



# Canyonlands

The official newspaper  
of Canyonlands National Park

Tower Ruin, Needles District

## On the Edge

BY KAREN SCHLOM

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN AFRAID OF HEIGHTS. WITH GUT WRENCHING FEROCITY the realization came back to me as I squatted at the outermost edge of the alcove containing the Tower Ruin archeological site. Staring down at the thirty-foot drop separating me from the safety of the sandstone bench below, I contemplated four hopelessly small footholds pecked into the rock. These were where I was supposed to place my feet for the descent. Installed by the ancestral Puebloans hundreds of years before, they marked the only feasible route back to home, work, life and lunch.

Two weeks earlier, when the park archeologist invited me to assist with a survey of Tower Ruin, I'd briefly recalled my acrophobia. But the lure of being able to climb into one of the best-known Indian dwellings in the park was overwhelming. Normally, entry into an archeological site within Canyonlands National Park is prohibited for visitors and rangers alike by the Archeological Resources Protection Act. In spite of the law, however, grave robbing, pot hunting, graffiti and artifact theft continue. Therefore, periodic surveys of sites like Tower Ruin are conducted to determine whether or not any impact has occurred. After a second's hesitation, I accepted.

Visiting someone's home even when they've been gone for centuries still provides a strong impression of how they lived. The folks occupying Tower Ruin selected a neighborhood offering both beauty and practicality. Commanding a spectacular view of Horse Canyon, the site caught the morning sun, benefited from the natural shelter of a rock overhang, and was adjacent to water and arable land. Questions about the people who had made this their home bubbled out.

"Do we know who lived here?" I asked the archeologist.  
"Most likely a family group," she replied. "Large civilization centers such as Mesa Verde would have been occupied year round. Here, homes were probably lived in seasonally by farmers migrating between Horse Canyon and the mesa tops above."

I examined a flake of chert lying on the ground. One side was concave indicating percussion by humans. Bits of charcoal also poked up through the sand, and broken corncobs rested on the surface.

"The entire area around these structures was pretty much a midden pile," the archeologist was saying. "The easiest place to throw garbage was out the door. Notice the dark soil where organic material has decomposed, evidence of a fire pit, and pottery fragments."

The archeologist inspected the main structure inside the alcove. From close up I could see how the stones had been shaped and fitted to form walls adjoining at right angles. Several thick log beams covered with smaller branches, juniper bark and mud thatching formed the roof. A few holes gaped where the mortar had collapsed, and some of the roof beams had fallen in.

"Carbon dating of the beams indicates Tower Ruin was occupied sometime between A.D. 1220 and 1280," I heard the archeologist say. "Notice how the pinyon logs supporting the roof are blackened, but



A pot found near Tower Ruin by a park employee in the late 1990s (top); Detail of a wall shows fingerprints in the mortar.

not all the charred sides face down. This suggests that the structure was burned prehistorically, then the same logs reused later."

"Why?" I asked.

"Most ancestral Puebloan home sites seem to have been burned every fifteen or twenty years," she answered. "Perhaps this was due to infestations of vermin. With garbage heaps and food items around, insects and rodents would have been a problem. A few years after being burned, the structures were often reoccupied. In this case, the roof beams were reused. This means the builders had most likely run out of good timber. Pinyon and juniper take a long time to grow in the desert and with the number of people occupying these canyons, wood was probably becoming scarce."

"How many people do you think lived in this area?" I asked.  
"It's hard to say. Most archeologists look at the number of structures and tend to estimate high. What you need to realize, though, is that not all of the houses were occupied at the same time. I'd say perhaps a few hundred people in Salt Creek and Horse Canyon at most."

I thought about how even centuries ago people had overused certain natural resources in response to population needs. Maybe some of the lessons learned by people of the past should be passed along to those living today. Then I began to wonder what other experiences we might have in common with the ancestral Puebloans. Had they

STORY CONTINUES ON LAST PAGE...

