

Archaeology Field School Reunion 2023: The Relics Revisit the Ruins

David Mudrick [NOTE: This personal memoir is an addendum to “My ‘Anasazi’ Summer”.]

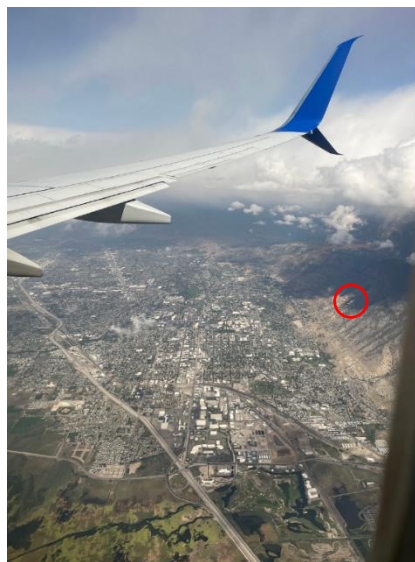
In conjunction with the production of the anthology commemorating the history of the BYU Archaeology Field School, now forty-seven to fifty-five years later, depending literally on who’s counting, eleven Camp Cottonwood veterans and five of their family members were able to gather for a reunion. My children convinced me that I should attend, and my son-in-law, Josh Ostraff, offered to accompany me in light of my own health issues. He would also be able to visit his family in Fairview, south of Provo. So, 9:30 am Saturday morning, September 23, 2023, found us in Monticello, Utah, assembling with the rest of the group outside the Rodeway Inn on US Route 191 where most of us were staying. [Yelp take note: If you’re planning a stay at that Rodeway Inn and you have a hankering for salt, make sure to bring your own. When asked for some, the manager declared unapologetically it was bad for you, and they didn’t provide any. There was black pepper despite some claims that it is a neurotoxin. While I’m at it, also note: The pictures below are mostly mine. If otherwise, they are so noted and/or used with permission.]

The largest reunion contingent from a single year was mine, 1972, comprised of then-students Blaine Miller, Don Miller (not related), Glenna Nielsen (Grimm), Rita Souther, and me. The remaining veterans included Judy Conner (Propper) (crew chief 1969), Grace Stitely (Duffy) (1969), Deanne Gurr (Matheny) (1971), Pam Wilder (Blaine Miller) (1971), Winston Hurst (1973), and Giovanni Tata (1977). Five of the alumni had also participated in subsequent years in other activities based at Camp Cottonwood, as lab supervisors and survey cooks, crews, and crew chiefs. Deanne’s failing health precluded her from joining us in most of our activities, and, sadly, less than a month later, on October 17, she passed away. Her daughters Julia and Nikki accompanied her to the reunion, as did Don’s wife Tamsin, Giovanni’s daughter Hannah, and, of course, my son-in-law Josh.

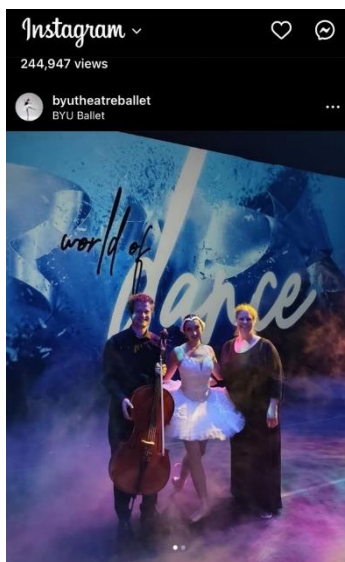
Josh and I had flown into Salt Lake City Thursday afternoon in time to get our rental pickup truck before heading south to Provo... well, in time to attempt to pick up the pickup, which I had reserved specifically to ensure better clearance on the canyon roads over the weekend. After waiting an hour or so with no surety of ever getting the truck, we settled for a small SUV at the same rate and with nominally better clearance than a sedan. With less time than originally planned, we headed south to Provo where we found a little family-owned Mexican restaurant specializing in tamales for dinner, made a quick visit to the Museum of Art at BYU, which was presenting works by Maynard Dixon selected from their collection, and headed over to the Marriott Center, where my granddaughter/Josh’s niece Isabella was performing “The Dying Swan” in BYU’s *World of Dance* spectacular. She was spectacular. Following the show and a brief visit with the alive and well swan, Josh drove us for another hour south to Fairview where we spent the night at his parents’ home and where Josh was able to visit with his grandmother.

The next morning we were on the road to Capitol Reef National Park, which lies within the 100-mile long Waterpocket Fold, to meet up with Josh’s youngest brother Ethan. As Josh drove, my just seeing the changing vistas of pinyon-studded hills, layered sandstone, and sculpted buttes was balm for the soul, not having been back to that part of Utah for a few decades. The small towns—Gunnison, Loa, Lyman, Bicknell, and so on—spaced like a handful of beads on a long string, invoked memories of past adventures and of a dear departed friend, Julia Anderson. We arrived at Ethan’s government housing, from where he took us in his pickup for a long backroad tour of the Cathedral Valley portion of the park. Then Josh and I were back on the highway for three more hours that included changing views of the mythical Bears Ears as we navigated southeasterly to a gap in Comb Ridge and pushed on to the unsalted inn where we would spend the next two nights.

Picture Section A1: Pictures between Salt Lake City and Monticello, Utah, enroute to the reunion



Approaching Salt Lake City from the south over Provo. Brigham Young University's block letter "Y" (highlighted) is visible in the cloud shadow on Y Mountain.



Granddaughter Isabella and her accompanists in "The Dying Swan," one of the numbers in BYU's *World of Dance* presentation.



Maynard Dixon's singular ability to capture the essence of Southern Utah is evident in this painting, *Diana's Throne*, in an exhibition of his works at the BYU Museum of Art that Josh and I viewed on Thursday evening after our arrival in Utah and prior to Isabella's performance.

Arriving at Josh's parents' home in Fairview late at night, we headed south the next morning through Maynard Dixon's country to Capitol Reef National Park to meet up with Josh's brother, Ethan. Just being back in the desert lifted my spirits. Through the car windows we got a progressive lesson in geology and geography, from irrigated fields hard against rock formations to upturned strata showing differential erosion to the small towns strung like beads along the road.



