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# Machine Learning for UAV and Ground-Captured Imagery: Toward Standard Practices

Authors Anonymous

## ABSTRACT

Our collaborative work began in 2019 with the intent to overcome obstacles that had arisen from the inability to access curated artifact collections from remote locations. It was our specific aim to not only create digital twins of excavated objects that could not be exported out of their country of origin, but also to emphasize the contextual associations of objects residing in hidden museum collections using a range of digital techniques. As part of a growing field project in 2022, machine learning (ML) with YOLOv5, a family of compound-scaled object detection models trained on the COCO dataset was used to classify visual data and advance our understanding of in situ archaeological phenomena prior to destructive fieldwork. While not the sole contribution, the use of object-based machine learning improved quality and range of information obtained in non-destructive site surveys and improved data sharing capacity. Despite challenges encountered while training the algorithm and classifying objects, combining ML with drone data collection will continue as part of our long-term spatial data recording procedure. Despite both success and failures reported here, this work contributes to greater standardization of ML techniques in archaeological practice.

**Keywords:** machine learning, archaeology, UAV & ground-based imagery classification, YOLOv5, non-destructive site survey

30 As part of our growing field project in 2022, we applied machine learning with YOLOv5 (DeepLearning  
 31 2020; Jocher2020), a family of compound-scaled object detection models trained on the COCO dataset  
 32 (see PyTorch 2023) to classify visual data and advance our understanding of *in situ* phenomena on the  
 33 ground prior to conducting destructive archaeological fieldwork. Beyond what have become well-  
 34 established digital field and laboratory methods in archaeology (e.g. high-resolution data capture, instant  
 35 digital recording and transfer with tablets and other small devices) over the past few decades, the  
 36 application of Machine Learning (ML) for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and ground-captured imagery  
 37 was expected to greatly expand our ability to select areas for intensified investigation or excavation in  
 38 expedient, non-destructive ways. Expanding on what we had learned while analyzing physical collections  
 39 in previous field and laboratory analyses (see Sharp 2019), the development of a neural network that was  
 40 aimed directly at survey presented several unforeseen challenges.

41 Although some initial challenges while learning to train the algorithm and classify objects left much work  
 42 to be done, ML on archaeological survey data captured with UAV will continue to be more tightly  
 43 integrated into our standard data collection procedure in the field. With intensifying efforts to integrate  
 44 ML into various disciplines and industry, however, we find ourselves in relatively uncharted territory with  
 45 few applied archaeological models to follow (but see Bonhage et al. 2021; Caspari and Crespo 2019;  
 46 Orengo et al. 2021; Sakai et al. 2023).

47 Upon our return to the field in 2022 after a three-year hiatus, we discovered that some areas of our study  
 48 area had become dangerous and inaccessible, necessitating the incorporation of remote sensing  
 49 technology in our initial surveys. The application of ML object/structure detection was expected to  
 50 facilitate not only precision recording of all areas of interest but also to help determine various  
 51 environmental risk factors like El Niño/La Niña climate fluctuations. Additionally, we were hopeful that  
 52 our non-destructive site monitoring data would assist with heritage preservation issues that would arise  
 53 in the future (e.g., Caster et al. 2022). This paper discusses our successes and failures and future  
 54 directions of our work in northern Peru, with the primary aim to contribute to the dialogue at this  
 55 transformational moment in digital archaeology. Looking toward the future and aiming to foreshadow  
 56 challenges that our project and others will face, we urge for intensified efforts toward standardization of  
 57 practice and integration of streamlined methods in this fast-expanding branch of computational  
 58 archaeology.

59 **Implementing YOLO for UAV and Ground-based Image Classification and Analysis**

60  
 61 In 2022, we applied UAV-remote sensing and deep learning in our survey season to increase the amount  
 62 of terrain our small team could study over the ten-day period. In anticipation of training a dataset for  
 63 automated object detection and classification, we used digital cameras and "LiDAR" enabled  
 64 smartphones with GPS to augment the range of data that our survey teams encountered on the ground  
 65 (and which were expected to be encountered in the future). As we have witnessed in other cases, we  
 66 anticipated the quality and coverage of data collected to improve dramatically using these cost-effective  
 67 techniques and highly portable tools. Additionally, we aimed to test the feasibility of applying UAV in our  
 68 proposed long-term research; one of several non-destructive survey techniques that we are hopeful will  
 69 become standardized for surveys in challenging topographical, environmental, or biodiverse terrain.