## Archeology in Context

An old rule states that knowing what you have is the first step towards understanding what to do with it. This is especially true for archeologists and the cultural resources charged to their care. Until an archeological site is located, identified and documented, there is no way to know how best to protect and preserve it. Therefore, the first step in any archeological project is to find and record all cultural resources within the project boundary.

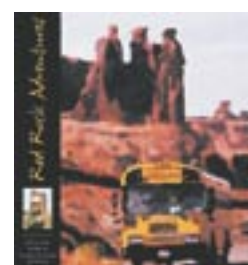
To accomplish this, archeologists perform what is called "systematic survey." This requires walking back and forth across a landscape in a specific pattern and closely observing the ground. Archeologists look for the remains of cultural activity. These include artifacts like pieces of broken pottery, grinding implements and projectile points; or features like structures, hearths and middens. When a site is found, archeologists note the location, record what is there, and look for any impacts that might be affecting the site. Impacts can include rodents digging under walls as well as people digging in structures.

One of the most important things archeologists look for when they record a site is the location and relationship of artifacts and features to each other. Known as "context," this relationship provides vital information for determining when prehistoric people occupied an area and how they lived. Visitors can preserve the contextual record by not picking up or removing artifacts found on the ground. Instead, report the find to a park employee so that archeologists can try to understand what happened so many years ago.

Once archeologists record the number and types of sites in a project area, managers can plan how to best care for those sites. With that in mind, archeologists at Canyonlands will conduct a systematic survey along the Green and Colorado Rivers over the next couple of years. This project will provide the basis for a plan that will address how to protect and preserve the resources in this heavily visited area of the park. With appropriate care, future generations can continue to appreciate the remarkable ways in which prehistoric peoples lived in their environment.



Thanks to you, improvements are being made throughout the park. See back page for details.



### TEACHERS!

*Red Rock Adventures: A Teacher's Guide to Canyon Country Outdoor Education* contains over 100 science activities for grades one through six. Topics are taken directly from the Utah State Science Core Curriculum guidelines and are correlated to the National Science Standards. See field trip descriptions and download copies of the award-winning curriculum at:

<http://www.nps.gov/seug/ccoe>.



### IT'S ALIVE!

Watch your step as you're exploring the park. See the back page for more information on living soil crusts.





National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Canyonlands Park News

### Published By

Canyonlands Natural History Association (CNHA), a nonprofit organization that assists the National Park Service in its educational, interpretive and scientific programs. CNHA's goals include enhancing every visitor's understanding and appreciation of public lands by providing a selection of quality, educational materials for sale at the park visitor centers. For more information, contact CNHA at (435)259-6003, or visit them online at [www.cnha.org](http://www.cnha.org).

### Editor

Neal Herbert

### Contributors

Chris Goetze, Jim Blazik, Karen Schlom, Mary Moran, Paul Henderson, Randy Harabin

### Park Mailing Address

Canyonlands National Park  
2282 SW Resource Blvd.  
Moab, UT 84532

### Phone

(435) 719-2313

### Email

[canyinfo@nps.gov](mailto:canyinfo@nps.gov)

### Website

[www.nps.gov/cany](http://www.nps.gov/cany)

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

# Mike + Jennifer = Graffiti

BY KAREN SCHLOM

SINCE THE FIRST HUMANS OCCUPIED WHAT IS now Canyonlands National Park people have felt compelled to leave their mark. From pecked or painted images created by the ancestral Puebloans to today's sentiments of love carved into the sandstone, the drive to leave a part of one's self behind for posterity remains strong. What then, separates rock art from graffiti? Why does federal law protect one type of human expression while the other is a violation?

The distinction lies in the reason National Parks were established and what the majority of park visitors travel many miles to see. Rock art, cowboy inscriptions, and the names of Colorado River explorers have archeological significance or historic value. These markings help visitors feel connected to the people of the past and provide fascinating clues into the lifestyles, values, and beliefs of those who lived here long ago.