Even the least spectacular vistas held my gaze, so it was good Josh was driving. The terrain became more stratified and vertical as we approached Capitol Reef from the west, as you can see out Josh's side window. At Ethan's government housing in the park, the cliffs rose right across the street, top and bottom right, so close their tops were mostly blocked by the modest overhang of his porch.





Josh and I stand next to Glass Mountain enroute to Cathedral Valley in Capitol Reef National Park, with the tall Temple of the Sun and small Temple of the Moon in the background, outlier outcrops of Entrada sandstone. The "mountain" is a deposit of translucent gypsum crystals. All three of these formations are the result of softer materials having eroded around them, leaving them exposed. Ethan was wary of an annular solar eclipse scheduled to pass directly over the region soon after our visit, that threatened to bring hoards of people to this spot because of its sun-moon association. The mostly unpaved trail we drove to arrive here, not to mention the fragility of the desert environment, would not easily accommodate an overflow of enthusiasts in cars lacking sufficient road clearance.



This relatively smooth stretch of trail, left, accesses the Cathedrals, vertical sandstone ridges capped by a paler rock.

Ethan and Josh contemplate the Gypsum Sinkhole, right, an anti-Glass Mountain. A gypsum plug buried here dissolved over time, creating a cavity that collapsed, forming a 200-foot deep pit.



Hours and miles later, after leaving Ethan, Josh and I passed two controversial landmarks, left, an upper arm of Lake Powell almost empty from extended drought and oversubscribed water-use, and right, the crouching Bears Ears, iconic bellwether for a battle over government vs private land rights in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.



Farther south, we approached the great wall of Comb Ridge and the notch through which the road would pass, left, to which we ascended, below, and passed through, heading east to Blanding.



The view north from Blanding to Monticello was dominated by the Abajo Mountains and increasingly obscured by bug hits.



After shopping in Monticello, we headed to our motel in the fading light as my camera focused on the day's insect collection.

Saturday morning we found Blaine, Pam, and Rita at the salt-free ad hoc breakfast bar in the hotel lobby. Rita was the only field school classmate other than Bruce Verhaaren with whom I was still in touch, although I hadn't seen her for a few years. The remaining adventurers appeared from their rooms or arrived at the hotel prior to our 9:30 rendezvous time. In the interim I caught up a bit with Blaine, Don, and Glenna. I wanted to introduce myself to Giovanni Tata and ask him about his BYU job title, Director, Creative Works, and motioned Josh over to join me since his dad was an art professor at the Y, but before I could open my mouth, Josh told Giovanni that Josh had been in Giovanni's home. Josh's father, Joe, and Giovanni were friends through the school.

Winston, an alumnus and a denizen of the area, would be our guide for two days of touring significant archaeological sites, including some of our own excavations, and other places of interest. Once on the road, he led the way in his pickup south past the expanded precincts of Monticello and then turned left onto a deliberately unmarked gravel exit off the main highway. From that point on, his lead vehicle raised a rooster tail of dust to be eaten and enlarged by the rest of us. Still, the road surface seemed better than when I traveled the same route on my solo drive from Provo to Camp Cottonwood in July 1972—better as in less unimproved and with no extreme wash crossings or quick-mud flats—although I had forgotten the impressive drop in elevation from the highway to the canyon floor, some 1,400 feet in only a few miles, which I assume hadn't changed since field school. However, the upper reaches of the canyon now looked greener to me, in some places almost overgrown, unlike the sparse desertscape typical of southern Utah. This was due in part to the preceding winter and spring's heavy snow and rainfall, during which temporary new waterfalls appeared everywhere along the canyon walls. It looked like Montezuma Creek's arroyo had widened, especially farther downstream. In fact, we learned later that portions of some ancient sites had been washed away in the process, which reminded me of my sighting a fallen section of the arroyo wall that contained a burial when on survey in 1972.

