

San Juan Basin Archaeological Society

a Colorado Nonprofit Corporation



Field Trip Report

Destination: Southwest Borderlands

Date: April 14 – 20, 2019

Leader(s): Paula Lutz

Number of Participants: 7

Seven SJBAS members toured the Southwestern Borderlands area, from the Chihuahuan Desert southeast of Albuquerque to the Gila National Forest north of Silver City. Hunter and Lorraine McCleary (with pup, Petra), Rege and Nancy Leach, Susan and Donn Hicks, and trip leader Paula Lutz traveled 1,337 miles over 7 days, camping 6 nights, to visit five incredible Rock Art and habitation sites of several sub-groups of the Ancient Puebloans of the Mogollon area. The Mogollon is geographically defined as the mountains, deserts and valleys of southwestern New Mexico, eastern Arizona, western Texas and northern Mexico. Several groups of the ancient Puebloans lived in this area from 200 AD to around 1300 AD. The Tularosa were to the north, and Hueco Tanks to the south, before they dispersed and some possibly went further south to Copper Canyon (Mexico).

Top 5 Imprints

5. The **Gila Cliff Dwellings** are unique in many ways. The site is comprised of seven (cliff) caves, with five of them naturally connected. The area was inhabited over several thousand years, but the stone walls were constructed within the caves and occupied for only a few decades before the site was abandoned. It is extremely isolated in the mountains of what is now Gila National Forest. The western branch of the Mimbres River flows nearby. The Gila Cliff Dwellings is one of a very few sites with pictographs on the interior walls of the dwellings, including long murals (now too faded to see). The ancient Puebloans who lived at Gila were believed to be from the Tularosa region to the north



and had the black-on-white pottery style unique to the Mimbres culture. The cliff dwellings were occupied until about 1300.



4. **Three Rivers Petroglyph Site** is south of the Malpais Valley of Fire, southeast of Albuquerque, and contains over 21,000 petroglyphs within a one-half mile rugged trail walk. The sheer number of so much rock art was overwhelming. The style is Jornada Mogollon, carved after removing the dark patina from the basalt by scratching through the patina, or pecking through it for a deeper image. Goggle-eyed and

horned beings are characteristic of the Jornada Mogollon rock art style, and at Three Rivers, almond-shaped eyes. Native Americans lived in the Three Rivers area 1,000 years ago, with good fishing in the rivers, and hunting and gathering.

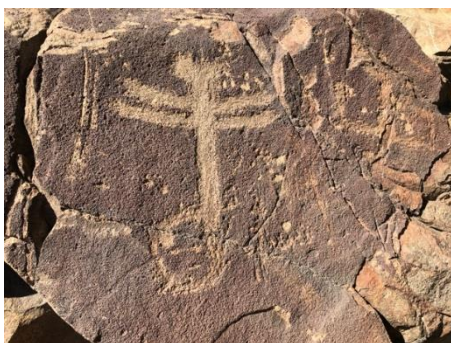
3. At the **Mimbres Culture Heritage Site** we had a personal tour by Marilyn Markel, who has been working at the Mattocks Ruin for 25 years with various archaeologists and field schools from several universities. The Mattocks Site, consisting of about 200 rooms, is a Mimbres pueblo village of about 1,000 years ago, built on top of an earlier pit house village. Pottery from the Mattocks Site is Classic Mimbres black-on-white, the “hallmark of this occupation period.” Bandelier visited the site in 1883, and it has been a center of research for over 100 years. The site is next to the Mimbres River, where now two species on the Endangered Species List are thriving: The Chiricahua Leopard Frog and the Chihuahua Chub. In addition to the three staple crops, the Mimbres harvested Black Walnuts; trees still stand on the site.



2. **Hueco Tanks**, slightly northeast of El Paso, Texas, is an area comprised of three mountains, made of solid igneous rock. “Hueco” means rock basin, and they are everywhere, giving water to wildlife and people. **Cave Kiva** is on North Mountain, and to find it on our self-guided tour we headed up onto the rocks, without trail or cairns, first looking for the duck, and then proceeding to follow the gaze of the crocodile. A 20-minute walk turned into a two-hour scramble with much hunting for signs that were described to us. But oh, what a find! There were reported to be 8 pictographs, 6 of

which are still very visible. The goggle-eyed mask is distinctive of Jornada Mogollon. Different locations on our walk offered rock art of Desert Archaic, Mescalero Apache, Comanche, and historic. At our camp site, we had two sightings of the Barbary Sheep (big open curled horns), one with a new kid.

1. On the second day at Hueco Tanks, we were part of a group tour with **Alex Mares** on East Mountain. As testament to the power of oral tradition and history, **Alex** came in at Number One on our Top 5 List. Alex is Navajo-Mexican-European, an Anthropologist-Sociologist; he worked at Hueco Tanks for 15 years and lived there for 10. He is deeply committed to preserving the history and integrity of Hueco Tanks, is extremely passionate about the significance of the site to many Puebloan tribes and is working hard to get it registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We walked on the valley floor between the three mountains to reach East Mountain. Margaret Hunter, archaeologist, did test pits throughout the valley floor in 1992 and determined that the entire area had been inhabited. Alex talked to us about geology, culture, art, religion, male/female division of labor hypothesis, history, and his love of Hueco Tanks. He barely got started on our 5-1/2-hour tour. The pictograph is “starry man” and the turquoise is copper from the south.



Bonus tip from Alex: iDStretch is an app that enhances rock art that is so faint you can barely see it and cannot clearly identify it. I bought the app and it works great on my iPhone 8 – working on photos I already have and will work with your camera as you look for and take photos of rock art.

Most Honorable Mention: The Dragonfly Petroglyph, seen on the 3-mile loop Dragonfly Trail near Silver City.

In summary, this was a long trip, but the week went fast - great sites, excellent tours, and great companions.

- By Paula Lutz