Statements such as "Mike loves Jennifer" and "Alex was here", however, lack the same significance and visitor appeal. These markings deface the natural beauty of our national parks, impairing the enjoyment of

visitors. Although the distinction may be lost on Mike, Jennifer, and Alex, it's painfully clear to those viewers subjected to such unwanted expressions plastered on the rocks they've come here to appreciate. This is graffiti.

Graffiti comes in numerous languages and includes a wide variety of cultural groups. Once it has been started in an area it tends to propagate. Apparently, the impulse to leave a mark is not only human, but also contagious. In only a few years a pristine rock surface can be reduced to the appearance of a wall in a subway station. Occasionally, graffiti perpetrators are caught and prosecuted. Unfortunately, this is all too rare.

Here in Canyonlands National Park, rangers have recently developed a new strategy for addressing the graffiti problem. This plan involves accommodating the driving force behind graffiti, while preserving the beauty of the park. To provide an outlet for those wishing to leave behind a record of their presence, visitor registers have been installed at critical locations. Ammo cans containing sign-in sheets may be found next

to highly visited rock art sites, and visitor center registers offer the opportunity to write down impressions or opinions. When full, these pages will be permanently stored at park headquarters. Names and comments will be archived and made available to the public on request.

To restore the natural beauty of areas damaged by graffiti, a concerted effort has been initiated to eradicate its unsightly presence. With funding made available through the Canyonlands Natural History Association supplies have been purchased to effect repairs to rock surfaces and hopefully halt further damage. Although the appearance of restored surfaces can never equal that of an undisturbed feature, damage can be mitigated through a variety of techniques.

Repair work ranges from misting graffiti sites with water and using a whiskbroom to brush out words or images, to the precise application of natural pigments designed to blend in with the native color of the rock. Graffiti removal requires a substantial investment in time and effort, pulling rangers away from other critical duties, but with the cooperation of park visitors this will ultimately pay off.

Through this new graffiti removal plan Canyonlands National Park hopes to enhance every visitor's experience. Spectacular unimpaired views will continue to be available to those who wish to see them. Rock art images so painstakingly crafted hundreds of years ago will be preserved, and charcoal inscriptions scratched by the cowboys during the last century will remain intact. Please ask at visitor centers and ranger stations for the locations of registers if you would like to leave your mark behind as well. Like the people here before you, your message will go down in history.



Graffiti covers a boulder in the Needles District (above left). Boy scouts from Troop 69 in Louisville, CO assist with graffiti removal at the Squaw Flat Campground in the Needles.



Interpretive program at Grand View Point



Mountain biking on the White Rim Road



Hiking the Grand View Point Trail

## Exploring Island in the Sky

### Basics

- Visitor center is open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. from April to late October, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. the rest of the year. Features exhibits, book and map sales, audio-visual programs, backcountry permits, general information, and park rangers on duty.
- There are no free water sources at the Island. Water is sold in the visitor center at the front desk and at a vending machine outside.
- Orientation video: *Wilderness of Rock* is shown on request at the visitor center (15 minutes).
- Vault toilets are located at the visitor center, Grand View Point, Green River Overlook, Upheaval Dome, White Rim Overlook and Willow Flat Campground. The visitor center toilets are wheelchair accessible.
- Campground at Willow Flat has 12 sites available on a first-come, first-served basis. No water or hookups provided. Fee is \$5 /site/night.

### Scenic drive

A 34-mile (round-trip) scenic drive allows visitors to tour the entire mesa top. The *Road Guide to Canyonlands - Island in the Sky District* offers an insightful narrative for the trip and is sold at the visitor center. Wheelchair accessible overlooks include Grand View Point, Green River Overlook and Buck Canyon Overlook. There are picnic areas at White Rim Overlook and Upheaval Dome.