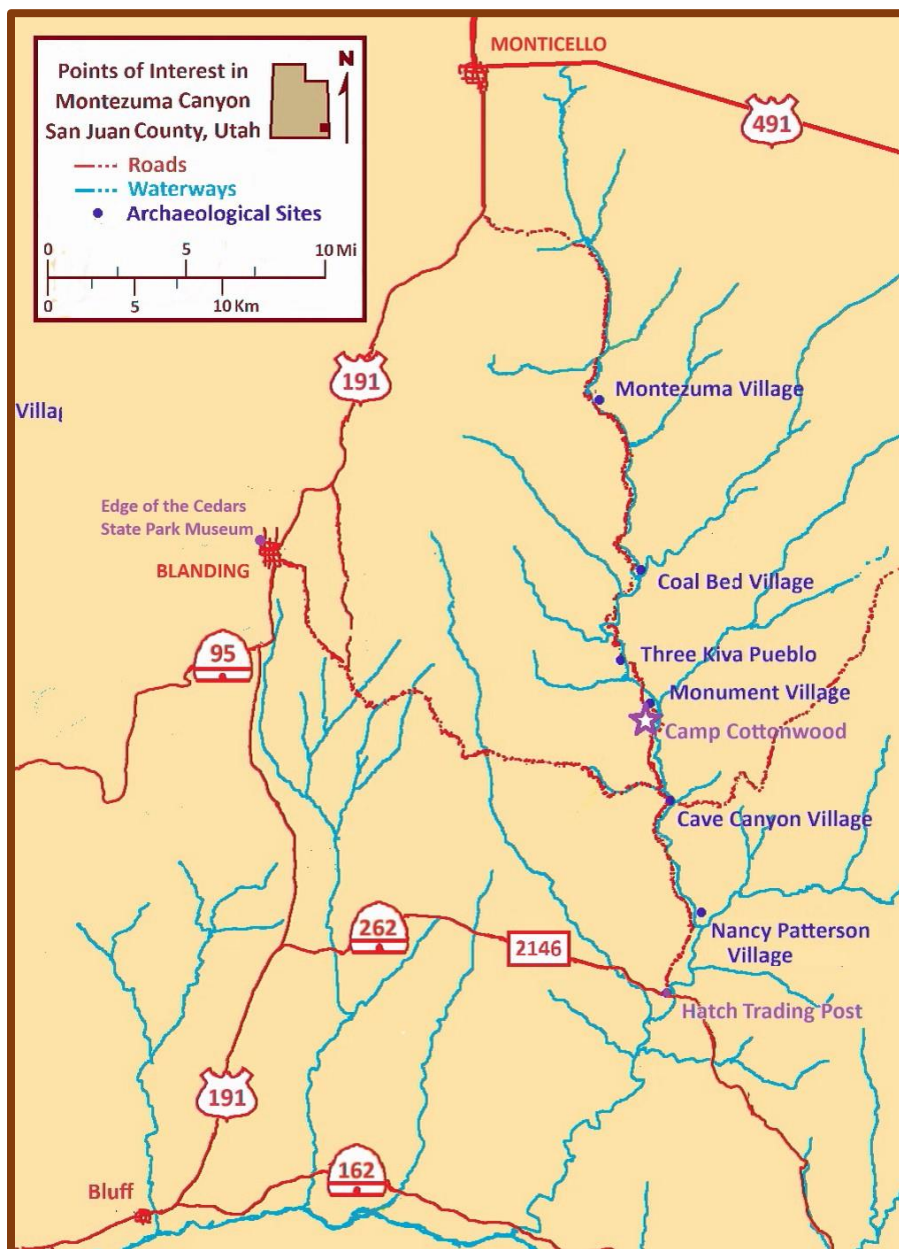
As we drove down the upper reaches of the canyon floor, the area also seemed to me to be almost densely populated—by local standards, that is—meaning I could see more than one habitation at a time, in some places one following another in quick succession. Modernity had also arrived, with handsome houses looking as if they had been planned, as opposed to settled over time. The formerly thinly distributed pickups were replaced by myriad up-to-date cars, trucks, and SUVs. Several of the numerous natural alcoves in the sandstone cliffs bordering the canyon, favored by the Ancestral Puebloans for some of their houses and granaries, now sheltered fuel tanks and trailers, sheds and storage structures, and even homes, indicated by walls and windows spanning the natural arched openings. Most startling to me was a commercial vineyard, with its rows of grapevines stretching away on both sides of the road. However, the profusion of local flora still included pinyon and juniper, rabbitbrush and creosote bush, and desert sunflower and thistle. To be sure, the area was still remote and sparsely populated in the normal sense of those words.

Our first stop was at the home and ranch headquarters of Hoot and Lyla Ransdell, longtime canyon residents and avid supporters of the local archaeological work. Hoot confirmed my thoughts that the arroyo had expanded significantly since the '70s, which he blamed on years of cattle grazing that had removed vegetation that would have slowed further erosion, supplemented by the past season's surprise precipitation. In 2021, the Ransdells, significant landowners in the canyon, transferred ownership of land containing the ruins of a major site now labeled Montezuma Village, minus their five-acre homesite, to the Archaeological Conservancy for long-term preservation. From their front porch, it was a short walk through a gate in a high barbed-wire fence onto the site. There, impossible to miss, sherds of broken pottery littered the ground underfoot, ranging in size from large pieces to fragments and varied in material, decoration, and the time period in which they had been created. Under the Antiquities Act

and/or other rules concerning public lands, unless you had a permit, any artifacts found, including the ubiquitous potsherds, were only to be examined and left in place.

Winston pointed out various pits, mounds, and wall remnants, identifying them as once having been kivas, a multistoried great house, and other structures. A few of us, not including me, were already familiar with the site. Dr Matheny had been instrumental in first surveying and excavating this large Ancestral Puebloan village, including some pioneering survey work by small plane. I was told some of his ashes had been scattered there at an earlier reunion. This morning Deanne, his widow and former field school student and staff member, had been too weak to accompany us on our tour of the canyon, but her daughters drove her down later to visit the Ransdells, who were good friends of theirs.

Picture Section A2: Montezuma Canyon map and Reunion Day 1 through Montezuma Village



This map features sites visited during the first day of the reunion, plus the Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum the next morning. From there a small contingent traveled to Cedar Mesa to look down on the cliff-embedded ruins at Picket Fork, off this map some 26 or so miles southwest of Blanding.

I traced features from Scott Ure's map in the anthology to create the base for this map. The archaeological sites are limited to those related to the reunion. Road indications are questionable, especially off the numbered routes, as are many of the waterways where I tried to trace what appeared to be the upper reaches of canyons. If these exist and do have water, it's likely only seasonal. The main channel of Montezuma Creek, running south through the reunion sites and beyond Hatch Trading Post, and the east-to west bed of the San Juan River which the creek intersects at the bottom of the map are fairly accurate.



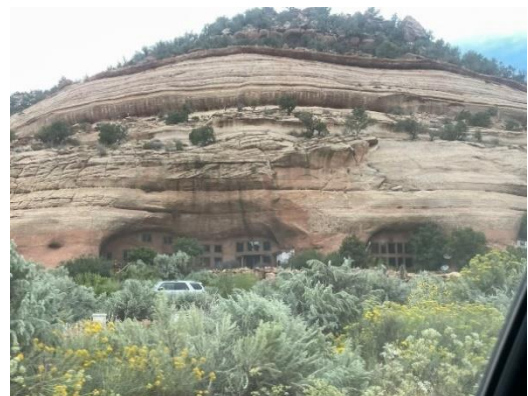
Saturday, September 23, 2023, “We few, we aging few,” the Relics Revisit the Ruins Tour officially kicks off under the awning of the Rodeway Inn in Monticello, Utah. Kneeling, L to R, Don Miller, Glenna Nielsen-Grimm, Julia Matheny. Standing, L to R, David Mudrick, Grace Stitely Duffy, Josh Ostraff, Hannah Tata, Rita Souther, Giovanni Tata, Pam Wilder Miller, Blaine Miller, Winston Hurst, Judy Conner Propper (holding the anthology draft), and Nikki Matheny. Absent from the picture but shown in the insets are Deanne Gurr Matheny, top, recovering from illness, who joined us for dinner and for the visit to the Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum the following day, and Don’s wife, Tamsin Miller, bottom, who took the group picture and Deanne’s. I’m not sure who took Tamsin’s but it was in her picture file.



