

# SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



## FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **September 21 - 23, 2018**

Destination: **Natural Bridges**

Leader: **Andrew Gulliford**

Number of Participants: 13

In mid-September when it was still warm, a dozen intrepid SJBAS members joined member Andrew Gulliford for a delightful Bears Ears, Cedar Mesa, and Natural Bridges exploration on Utah state, U.S. Forest Service, and National Park Service land. The sun, moon, and stars cooperated with clear, cool starry nights. The planets aligned for the Autumnal equinox, and we all enjoyed camping, camaraderie, and hiking to Pueblo II and Pueblo III sites. In the best spirit of our departed member John Sanders, we joined together each night for happy hour, but then cooked our own meals and prepared our own lunches.

Members slept in tents, one trailer, and two Volkswagen Westphalia campers. We met at noon on Friday September 21 for a picnic lunch at the shade shelter at Edge of the Cedars State Park. We were unable to find campsites at

Natural Bridges, so we camped on Utah state land. That afternoon we studied the Cave Towers sites on SITLA or State of Utah land including towers on both sides of the drainage and one unmarked but fenced grave. The Cave Towers site is now well-interpreted and is one of several late PIII tower sites surrounding springs and seeps at the head of canyons. This site is at the head of Mule Canyon on the south side of highway 95.

On Saturday September 22 we carpoled to Natural Bridges National Monument, set aside in 1908 by my hero Teddy Roosevelt. We dropped off the top to hike into White Canyon at Sipapu Bridge for an approximately two-mile loop. We found rare Basketmaker white pictograms which the Park Service has tried to protect by adding latex driplines to move water from falling on to the glyphs. We saw a few small room blocks and a barrier to entry on a cliff ledge as described by Bill and Beth Sagstetter in *The Cliff Dwellings Speak*.



We then drove above the canyon to cross into the Manti La Sal National Forest. We drove between the Bears Ears at about 8,700 feet in elevation to the meadow where most of the recent Native American ceremonies have taken place in defense of the 1.35-million-acre Bears Ears National Monument designated by President Barack Obama. President Trump has shrunk those boundaries by 85%. Four lawsuits are pending against Trump's actions. The Bears Ears Intertribal Coalition of Ute Mountain Utes, Northern Utes, Navajos, Hopis, and Zunis maintain that the original Obama boundaries, including seven wilderness study areas, should be enforced. The area is unique for Native American sites, which may number 100,000 in San Juan County, Utah, as well as for current medicinal plant gathering. The Bears Ears jut out above the top of Cedar Mesa and can be seen in many directions for almost 100 miles.



President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act in June 1906. The Bears Ears National Monument is the first time in over a century that Native American tribes have sought protections for their own ancestral sites using that federal law. Trump's deletions include almost all of Cedar Mesa except for Moon House. He also excluded all of Grand Gulch as well as other mesas and canyons with numerous archaeological sites and rock art panels.

Returning from Bears Ears we visited Salvation Knoll, an important site in Mormon history. Scouts for the Hole-in-the-Rock Expedition had become lost on the top of Cedar Mesa. One of the scouts had been to Montezuma Creek and had returned home via the Abajo Mountains so he knew those landmarks but could not see them. Climbing Salvation Knoll in late December of 1880 he found the long sweep of Comb Ridge to the southeast and the Abajos to the northeast, so he knew where he was. The scouts then guided the Hole-in-Rock Expedition off Cedar Mesa down Road Canyon to where Comb Wash meets the San Juan River. The Mormon families with their wagons and tired mules and horses struggled up San Juan Hill. When they got to Cottonwood Wash they chose to go no further, and, in the spring of 1881, just as Durango was being founded, they established the town of Bluff.

We climbed Salvation Knoll for the view and could see out across most of Cedar Mesa as well as all the way down the Comb.

On Sunday morning we visited the Mule Canyon Ruins stabilized on the north side of the highway. We discussed the excellent kiva and tower there along with the PII room block and the classic Prudden "unit pueblo," which T. Mitchell Prudden had first described in *The American Anthropologist* in 1903. His article "The Prehistoric Ruins of the San Juan Watershed in Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico" was one of the first scholarly reports of Ancestral Puebloan sites in the Four Corners with a careful synthesis of above ground pueblos and cliff dwellings from what is now Aztec National Monument all the way west to Chinle Wash.

We drove south to the Kane Gulch Ranger Station to purchase books, maps, and the new bandana that has drawings of local area potsherds for identification. It's a nice, handy addition to your hiking wardrobe. Get it wet and tie it around your neck to cool off, then remove it to study and identify any potsherds you might find.

From the Ranger Station we drove to Muley Point then out on the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area to a view way above the top of Johns Canyon. We visited a rock art site there after much crawling and climbing to get on the proper ledge. One of our group, a hunter, identified two bighorn petroglyphs as being pregnant sheep because of small protuberances out their rear ends.



By late afternoon we drove to the top of the Moki Dugway. I discussed the history of the road, built in 1957 by Texas Zinc, and the company's plans to move uranium ore from the Happy Jack Mine at White Canyon, south across Cedar Mesa, then down the Dugway to Mexican Hat where there was a uranium mill. From where we looked out across to the south we could also see a wrecked haul truck trailer that had fallen off the route. I also explained the apocryphal story of the red Mustang convertible rented by a German tourist who had stripped to his leopard skin underwear and then driven at high speed over the edge. His remains were so crushed that the Search and Rescue team was not sure of his sex.

We drove down the Dugway and re-convened for drinks and a wrap-up at the Gulliford-Moran house, "Casa del Tio Oso," in the Copper Cliffs subdivision below Tank Mesa and across from the Desert Rose Motel. To use a 19th century phrase, "and a good time was had by all."

Participants: Pete and Tish Varney, Joan and Byron Kellogg, Ruth Guarino, Mary Morehead, Phil Bruckbauer, Betsy Moore, Andrew Gulliford