### Interpretive activities

- Interpretive trails (with printed guides) include Mesa Arch and Neck Spring.
- Ranger programs: Geology talks (20 minutes) are presented daily at 10:30 and 11:30 a.m. at Grand View Point (April to late October). Afternoon talks and walks as well as evening campfire programs are presented several times a week (April to September). Check at the visitor center or campground for times and topics.

### For kids

Free Junior Ranger booklets are available at the visitor center. Kids age 6 to 12 can earn a Junior Ranger badge by completing five or more activities in the book. For hiking, kids enjoy peeking through Mesa Arch and climbing the back of the whale at Whale Rock. Use caution as there are unfenced overlooks on both of these trails.

### What to do with your day

First, stop at the visitor center for current information on trails, roads, interpretive programs, weather, or to watch the park orientation video.

#### If you have 2 hours:

Drive to Grand View Point or Green River Overlook. Hike to Mesa Arch.

#### If you have 4 hours:

Drive to Grand View Point, Green River Overlook and Upheaval Dome. Hike the Grand View Point, Mesa Arch, and Upheaval Dome Overlook trails.

#### If you have 8 hours:

Visit every overlook. Hike several mesa top trails or one of the more strenuous trails descending to the White Rim. Enjoy lunch on the trail or at White Rim Overlook or Upheaval Dome picnic areas.

#### If you are interested in geology:

View the exhibits at the visitor center and pick up a geology handout. Visit Grand View Point to see the rock layers. Visit Upheaval Dome and hike to the first overlook. There you can learn two theories about how the crater might have been formed.

#### If you are interested in natural history:

View the visitor center exhibits and pick up a free natural history handout. As you pass through Gray's Pasture, keep an eye out for mule deer or bighorn sheep. Walk the Mesa Arch or Neck Spring trails and learn about native plants.

#### If you are interested in human history:

View the visitor center exhibits and pick up a free handout. Hike the Aztec Butte Trail to see ancestral Puebloan ruins. Hike the Neck Spring Trail to view remnants of the ranching era. Old fences and corrals are visible along the scenic drive and Murphy Point Road. Also, old mining roads are visible from most overlooks.

#### If you are interested in watching sunrise/sunset:

Find out sunrise and sunset times at the visitor center. Visit Mesa Arch at dawn. Visit Green River Overlook at dusk for incomparable views of sunset over the canyons. Hike to the top of Aztec Butte for a spectacular view of the Island in the Sky and surrounding countryside.



# Echoes of Past People

BY RANDY HARABIN

IMAGINE BEING DROPPED INTO THIS WILDERNESS and having to figure out how to survive. Where would you find necessities like food, shelter and water? Could you cope without the modern advantages of cell phones, guide books and maps? Early inhabitants of this area developed innovative ways of using available resources to meet their needs. In many respects, ways of living in the past do not differ greatly from the present. Our basic needs have not changed, though we use many new technologies to fulfill them.

Some of the earliest evidence of human occupation in the Canyonlands area dates from around 9,000 years ago. During this time, a nomadic culture known as “desert archaic” lived off the land, moving in concert with the migration of animals and seasonal changes. They were somewhat like an early version of today’s “snowbirds” who avoid severe weather by wintering in Florida and summering in New England. Because of their mobile existence, archaic people did not build permanent homes. They lived in caves, under cliffs or in temporary brush shelters.

The desert archaic people were characterized as hunter-gatherers because of the way they procured their food. They hunted wild game like deer, elk, mountain sheep and a variety of rodents. In addition, they collected wild plant seeds, roots, berries, fruits and nuts. Harvested plants included ricegrass, yucca, sunflower, cactus and pinyon pine. The pine nut has likely been a delicacy for centuries.

About 2,000 years ago, ancestral Puebloans (formerly known as “Anasazi”) moved into the area that is now Canyonlands. The major cultural shift at this time was the adoption of agriculture to grow, rather than gather, food.