Winston's white pickup, two vehicles ahead, led our little caravan south out of town. He suddenly turned left onto the unmarked, unpaved canyon road and kicked up a rooster tail of dust. Being third wasn't too bad, but it got progressively worse for the rest.



For longer than I remembered fifty-one years later, the road dropped in a series of sharp switchbacks and steep descents, as the canyon rim and the highway we had left rose higher and higher above us.



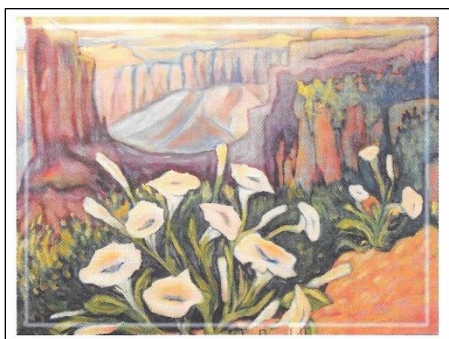
The Entrada and/or Navajo sandstone strata forming the upper canyon walls and found throughout the region supported the formation of alcoves, which provided a sort of prehistoric climate control for the early inhabitants of the area. Perhaps first employed as shelter, eventually permanent structures such as granaries, homes, and entire settlements were constructed within their protective ceilings. In the canyon today, on private land, modern homes, garages, and other facilities echo their ancient predecessors, perhaps proving that even across subsequent eras the more things change, the more they stay the same.



Along with the expanded population, other obvious changes to the physical environment included excessive greenery for this arid locale—maybe not so arid, partially due to the preceding year’s unprecedented snowfall and melt. This may have contributed to increased erosion of Montezuma Creek’s arroyo and affected the vineyard straddling the road to our east, left, and west, right.



As I was writing this, I decided to look up the vineyard and found the website for Montezuma Canyon Ranch & Vineyards, LLC, which contained the aerial photo above (© 2024, Montezuma Canyon Ranch & Vineyards, LLC). It looks north up canyon toward where we entered. The land has changed, at least superficially, but Mother Nature is never fully compliant. Their website relates that a catastrophic freeze in the winter of 2021-22 caused their vines to die back to the ground, from which they are recuperating. Not sure if the recent wet weather would have been helpful or harmful. You can see the arroyo winding its way south from upstream, center left, behind the line of trees, to the right side of the photograph.



Our first stop was at the Ransdells’ ranch headquarters and home, which stood next to a large quonset hut, upper left, that was kind of an inverse copy of the sandstone alcoves, a metal “outie” vs the rock “innies.” We visited with Lyla and Hoot, center (Tamsin’s photo), on their spacious porch, upper right, then walked behind their house and through a gate in a high barbed-wire fence into the adjacent site of Montezuma Village. The Ransdells’ primary home is in Fruitland, New Mexico, so we were fortunate to see them here. Lyla is an accomplished artist, and she and Josh, a college studio-art professor, talked about art and art education. She gifted him with a pack of note cards featuring some of her artwork, which she also sells locally at the gift store run by the vineyards. To me her style is whimsical and informed, true to her desert home, as illustrated by this card, “Jimson Weed,” left (© Lyla Ransdell, 2017).



Under darkening skies, worrisome but blocking the hot sun, we walked through scrub to the mounds and pits comprising the remaining exposed features of the South Great House at Montezuma Village. Some of us, with canes, walking sticks, and poles in hand, navigated more carefully than others.



Winston, pointing down, describing the site to Glenna, Rita, Judy, Blaine, and Josh. This "village" was once a major population center in the canyon.



My compromised balance, above, forced me to look down at potsherds of which Josh's photos, below, provide a sampling.



Back in the day, I might have identified this as PIII black-on-white ware, but I'd be making it up like I am now. The ability to classify and date these artifacts is an important key to labeling sites correctly.



Is this or is there a PIII black-on-white ware?



This is corrugated ware, used for domestic purposes. The coils building up the pot are left unsmoothed but are crimped together with a burnishing tool or finger. Sometimes fingerprints are visible in the clay. Sometimes you can't make this stuff up.

Surgeon General's Warning: I feel compelled to remind you to take any archaeological references herein with a doubtful heart and a whether eye (as opposed to weather eye), as in whether or not there could be anything accurate in them.



Speaking of weather, maybe we had a drop or two of rain before the sky lightened and we set off south again, but not enough to clean the dust-and-dead-bug medium on the windshield, left and right. So, on to Coal Bed Village, our next destination.

The next stop farther down the road on the relics-visit-the-ruins tour was the archaeological site of Coal Bed Village. The following passage from an informative sign at the rustic parking area provides a brief introduction to the site:

This large Ancestral Puebloan community center is now referred to as Coal Bed Village. Hundreds of people lived here when the village flourished around 1150-1250 CE. It may have been the center of a broader community in this part of Montezuma Canyon and part of a larger political network. During this period, the climate became hotter and drier. It became harder to farm on the high mesas. People moved into canyons like this that had good access to water and formed strong community bonds.

A short hike with some uphill stretches led us from our vehicles to an ancient entrance plaza, probably used for ceremonies, which contained the remnants of a wide staircase bordered by a row of standing stones. From there the site wrapped around the hillside flanks of a small butte. Much of the site had eroded away due to its position on a slope overlooking the creek, but in what remained, archaeologists found the ruins of two great houses, kivas, and other structures. A steep trail which we didn't have time to follow led to the top of the butte, which Winston reported contained an additional ruin.

