

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **April 26 - 28, 2017**

Destination: **El Morro, El Malpais and Acoma**

Leaders: **Barb and Lyle Hancock**

Number of Participants: **12**

Twelve hardy SJBAS members participated in the field trip. We rendezvoused at noon at El Morro National Monument where we ate lunch at the visitor center picnic ground. Then we viewed the NPS El Morro informational video, and hiked the 2-mile Mesa Top Loop Trail, stopping at the pool, the inscription panels, and the 13th century Atsinna Pueblo. El Morro became an important stop for travelers because the pool filled by rainwater running off the cuesta was a reliable water source along the ancient and historic trade route. Ancestral Puebloan people, Spanish explorers, U.S. Army soldiers, and railroad workers left over 2,000 documented inscriptions. The trail to the top of the cuesta was built by the Civil Works Administration during the Great Depression. The CWA was a short-lived U.S. job creation program established by the New Deal to create manual labor jobs for millions of unemployed workers. They did a remarkable job cutting steps in the sandstone, building switchbacks, paving the trail, and delineating a path across the sandstone bluff. We hiked through the partially-excavated 800-room Atsinna Pueblo ruin situated on top of the cuesta. After our hike, we drove to Joe Skeen BLM Campground in the El Malpais National Conservation Area, set up camp, and enjoyed a somewhat breezy happy hour.

On Thursday, we formed carpools and left camp about 8:30 a.m. to visit several Ancestral Puebloan sites and historic homestead sites in the BLM-managed National Conservation Area. The wind was howling and it was cold, but our intrepid group persevered. We hiked into the partially-excavated Dittert Pueblo, a Chacoan outlier, inspected a ranch ruin from the 1930's, found an unexcavated great kiva, and located an interesting petroglyph panel. Then we moved a few miles down the road and hiked to a special panel that exhibited a creation story of the Ancestral Puebloan people. Finally, we hiked to the Lobo Canyon petroglyph panel (photo). On the way back to the campground, we stopped to see La Ventana Arch, one of the largest natural stone spans in New Mexico.

We awoke on Friday morning to snow flurries and a light rain. After quickly breaking camp, we headed to the Sky City Cultural Center at the Acoma Pueblo. The cultural center, built in 2008, is an impressive building within which reside the Haak'u museum, a café featuring traditional foods, conference rooms, and a gift shop. We joined a few other intrepid souls for the 1½-hour tour. Our guide did a great job explaining the history of the Acoma people and the pueblo. We visited the huge San Estevan del Ray Mission Church built from 1629 to 1641 when Father Juan Ramirez enslaved the Acoma people to build the mission. They moved 20,000 tons of

adobe, straw, sandstone, and mud to the mesa top for the church walls, and hauled Ponderosa pine logs for the ceiling vigas from Mount Taylor, over 40 miles away. Then we walked through the pueblo, stopping at various vendors to see pottery and other crafts for sale. It was freezing cold with a light breeze, rain showers and snow flurries, so we moved relatively quickly to finish the tour. Then we visited the Haak'u museum and had a catered lunch. The field trip ended after lunch and our group headed home in many directions.

Participants were Randy Graham, Linda and Pete Groth, Barb and Lyle Hancock, Nancy and Reg Leach, Marion and Andy Simon, Diane Skinner, Irene Wanner, and Susan Whitfield.

- By Lyle Hancock