Corn first domesticated in central Mexico became the main cultivated crop. Other crops included squash and beans. Just as today, the farmers built irrigation and flood control systems to ensure good yields.

With the rise of agriculture, people became less nomadic, and their dwellings evolved to accommodate this new lifestyle. Early shelters consisted of shallow pit houses, partially underground excavations with poles and mud above ground. Later, dwellings became surface houses of poles and mud similar to modern stucco designs. Eventually, the ancestral Puebloans created pueblos, multi-storied architecture of stone masonry which were essentially prehistoric apartments.

Other technologies were developed and applied to hunting and food preparation. The bow and arrow made hunting small game like rabbits, squirrels and birds much easier. In the kitchen, cooks used grinding stones for corn meal. They could then prepare early “tacos” made with corn tortillas, beans, squash, rabbit and turkey. Pottery was the new technology for food storage, cooking and carrying water. A variety of ceramics

was produced – jars, bowls, ladles, pitchers and mugs – much like today’s kitchenware.

Prehistoric people developed a fascinating method of communication, commonly referred to as rock art. Pictographs are painted on the rock surface with various pigments from minerals or plant sources. Petroglyphs are pecked into the surface using a chiseling rock. Some images are obvious: sheep, sun, water, corn, hands and feet. Others are mysterious: ghost-like figures which may be representative of their gods.

After centuries of living in this area, the ancestral Puebloans abandoned it roughly 750 years ago. This departure may have been due to a prolonged period of drought, overpopulation and depletion of natural resources, or social unrest in their society. Similarities between the ancestral Puebloans and modern-day cultures like the Hopi in Arizona and the Zuni in New Mexico suggest that these people did not simply disappear, but moved to new locations. Like our mobile society today, the ancestral Puebloans moved to seek better surroundings and more fruitful lives.



Painted by archaic hunter-gatherers, the Harvest Scene pictograph panel in the Maze District of Canyonlands features a fascinating collection of life-size figures.

## Reading Rock Art

If you travel the canyons of the American Southwest, you are sure to see figures carved or painted on rock faces. These include abstractions like spirals and dots, or more recognizable forms like animals, humans and handprints. Whatever they represent, these curious figures provoke within most people the desire to understand.

For lack of a better term, we call it “rock art,” but these images are more than mere adornments hung on the landscape. They are communications between people, written not with letters but with visceral, vital imagery. And if we look closely and compare different rock art panels, themes and characteristics emerge, as well as something on the edge of comprehension. A figure on horseback suggests a relatively recent date of production. The portrayal of an atlatl recalls a much older archaic period. A line of ghostly figures holding snakes with birds or other animals hovering above them may suggest an otherworldly experience. In effect, the odd figures convey the social, economic and religious concerns of many different cultures, both historic and prehistoric.

Imagine trying to convey a concept as simple as “food this way” in pictures, or one as complex as your deepest fears and highest aspirations. What symbols would you use? Would a person a thousand years from now understand them? Would they be able to follow your directions to water or understand your place in the cosmos?

Whatever the intent, rock art can be considered the celebrations, maps and practical wisdom left by indigenous people for those who would follow. Through rock art, knowledge could be passed to future generations—including our own. Though we may not understand them, petroglyphs and pictographs often inspire a sense of awe and wonder. One translation of these images might well be: “listen and survive.”

## Exploring The Needles

### Basics

- Visitor center is open 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. from April to late October, and 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. the rest of the year. Features exhibits, book and map sales, audio-visual programs, backcountry permits, general information, and park rangers on duty.
- Water is available year-round at the visitor center and at the Squaw Flat Campground.
- Orientation video: *Wilderness of Rock* is shown on request at the visitor center (15 minutes).
- Restrooms are available at the visitor center and Squaw Flat Campground (wheelchair accessible). There are also vault toilets at Elephant Hill.
- Squaw Flat Campground has 26 sites available first-come, first-served. No hookups. \$10 /site/night.

