

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **September 29, 2018**

Destination: **Hispano Cemeteries and Catholic Churches**

Leader: **Joan Kellogg**

Participants: **8**

We were fortunate to have Ruth Lambert as our very knowledgeable guide. She is currently studying and recording the cemeteries through grant to the San Juan Mountain Association. She has recorded over 30 rural cemeteries and is creating a detailed on-line reference of all the documented cemeteries. Ruth has also studied the historic settlements and churches associated with the cemeteries. Participants appreciated Ruth taking time out of her busy schedule to share her extensive knowledge of the early historic settlements of Pagosa Junction/Gato, Juanita, and Trujillo.



Byron, Ruth, and Chris Chavez



St. John's Church

We headed east on Highway 160 to the Cat Creek Junction turn-off and then south to Pagosa Junction. Only St. John's Catholic Church, a few abandoned structures and remnants from the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad remain in the settlement. Ruth had arranged for us to meet Chris Chavez at the Church. We were thrilled to tour the well-preserved 100+ year old church. Even though there has been some vandalism, the church is beautifully preserved, especially the stained-glass windows. The church is still used for special religious celebrations.

We then drove a short distance to the Pagosa Junction/Gato Cemetery. Ruth explained the process for documenting and identifying the burial sites. She also explained how the land was set aside around 1890 to 1900 for the cemeteries with infrequent burials continuing today. From Pagosa Junction we drove to Juanita. Just before arriving at Juanita we stopped at an overlook to see the double railroad



Juanita cemetery gravesite



Double Truss Bridge

trestles over the San Juan River. The bridge is intact, but the rails have been removed. Before touring the townsite and the cemetery, we enjoyed a picnic lunch under cottonwoods near the confluence of Navajo and San Juan Rivers on the Navajo River Ranch. Ruth was given permission for us to enjoy this lovely picnic area on this privately-owned ranch which pretty much encompasses the settlement of Juanita. Ruth shared the history of the few remaining buildings including a school/mercantile, and the remnants of another Catholic Church. We visited the cemetery and again we found ourselves pondering the lives lived in this community.



St. James Mission

After traveling along a portion of the Tracks Across Borders Scenic and Historic Byway, we made our last stop at the Trujillo Cemetery. This was a larger cemetery and located near St. James Mission, another 100+ year old Catholic Church. It was evident that this church was well loved and preserved with many similarities to St. John's in Pagosa Junction. Ruth mentioned that the remote location of the cemeteries and townsites has a wonderful timeless quality that would appeal to historians and archaeologists. She certainly was right about that.

Participants: Rege and Nancy Leach, Michael Mohr, Rosalie Phillips, Tish and Pete Varney, Byron and Joan Kellogg