70  
 71 In this regard, the range of circumstances we confronted in regional surveys are both long-standing and  
 72 recent. In northern coastal Peru, concerns that have become more prominent are the result of increased  
 73 frequency of extreme climate events, as well as reduced site monitoring and protection capacity over the  
 74 past five years. Given the challenging environment and sometimes perilous terrain, the ability of UAV to  
 75 ensure the safety of field crews makes it an ideal choice.

76  
 77 Nepal and Eslamiat (2022) provided the context and justification for using UAV drones as one of this  
 78 season's survey method. UAVs have already been employed in numerous domains, including traffic

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**Opmerking [1]:** Why are these specific references chosen? There are actually many articles on the use of ML and DL on remotely sensed data for archaeology. See for instance, Lambers et al. 2019 for an (already slightly outdated) overview.

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**Opmerking [2]:** This parts reads as a conclusion not as an introduction, please consider rephrasing / restructuring.

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**Opmerking [3]:** Machine learning and deep learning are used inconsistently, I would stick to one of the terms.

85 monitoring, surveillance, inspection, surveys, etc. UAV use in contemporary fieldwork is transforming the  
86 way the world is viewed as real-time deep learning algorithms increase both speed and accuracy of  
87 information capture. With the deployment of deep neural networks in recent years, UAVs have taken  
88 over aerial sensing research in the urban, environmental, and agricultural sectors (see Nepal and Eslamiat  
89 2022).

90 Deep Learning is a subset of Machine Learning that uses many layers to extract data features. Its  
91 application has been used in a wide range of industries, from creating autonomous UAV trajectories to  
92 now making significant strides in accurate **object classification**. Their methods provide real-time object  
93 detection, which makes them appropriate for autonomous robotics and UAV applications in archaeology  
94 as well. The development of computer vision and deep learning methods has also been aided by the  
95 usage of graphics processing units (GPUs) **for** deep learning algorithms (Nepal and Eslamiat 2022). This  
96 made it possible for us to incorporate object detection methods appropriate for our real-time application  
97 in archaeology.

98 In this study, we tested the utility of both UAVs (both DJI Mavik and DJI Phantom 4 Pro) and ground-  
99 based image capture (iPhone Pro MAX and various Android smartphones) in our archaeological fieldwork.  
100 When combined with increasingly established object detection capabilities of deep learning programing,  
101 we found these methods to be both economical and accessible, a clear advantage recognized in other  
102 academic and industry applications (see Nepal and Eslamiat 2022). Although several **deep learning and**  
103 **CNN (Convolutional Neural Network)** algorithms have been presented since 2012, **YOLO is a single stage**  
104 **deep learning system that detects objects using a convolution neural network.** Several deep learning  
105 algorithms now available like **recurrent neural networks (RNN, see Mittal 2020)**, cannot detect an object  
106 **in a single run, but YOLO enables the detection across a neural network in forward propagation, making it**  
107 **appropriate for real-time application. For these reasons and because of its accelerated rate of detection,**  
108 **YOLO was the deep learning program used for our study (Nepal and Eslamiat 2022).**

### 109 Analytical Challenges

110 The primary dataset for training the **YOLO algorithm** consisted of imagery captured during 2022 fieldwork  
111 (Figure 1 and 2). Images ranged from pictures of individual pottery fragments, pottery in a local workshop  
112 visited by the survey team in 2019, vessels fragments photographed in the lab during 2015 field season  
113 (Sharp 2019), and images downloaded from the internet that were representative of the range of vessel  
114 forms and decorative styles on pottery observed in the field.

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**Opmerking [4]:** Do you mean object detection or image classification?

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**Opmerking [5]:** I think a CNN is a Deep Learning algorithm...Deep Learning is the method and CNNs are one of the algorithms.

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**Opmerking [7]:** I think there might be confusion here with R-CNN. The difference lies in that YOLO is a single stage detector, while R-CNN is a two stage detector. Basically, the difference is whether localization and classification is separated or not.

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**Opmerking [8]:** For information in the difference in speed you can have a look at Olivier & Verschoof-van der Vaart 2021, 10.5334/jcaa.78.