### Scenic drive

The scenic drive continues 7 miles past the visitor center, ending at Big Spring Canyon Overlook. Along the way are several pullouts for short hiking trails, viewpoints and a picnic area. Graded dirt roads lead to Cave Spring, where there is an interpretive trail, and to the Elephant Hill trailhead, where there is a second picnic area. The Elephant Hill access road provides excellent views of the Needles from a car (about one mile from the pavement).

### Interpretive activities

- Interpretive trails (with printed guides) include Cave Spring, Pothole Point, Roadside Ruin and Slickrock.
- Campfire programs are presented five nights a week at Squaw Flat Campground (April to October). Check at the visitor center or campground for topics and times.

### For kids

Free Junior Ranger booklets are available at the visitor center. Kids age 6 to 12 can earn a Junior Ranger badge by completing five or more activities. The Cave Spring Trail, featuring a cowboy camp and prehistoric pictographs, is always a hit with kids. Pothole Point is another popular hike, especially if the potholes are full of water. Before you set out, rent a kids’ discovery pack from the visitor center. Packs include a naturalist guide, binoculars, hand lens and more (small fee and deposit required).

### What to do with your day

First, stop at the visitor center for current information on trails, roads, interpretive programs, weather, or to watch the park orientation video.

#### If you have 2 hours:

Drive to Big Spring Canyon Overlook and hike the Pothole Point trail along the way. Drive to a view of the Needles on the Elephant Hill access road.

#### If you have 4 hours:

Explore the scenic drive and graded dirt roads. Hike the Cave Spring, Pothole Point and Roadside Ruin trails or the longer Slickrock trail.

#### If you have 8 hours:

After exploring the scenic drive, hike to Chesler Park or around the Big Spring-Squaw Canyon loop. Enjoy lunch on the trail.

#### If you are interested in geology:

View the exhibits at the visitor center and pick up a free geology handout. Every Needles trail provides unique views of rock formations, and marine fossils are visible in the canyon below Big Spring Canyon Overlook (follow the Confluence Trail).

#### If you are interested in natural history:

View the visitor center exhibits and pick up a free natural history handout. Bighorn sheep are seen most frequently from overlooks along the Slickrock Trail. Squaw, Lost and Salt Creek canyons are great for early-morning birding.

#### If you are interested in human history:

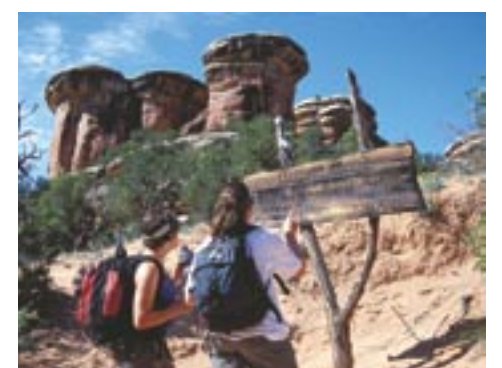
View the visitor center exhibits and pick up the free human history handout. Hike the Roadside Ruin and Cave Spring trails. If time permits, visit the Peekaboo rock art panel in Salt Creek Canyon.

#### If you are interested in watching sunrise/sunset:

Find out sunrise and sunset times at the visitor center. Sunrise is spectacular from the campground area, especially along the short trail over the butte between Loops A and B. Visit Pothole Point or Wooden Shoe Arch Overlook as the glow of sunset washes over the Needles.



Pothole Point



On the trail to Chesler Park



Chesler Park





A raft plunges through a rapid on its way through Cataract Canyon.

## Backcountry Areas

Much of the land in Canyonlands remains undeveloped, a fact evident at any of the overlooks along the Island in the Sky scenic drive. The park's primitive character has made it a popular destination for backcountry travel. In every district, rugged roads, trails and rivers provide paths into remote corners of the park.

