

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **October 27 - 29, 2017**

Destination: **Nine Mile Canyon and Beyond**

Leaders: **Tish Varney**

Number of Participants: **10**

Ten SJBAS members assembled in Price, UT for a weekend of encountering Rock Art led by our guide, Layne Miller, long time resident of Price, UT. The action-packed weekend included viewing rock art and hearing the many stories from Layne to make this trip rich in discovery and appreciation. While much of the Nine Mile Canyon art is accessible to view from the paved highway through mostly BLM lands, some incredible 'glyphs' are not apparent and can easily be missed. Additional locations south of Price require a hike to the spectacular panels. But let's start at the beginning...

Friday evening, Oct. 27, we congregated at Layne's home for an orientation and social. Gathering around the kitchen table, we learned about Layne's longtime interest in rock art and the many people he has guided for research and historic discovery. Layne worked many years as a newspaper writer and photographer. He is a founding member of URARA (Utah Rock Art Research Association) and gives many talks and guides tours for the city of Price to Nine Mile and other locations. Everyone met brand-new members Betsy Moore and Phil Bruckhauser.

Our group fit into two cars and made an early start on the nearly 50-mile road to our destination of Nine Mile Canyon. The first canyon we encountered was Soldier Canyon, named after the route that US soldiers used to escort the Ute Indians to the reservation. We stopped to view a carved signature of a regiment assigned to the area. Other Anglo signatures made with axel grease occurred along the canyon walls proving that this route was well used. Remains of a livery stop marked the location where extra horses were kept as help for wagons to maneuver the summit to Nine Mile Canyon. Lore surrounds the name 'Nine Mile' because the canyon is actually 40 miles long! Layne indicated that rock art styles from the Desert Archaic, Basketmaker, Fremont and modern Ute cultures appear in the canyon. Although interpretation is usually not possible, some styles can be related and verified through tribal stories and research. One of the most magical of panels illustrated the legend of Coyote (Maji) and the creation of the starry sky.

Through Layne's many discussions with native peoples, he explains that the meaning of the Owl symbol signifies a bad omen. According to Native American legends and myths of some tribes the Owl is a symbol of death. We saw many panels where the owl symbol was present. The Ute style of petroglyph may contain a

stylized horse with an elongated body. These images indicate a post European presence when horses were introduced to the area, therefore, giving a relative historic time frame to the petroglyph. Other Ute images include the climbing bear and bear paw. Another panel was the subject of Erich von Daniken (ancient alien's theory) who interpreted it as an alien space ship. In contrast, Layne gave a logical description of a railroad locomotive on tracks. Since the Utes traveled in the area between Price and Ft. Duchesne, they would have seen this 'monster' on wheels near Price.

Towards the end of our day in Nine Mile, we stopped at the famous "Great Hunt Panel". Here we marveled at the detail of the bighorn hunting scene. Here we also thought was a good location for a group picture. As usual, Pete Varney was behind the camera and not in the photograph!

After returning to Price, the group enjoyed a Mexican dinner together and then an ice cream social in the Varney's room. Our revelry was limited as we planned to head off again early the next morning.

Day two, (October 29) we headed south of Price about 45 miles to the San Rafael Swell and accessed the BLM roadway to the Rochester Panel above Muddy Creek. The short hike to the panel containing Fremont, Barrier Canyon and some modern cowboy petroglyphs gave a sense of adventure as the trail snakes along the cliffs. One of the most fascinating features of this very complicated panel includes what Layne described as the Fremont journey from the underground that includes trials and terror from wild beasts. Photographs are inadequate to capture the feeling of being present in this location and seeing this remarkable art. Our tour ended with a scramble to a remote location creating more questions about the amazing rock art of the ancients.

- by trip leader Tish Varney

Participants: Randy Graham, Byron Kellogg, Joan Kellogg, Michael Moravan, Elaine Moravan, Paula Lutz, Betsy Moore, Phil Bruckhauser, Tish Varney, and Pete Varney