Our aging crew had various abilities and disabilities, with some of us being more agile and sure footed than others. I surprised myself by being able to keep up with Winston, despite my cane and the loss of the balance center in one ear. We each knew our limitations and acted accordingly, although these were people who in field school and in their careers in archaeology had scaled cliffs and dropped into precariously located sites in the course of their work. I, too, had had some similar experience climbing and spelunking, including a 140-foot free rappel into Hell Hole, an infamous sinkhole in West Virginia, but those days were in my ancient past. Josh accompanied me on this trip in part to drive the long distances, as well as ensure my safe passage across the airports with their interminable terminals.

Winston showed us USGS LIDAR images of the region that indicated a great number of previously unidentified ancient constructions, including extensive ritual roads and vast areas with agricultural berms and other water and erosion control structures, stretching into the Chaco Canyon area of influence toward Mesa Verde far to the east. Such an infrastructure would have been necessary to support the population indicated by the size and number of sites found in Montezuma Canyon and the surrounding area. These discoveries may revolutionize our understanding of the Ancestral Puebloan environment. Winston has presented some of his findings and I assume will continue to do so in the future.

After returning to the parking area to lunch on our bag lunches—Josh and I had sandwiches purchased that morning from the Subway in Monticello—our caravan continued down Montezuma Canyon. We stopped briefly to observe the stone and adobe structures of Honeycomb and Bradford Canyon Ruins, perched in the cliff faces above us, from the road. The next full stop was at Three Kiva Pueblo, the renamed and partially restored site 42Sa863 that we excavated over the years of field school. The BLM had replaced our roof on Kiva 1 with a more robust one capable of supporting a stream of visitors... or at least a steady trickle, considering the relative remoteness of Montezuma Canyon. Returning to the site after fifty-one years was less surprising than I might have expected, partly because I had recently seen YouTube videos of the area including a visit to the kiva. The second restoration of the kiva had been thorough and substantial. After descending the permanent ladder through the square opening in the roof, we could see the thick logs forming the cribbing that supported the remainder of the ceiling. The niches and other ritual features stood out in the light coming in from overhead.

We took group photos on the roof, after which people wandered the site to identify and examine areas where they had labored in the past, shoveling fill into screens or brushing a newly exposed packed-earth

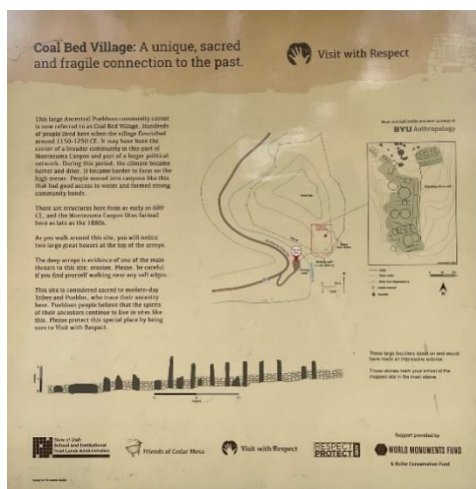
floor or running to push a wheelbarrow up a board to dump excavated earth onto a growing mound away from the site, all the while battling whatever Nature had to throw at us, from fire ants to heat stroke. Only the top courses of the stone wall enclosing Room #5, which Glenna, I, and others had dug down to where we had to pitch shovelfuls backward over our heads remained above ground, the room having been refilled to stabilize the kiva on the other side of the wall. It is a common practice to rebury excavations that are not being left exposed for some other purpose.

A short drive downstream from Three Kiva Pueblo brought us to the large meander in Montezuma Creek that had formerly defined three sides of Camp Cottonwood. The enclosed area still contained a large stand of cottonwood trees, but several of the more venerable ones had succumbed to the inevitable triumph of gravity. The buildings and other indications of what had stood there were gone, having been removed or auctioned off after the final season of field school. Only the valves capping the artesian wellhead remained. Once more we lapsed into reminiscent pointing and speculating—"The lab was... here!"—accompanied by the taking of more individual and group photographs.

After a sufficient and respectful time, we mounted up and continued south through the widening southern reaches of the canyon. I recognized some of the features from my slides and remembered others, like the triangular-rectangular high-tension-line towers that fifty years ago I likened to a battalion of giant kachinas marching in well-spaced single file across the landscape. We stopped briefly and stood by the road to identify an intervening canyon, farther up which lay the "rainmaker" petroglyph I discussed in the 1972-73 memoir. The next stop-and-point spot at the site of Cave Canyon Village, which was comprised of two components, the Basketmaker on a mound on our side of the road and the Puebloan on the other side. We had time to visit neither and shortly moved on to stop on the road once again opposite the large, privately owned site named Nancy Patterson Village, which lay on a hill across Montezuma Creek. It had been excavated by archaeologists and exploited by pothunters. Our last stop for the day was the more recent historic site of Hatch Trading Post, closed for years but allegedly being restored by a new owner, where we broke out bottles of cream soda brought along for the trip in memory of the Old Red Eye brand once sold there. The interior, to which we had access through Winston, who got a key from the owners, was new to me as on my only previous trip to Hatch's, we had arrived after closing time and then dropped our right front wheel into a ditch on the way back to camp. A brief pow-wow determined that the position of the descending sun indicated our need to return to Monticello in time to prepare for our group dinner that night. The drive west to the main highway, then north through Blanding to Monticello gave us different perspectives of Comb Ridge, the Bears Ears, the Abajo Mountains, and the Sleeping Ute, each backlit or illuminated by the lowering sun depending on whether they lay to our west, north, or east.

We dispersed to our various rooms and lodgings to shake off the palpable canyon dust and wash for dinner. Like the missing salt, the hotel swimming pool was unavailable to aid our efforts, "closed for maintenance," which I suspected was scheduled to end at some yet to be determined far future date, but no doubt not filled with salt water. We reconvened that evening at the Granary Bar and Grill in the Grist Mill Inn just off the road that ran east from town to the Colorado border. Our obsequious server, Charles, I think, spent the first ten or fifteen minutes taking down the individual orders from our group members who now numbered eighteen. I would have liked to have been able to hear the band we had passed on our way to our larger dining room, which was playing an old folk-country standard as we were ushered through the bar. The menu was limited and the fare passible, with conversation mostly only possible with our closest neighbors due to the length of the table we occupied. Poor Winston, a seemingly gentle, retiring soul, was seated to my right and therefore subject to my relatively uneducated questions about archaeology and an occasional obscure joke, although I tempered my repartee on his behalf. Deanne and her daughters arrive a bit after the rest of us, who were all heartened that she was able to attend.