The White Rim Road, a 100-mile loop below the Island in the Sky mesa, is a favorite of mountain bikers and four-wheel drivers. The Needles provides ideal itineraries for backpackers in search of solitude. The Maze offers opportunities for lengthy exploration by foot and vehicle. Due to its remoteness and the difficulty of roads and trails, travel to the Maze requires more time, as well as a greater degree of self-sufficiency.

Yet another way to see the park is on the rivers. Boaters can float down the flatwater sections of the Colorado and Green rivers to the Confluence, or continue downstream to face 14 miles of rapids as the river tumbles through Cataract Canyon.

Rock art enthusiasts should be sure to visit Horseshoe Canyon, a detached unit of Canyonlands northwest of the Maze. A moderately strenuous hike leads to a series of pictograph panels created by hunter-gatherers over 2,000 years ago.

If you're interested in planning a trip to any of these areas, request a copy of the *Canyonlands Trip Planner*, or visit our website at [www.nps.gov/cany](http://www.nps.gov/cany).

# Thanks to You

CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK WILL ENCHANT YOU WITH ITS MYSTERY AND BEAUTY. MILES OF roads and trails offer access to a colorful geologic wonderland in the heart of the high desert of southeast Utah – a masterpiece of nature's work.

With all this majesty, hundreds of thousands of hikers, campers, boaters and other outdoor enthusiasts are drawn to Canyonlands each year. The park's popularity creates a challenge – to assist and protect its visitors, while preserving the natural and cultural treasures that brought them here in the first place. With your park fees and continued support, we can meet this challenge together.

In 1996, Congress authorized the Recreational Fee Demonstration (Fee Demo) Program in order to reverse the deteriorating scope and quality of federal facilities and address natural and cultural resource issues. Prior to the Fee Demo program, money was returned to the general fund of the federal government and parks were only reimbursed for their collection costs. Now, Canyonlands keeps 80% of camping, entrance and backcountry permit fees. During the past six years, over 3.3 million dollars has been put to work at Canyonlands.

For the first time in nearly 20 years, the park has a trail crew to perform routine maintenance on over 120 miles of trails. Major trail reconstruction projects have been undertaken at Grandview Point, Mesa Arch and Roadside Ruin. All of the paved roads at Canyonlands have received preventative maintenance to extend their life and make travel safer. The road to Green River Overlook has been paved, and the walkway to the viewpoint is now barrier-free. New restrooms have been installed at Green River Overlook. Campsites have been rehabilitated both in the frontcountry and along the White Rim Road. Many other projects are in progress. This year, power-generating systems are being upgraded, outdated structural fire fighting equipment is being replaced and an archeological survey of the river corridors is being initiated (see sidebar on page one).

National Park Service employees and volunteers work hard to protect the resources of Canyonlands. Now you are a partner in this important work. Thanks to you, park facilities and programs are improving, and visitors can continue to experience this national treasure for generations to come.



Green River Overlook



New bulletin boards, recycling and garbage bins at the Willow Flat Campground



**WATCH YOUR STEP!** Cryptobiotic soil crust is a living groundcover that forms the foundation of high desert plant life in Canyonlands and the surrounding area. This knobby, black crust is dominated by cyanobacteria, but also includes lichens, mosses, green algae, microfungi and bacteria.

## Protect Your Park

- Avoid trampling cryptobiotic soil crusts by walking on trails, slickrock or in sandy wash bottoms.
- Pets are not allowed on hiking trails or four-wheel-drive roads, even in a vehicle. Pets may accompany groups at overlooks and in the campground, but must be leashed if outside a vehicle.
- Protect water sources. Do not swim or bathe in potholes or intermittent streams.
- Preserve your heritage. Do not enter, alter or deface archeological sites. Leave artifacts undisturbed.
- It is illegal to remove natural or cultural features including plants, rocks, artifacts, driftwood or antlers.
- Vehicles and bicycles must travel on designated roads.
- ATVs are not permitted.

