

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **October 11, 2015**

Destination: **Navajo Pueblitos**

Leader: **Robert Powell**

Number of Participants: **12 CAS conference attendees**

The trip worked out very well. The group was very inquisitive and enthusiastic and we stayed in Largo Canyon and on Ensenada Mesa until 4:00, two hours later than I had originally planned. I gave each driver and several others a printed road guide for each of the segments on the backcountry roads. To make up for lost trips to unavailable Pueblitos, we went to and photographed a long Navajo petroglyph panel. We also took time to take scenery photos and view from a short distance: other petroglyph panels, two pueblito ruins, natural arches, a cattle round-up, and a ranch that habituates wild horses from the Carson National Forest.

I talked about the history and intercultural interactions that led to the construction style of pueblito structures. The necessary geologic formation (San Jose Sandstone) supplies flagstones for stone buildings and towers (the Nacimiento Shale formation west of Dinetah doesn't facilitate stone buildings). Because of the need for available flat rocks, Pueblitos only occur in a relatively small region, from La Jara Canyon to the west and to just south of Blanco.

Severe overgrazing by Spanish sheep (many millions) in Dinetah canyons during the late 17th, 18th and early 20th centuries caused the canyons to become much less productive. Largo Canyon is now mainly weedy shrubs. For comparison, I pointed out small patches of grassy natural habitat, Blue Gramma and Rice Grass with a few shrubs scattered among the grasses. That habitat is preferred by ranchers in north-central New Mexico.

The last trip segment on Ensenada Mesa involved alternate left or right decisions for nine Y and T intersections. Often the side road to a group of wells is in better condition than the "main" road. None of the roads had road numbers or marked destinations. The others cars followed me closely, so no one got lost. We finally went to a pueblito on the highest shelf level of Ensenada Mesa. With someone else's camera, I took photos of the group standing on the upper porch of Gould Pass Pueblito. She plans to send me attachments of the photos that I can edit them for use in newsletters.

We could have stayed on the mesa longer, the group was still enthusiastic and not tired, but some wanted to go back to Durango in time to see the movie. So we did not go down to visit the Citadel Pueblito, which is in very good condition. Everyone got back to Durango by 5:30.

The group seemed very appreciative of the background information and the availability of a guided trip that they could not do on their own. Some of the roads were so severely damaged by floods that they won't be usable by regular cars until next year when they can be graded and filled in on the outside edge. Incidentally, in one previously slippery road section we saw curving tire tracks within one foot of a drop off into a deep canyon. We drove extra carefully along that section of road. However, it will be OK when it completely dries.

The trip participants were very satisfied and complimentary about the conference.

Prepared by: Bob Powell