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**Opmerking [9]:** I would state which YOLO version is used as there is quite a difference between them.



116

117 Figure 1: Example of field images of pottery and other materials in physical setting that comprise original  
118 training data.



119

120 Figure 2: Additional pottery fragments in association with stones and twigs.

121 Downloading and installing programs to begin training revealed many compatibility issues amongst pre-  
122 installed programs on our Windows PCs — as finding out which version was compatible with another  
123 program and/or our own computers proved difficult at times — which necessitated a bit of  
124 experimentation, downloading and re-downloading and frequent program updates. Equally so, offline  
125 training of the algorithm with installed programs was bulky and required several steps. Considering this  
126 limitation of offline training on a Windows PC, we decided to train YOLOv5 for pottery sherd detection

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129 using Google Colab, a partly free computing application with a paid tier, that allows Python commands to  
130 be implemented and stored in the Google cloud.

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Opmerking [11]: Reference?

131 Once we began working in the cloud, we were heavily reliant on the aid of Deep Learning (DL) <sup>1</sup>  
132 computing tools, which included AI engine, makesense.ai, to label our datasets categorically through  
133 bounding-boxes. The archaeologists on our team found this technique to be easy to learn and apply  
134 successfully, requiring only basic programming skills. Conveniently, the collaboration between Github  
135 repository and Ultralytics (Jocher 2020) supplied a Google Colab forum prefixed with a YOLOv5 training  
136 notebook<sup>2</sup>. This provided the foundational base where our dataset (taken from 2022 fieldwork imagery)  
137 was input into Colab's YOLOv5 training applications.

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138 Our first attempts at training the algorithm offline with installed software were not as easy as expected.  
139 For example, it was essentially impossible to “plug-and-play,” so to speak. We also discovered that using  
140 the lab imagery from 2015, which had been processed at a lower resolution and was free of ‘background  
141 noise’, did not work as well as (considerably more complex) field imagery. In fact, while training the  
142 algorithm, Christofis discovered that the prepared diagnostic imagery and images of whole-vessel pottery  
143 specimens downloaded from the web worked exactly 0% of the time (Figure 3). Although such images are  
144 certainly useful for typological identification of pottery and other artifacts, they were unsuitable for  
145 training the algorithm alongside field-captured imagery.

146 Importantly, YOLOv5 was never able to identify any pottery sherd images taken in a lab setting once we  
147 used the complex images captured in the field in initial training sessions. In all lab-based datasets,  
148 YOLOv5 could not detect the differences between stone and sherd. These occurrences continued through  
149 approximately 50 images and three training runs, where all sherds were incorrectly detected as stones in  
150 our output. These results continued to come back just as inconclusive, even with aid provided by  
151 comparative training of lab-based datasets against stock images of stones. This means that, given the  
152 current capabilities of YOLOv5, the algorithm cannot be utilized for legacy assemblages if training  
153 multiple datasets (like survey imagery) subsequently and/or simultaneously. We believe, however, that  
154 laboratory collections and other prepared diagnostics can be used if trained separately from the objects  
155 photographed in the field. We plan to test this hypothesis in the future.

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Opmerking [12]: These are also results, I would move them to the result section.

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<sup>1</sup> The standardization and training methods discussed could not have been constructed without the help of DeepLearning's tutorial, “YOLOv5 training with custom data” (DeepLearning 2020).

<sup>2</sup> We were thankful to have support from Weights and Biases' online YOLOv5 tutorial (Davies 2022)– a step-by-step guide on how to download and kickstart YOLO's object detection features.



157

158 Figure 3: Results using images processed in the lab to train the algorithm after initial attempts at training  
 159 using field photos.

160 After our YOLOv5 repository was established and all complimentary programs downloaded, we began the  
 161 process of setting up a standardized workspace. This started with creating a master folder to contain  
 162 training datasets (images) and their allocated labels, — a compartment for each, titled “images” and  
 163 “labels.” Inside these two folders, two more spaces were created to separate “train” and “validation”  
 164 images and/or labeling. Validation datasets were used as a precautionary addition to the training  
 165 datasets, meant to fine-tune and evaluate detection accuracy. After setting up our master folder, we  
 166 imported the datasets from our 2022 fieldwork into the train and validation containers of the images  
 167 folder (our validation images were always a smaller sample size than training). We tried to choose  
 168 collections that replicated the natural ‘noise’ of the landscape, where pottery sherds were scattered  
 169 along rocks, found on dirt, and in association with sticks and leaves.