## Protect Yourself

- Drink at least one gallon of water per day, more if involved in strenuous activity.
- Always carry a map, adequate clothing and flashlight in the backcountry.
- Remain in one place if you become lost or separated from a group.
- Always let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Never cross a canyon that is flooding.
- During lightning storms, avoid lone trees and high ridges. Sit in a vehicle if possible.
- Be careful near cliff edges, especially when rock surfaces are wet or icy.

# Artifacts Returned

FEW PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE THRILL OF discovering prehistoric artifacts. To find something that has lain untouched and unseen by human eyes for centuries can be a treasured memory.

Such was the case for Alice Dansdill. A former resident of Moab, Dansdill was visiting what would become the Needles District of Canyonlands with family and friends in June of 1963 when they found a rare collection of artifacts. Concerned for their safety, she took home eight ceramic vessels, three whole gourds and four half gourds.

Once the park was established, it was always her intention to return the collection to the area's new stewards. Mrs. Dansdill died in 1998, but her wish came true when her husband, Mr. Bob Dansdill of Aurora, Colorado returned the collection in the fall of 2002.

The collection is in great condition and contains a combination of both prehistoric and historic ceramics, as well as gourds which can be accurately dated. Mr. Dansdill also donated photos of the objects as they were found and during excavation, which will facilitate future research. The collection will be stored in the park's curatorial facilities, but it is hoped that some of the artifacts can eventually be exhibited in the Needles District Visitor Center.

4 Canyonlands Park News



The artifacts as found in 1963 (top); small bowl thought to be of Hopi origin (this bowl is just visible in the right background of the upper photo).

"It's rare that a collection of this quality and research potential is returned to a Federal agency," said Superintendent Jerry Banta. "We're thrilled and certainly appreciative to have such an important part of our cultural heritage returned to the public. It's obvious that they have cared for the collection and we greatly appreciate Mr. Dansdill's diligence in pursuing its return."

ON THE EDGE, continued from the front page...

been afraid of climbing to their home like I was?

"How long did the average person live?" I asked, seeking a clue to the dangers these people had faced. "That depended upon gender. Men typically lived to be in their thirties. The average life span for women was around twenty. Childbirth was the primary cause of mortality in females, but if a woman survived her childbearing years she had a good chance of reaching fifty or even sixty."

"Did they fall much?" I inquired timidly. "Fell, got bashed with things, and bopped each other over the head. Traumatic injury was by far the most common health problem. One skeleton of a sixty-year-old female studied at Mesa Verde showed she had broken nearly every major bone in her body at least once," the archeologist said. This definitely made my fears pale by comparison.

After an hour of work the site had been thoroughly examined. "No evidence of recent human impact," the archeologist pronounced. "The structural damage, lack of surface artifacts, and soil disturbance we've seen today goes way back. Most artifacts with any value were dug up and carted off before the establishment of the park."

I felt discouraged. "So, how many undisturbed archeological sites do you think there are left inside Canyonlands?"

"None," she responded. "With aerial looting and modern climbing equipment, all of our sites have probably been compromised."

An eerie sensation passed over me that the very essence of these people's lives had been vacuumed clean by the hand of humanity.

"Does that mean we should give up trying to protect these places?" "Of course not," the archeologist replied. "There is still much to save. Take Tower Ruin...after everything it's been through, most of the buildings are still standing, still holding onto secrets of the past that we can't decipher yet. But our task for today is completed. It's time to go down."

Then I was there at the edge of the cliff staring at the footholds, my stomach tied in knots. In retrospect, this was the experience of a lifetime. A thrilling peek into the lives of people long departed. At that moment, however, all I was could think about was how to stop my knees from shaking. I'd probably be up there still if three young employees hadn't helped me down.

After I reached the security of the slick-rock bench below I gazed once more into the alcove. Beautifully mortared walls, still standing strong 750 years after their construction, graced the interior. The archeologist was right. Tower Ruin was definitely worth saving.