

Tree-Ring Dating of Casa del Mañana Log Cabin
Vallecitos de los Indios, Jemez Mountains, New Mexico
A Report By
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The current owners of a two-story and one-story cabin located at 345 Vallecitos Road in Vallecitos de los Indios asked if I would attempt to tree-ring date the structures. They refer to the two-story cabin as “Casa del Mañana.” On July 9, 2023 we obtained five specimens from logs in the two cabins.



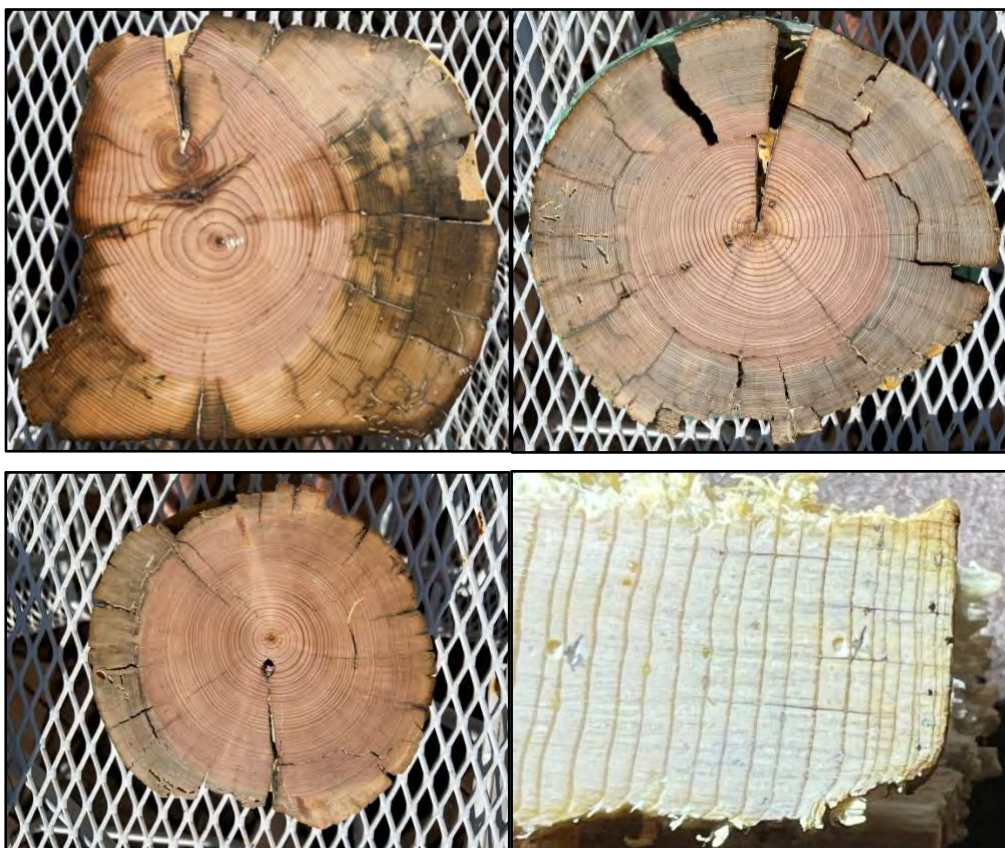
View of the west side of the two-story Casa del Mañana log cabin (at left), and cutting the log end (CDM 1) on the east side (at right).



The locations of the two core samples (CDM 2 and CDM 3) on the north wall of the two-story cabin are shown here at left, and a cross section (CDM 5) on the one-story cabin at right.

The three cross sections (CDM 1, CDM 4, and CDM 5) were mounted on plywood, and the two core samples (CDM 2, and CDM 3) were mounted on wood holders. All samples were sanded with grits from 60 to 400. The ring-width series were examined with a variable power binocular microscope at 10X to 30X magnification. The ring-width patterns were plotted using the skeleton plot method, and the plots were crossdated against a Jemez Mountains master tree-ring chronology.

Photographs and other details of the samples and the dating are described below.



Upper left: CDM 1, upper right: CDM 5, lower left: CDM 4, lower right: closeup of outer rings on core sample CDM 2.

Cross section **CDM 1**: This cross section was taken with a hand saw from the external east wall of the two-story cabin. It was cut from a log end. Crossdating was good, but the dating during the 1900s drought (1896 to 1904) was ambiguous, with a missing ring during that period. Signature small ring-width years of 1922 and 1925 enabled dated to an outermost ring of 1929. That ring was incomplete, with no latewood present. The innermost ring at the pith was 1802.

