

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **May 6 - 7, 2017**

Destination: **Hovenweep Outliers and Montezuma Canyon**

Leaders: **Bob Powell**

Number of Participants: **13**

Our Saturday meeting places were rather scattered – five carpooled from Santa Rita Park, two joined the group in Cortez, and six met the rest of us east of Hovenweep Headquarters. We visited Horseshoe Tower and Horseshoe House, Hovenweep outliers that are in Colorado three miles northeast of the main site. Weather conditions were very good for walking and photographing: clear blue skies with a few puffy cumulus clouds, cool temperatures, a very gentle breeze, and no polluting dust. The side road from the main Hovenweep Road was relatively smooth; however, we could not drive on a rough road to the nearby Holly Site because two cars had low clearance. Fields of beautiful Narrow-leaf Penstemon, *Penstemon angustifolius*, lined the side road. Most of the flowers were light blue, but many were pink.

From the Horseshoe Site, we drove a few miles to Hovenweep headquarters, briefly visited the building and then had lunch at the picnic tables. The Viner's decided to stay at the headquarters and did not complete the trip. After lunch we drove on clay, unmarked roads in the Navajo Reservation to our next site, Cajon. Fortunately, it had not rained recently. Cajon is eight miles southwest of Hovenweep headquarters. Though it is rarely visited, it is well worth the side trip. It has several surface buildings that are incomplete but are in very good condition and very photogenic. As a bonus, they are less than 100 yards from the parking area. The register only receives about three signatures per day. This was the last time that we drove on clay roads; from then on, we were on paved or gravel roads.

Our next stop was by Hatch Trading Post at the intersection of paved Hovenweep Road and gravel Montezuma Canyon Road. Weather had deteriorated a bit – winds were increasing and skies had become only partly clear. Each participant had a detailed road log listing mileages to archeological sites and a few geological features. Archeological sites in middle

Montezuma Canyon are not in very good condition. Petroglyphs are not outstanding because the rock surfaces do not have well varnished working surfaces. Anasazi surface buildings have suffered for two main reasons. After World War I people in the Blanding-Bluff area were trained to find artifacts in good condition and then sell them. Buildings were damaged from non-professional excavations. The final destruction was caused by cattle rubbing their backs on stone walls and gradually knocking the walls down.

The middle Montezuma Canyon has many rubble mounds, remnants of small family group dwellings. The rubble mounds have many small broken pieces of pottery, a few chips of stone from lithic working, and remnants of stone walls. The geological formation of chert layers was explained. We drove by most of the mounds, but did stop at a site that had from 6 to 10 small one-story dwellings. The ridge has many hundreds of small shards with a few different styles. We stayed there for about a half hour while people searched for different styles of pottery and a few stone chips and traced the remnants of walls. Winds had become strong. After visiting the site, we went down to the intersection of the

Montezuma Canyon Road with the Blanding Road to discuss times and meeting places for the next morning. Wind and dust were so extreme that we had to move a mile west by a grass meadow to continue the discussion. Six were camping out at a nearby dispersed site; others went to Blanding to stay in motels. A short time later a wind, lightning and rain storm started pelting the area and the campers decided to move closer to a gravel road and farther north up Montezuma Canyon.

On Sunday, the weather was excellent, especially no wind or rain. Upper Montezuma Canyon is much more interesting than middle Montezuma Canyon. We visited an excellent set of panels extending for about 200 yards. The well-crafted petroglyphs of buffalo, elk, horses, and cranes were constructed by Utes; simpler petroglyphs are of Anasazi origin. After viewing the site for a half hour, the Blanding group drove north and met the campers. Along the road north we stopped many times to view petroglyphs from up close. The BLM-maintained Three-Kiva site is 7.3 miles north of the intersection of the Blanding/Montezuma Roads. We stopped there for a while to look at remnants of surrounding houses and climb down into one of the kivas.

After leaving the Three-Kiva site, we drove farther north to view the Anasazi Bradford Cliff Dwellings. Again, we spent a long time viewing the site. A fence and steep cliffs prevent climbing up into the dwellings. Three large cliff dwellings are farther north up the canyon. They are in excellent condition, have fancy doors and windows and are lived in. One is for sale. The camping group was told how to locate the long set of panels and they all returned there later in the afternoon. The cliff dwellings were our last stop as a group. We all headed back south down Montezuma Canyon to paved roads. The camping group stopped at the excellent panel site.

Participants: Thirteen members went on the trip, eleven for the whole two days and two for only the morning of the first day. In alphabetical order, they were: Bindu Bammi, Gary Friedrich, Brad and Suzie Grimm, Michael Hughes, Ron and Catherine Larkens, Brooks and Janice Taylor, John and Eliane Viner, and Flo Zerr. Bob Powell was the trip leader.

- By Bob Powell