Picture Section A3: Coal Bed Village through the end of Reunion Day 1



Left, at Coal Bed Village's rude parking area, Blaine, Pam, and Judy read an informative sign, that, center, shows a walk of about 1,000 ft across the creekbed to the entrance of the site, where there is a wall alignment of standing stones, called megaliths, right (photo by Tamsin Miller). I photographed the sign because I decided it might helpful later, as in this memoir.



In this patchwork panorama, above, extracted from a video clip, Blaine is near the megaliths; Pam, Glenna, and Judy are listening to Winston's description of the site; and Rita, Tamsin, and Don are viewing things in three directions. The site was significantly larger than this.

Not far off to the right of Don, above, where Tamsin might have been looking, Josh, right, is either viewing or photographing what looks like a line of potsherds or maybe making an offering to the god of canyon roads that nothing would tear a hole in the undercarriage of our not-a-pickup truck rental car.

Left, much of the site lay along a deep arroyo and was succumbing to erosion, dropping into the creek bed beyond these foreground ruins.



Winston shares LIDAR images, below, indicating previously unimagined Puebloan agricultural and ritual road development. Giovanni looks on, left, as he describes some area specifics.



Left, we spread out for lunch on the hill overlooking the parking area. Notice the site sign in the background.

Rita and Glenna join Blaine and Pam, right, finding a log seat, with Josh and Winston in the fore and background.





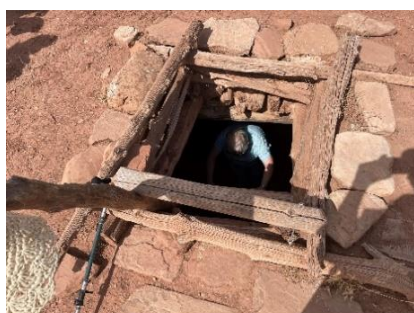
Enroute to Three Kiva Pueblo, we stopped to view some cliff dwellings, above, at the junction of Bradford and Montezuma Canyons. Another party was in the parking lot in the background, so we remained in a pullout at the side of the road.



At the entrance to Three Kiva Pueblo—the name given to site 42Sa836 by the BLM—Don and Tamsin, left, and the 1972 alumni, Don, Rita, Glenna, Blaine, and me, right. We were all in Steve Hayes' excavation crew, which stabilized the site and roofed Kiva 1. (Photos from, if not both by Tamsin Miller)



Left, the field school alumni with the exception of Deanne pose atop Kiva 1: Left to right, Judy, Grace, Pam, Winston, Blaine, David, Rita, Glenna, Don, and Giovanni (photo by Josh). Note the up-canyon vista. The BLM reconstructed the roof to literally support tourism. Below left, Rita stows her walking stick and trademark floppy hat to descend the ladder into the kiva. Below center, you can see the beams and cribbing supporting the roof over Josh and Giovanni. Below right, Winston, Glenna, Blaine, and Pam at the north wall, I think. If so, the overlay outlines Room #5, which I think is the one Glenna, I, and others excavated over our heads in 1972 and which was then refilled to stabilize the kiva.





The alumni band has returned to Camp Cottonwood, or at least to the location of the once historic and now mythic Camp Cottonwood. There's not much obvious physical evidence of its existence at the site, most of it having been above ground level and subsequently packed up and carted away or auctioned off and removed. I suspect that below the surface there was less presence than the footprint of a prehistoric pit house. The natural site was recovering, and some of the larger cottonwood trees had toppled during the intervening fifty or so years. We speculated on what had been where, not always agreeing (photo by Tamsin Miller).



The artesian well head, right, was the only remaining tangible camp artifact I could find and probably one of the few locations we might all agree on.



Rita found a bleached skull that might be bovine or cervid (deer), so we'll accept the most logical answer, extraterrestrial.



I took this picture to have at least one with our two photographers Judy, left most, and Tamsin, next, cameras at hand, but neither looked this way. Blaine, Don, Glenna, Winston, and Pam complete the sweep to the right.



After a respectful period of time, with the site going back to Nature, "breeding sunflowers out of the dead land," left, and with no Jane from which to view Rita's unnamed hill, below, it was time to saddle up and wheeze on down the road, right.



On the way to Hatch Trading Post, we stopped a couple times to view sites from the road. Left, Glenna points to the Basketmaker component of Cave Canyon Village, where she was a crew chief in 1976. The Puebloan component lay on the other side of the road. Similarly, farther down the highway, Nancy Patterson Village, right, a large, privately owned site, lay across the unpaved canyon road and beyond Montezuma Creek. I remembered hearing about mechanized pothunting at the site during my brief return in 1973. I also remembered the single-file march of the kachina-like power-line towers, center, that crossed our path between Cave Canyon and Nancy Patterson. I may not have been the only one who thought much about it, especially if there was an archaeological survey of the planned route, but I'm pretty sure no one else wanted a picture of them.



At Hatch's, Winston had a key from the current owners, who have plans to resurrect it in some form. From somewhere a dog barked the whole time. Above left, Giovanni, Hannah, and Tamsin head inside. Above right, Grace is beguiled by the old horseshoe-studded bench and happily succumbs, right.

Inside, old display cases and goods are reminiscent of past times, but not for me, as my one trip to Hatch arrived after closing. Outside again, we rescued Grace and drank a toast with bottled cream soda brought for the occasion to the Old Red Eye once sold there.



Leaving Hatch's, we drive west, far left, toward Comb Ridge and the Bears Ears, to intersect US-191, then north toward Blanding, left, with the Sleeping Ute in Colorado on our right to the east, and on to Monticello and dinner.