Core sample **CDM 2**: This core sample was obtained from the external north wall, inside a shed on that side of the two-story cabin. It was obtained with a hollow bit and electric drill. Saw dust jammed the core in the bit and broke the core in several pieces. Only about 4 inches of core could be reliably mounted and examined. Despite the short length there were 128 rings on the

sample, and the crossdating was excellent. The outermost ring was 1929, incomplete ring. The innermost ring (not pith) was 1801.

Core sample **CDM 3**: This core sample was also taken from the north wall of the two-story cabin. Like the other core sample, this one was broken in multiple pieces and only the outermost pieces could be reassembled and mounted. However, several signature small rings (e.g., 1880, 1922, 1925) were identified. There were 1 or 2 missing rings during the 1900s drought. The outermost ring was 1929, incomplete. The innermost ring (not pith) was about 1860.

Cross section **CDM 4**: This cross section was taken from the end of a log on the southwest corner of the one-story cabin. Crossdating of the inner portion of this sample was excellent from the inside (pith) date of 1719 to about 1810. After that period the ring growth become very suppressed, with many rings wedging out and locally absent. Based on a ring count only after 1810, the outermost ring would be about 1892. However, given that there are probably many missing rings in the outer period, the actual cutting date is probably a decade or more later.

Cross section **CDM 5**: This cross section was taken from the end of a log on the southeast corner of the one-story cabin. Crossdating of this sample was good from the innermost (pith) date of 1790 until about 1890. Then there are an uncertain number of missing rings during the 1900s drought when the ring widths are very reduced. A ring count to the outside would be 1911, but with likely 3 or 4 missing rings in that period the outermost date would be about 1914-15.

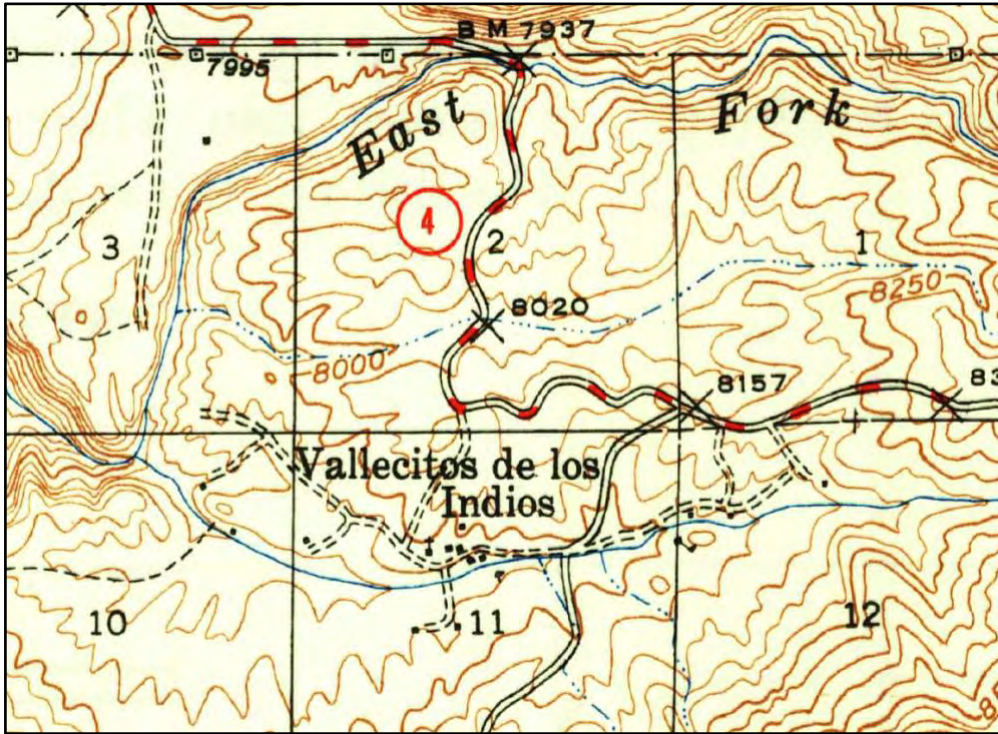
Summary

The three samples (CDM 1 to 3) from the two-story Casa del Mañana cabin all indicate a cutting date of 1929. The 1929 ring is incomplete, indicating that these trees were cut during the early growing season, probably in May or June. Therefore, this cabin was built as early as summer of 1929. It may be that the logs were cut and allowed to dry for some time, or there were other delays, and so the construction date of the cabin could have been a year or more later.

The two cross section samples from the one-story log cabin were problematic, and it was not possible to determine exact outermost or cutting dates. Based on ring counts from confidently crossdated portions of the series, it seems these logs were probably cut sometime between 1900 and 1915. Additional samples from other logs in this structure would probably result in exact cutting dates.