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**Opmerking [13]:** A validation dataset is generally used to check what the performance is of a model during training. Maybe rephrase this sentence or please explain more how the dataset was used in this research.

172 With the master folder uniform, we began the process of bounded-box labeling for both the training and  
173 validation datasets. To do so, the images were imported into makesense.ai's object detection browser.  
174 This free-to-use GPLv3 website was quite user-friendly (if not a tedious affair), that allowed us to upload  
175 photos, set up personalized labels, and transfer our new labels into various components of our images.  
176 For this study, we chose detection of four classes — sherd, stone, leaf, and stick — due to the repetition  
177 of appearance that these elements demonstrated within our images. As makesense.ai's manual object  
178 detection process would be used to cross-analyze YOLOv5's own capabilities to detect parallel sets, being  
179 thorough and detailed (while labeling) was crucial for a standardized accuracy reading. After labeling all  
180 sherds, stones, leaves, and sticks within each image of each dataset, we exported all labels into a YOLO  
181 compatible zip file, which was then extracted into the designated label file.

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182 Following the exportation of our labels, our master training folder (now consisting of full datasets and  
183 labels) was ready to be uploaded for YOLOv5 training. Here, we transitioned to the next part of our  
184 research with the help of Google Colab. Google Colab's YOLOv5 workspace<sup>3</sup> is conveniently set up as a  
185 functioning tutorial – much of the code needed to train, validate, and detect with YOLOv5 has already  
186 been provided. After cloning YOLO, we activated the first line of code. This allowed us access to all  
187 applications in an individual Colab session. After cloning finalized, we uploaded and unzipped our training  
188 data into Colab. Here we found that YOLOv5's pre-existing classes have no applicability to our own study.  
189 For example, before re-classification images of pottery specimens had been misidentified as modern  
190 objects like toilets, hammers and books (Figure 4). Ergo, we edited the code on this file to match the  
191 classes/labels that we had created and implemented during the beginning of this research process.  
192 Ensuring that our project-specific constraints were now recognized by YOLOv5's algorithm, we changed  
193 the number of classes to 4, and the names (labels) to "stone", "sherd", "stick", and "leaf" which improved  
194 detection results substantially (Figure 5). With these adjustments in place, the data were re-imported  
195 back into Colab's YOLOv5, where we could finally test detection capabilities by advancing to "train" in our  
196 workspace. Activating the second block of prewritten code and experimenting with different epoch  
197 bounds we achieved the following results.

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**Opmerking [14]:** I think it is not necessary to be this detailed about the code on Colab. A sentence that the classes were adjusted and a reference to the code is enough.

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**Opmerking [15]:** What I am missing is the parameters that were used for training: number of epochs, learning rate, etc.

<sup>3</sup> <https://colab.research.google.com/github/ultralytics/yolov5/blob/master/tutorial.ipynb>



203

204 Figure 4: Image depicting a shell and pottery fragment misidentified as a toilet and book.





205

206 Figure 5: Improved object detection using smaller set of relevant classes.

207

**Preliminary Results**

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209 Precision and recall are two commonly used evaluation metrics in ML and information retrieval. Precision  
 210 tells us how often the model is correct when it predicts a positive label. A high precision score indicates  
 211 that the model is good at correctly identifying positive instances, while a low precision score indicates  
 212 that the model is making a lot of false positive predictions.

213 Recall tells us how often the model correctly identifies all the positive instances. A high recall score  
 214 indicates that the model is good at finding all the positive instances, while a low recall score indicates  
 215 that the model is missing a lot of positive instances.

216 While we trained initially at 150 epochs, 60 was identified as the ideal constraint for our research, as it  
 217 allowed us to load the number of times that YOLOv5 trained our datasets without overfitting them.  
 218 When YOLOv5 was run through other epoch modes, such as its default setting 3, and results were still  
 219 promising.

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- Opmerking [16]: Reference, and maybe just the formulae?
- Auteur
- Verwijderd: bounds
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- Opmerking [17]: How was this determined?

