

# Navajo Culture

May 8 through May 11, 2009 thirteen SJBAS members explored Navajo culture with a visit to Window Rock and to Crownpoint AZ for the monthly Navajo Rug Auction. We enjoyed a drive through the beautiful Chuska Mountains on the way to Window Rock. We arrived at the auction in Crownpoint in time to preview over 100 rugs being offered for sale. Many different styles of rugs were on display from all over the Navajo Reservation. Sizes ranged from very small to very large. All exhibited the care and talent of the weavers in creating their works of art. Prices were quite reasonable and were close to what weavers now receive from traders. The Crownpoint Rug Weavers Association created the auction in 1968 to establish more uniform and fair prices for all weavers. Several of us did purchase lovely rugs in varying styles and sizes. Saturday May 9 we visited Navajo tribal Headquarters to view Window Rock and the beautiful park surrounding it which honors the Navajo code talkers and tribal members who lost their lives in the line of duty. We then proceeded to Hubbell Trading Post. Established in 1876, Hubbell Trading Post is the longest continuously operating post on the Navajo Reservation. By chance our visit coincided with the semi-annual Native American Arts and Crafts Auction and Open House on the Post. We toured the visitor center, the Post with its historic bullpen and rug room, the Hubbell home filled with artifacts which included baskets, rugs, paintings, furniture, braided horse gear and more. We also visited the huge barn, corrals and outbuildings sheltering many horse-drawn implements. We visited vendors selling fetish carvings, pottery, jewelry, old pawn, baskets, rugs, kachinas and more. We explored over 400 items offered for sale in the large blue and white auction tent. Most items were rugs. Other offerings were baskets, pottery, artwork and jewelry. Some of us stayed to bid on rugs successfully. This concluded the portion of the trip organized and led by Gail Schulz.

The next portion of our trip was organized by Linda Robinson, who was unfortunately unable to participate. We proceeded to the Thunderbird Lodge in Chinle AZ for a two night stay. Some of us toured the visitor center while some of us drove the South Rim drive of Canyon de Chelly. Sunday May 10 we boarded our 6 by 6 truck at 9:00 AM for an open air tour of Canyon del Muerto and Canyon de Chelly that lasted until nearly 6:00 PM. Water was flowing freely everywhere following releases from Tsaile Dam. Skies were bright blue and contrasted beautifully with the reds and browns of the cliffs high above us. Gnats were present but in low numbers to our great relief! We viewed many ruins and rock art panels including Antelope House or Running Antelope, Standing Cow Ruin and Mummy Cave. We saw rock art and ruins in many places high above us. We stopped at a number of sites and panels for a better view and had lunch on picnic tables looking directly into the beautiful Mummy Cave ruins. After lunch we drove back out of Canyon del Muerto and into Canyon de Chelly. We viewed more rock art and ruins as we made our way to Spider Rock. There we saw ruins part way up the rock and beautiful rock art on canyon walls, and admired the stark beauty of Spider Rock. Our guides narrated the story of how Spider Rock got its name and told us Navajo parents still tell their children to behave or Spider Woman will come down the rock at night, gather up the bad children, take them back up her rock and devour them. We drove back down Canyon de Chelly and headed for Thunderbird Lodge. One of our group counted 59 stream crosses on the way back! The next morning we went our separate ways, some to explore the North Rim of the canyon and the Lukachukais, all pleased that we had been privileged to enjoy this beautiful homeland of the Navajos.

R. Gail Schulz May 15, 2009