Overall, the dating of these structures fits the general understanding of the historical development of homes, sawmills, a dance hall, and church in the Vallecitos de los Indios area in the 1920s and 30s (Scurlock 1981). At that time there was a boom in logging activity in the Jemez, with extensive railroad logging beginning in the late 1920s along the Rio Guadalupe. By the early 1930s truck logging began on the Baca Ranch, and also on the nearby San Diego Land Grant and Forest Service lands. Multiple sawmills were in operation in the area in the 1920s-1930s, including mills run by the Caldwell and Abousleman families. A community of loggers,

ranchers and their families built up in this area. Today, the development which encompasses this area is referred to as Sierra de los Pinos.



Clip of a portion of the 1944 USGS Jemez Springs topographic quadrangle. Note the symbol for a church building.



View of the east side of the one-story cabin. At upper left on the hill, the old San Antonio church ruin is just visible.

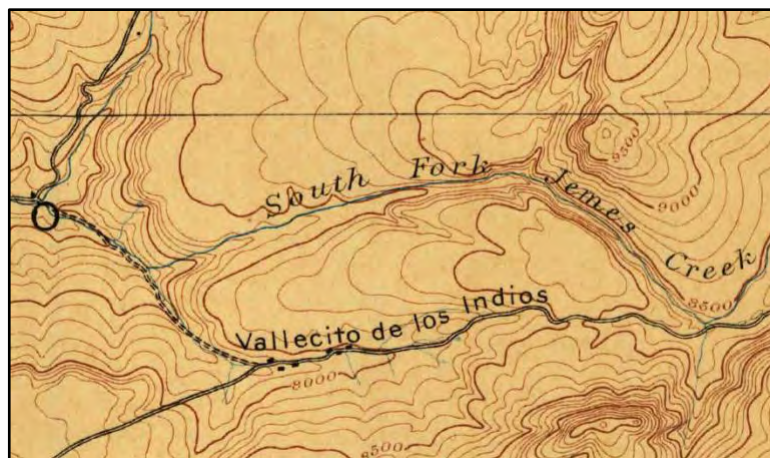
Finally, the following excerpt from a historical summary of Euro-American history of this area of the Jemez Mountains is very informative about who lived in the La Cueva, Redondo Creek, and Vallecitos de los Indios areas circa 1900-1930s (Dan Scurlock, Chapter 11: Euro-American History of the Study Area, page 142, In: High Altitude Adaptations Along Redondo Creek, The Baca Geothermal Anthropological Project, edited by Craig Baker and Joseph C. Winter, Office of Contract Archaeology, University of New Mexico, 1981):

“From public land records and informant interviews, the following homesteads, occupied mining claims, and ranches in and around La Cueva and Vallecitos (Upper) were recorded. Moses Abousleman, Seth Timothy Hoffheins, Joe Lyman, L L. Shields, B. B. Freelove, Edward MaCauley, H. A Lucero, Jose Maestas, Jose Armenta, Jose Andres, Julian Rivera, Jose Martinez, Jose Tana, Julian Montoya, Telefora Gonzales, Rocindo Gallegos, Rocindo Lucero, and P. Ruiz (United States Bureau of Land Management, n.d.; A. Hoffheins 1979; Smith 1979; United States Forest Service 1883-1913).

The time when the cluster of homesteads south of the project area was named Vallecitos de Los Indios was not ascertained. The names of the settlement and the Creek on which the homesteads were located probably originated from the many aboriginal archaeological sites scattered along the main valley and its tributaries. The Jemez have utilized the area throughout the historic period and as late as the early 1940’s they were gathering pinon nuts and wild herbs from the mesas and canyons near Vallecitos de los Indios.

A log church and dance hall at Vallecitos de los Indios existed as early as 1915. The church, named San Antonio is now in ruin. The dance hall is no longer extant.

Sawmills operated in the area during this time. Jim Smith operated a water turbine powered mill at Battleship Rock from the late 19th century to circa 1912. The Freelove sawmill, located on San Antonio Creek just northwest of Redondo Creek, was recorded by surveyors in 1913-1914. Lou Caldwell began operation of a sawmill on his homestead at Vallecitos de los Indios in 1925, and in 1930 the Hughes brothers established a sawmill at Ponderosa, or Lower Vallecitos. These were all small operations which processed logs from the San Diego Land Grant or National Forest land near the project area (Smith 1979; Kintzinger 1978).”



Clip from 1892 USGS map. The trails from Jemez Springs via Cat Mesa and Battleship Rock are shown, as well as six structures at “Vallecito de los Indios.” The “South Fork Jemez Creek” is today named the “East Fork.”