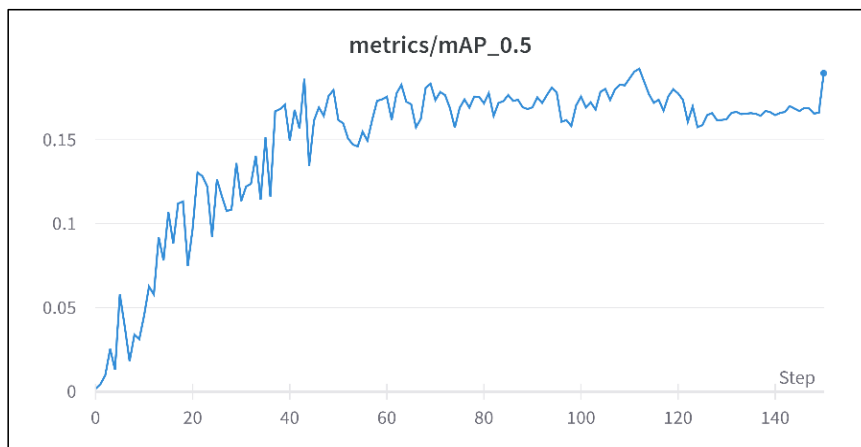
221 | After training for 150 epochs, we managed to obtain a precision score of 0.28, which meant out of 100,  
222 | only 28 predictions were correct. Even though this was the highest precision score out of all our training  
223 | runs, this was still quite low for our application. This was due to the limited number of examples that  
224 | were available, as we only used 56 images for training this model (on this specific run). On the second  
225 | run, we obtained a 0.23 recall score— still low for our application. Although both of these outputs exhibit  
226 | low precision and recall, it is possible to make significant improve detection when new data are added. A  
227 | precision score of 0.28 and a recall score of 0.23 supports that YOLOv5 is able to correctly detect sherds  
228 | against the complexities upon the natural landscape (as seen in our collation of stones, leaves, and  
229 | sticks).

230 | Average Precision (AP) is a performance metric that measures how well a model can detect and localize  
231 | objects in an image. When analyzing results, mAP simply refers to the mean of Average Precision.

232 | We achieved a mAP value of 0.19, which meant that the average precision across all the classes in the  
233 | dataset was 0.19. In other words, the model's performance in detecting and localizing objects in the  
234 | images was not ideal (The mAP score ranges from 0 to 1, where a score of 1 indicates perfect  
235 | performance, and a score of 0 indicates that the model is not able to detect any objects correctly). A mAP  
236 | score of 0.19 is again quite low, and it suggests that the YOLOv5 model needs to be improved in order to  
237 | achieve better performance. It is important to note, however, that the interpretation of a mAP value  
238 | depends on the dataset and the specific task being evaluated. Thus, a score of 0.19 may be considered  
239 | 'good' or 'bad' depending on the difficulty of the task. In other words, archaeological object detection  
240 | may be more difficult than other utilities, and therefore, what is considered a 'good' mAP value may be  
241 | lower than in other applications.

242 | A common way to monitor a model's performance during a training session is by plotting mAP as a  
243 | function of the number of iterations. This graph below provides information of the YOLOv5 model's  
244 | performance during our training process. This gives us guidance on how well the model is fitting the  
245 | training data. During the initial stage of the training, mAP increases rapidly, and then slows down as the  
246 | number of iterations increases. After some time, it remains constant. As we can see in the chart below,  
247 | the model is constant after 60 iterations, which means that the model begins to overfit the data.

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Figure 6: Graphical illustration of results after 150 iterations.

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### Discussion and Concluding Remarks

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Opmerking [20]: Reference.

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Opmerking [21]: There has been quite some research on the added complexity of archaeological versus normal object detection. See for instance the PhD thesis of Verschoof-van der Vaart: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3256824> Especially chapter 7.

255 With the semi-successful training of the algorithm, we hope to standardize YOLOv5's object-based  
256 methodology and expand it to our low altitude drone-based survey data. How does Google Colab fit into  
257 this picture? Certainly, it provided us with a convenient tool when software downloads and versioning  
258 presented critical problems. A critical question that emerges, however, is whether it is necessary to work  
259 independent of the online system. In particular, we look towards the limitations of Google Colab: its  
260 potential for data loss and even its potential untimely discontinuation in the future (as has been the case  
261 with other Google products like Google Poly). These challenges notwithstanding, the ability to conduct  
262 high-resolution classification of objects on the ground without collecting them or using expensive GPS  
263 units are some of the key advantages of using YOLOv5 technique.

