

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **November 2, 2013**

Destination: **Crow Canyon in Largo Canyon, New Mexico**

Leader: **Jim Mueller and Rhonda Raffo**

Number of Participants: **17**

On November 2, 2013, 20-year veteran BLM archeologist Jim Copeland led 17 SJBAS members on an excellent field trip to Crow Canyon, a side canyon to the larger Largo Canyon that crosses US route 64 east of Bloomfield. Crow Canyon contains the best and most extensive collection of early Navajo petroglyphs in the Southwest, in addition to earlier Ancestral Puebloan rock art.

We also made a stop in Blanco Canyon. This canyon contains many types of Navajo rock art and is most well known for rock art containing constellations. It is in the Crow Canyon area that the Navajo (Dine) believe they originated. Very good examples of rock art about the origins of the Navajo are located here in what is known as Dinetah, the traditional homeland of the Navajo. Panels containing these petroglyphs are located at ground level with the images being like sand paintings that are used in ceremonies. For these reasons, it is thought that the panels were also used for ceremonial occasions. Traces of color indicate that at least some of the petroglyphs were painted.

The following reflects some of what we learned from this trip: things in Navajo are either masculine or feminine, and all things are paired so that life is in balance. We saw both straight corn and crooked corn plants representing male and female stalks. Females have rectangular heads whereas males have round heads. We also saw triangular heads that Jim said are unique to Crow Canyon but their significance was unknown. Soft spring rain is female, while the summer monsoon rains with lightning and thunder are male.

We saw a pueblito, a defensive structure built on top of a large boulder or cliff edge, used for protection during Ute raids. There are over 200 pueblitos in the area and most were built between the early 1700's and 1754. The raids most likely pushed the Navajo further south and west.

A few of the excellent petroglyphs we saw were examples of Monster Slayer and Born of Water (mythical heroes to the Navajo), Big Warrior Panel as well as lizards, bats, the big dipper, Orion and Pleiades (7 sisters), snakes, mythical horned characters, coyote and a man changing into a coyote (or vice versa), animal tracks, a dragon fly, birds both in profile and more interestingly, in flight. Other figures in the artwork had individuals dressed in fringed clothing. Some of the images were more detailed in that the drawings of the legs showed well-developed calves, knees and ankles.

Some anthropologists believe that around 1800, some of the Navajo quit making painted pottery, spiritual rock art and masonry structures and returned to their more conservative Athabascan roots. Historical petroglyphs included images of a man smoking a pipe and Spanish soldiers on horseback. Horses without riders were distinguished from other four-legged animals by very pronounced round hooves. Shepherders in 1800s early 1900s wintered in the canyons near Largo Canyon and returned to the same ones every year based on their rock art and carvings.

- Prepared by: Jim Mueller

Participants: Jim Mueller, Rhonda Raffo, Joel Arnold, Gail Schulz, Letha Cagle, Bob Powell, Tom and Lydine Hannula, Bev and John Moore, Linda and Richard Robinson, etc.