Sunday morning we gathered at Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum on the west side of Blanding. Josh and I had started for there early, after packing and checking out. As we drove south from Monticello, we noted the unmarked left-hand entrance to Montezuma Canyon Road we had negotiated only a day before but an adventure later and watched the Bears Ears, which were poking above the horizon, this time on our right, track us for miles. We arrived in Blanding with plenty of time to make our scheduled rendezvous, so we did a quick tour. Blanding surprised me with its vitality. My former association with it was admittedly limited, but it seemed then to be a dusty Mormon desert ranch and farm town, with a bit of a locals-versus-archaeologists attitude. I use the term Mormon fully aware that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has asked that its members, the press, and others no longer refer to it by that name, which I use in the same way as Anasazi, in the context of its time. It was a label coined by enemies of the church, although that spirit has diminished over the years, similarly to the Navajo term Anasazi for their “ancient enemies” being applied to the ancestors of today’s Pueblo peoples instead of a label in tune with their own prehistory.

Blanding seemed now to embrace its prehistory, as well as its future. The sign for the Blanding Visitors Center sported an Ancestral Pueblo motif. Welcome banners from Utah State University Blanding Campus hung from the streetlamps that lined the main road. Therein lay another story, with the town’s church-member founders in 1897 envisioning a future higher educational resource, not only for their children but also for the Native American children in the region. That dream struggled to become reality over the next eight decades but appeared in 1977 as the fledgling Blanding extension of the College of Eastern Utah, then centered in Price, eventually to become part of USU, which is responsible for education in rural regions of the state. BYU was a contributor to an earlier effort, and Winston, Blanding born and raised, had co-founded the White Mesa Institute, which brought in notable outside university authorities during their off seasons, as part of the CEU educational offerings.

The Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum, a “Museum of Native American Culture and Art with an emphasis on the Ancestral Pueblo Culture” according to its Facebook page, was the embodiment of that spirit, as well, celebrating the ancients in an attractive, educational, and professional manner. It housed an impressive collection of artifacts and presentations on the prehistory of Four Corners and its peoples. It also showcased contemporary art and cooperative efforts with the local communities. Winston led our tour, speaking authoritatively on the artifacts, having excavated a number of them himself or otherwise being familiar with their discovery and significance. He and other field school alumni had contributed significantly to the development of the museum. Coincidentally, I recently learned from a friend in our ward in Reston, Hugh Redd, that his own family, long-term Blanding residents, had donated many artifacts to the museum following the tightening of controls over the disposition and ownership of antiquities. A partially restored great house complex lay on the museum grounds and included an accessible kiva similar to ours at Three Kiva Pueblo. Informative signage spoke to important aspects of what we were seeing and its larger context. At 6,100 feet elevation, although 1,000 feet lower than Monticello, the museum grounds offered an impressive panoramic view in all directions.

Several of us, including Josh and me, departed the reunion from the museum to begin our return home. Winston led those remaining, Grace, Judy, Don, and Tamsin, to Cedar Mesa some thirty miles to the west and up not quite impassible roads to look down onto the cliff dwellings at Picket Fork tucked under the overhanging rimrock and now unreachable in our present stage of life. Josh and I had agreed to forgo that last excursion to allow us to arrive in Fairview in time for dinner with his family and to give him more time with his grandmother Nola. She had been declining in health rapidly and, in fact, died about six weeks after our visit. Her condition was one reason that Josh had accompanied me on the trip, although he was also keen on visiting the archaeological sites and learning more about that field from the ground

up... and down. He returned to Utah afterward to attend her funeral, but he was grateful to have been able to spend this additional time with her while she was still alive and cognizant, as was I, who had visited her and others of Josh's family over the years.

We took a different route back to Fairview that would definitely be more trafficked than our Friday trip via Capitol Reef, and not just because of weekend traffic. The road ran north through the heavily commercialized strip connecting Moab and the entrance to Arches National Park, then on to meet I-70 at Crescent Junction. In 1970, I had used that intersection as an excuse to exit from a promising east-bound ride while hitchhiking to Boulder, Colorado, on my way back to Maryland after visiting Pat in Provo. The east-west road then, prior to the completion of I-70, was US Rt 6. I had gotten the ride around Green River and was sharing the back seat with a couple also hitchhiking, when the front-seat passenger said to the driver, "I wonder whose car this is." He opened the glove compartment and read the registration, "Dr [so and so], Portland, Oregon," which he then tossed out the window. They had stolen the car there and were now proceeding at a rapid rate east toward Denver. Figuring they would sooner or later be stopped by the Utah Highway Patrol, I announced that I had a sudden hankering to visit the recently established Canyonlands National Park south of Crescent Junction, which we were approaching. With mixed feelings I watched them disappear into the desert to the east, abandoning hope of reaching Boulder by sunset. In fact, it wouldn't happen until a full day later. I was stuck there for the next two hours trying to flag down another ride, including a UHP cruiser that had been parked up the highway watching me for a half hour. They roared by. Traffic was almost nonexistent. The very occasional freight train rumbling past on the Denver and Rio Grande Western (Dirty Rotten Going West) tracks that ran parallel to Rt 6 and the Book Cliffs to the north were almost as frequent as the cars heading east. I occupied myself by singing over and over the words of a recently released Charlie Pride song about hitchhiking, "Is anybody goin' to San Antone or Phoenix, Arizona?" only he was dealing with wind and rain while I was standing in the hot sun.

Flashback over, Josh and I stopped briefly at the classic (as in old and funky) gas station at the junction before driving west on the interstate past Green River, where we turned northwest on the liberated US Rt 6 toward Price, the reverse route I hitchhiked fifty-three years before. Less than an hour later, we exited that road to head southwest to Huntington, then northwest to Fairview, following a lovely route through the mountains. Fall was not far off, and the first changes of color, crimson stands of scrub oak and maple and golden groves of quaking aspen, were appearing on the slopes above and around us. Josh pointed out an area where he and his dad had shot an elk. Within two months of our flight home, Josh would return to Fairview for his grandmother Nola's funeral, sometime after which, he and his dad would take down another elk in the same area to provide meat for the coming winter. By late afternoon we descended Fairview Canyon into the Sanpete Valley to Josh's parents' home. Monday morning we drove to Provo, where I was able to visit Bruce Verhaaren in his home, his health having prevented him from attending the reunion. His memories were sharp although his movements were unsteady. Josh took a parting photo of Bruce and me before we set out for Salt Lake City and the airport, the rental-car return, and the gates of security.

