

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **Sept. 16 – 18, 2016** Destination: **Rock Art near Bluff and Ancestral Puebloan Sites on Comb Ridge**

Leader: **Andrew Gulliford** Number of Participants: **12**

On Friday morning our group of twelve met for a hearty breakfast at the Twin Rocks Café in Bluff, Utah, then we hiked to the Sand Dune rock art panel just northwest of town. Petroglyphs were mostly Basketmaker through PIII, including a rare kiva ladder and many cupules used for offerings of corn pollen. As an added bonus, Andy pointed out an exceptional life-size Barrier Canyon-style anthropomorphic pictograph that was quite unusual for this area. We enjoyed a fun tour of Andy's new house, still a work in progress, and then a picnic lunch at the Sand Island River put in. After lunch, we explored the Sand Island rock art panels revealed a few years ago after mechanical tamarisk removal treatment enabled easier access. Represented were a possible Paleo mammoth, Glen Canyon Linear, and Basketmaker to PIII to historic Navajo petroglyphs. Then we visited the Wolf Man Basketmaker Panel in Butler Wash. Petroglyphs included wolf tracks, a beautiful shield, a flayed face, a macaw, a wonderful corn plant, an exceptionally accurate man, a scepter, an atlatl, carry bags, a great blue heron, etc. We also discussed the entrenchment of Butler Wash that probably occurred in the late 19th century when the area was overgrazed by huge herds of sheep and cattle and down cutting of the perennial stream most likely took place. During the Ancestral Pueblo occupation, the valley was likely verdant with surface water flowing through a lush riparian zone. The valley at the east base of Comb Ridge was surely a popular travel corridor during pre-historic times. Our group then headed north along the Butler Wash road and viewed Sunset House from the road. This cliff dwelling is a refuge site with a defensive wall and a clearly defensive location. Half of our group returned to developed campsites near Bluff, while the other half camped at a dispersed site along Butler Wash.

On Saturday morning we hiked into the Long Fingers site (aka Split Level, Green Shield) where we viewed a distinct example of a secure refuge site with defensive walls built on an inaccessible ledge above a multi-room habitation site. Unique pictographs included several green shields, and petroglyphs included two hands with very long fingers and a calendar glyph, a large spiral with long horizontal lines and pecked hash marks. We could not discern how it worked, but it sure looked like it could measure celestial events or the passage of time. After lunch Nik Kendzierski from the Center of Southwest Studies joined the group and we visited the spectacular Monarch Cave site. We returned to camp late in the afternoon and enjoyed our evening happy hour in the shade of cottonwoods. Later we spotted a NASA weather balloon clearly illuminated by the setting sun floating over northern New Mexico and were treated to a full moon rise.

On Sunday morning we broke camp and headed to a seldom traveled canyon. On the way into the canyon, we stopped to look at a historic sweat lodge with the stacked-stick door and roof covering still intact. This structure was most likely built in the early 20th century by Navajo sheep herders. Then we bushwhacked up the bottom of the canyon to view a seldom seen site that Andy dubbed Beautiful Wall. The pristine dry stack wall is tucked high into a north facing alcove; it may have been used as a guard structure for an ancient trail over the Comb. Then we climbed to the top of the Comb to

see a “herradura” (Spanish for horseshoe), an Ancestral Puebloan shrine. This ceremonial site consists of a circular structure about 7 meters in diameter surrounded by a 1-meter high rock wall with an entry opening facing east. Nearby were the shards of a broken pot that was likely smashed on purpose as a special offering. We paused for lunch on the ridgetop and enjoyed the spectacular view of the summit ridge and Comb Wash below. We viewed another remote site Andy named the Pinnacle Wall Ruin at the head of the next drainage over. It was a magnificent day, but time to head for home, so we hiked out the way we had come and came across a PII site on top of a low hill at the mouth of the canyon. Andy is always a wealth of information, and he did a wonderful job planning and leading this field trip.

Suggestions if trip is repeated: Meeting for breakfast in Bluff on Friday morning was a bit awkward, as participants had to drive over a day earlier and camp nearby. The group should all camp together, rather than splitting up with some participants camping at a dispersed site and others returning to developed campsites near Bluff.

- Prepared by Lyle Hancock

Participants: Andy Gulliford, Mark and Marlene Gebhardt, Barb and Lyle Hancock, Nik Kendziorski, Joan and Byron Kellogg, Rhonda Raffo and Jim Mueller, Pete and Tish Varney