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**Opmerking [22]:** An option would be to use Roboflow – Colab and then run the trained model locally.

264 With the training of the YOLO object detection algorithm on material culture collected on the ground and  
265 with UAVs (see Orengo et al. 2021), we have entered a new era of digital archaeology. This affordable  
266 approach produces high-resolution spatial data as well as material culture records that are informative,  
267 experiential, immersive, and easily accessible (i.e. limited post-processing) and permit us to leave objects  
268 *in situ* without destroying site components. Among others, the ability to weed out non-essential data and  
269 focus on the essential, visually navigate and detect objects and features non-destructively are proving to  
270 be key advantages (see also Mittal 2020). While fundamentally successful at detecting pottery sherds on  
271 the ground, the ability to transfer data into our GIS for spatial analysis (based on accurately classified  
272 images captured with location enabled smartphones and machine learning with YOLOv5) has the capacity  
273 to transform traditional time-consuming survey, object recording, and collection.

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274 For archaeologists, a critical advantage of incorporating object-based machine learning techniques is  
275 never having to pick up an artifact while at the same time being able to identify it stylistically,  
276 quantitatively, and locationally. Applying such methods contributes to the speed and accuracy with which  
277 new survey data can be captured. Through high-resolution *in situ* recording, using images captured on  
278 the ground or remotely using UAVs, the preservation of fragile and at-risk archaeological sites is  
279 significantly improved. Furthermore, through the advancement of non-destructive techniques, we gain a  
280 high-resolution view of the landscape and surrounding environment while actively working towards its  
281 conservation.

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**Opmerking [23]:** Has this already been developed? Because generally images lose their geospatial information when going through a CNN.

282 In this experiment, YOLOv5 has exhibited potential for consistent detection of archaeological  
283 phenomena, although statistically marginal. In this case, it was successful at detecting and classifying the  
284 presence of pottery sherds when used with images captured on the ground rather than the UAV imagery.  
285 Presently, images captured using our UAV camera were too vague to produce the necessary detail for  
286 distinguishing pottery from rocks. During the next step of this project, we plan to re-capture drone data  
287 at lower altitudes (approximately 15-20 meters) and use higher-resolution cameras to test our  
288 methodology.

289 We also believe that, given more time to enlarge the dataset and retrain the model, we support ideas  
290 that implementing programs like YOLOv5 into UAV surveys could considerably supplement the way that  
291 today's digital archaeological fieldwork and surveying is done. UAV-captured surveying and diagnostic  
292 evaluation with machine learning tools will save time, money and resources, while allocating more space  
293 to actively research, excavate, and connect with communities. The immense amount of data provided by  
294 AI-commanded drones as well as its "no-touch" approach also leaves opportunities for a better (and  
295 more ethical) digital recording of both archaeological and contemporary phenomena; thus, assisting in  
296 the current revolution to advance a more decolonized archaeology and emphasize preservation.

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297 Yet with our new-found ability to partially detect, analyze, interpret and share, we find ourselves ever at  
298 the cross-roads of experimentation, trial, and error. Although creative and thought provoking, we aim for  
299 standardized methodologies to lend credibility, longevity, and repeatability to our approach. With this  
300 paper and our shared insights, it is our aim to contribute to the dialogue on combining such approaches,  
301 helping to further integrate this advancing technique into our trans-disciplinary community of  
302 computational archaeology practitioners.

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### Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the field crew from the 2022 field season of Proyecto de Investigación Arqueológica Gallinazo del Norte (or PIAGN) for their help in recording the data used in this research. We are grateful for the loan of the DJI Mavic 2 drone used to capture data in 2022 PIAGN survey by Aerospace Engineering Lab of Dr. Hossein Eslamiat, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

### Funding

A portion of this project was funded through NSF Award # 1519048 Doctoral Dissertation Research Award: Social Interaction as Determined Through Spatial And Technological Analysis.

### Conflict of interest disclosure

The authors declare that they comply with the PCI rule of having no financial conflicts of interest in relation to the content of the article.

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