

Grand Staircase-Escalante

Doug McFadden, Bureau of Land Management

A VAST TRACT OF HIGH DESERT makes up the Grand Staircase - Escalante National Monument in south-central Utah. The monument encompasses several physiographic areas - entire landscapes - and an archaeological record that spans from at least 6000 B.C. to the Historic period. It is the effect that these varied, and sometimes marginal, landscapes had on its occupants that makes the monument's prehistory of interest. There are no great kivas, massive cliff-houses, or spectacular ballcourts. The artifacts are generally mundane created for function rather than effect - and the social history was simple and egalitarian. What is special is the *wholeness* of the archaeological record on the monument and our ability to study it in its natural setting.

From west to east, the monument includes three major landforms:

∴ The Grand Staircase: a series of "steps" defined by cliff-lines and benches that ascend from about 5,000 to 8,000 feet.

∴ The Kaiparowits Plateau: rugged tablelands dissected by countless, mostly dry, canyons.

∴ The Escalante Canyons: an entrenched permanent stream whose tributaries head at over 10,000 feet on the Aquarius Plateau and flow through the desert to its confluence with the Colorado River.

These contrasting natural settings presented very different opportunities and constraints for their occupants.

Research to date has focused on the history of use for each area and on sketching in the basic adaptations employed. This approach highlights the many different ways to make a living in these sometimes harsh environments. Perhaps the most intriguing example is the simultaneous occupation of the Grand Staircase by the Virgin Anasazi, and of the Escalante Canyons and eastern Kaiparowits Plateau by the Fremont. While each group had access to the same basic technologies and agricultural methods, they employed them in very different ways. A brief review of the monument's culture history will put the Fremont! Anasazi (circa A.D. 500-1200) relationship in context.

The earliest Archaic period dates in the area come from Broken Arrow Cave, located a few miles south of the monument boundary. The lowest stratum of a test excavation in the cave yielded radiocarbon dates of 6000 B.C. The occupants appear to have used the site as a base to forage for native grasses and small game during the spring. A type of sandal known as "plain weave" found in the cave suggests an



Doug McFadden

Top: Archaic pictograph, Escalante Canyons.

Middle: Fremont pictograph.

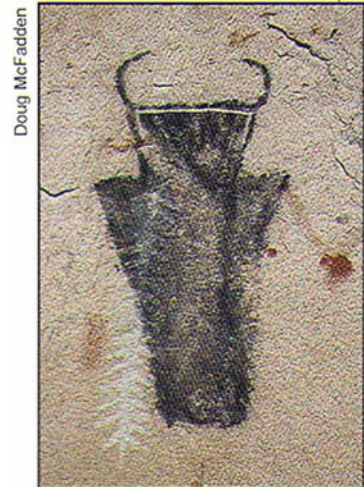
Bottom: Virgin Anasazi pictograph (Cave Valley style), Grand Staircase.

affiliation with other early sites on the Colorado Plateau. Inventories conducted on each of the monument's landscapes have documented Archaic open sites.

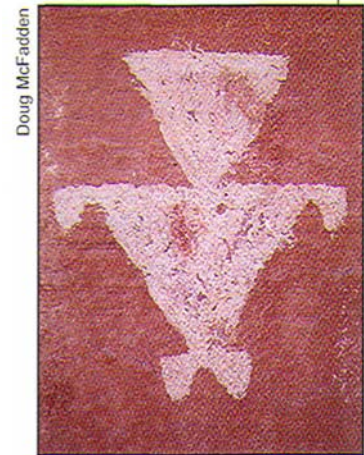
These are identified by a great variety of diagnostic projectile points ranging from early Archaic Pinto style through late Archaic Gypsum dart points.

Gypsum points are also found during the early agricultural period known as Basketmaker II on the Grand Staircase. This may indicate that agriculture here was adopted by the local population rather than introduced by migrants from the south. One important research question is whether or not the processes that led to the adoption of agriculture on the Grand Staircase, which eventually became Virgin Anasazi, were the same as those in the Escalante, which eventually emerged as Fremont?

Anasazi sites of the Agricultural period (A.D. 1-1250) are the most visible on the monument and have received the most attention from scholars. Several notable early archaeologists worked in the Grand Staircase region during the early twentieth century. Neil Judd conducted fieldwork in Cottonwood Canyon in 1919, and in 1920, Jesse Nusbaum excavated the famous Basketmaker II



Doug McFadden



Doug McFadden

site, Cave du Pont. In the 1930s, Julian Steward conducted an extensive survey and several excavations on the Grand Staircase portion of the monument.

The recent intensive inventory of large tracts of land by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) archaeologists has focused on understanding the distribution of different types of sites over the Grand Staircase landscape. Dispersed communities of agricultural farmsteads, with densities of up to 40 sites per square mile, occur in a variety of settings conducive to dry farming. The presence of both houses and large storage structures indicates a sedentary, year-round occupation. Careful documentation of architectural styles, site layouts, and ceramic types indicates these patterns of occupation spanned over 1,000 years - a remarkably long-lived adaptation that also suggests continuity between generations of local descent groups.

