

# SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



## FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **May 21, 2016**

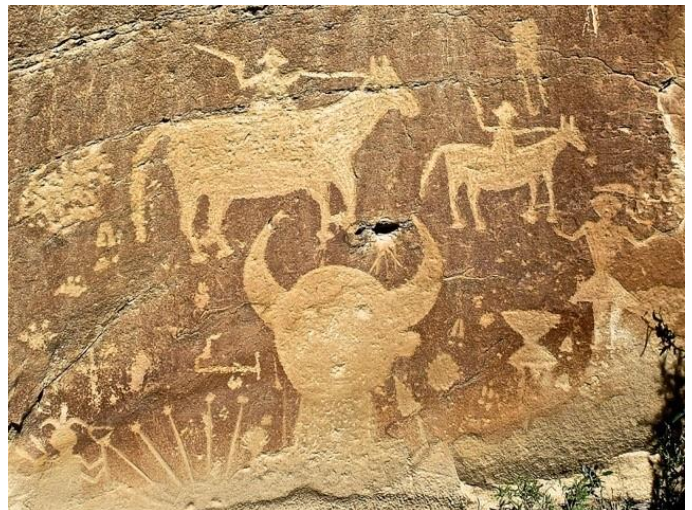
Destination: **Pueblito Culture in Largo Canyon Area**

Trip leader: **Bob Powell**

Number of Participants: **10**

On May 20, I drove to the area to check on roads. Roads in San Juan County were being graded that day; roads in Rio Arriba County were deeply rutted, but passable and not muddy, as they were last year. The next day, Saturday, a group of SJBAS members met at Santa Rita Park and carpoled to Aztec, then to Bloomfield and east on US 64 to the Largo Canyon road. There we met two members from Pagosa Springs, Baron Haley and Chris Kilgore. At the parking area we discussed the general history and culture of the Pueblito era. In 1696 the Spanish Governor, Diego de Vargas, defeated the second Pueblo Revolt. The governor then began a serious program of reprisals and punishment for the leaders and pueblos that had revolted. Many of the northern Pueblo Indians fled west to Acoma, Zuni and Hopi areas, some went east to the Great Plains and a few joined the Navajos in the Gobernador area near the present Navajo Reservoir. The Navajos had engaged in many raids and battles with the Spanish. It is not known whether whole families moved, or just young males that had fought the Spanish. Anyway, the Pueblo groups were certainly a minority within the Navajo tribes.

The Pueblo groups brought with them a few Pueblo customs like flagstone buildings and more use of carvings on rock walls. During the day, we viewed some examples of those aspects of the Pueblito subculture. The subculture lasted only two or three generations. After that time, the people of Pueblo ancestry either became fully assimilated or returned to their pueblos. The Navajo tribes moved west, where the geological formations (Nacimiento Shale) do not provide flagstones for construction or smoothly surfaced rock walls for petroglyphs. The subculture was also limited in area from about La Jara (Cliff Rose) Canyon west to Bloomfield and from 10 to 35 miles south of the San Juan River. The Gobernador/Largo Canyon area is one of few in the region that have flagstones suitable for construction. All but a few structures near the Navajo Reservoir are about day's walk south from the San Juan River floodplain where Utes were established. The Navajo and Pueblo people were pressured by Jicarilla Apaches on the east, by the Utes to the north, and by the Spanish to the south. They finally left the Largo Canyon area, moved west and southwest and never returned as a tribe. The Pueblito subculture was always a minority and was restricted in both area and time.



We drove up Largo Canyon, past the two large dead cottonwoods, turned left and easily crossed the almost dry Largo Wash. The road to the Cuervo (Crow) Canyon petroglyphs site had just been graded and we were able to drive to the

trailhead, unlike last year. We spent a long time at the site, viewing both Navajo and Pueblo style petroglyphs on the west-facing wall of the massive San Jose Sandstone. Lower strata of San Jose Sandstone are massive (few joints) and smooth, excellent for petroglyphs, but poor for construction flagstones. Upper strata of that formation have many vertical and horizontal joints and provide numerous flagstones, but poor surfaces for petroglyphs. Rock drawings and most Pueblito structures are vertically separated. Later, while still in Cuervo Canyon, we looked at the Big Man panel from a distance. We did not have time to cross the canyon through the heavy brush.

We returned to the main road and drove southwest to the Mustang Ranch. Just before reaching the ranch buildings, we stopped to view the Largo School Pueblito that was above us on a small cliff. We saw and discussed the wild horses that were being habituated to humans. From there on the roads were deeply rutted but we could drive safely by staying on the high ridges. We drove onto Encinada Mesa and many miles northeast until we reached the Gould Pass Pueblito. On the way we saw a small herd of pronghorns. Just before parking we stopped to take photos of the pueblito perched on top of a large boulder.



After parking, we walked a short distance toward the pueblito and ate lunch. After lunch I took the group around the south and southwest side below the structure to view a possible midden. No household trash was even in the deep cracks. The building could not have been used as a long-term home. We then climbed up into the structure and onto a porch with a superb view. We then discussed its possible construction and usage. The building used unfinished San Jose flagstones with a lot of mud mortar. There was no permanent water supply nearby, no signs of a small water gully, so the structure had to have been built in spring during the snow melt time or during the summer monsoon season. The building does not have a fireplace or a vent hole in the ceiling, so it could not be used as a live-in

residence. Because it is on a windy ridge, it would be very uncomfortably cold in the winter. No source of water is close by, so it would not be usable during the early summer before the monsoon season.

Some authors write that pueblitos were defensive. Ute raiders from the north or Apache raiders from the northeast could approach to within a hundred yards without being seen. The view in those directions is restricted. People in the building could expel a short time raid, but could not survive a siege because there is no water supply. So its function probably wasn't as a defense fort. We discussed: what then was its purpose? The group proposed several possibilities. It provides excellent far-ranging views of grasslands to the southeast, south and southwest. A hunter could stay there for a short time and search for herds of pronghorns or elk. It could be used as a temporary shelter while gathering piñon nuts in mid-fall. It could have been used a way-station for travelers, a vision site for young men, or as a picnic site for a family or group. There was no decision on what was the most likely use of the structure.

We left the Gould Pass Pueblito and drove down off the high mesa to the next level lower. The road was not passable last year because of deep mud puddles. Before reaching the next pueblito we stopped and walked to see the 200-foot drop-off where Cuervo Wash changes from a small creek in a grassland to a deep canyon with steep walls. We drove a short distance farther, parked, and walked a short distance to the Citadel Pueblito, again built on top of a large boulder. It is near the head of one branch of Cuervo Wash. During wet years, there would have been a small creek just below the structure. We were several hours later than planned, so we did not have a long discussion at that site. We had enjoyed good weather all day. Then began the long drive back to Durango. Again we saw a herd of pronghorns. With the large number of junctions and unmarked roads going in all directions, it would be very easy to get lost on Encinada Mesa. This day, we all made it directly back to the Largo Canyon road, but I have become lost twice in the past.

Prepared by: Bob Powell