

John W. Sanders: In Remembrance

In honor of John W. Sanders, a founding Member and significant contributor to the San Juan Basin Archaeological Society (SJBAS), SJBAS established the John W. Sanders Internship Fund in 2013 to fund student internships at the Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College. Internship funding is made possible through SJBAS fund raising efforts and individual contributions.

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John's Background

Immediately after graduating from the University of Missouri, Kansas City campus, in 1942, John joined the Merchant Marine. He served four years as a seaman and deck officer on oil tankers and freighters carrying fuel, munitions and other supplies to the British, Russian and American armies. He participated in the Battle of the Atlantic, a battle in which Merchant Marine ships played a key role, even though they didn't bear guns. After World War II, John earned a master's degree in geology and paleontology from the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO.

In 1948, John began a career as a petroleum geologist, exploring for oil and developing oil fields in North and South America, Europe, North Africa and Southeast Asia. In the 1950s, John chose Durango for his retirement when he worked for the Gulf Oil Corp. After John retired from his last position, in Sumatra, in 1978, he worked as a consulting geologist in the Four Corners for several years.

After John's first wife, Jackie, died in 1980, following 37 years of marriage, John married Shaila Van Sickle in 1982, former Fort Lewis College Professor and current member of SJBAS.

John's principal interests included the study of history, anthropology and archaeology, as well as hiking and camping in the Southwest. John was a member of a number of archaeological and environmental organizations, and served as the first vice president and the second president of the SJBAS. In 1998, John received the *Ivol Hagar Award* from the Colorado Archaeological Society for his outstanding contributions to the advancement of archaeology.

SJBAS Background

The first SJBAS meeting was the result of an article in *The Durango Herald* inviting anyone interested in the archeology of Durango and the Southwest to attend an organizational meeting in the basement of the old Durango Public Library, then on Second Avenue. Forty-four people signed the roster: 30 adults and 14 children. SJBAS became an official chapter of the Colorado Archeological Society (CAS) in April 1979. In 1980, John became the SJBAS president. He was the essence and direction of the Society until his death in May, 2013, at the age of 92. Thanks to more than thirty years-worth of SJBAS newsletters that John wrote and sent out to members (totaling at least 360 individual issues), an archive exists of the early days of

SJBAS.

For many years, John led one or more SJBAS field trips each year, scouting out the area first, usually with other SJBAS members. The first SJBAS trips visited, among other sites, Salmon Ruins, Chimney Rock, Lowry Ruins, led by Al Lancaster, and Chaco Canyon. Before the prevalence of home computers and Google maps, John wrote introductions to and provided hand-drawn maps of the sites the group was to visit and always seemed to be able to answer all of the members' questions.

John got by with the lightest backpack and also the lightest breakfast of anyone else on SJBAS trips: bacon and Twinkies. His ability to endure long hikes earned him the reputation of being the Club's "energizer bunny." John was known for the endless supply of stories he told around campfires and to weary and frightened hikers who needed encouragement to keep going.

John's archaeological friends marveled at not only his extensive knowledge of the areas they visited on numerous field trips but also his energy and stamina. Even into his 80s, he seemed less tired than anyone else after a long day's hike. He reluctantly gave away his backpack only when he turned 90.

Those who would like to honor John and recognize his many contributions to SJBAS can make a donation by check payable to: The John W. Sanders Internship Fund. Checks are to be mailed to the Society Treasurer, Mark Gebhardt, 107 St. Andres Circle, Durango, CO 81301.

Comments in honor of John from SJBAS member Penny Gomez (who also contributed to the background information about John)

John and his first wife, Jackie, were my neighbors. John always treated my children with kindness and respect, asking about them long after they were grown. Because of John's enthusiasm and persuasiveness in describing SJBAS, I became a member. On a trip to Chaco Canyon in August 1979, my nine-year-old son managed to get off the steep trail to Pueblo Alto, evidently trying to take a short cut, and got stuck on a cliff, unable to move up, down, or sideways. John delegated a willing sixteen-year-old young man in the group to maneuver a rescue.

On an SJBAS two-night camping trip, in about 1985, to Comb Ridge, the plan was to hike to various ruins in the vicinity of the Bears' Ears in southeastern Utah. Although the Friday afternoon departure was tentative, due to bad weather predictions, John decided the trip was a "go" about 3:00 p.m. Therefore, when the group arrived at the camping spot near Comb Ridge well after dark, in a light rain, they couldn't see the location where they were setting up camp. Campers woke at dawn the next morning with floating mattresses and soaking sleeping bags, shoes, and spare clothing. A small lake had formed in the arroyo campsite. As the sodden group gathered to assess the situation, John shrugged his shoulders, opened his hands outward, smiled and calmly suggested that the group break camp, drive to Blanding for a hot breakfast, and cancel the remainder of the trip. John was a wise man.

Penny describes John as: gracious; forever youthful; a gentleman and a gentle man; modest; has twinkly, kind eyes; an optimist; and the backbone of SJBAS.

Comments Honoring John from Mark Gebhardt

John had an incredible sense of humor. In addition to his Far Side cartoons in the Moki, who else would add nudie slides in the middle of our Holiday Party field trip slide shows?

SJBAS Members who would like to share recollections of John for the website should send their write-up via e-mail to the club Webmaster: lylehancock@bresnan.net



Photo by Laura Paul

In remembrance
John W. Sanders
1920-2013