

Bryan Bates Archaeoastronomy Bio:

When teaching science at Rough Rock in 1980, Bryan Bates had students ask their elders about traditional sky knowledge instead of having Navajo kids read about dead European astronomers. When time to collect reports, all of the students said NO – a surprising response given his relationship with the kids. The kids said their elders told them this knowledge was for Navajo and not some “bila’gaana’ teacher”. The students turned their papers into the Navajo principal who graded their work, and Bryan got the students’ scores; but, his interest in cultural astronomy was piqued.

In 1985, at a therapeutic high school, Bryan had his astronomy class take tree-trunks from the school’s fire break and built a full-scale model of Stonehenge that became the school’s naked-eye observatory; that is, until cattle were let into the field. The cows didn’t seem to understand the annual solar and lunar alignments the students had measured out.

When teaching at Coconino Community College, Bryan created the first archaeoastronomy course west of the Mississippi River. He secured a grant from the NASA Space Grant, via NAU Physics Department, and developed the course manual he used for several years and is now, in part, being used at ASU. Bryan taught archaeoastronomy at CCC for 10+ years, NAU summer teacher programs, and has presented at numerous conferences including Flagstaff’s Festival of Science where he served on the Board for 10+ years.

Bryan has presented at several Oxford International Conferences on Cultural Astronomy, and was Chair of the 2004 Oxford Conference here in Flagstaff. In 2008, he and two colleagues began a regional research organization, a follow-up from Oxford, that held its seventh conference in 2019 on “Traditional Knowledge of Native Peoples” at the NAU Native American Cultural Center with 21 native speakers representing 10 different tribes. He has published ten peer-reviewed articles and was Co-editor of four Conference publications.

Bryan continues his research in cultural astronomy and has recently been surveying sites in SW Colorado with the Society for Cultural Astronomy of the American Southwest (www.scaas.org) of which he was a founder. Their current project involves working with native peoples at these sites as they use drone

photography to place sites within the cultural landscape, and take transit measures of potentially culturally significant sites to evaluate potentially significant ancestral Puebloan astronomical observation sites.

Bryan retired from CCC in May 2016 as an Emeritus Science Professor. Since then, he has been working as a naturalist for numerous different organizations throughout the west.