

# SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



## FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **August 21 - 25, 2013**

Destination: **Range Creek and Nine Mile Creek**

Leader: **Gail and Marlo Schulz**

Number of Participants: **22**

From August 21 – 25, twenty-two SJBAS/CAS members and trip leaders Gail and Marlo Schulz set off to our base for this trip to Price, Utah to explore the Fremont culture. On the way from Durango to Price, we visited the Sege Canyon Rock Art at Thompson, UT, which contains ancient petroglyphs and pictographs. We traveled on to Green River, UT to the John Wesley Powell Museum where we viewed an award-winning video chronicling Powell's trip down the Green and Colorado Rivers, through the Grand Canyon. Ghost images of Powell and his crew provided graphic illustrations to match the narration. We enjoyed touring the museum, which includes exhibits about the exploration of the Rivers, complete with replica boats and exhibits about the Fremont culture. We were treated to a wonderful exhibit of paintings (yes, for sale) of the River and canyon country and the stunning skies that can occur in this area. Before moving on to Price for the night, we visited the Black Dragon panels in Black Dragon Wash west of Green River. We enjoyed the beautiful, cool, shaded canyon while viewing the pictographs and some petroglyphs.

On August 22, we spent the entire day viewing the petroglyphs and pictographs in Nine Mile Canyon. We followed the "Horned Snakes and Axle Grease" guide written by Jerry D. and Donna K. Spangler, which features 85 sites with detailed directions on their location. We found many rock art panels, which those of us who had been there before had not been able to locate previously, as well as enjoying the major sites of the "Great Hunt" panel and the numerous sites at Daddy Canyon. We found evidence of walls on a ledge, across from the vantage point of a pit house village on a hill near the Great Hunt panel. There are over a thousand documented panels containing rock art in Nine Mile Canyon, so we barely scratched the surface of what there is to see.

On August 23, we drove to the Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry, about 32 miles SE of Price, where we saw the fossil bed which has produced over 12,000 individual bones and one dinosaur egg. This site was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1966 and is recognized throughout the world as the primary source of fossilized bones from the flesh-eating Allosaur. Predators represent about 75% of the bones found here. There are at least 70 different animals belonging to 11 species. Bones and casts from the site are found in over 60 museums worldwide. Scientists have not been able to determine how and why the bones came to rest in this place 147 million years ago. We then returned to Price to tour the U of Utah Eastern Prehistoric Museum's paleontology and archaeological wings. A massive electrical power outage affecting about 3,600 homes and businesses cancelled our plan for a guided tour of the paleontology wing, but the power came on just in time to allow us our guided tour of the archaeological wing. We saw the 11 spectacular Pilling un-fired clay figurines discovered in the 1950s by Clarence Pilling, in a cave in a Range Creek side of the canyon. Museum exhibits are being refreshed and rebuilt. We enjoyed our tour.

We stocked up on food, ice and gasoline and drove the very impressively steep, narrow road to the Range Creek trailhead where we camped Friday night, just before showers interrupted our evening. Skies cleared shortly, and we had a late happy hour.

On August 24, we were picked up at the Range Creek trailhead by our Tavaputs Ranch owners and guides, Jeanie and Butch Jensen. We piled into four of their vehicles for an all-day canyon tour. We stopped many times, gathering around spotting scopes for views of intact granaries in impossibly high and inaccessible places, and great pictographs and petroglyphs. We could walk to some of the rock art on lower canyon walls. Our guides answered many questions and told stories of Jeanie Wilcox Jensen's childhood in the canyon and the appreciation her grandparents, parents and uncle Waldo Wilcox had for the Fremont culture and their artifacts. Waldo Wilcox became the owner of the canyon ranch, while his brother Don, Jeanie's father, took the Tavaputs Plateau ranch, overlooking Desolation Canyon on the Green River, where their father died.

Waldo eventually conveyed ownership of the canyon to the State of Utah, which turned it over to the Dept. of Wildlife to administer. Several exchanges and trades later, the canyon is now in the hands of the U of UT, which is dedicated to the preservation of the Wilcox Canyon Ranch as well as to the study of the Fremont culture. Because the Wilcox family protected the canyon and Fremont artifacts for so many years, it is the most intact and intriguing record of Fremont culture in existence. We ate lunch at the old Wilcox ranch and were treated to a history of the settlement of the canyon by U of Utah resident archaeologist, Corrine. When we left the ranch, we stopped to view pit house villages exposed by 2012 range fires, more granaries with wood still intact, perched high on canyon walls, as well as more rock art. We saw only a small portion of the many granaries, pit houses and rock art which fill every part of the large canyon and its side canyons. We had planned to camp at the Range Creek trailhead following our tour, to enjoy talking about all we had experienced. However, Tropical Storm Ivo had other ideas. When heavy rains and flooding were forecast, we decided the steep, narrow clay road, with long drop-offs, would be too dangerous if it got much rain, so we left the Range Creek trailhead and went our separate ways Saturday night.

- Prepared by: Gail Schulz