While the Virgin Anasazi were living in these dispersed communities, dry farming in the uplands, people of the Fremont culture were adapting to the well-watered canyon settings of the Escalante drainage. Unlike the sedentary Anasazi, the Fremont strategy appears to have been seasonally mobile. Clusters of pithouses best situated for big game hunting and winter residence, rather than farming, have been identified by recent inventories in the uplands. Inventories in the canyons have identified camps along arable segments suitable for summer occupation. Isolated storage granaries, concealed in the canyon walls, facilitated seasonal mobility between the two locations. These allowed the Fremont to secure seed corn for the *following* year and also provided short-term storage during their absence.

The Virgin Anasazi and Escalante Fremont sequences paralleled each other for several hundred years. Each was adapted to an exclusive setting and a way of life which involved virtually no interaction. About A.D. 1070, both areas were affected by the "Pueblo II expansion" - a sudden influx of traits from the Kayenta culture area of northeastern Arizona. These traits include linear masonry forms, Bull Creek projectile points, corrugated ceramics, and varied white ware designs, red wares, and orange wares.

These changes are most apparent on the eastern margin of the Kaiparowits Plateau, known as Fiftymile Mountain. Here, at about 7,400 feet, a small Fremont occupation,

Doug McFadden



Julian Steward's excavations at "Site 2" on the Grand Staircase revealed an adobe "pit lodge." These structures have recently been dated to the Pueblo I period and are now recognized as an architectural type unique to the Virgin Anasazi culture area.

evidenced by scattered pithouse rock alignments and small granaries concealed off-site, is replaced by a large Pueblo II occupation involving a new settlement pattern with diverse architectural styles and site layouts. In 1961, 11 Anasazi sites were excavated by the University of Utah (as part of the Glen Canyon salvage project). The excavators believed the occupants migrated from the Tsegi Canyon region of the Kayenta heartland. They also

assumed, based on mixing of ceramics, that the Fremont and Anasazi sites were contemporaneous. Recent tree-ring and radiocarbon dates indicate, however, that the Fremont and Anasazi occupations may have been sequential.

The nature of the Fremont! Anasazi relationship remains elusive: Did the Anasazi/Fremont form a "socio-cultural continuum" as has been suggested? Did they reside together - for at least a while? Did the populations

University of Utah



Three Forks Pueblo, Kaiparowits Plateau (excavated by the University of Utah in 1960).

simply "blend" as Jesse Jennings suggested for the nearby Coombs Site? Or does the unique settlement pattern on Fiftymile Mountain - neither Kayenta, Virgin, nor Fremont - suggest that some or all of these people "reinvented" themselves by combining knowledge and traditions to form a new, more suitable adaptation?

Sometime during the thirteenth century, puebloan occupation of the monument ceases. Following a hiatus of perhaps a century or less, the distinctive projectile points and ceramics of the Southern Paiute appear in the archaeological record. Considered the "Neo-Archaic" by some, the Southern Paiute way of life focused on hunting

panded into south-central Utah during the 1860s. Apart from the historic Paria town site, there are only light traces of Mormon use of the monument. The most intensive use of the landscape was grazing, which put severe pressure on the traditional Paiute foraging way of life. John Wesley Powell made the first ethnographic observations on the Paiute during his stay in Kanab while conducting his historic triangulation surveys during the 1870s (triangulation cairns occur on the monument). During the 1930s, ethnographer Isabel Kelly described traditional uses on the monument by both the Kaibab and Kaiparowits Paiute bands.

Regarding the fate of the Paiute way of life, Kelly says:

This kaleidoscope of experiences and of exposure to culture change can only be described as dramatic. It must also have been traumatic.

Clearly, there are tremendous opportunities for researching all forms of culture change on the monument. During the past 8,000 years, major adaptive changes occurred due to external social influences, climatic shifts, and environmental change. In contrast, there was a *lack* of significant change and interaction during some periods. In fact, the long-term stability of the puebloan occupation seems particularly remarkable. Building upon a foundation of previous research, the monument's cultural resource program will not only protect these cultural resource values, but will encourage archaeological inquiry to develop and enhance them.

Doug McFadden



Fremont granaries (ca. A.D. 900) built under a rock ledge.

and gathering. Indeed, the widespread distribution of camps and activity areas over a variety of environmental settings evidences a highly mobile way of life with little or no agriculture. Paiute culture seems to have been stable until the mid-nineteenth century.

Mormon settlement, which was characterized by a village pattern along streams capable of providing irrigation water, ex-

The New National Monuments of the Southwest

Name	Acres	Date of Proclamation
Grand Staircase-Escalante	1,900,000	September 18, 1996
Agua Fria	71,100	January 11, 2000
Grand Canyon-Parashant	1,014,000	January 11, 2000
Canyons of the Ancients	164,000	June 9, 2000
Ironwood Forest	134,750	June 9, 2000
Vermilion Cliffs	293,000	November 9, 2000
Sonoran Desert	487,000	January 17, 2001