

SAN JUAN BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Chapter of Colorado Archaeological Society



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Date: **June 8 - 10, 2017**

Destination: **Canyon de Chelly**

Leaders: **Joan and Byron Kellogg**

Number of Participants: **12**

June 8 - Cottonwood Campground and Hike to Spider Rock Our adventure began with five couples finding campsites at the Cottonwood Campground near the entrance of Canyon de Chelly. For the most part, we found sites that took the full advantage of the shade of the magnificent cottonwood trees. One couple stayed in Chinle at a motel.

At 3:30 p.m., nine of us met Oscar Bia, our Diné guide. The group drove to his sister's house, located near the south rim of the canyon. From there Oscar and his son drove the group to the trailhead for the Spider Rock hike. (We had hoped to hike to Three Turkey Ruin, but that hike was closed to non-tribal members). Instead we hiked the longer and more difficult trail through Bat Canyon to the base of Spider Rock in Canyon de Chelly. At one time, the trail had been maintained and utilized as public access to the canyon. Currently though, it is used as a cattle and horse trail in addition to the occasional guided hikes. It was steep and very rocky, but the changing view of the evening light on the canyon took one's mind off the precipitous descent.

Once we arrived at the base of Spider Rock, Oscar shared stories and we ate our picnic dinners. Oscar's stories had been passed down to him from his elders and he even sang a traditional song. It was a magical setting, highlighted by the opportunity to learn about the many generations who have lived in the sacred canyon. We also spotted some interesting rock art and relished the evening glow on the 800-foot high sandstone spire.

We arrived back at the top of the canyon as the full moon was rising. We returned to Oscar's sister's house, where she came out to the parked cars to show us a rug she had woven. By that time, it was too dark to really appreciate the details of the weaving. We returned to Cottonwood Campground for the night and a well-deserved rest.

June 9 – All-day Tour of Canyon de Chelly

At 9:20 am, we met Oscar and his Uncle Daniel near the campground entrance. We divided into two groups of six and hopped into the two Chevy Suburbans, heading east into the canyon. There was no water running in Chinle Wash, so we followed the sandy river bed. As we traveled deeper into the canyon, both guides pointed out various ruins and rock art panels. Antelope House Ruin and its accompanying rock art was especially lovely. We also saw many fenced fields that at one time had been farmed. Oscar explained that many of the younger generation aren't interested in keeping up with the farming traditions. We also drove through groves of non-native trees such as Russian Olive, tamarisk and even cottonwoods. These trees were planted for erosion control by the CCC in the 1930s. Now there's an effort to remove these invasive trees.

We stopped at Katherine Paymella's (Oscar's clan sister) house for a weaving demonstration and explanation of the wool preparation process. We all sat in her weaving hogan surrounded by hand-dyed wool and various weaving tools. She was very articulate in her descriptions and readily answered our many questions.

Our last stop before turning around was Mummy Cave, one of the largest Ancestral Puebloan villages in the Canyon. We ate lunch as Oscar discussed the dwelling. It is a magnificent structure with a southwestern exposure. Two very large gamble oaks frame the view of the ruins.

Before we returned to the entrance of the canyon, we stopped at White House Ruin. This is the one area that visitors are allowed to go without a tribal guide. This 2.5-mile round trip trail descends 600 ft. into the Canyon. We were pleased that we didn't have to hike out since the air temp was 95 degrees! We returned to the campground to enjoy each other's company with the traditional SJBAS happy hour. Later some people explored the nearby historic Thunderbird lodge.

We said our good-byes the next morning and returned via various routes. Several of us drove over the beautiful Chuska Mountains.

– by Joan Kellogg

Participants: leaders Byron and Joan Kellogg, Barb and Lyle Hancock, Tish and Pete Varney, Rege and Nancy Leach, Jim Mueller, Ronda Raffo, Christine Johnson, and Jay Culver