In closing I want to express my admiration for the field school alumni and staff I have known personally or only by name or through myth. I'm impressed by what I hear of your lives and accomplishments since field school, within or without archaeology, and the contributions you have made to your communities and world. For example, I'm sure the awakening of public interest throughout San Juan County in its ancient history and the desire to ensure its preservation, as well as the appearance and development of resources like prehistory and history related state parks and museums, were due in more than a small part to the efforts and legacy of our alumni. When Dr Matheny established Camp Cottonwood in a remote canyon tucked into a corner of Southern Utah, he set in motion effects that continue to reverberate

throughout the region and the world at large. I am extremely grateful to him for my having been present back then, as I am now to you who organized and executed the reunion and to Josh for making it possible for me to attend. My heart is fuller for new friendships and the rekindling of old ones while saddened by the loss of Deanne Matheny and Nola Ostraff. Still, I am comforted and restored by remembering my past and recent passages through the everlasting mesas and canyons, where some of my heart will always remain. (Apparently, part of my mind is still stuck in Crescent Junction, as well.)

— David Mudrick, July 11, 2024

Picture Section A4: Reunion Day 2 and our return home



Sunday morning, above, off our right side, the Bears Ears tracked our progress south to Blanding, center, where the town has embraced its prehistory, in no small part due to the work of various BYU Archaeology Field School alumni, and, in particular, Blanding born-and-raised Winston, right.



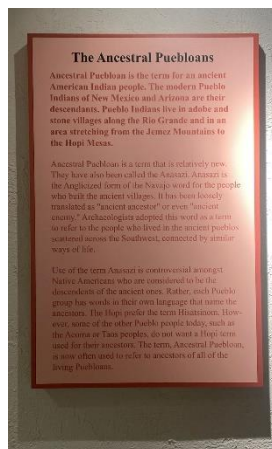
We rendezvoused, left, outside the Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum, center, with its evocative regional architecture, to await its opening, where Grace and Don, right, inadvertently startle one of Rita's extraterrestrials crouching among the outdoor sculpture.



Inside, we viewed exhibits from one of the largest collections of Ancestral Puebloan artifacts in the Four Corners area, any item from which Winston, right, seemed able to elucidate or may have had a hand in its excavation or acquisition.



Deanne's daughters, left, Nikki and Julia, stand behind a black-on-white canteen. A PIII one? (Photo by Judy)



The exhibits and signage provided a comprehensive educational resource. The case, far left, is interactive through a special workstation. The sign, left, is about the change in terminology from Anasazi to Ancestral Puebloans I've discussed in this memoir. I'm sure it's more accurate than me.

Is Don, in the background, photographing Tamsin instead of the reverse?



Left, Julia and Nikki follow Rita, Winston, Grace, and Tamsin outside to the next stop on our museum tour, a partially reconstructed Great House and kiva (photo by Judy). Informative signs are scattered throughout discussing site-specific and regional topics.



Above right, the interior of the kiva is illuminated by the light coming through the roof opening. The wall is partially plastered in mud, for example, behind and to the left of the ladder, reminiscent of Moon House, where we could see the fingerprints of the ancient plasterers. Note the amount of lumber required for this kiva's construction. Overtime, the pressure of harvesting trees for raising buildings, fuel, heating and whatever else took its toll on the environment.



From atop the kiva, Blanding lies to the west and southwest behind Blaine, Winston, and Pam, left. The Abajos rise to the north behind Josh, right. A commanding view in all directions may have been a reason for placing the Great House here.



Deanne had arrived at Edge of the Cedars with her daughters but was too weak to accompany the tour. In this photo, taken there by Tamsin, she holds up a draft copy of the anthology, into which she poured so much of her expertise, memories, and precious remaining time. She is flanked left and right by Judy and Grace, who were the other principals responsible for bringing the project to completion. As Josh and I and several others departed from the museum and the reunion, we didn't know this would be the last time we would see her.

As we headed north, we happened to come up behind Glenna's red car, below, which we recognized from our caravanning in the canyon.



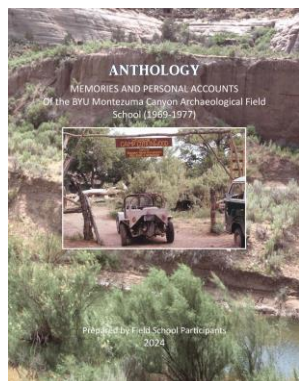
We passed an interesting array of geologic formations, including this outlier, left, that seems to mimic the state-highway beehive signs, and a sturdy road-side arch, above.

The weekend congestion around Moab and Arches National Park slowed us a bit but thinned before we reached Crescent Junction, right, where I couldn't resist a selfie with this strange looking individual. (I'm talking about the car.) Still a remote intersection in the middle of the desert as when I drove and hitchhiked through in 1970, the junction's traffic has increased since Arches' changed status from National Monument to Park and the completion of Interstate 70 to its termination at I-15 at Cold Fort. We stayed on I-70 only as far as Green River, where half a century ago we left Dee Hardy to await his car, turned northwest, trailing a pair of motorcyclists, below left. Fall began to appear as we ascended into the mountains, starting with stands, then hillsides, of quaking aspen turning gold and crimson scrub oak and maple, below left and center.



We descended to Fairview, where Josh was reunited with his family and failing grandmother, above right. His young niece Wren's presence took the edge off the impending future. Next day, after breakfast, on to Provo, where Josh photographed what may be the last reprise of Rocky and Bullwinkle, left, in the guise of me and Bruce Verhaaren. Then, the Provo kachina power-pole battalion passed in front of Mt Timpanogos, right, to bid us farewell as we departed for Salt Lake City and home.





Anthology Artifacts: Cover, Citation, Link, and Contents

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