship and the Pharaohs of Egypt's Fifth Dynasty, by Dr. Mohamed Ismail Khaled (Secretary-General, Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt). Bowers Museum, October 16, 11 am. Fee: \$40; members \$35. Information and ticket purchase: www.bowers.org.

The First Emperor's Chariots: Where Are They Going?, by Dr. Eugene Y. Wang (Harvard University). Bowers Museum, October 19, 1:30 pm. Fee: \$20, members \$15. Ticket purchase and information: www.bowers.org.

Rethinking Ancient Egypt in the 21st Century Museum, by Dr. Sara E. Cole (Associate Curator of Antiquities, Getty Villa). A lecture of the AIA, Orange County Chapter, DeNault Auditorium in Grimm Hall, Concordia University, 530 Concordia West, Irvine, October 19, 2 pm. Fee: \$10; members free. Information: www.aia-oc.org.

Lectures (continued)

A Halloween themed lecture, by Sandra Pentney and Karen Lacy. A lecture of the San Diego County Archaeological Society, Los Penasquitos Ranch House, 12122 Canyonside Park Dr, San Diego, October 28 7:30 pm. Free. Information: sdcas.org.

Many past PCAS lectures are available on YouTube: youtube.com/@pcas-pacificcoastarchaeolo9403/videos.

Classes, Meetings, and Events

Archaeology Day at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area will have hands-on activities, presentations, and a food vendor. Santa Monica Mountains Visitors Center, 26876 Mulholland Hwy, Calabasas, October 4, 9 am–2:30 pm. Information: www.samofund.org/outdoors-calendar.

Arch in the Park, a San Diego County Archaeological Society event. Los Penasquitos Ranch House, 12122 Canyonside Park Dr, San Diego, October 18, 10 am–3 pm. Free. Information: sdcas.org/upcomingevents.

Fall Gathering at Malki Museum will have Native American demonstrations and information tables. 11-795 Malki Rd, Banning, October 18, 11 am–3 pm. Free. Lunch (12 pm): \$15 suggested donation. Information: <https://malkimuseum.org>.

Archaeology Day, presented by the Colorado Desert Archaeological Society, will include basketry, games, storytelling, speakers, and hands-on activities. Anza-Borrego Desert State Visitor Center, November 8, 9 am–3:30 pm. Free. Field trips on November 8 and November 9 are planned with required pre-registration. Fee. Information: www.anzaborregoarchaeo.org/archday2025.

PCAS CODE OF ETHICS

The Pacific Coast Archaeological Society (PCAS) is a nonprofit group of professional and avocational people dedicated to proper management of our cultural resources, public education, and the protection and preservation of archaeological materials and collections.

The following principles have been adopted by the PCAS:

1. Professional methods and forms will be used on all archaeological field surveys, excavations, and laboratory sessions.
2. A complete record of field and laboratory work will be filed with the PCAS Curator and stored at a facility approved by the Society's Board of Directors.
3. No archaeological materials will be removed without proper permits, landowner permission, and a field research design.
4. Unless otherwise legally stipulated before activity commences, all materials collected will be deposited for further research with the Curator at a facility approved by the Society's Board of Directors.
5. All generated reports will be the property of the Society and distributed as deemed appropriate.
6. All Society field activities will be performed only under the direction of a qualified field archaeologist (Principal Investigator) and the supervision of field or site directors.
7. The above principles will be observed on both Society approved projects and projects performed under the direction of an authorized institution or organization.
8. The Society and its members will strive to educate the public of the importance and proper management of our nonrenewable cultural resources and to discourage the collection and commercial exploitation of archaeological materials.
9. PCAS members shall not benefit from the acquisition, purchase, sale, or trade of archaeological artifacts, materials, or specimens.
10. All members shall adhere to City, County, State, and Federal antiquities laws.

Zoom Meeting

- Email a **new** Zoom registration request by **noon on Thursday, October 9** to membership@pcas.org. You will receive an emailed link to the meeting.
- Guests (non-PCAS members) are welcome with registration.
- When the presentation starts, please **mute your microphone and turn off your webcam**.

PCAS host **Steve Dwyer** will open the Zoom meeting at 7 pm to allow time to resolve any technical problems prior to the beginning of the PCAS General Meeting and lecture at 7:30 pm.

No in-person meeting in October.

PCAS Speaker Calendar

November 13, 2025

Dr. Tom D. Dillehay

The Archaeology, Genetics, and Environments of the First South Americans

December 11, 2025

Dr. Ulrike Matthies Green

Frontiers and Encounters: Wari and Tiwanaku in the Moquegua Valley, Peru, during the Middle Horizon (ca. AD 600–1000)

January 8, 2026

Dr. Carla Betancour

Biocultural Heritage and the Deep History of the Llanos de Moxos: Lessons from the Bolivian Amazon

February 12, 2026

Dr. Maren Pauly

Radiocarbon Dating & Stable Isotopes in Archaeology

March 12, 2026

Dr. R. Scott

2025 PCAS Board Members and Committee Contacts

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*PCAS Board Member

PACIFIC COAST ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

2025 Calendar Year Membership and Subscription Form

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Newsletters will be sent by email unless a mailed copy is requested.

I have read and agree to abide by the PCAS Code of Ethics _____

Signature

Membership (Includes Quarterly/Newsletter)

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- Family Membership – \$50
- Supporting Member* – \$55
- Donor Member* – \$75
- Lifetime Member* – \$1000

* May be individual or family membership

Subscription Only

- Quarterly* – \$50
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www.pcas.org/membrs.html

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