A Letter from Amber Koski, Bureau of Land Management:

The Bureau of Land Management Green River District welcomes you to your public lands,

In 2016, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Green River District (GRD) partnered with Arizona State University to provide Tribal and area youth with an interactive Science Technology Engineering Art Mathematics (STEAM) experience in an outdoor, living classroom. Through the wonders of archaeology, students and volunteers alike are learning about their public resources by assisting professional archaeologists in the excavation of a Fremont pit house. Although Utah residents are surrounded by public land, the stewardship of these shared resources can be controversial within communities. Some of this controversy stems from a lack of understanding about the BLM mission “… to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public land for the multiple use and enjoyment of present and future generations.” Multiple use means balancing differing perspectives and managing resources into the future; while challenging to achieve, the GRD strives to foster a collaborative approach to the management of our shared resources. We look forward to working with each of you well into the future!

Best Wishes,

Amber Koski
Assistant Field Manager
Vernal Field Office, Vernal, Utah

#RespectAndProtect

Save the Date!

Nine Mile Canyon Excavation Celebration
Saturday, February 24th
4 - 6 pm
Prehistoric Museum, Price

This free, public event will feature light refreshments, presentations from our team of experts, special displays, and a chance to explore the museum’s Nine Mile Canyon exhibits.

Families welcome!

For more information, visit: ninemilevolunteer.weebly.com
A Successful First Year
by Jada Lindblom and Christine Vogt, Arizona State University

In the fall of 2016, the Bureau of Land Management Price Field Office announced a call for proposals for a community engagement public archaeology project in Nine Mile Canyon. A site, referred to as “Cottonwood Village,” had been of interest to archaeologists for many years but had not yet been excavated. Local BLM staff saw this as a unique opportunity to allow community members, especially youth, to take part in the scientific process of discovery in a very special setting. A team of faculty from Arizona State University’s School of Community Resources and Development (Christine Vogt, Dallen Timothy, Gyan Nyaupane, and Evan Jordan) and a graduate student (Jada Lindblom) became interested, as two team members had previously lived in Utah and been engaged with cultural preservation, and others had worked previously on tourism and natural resources projects with the BLM elsewhere. The ASU team connected with in-state experts, including Jerry Spangler of Colorado Plateau Archaeological Alliance, Jody Patterson of Montgomery Archaeological Consultants, and Timothy Riley of the Utah State University Eastern Prehistoric Museum, and from here our project team was born. We set forth to work with BLM coordinators Amber Koski and Nicole Lohman, as well as representatives from local and state organizations and agencies (including many of you likely reading this now!). We especially appreciate those of you who joined us on a chilly day in December 2016 for initial project brainstorming on site. Your experience and expertise regarding the canyon was a great asset to our team to propel us forward in project planning and execution.

Our team of collaborators organized six three-day weekends of camping and volunteering, aimed primarily at Utah high school students, scheduled for the fall of 2017. These events were designed to let a small group of volunteers work closely alongside professional archaeologists during this highly anticipated excavation. We launched a project website (https://ninemilevolunteer.weebly.com), a Facebook group (Nine Mile Canyon Archaeology Volunteering), and several press releases. We were thrilled by the enthusiastic response we received. In the end, we had far more applications and inquiries than available volunteer spaces.

Five student groups from four high schools participated, including Carbon High School in Price, Nebo School District Title VI Indian Education Program, American Leadership Academy in Spanish Fork, and Salt Lake Center for Science Education. In total, we had 72 volunteers participate over the six weekends in September and October (see the sidebar to the right). From the high level of interest and positive volunteer feedback, we feel very encouraged that this project may have a bright future ahead and continue to engage students and community members in the appreciation and stewardship of remarkable Nine Mile Canyon.

In the following pages, Jerry Spangler, Jody Patterson, and Tim Riley reflect on the project and the importance of Nine Mile Canyon as a place to investigate, share, and protect. We’d like to thank all of you who provided guidance, support, and volunteer hours throughout the past year. We truly could not have done it without you!

Cottonwood Village: Part of a Bigger Picture
by Jerry D. Spangler, Colorado Plateau Archaeological Alliance

Archaeologists have a habit of looking down. And down is where we usually see the traces of the past: the potsherds from broken ceramic vessels, the chert flakes left behind from stone tool maintenance, and outlines of ancient structures, like the one here at Cottonwood Village. But as you stand on the bench and imagine the ancients who once lived here, look outward. Across the canyon to the north is another small village, and yet another one to the northeast and another to the east. There are nearly 20 stone structures – we suspect they are open residences – within the view spread of Cottonwood Village, and at least that many more stone-and-adobe granaries tucked high on the cliff faces.

In other words, the area around the mouth of Cottonwood Canyon was a veritable beehive of prehistoric activity, and Cottonwood Village is simply one page in a much larger book that can unveil the secrets of how ancient Fremont farmers thrived here.

To put it all in perspective, even if we conservatively estimate that only half of the residences were occupied at any point in time, and each housed on average two adults and two children, there would have been roughly 40 people living at the mouth of Cottonwood Canyon. In historic times (since 1877 when ranchers first arrived), this area has rarely if ever supported more than four people at a time. In fact, the mouth of Cottonwood Canyon was one of the most densely occupied areas anywhere in Nine Mile Canyon with more than 100 locations with residences, granaries or cists, and rock art.

2017 fieldwork by the numbers:
- Total volunteers: 72
  - Youth: 42
  - Adults: 30
- Group and individual volunteer applications received: 68
- High schools participating: 4
- Participants at excavation (including guest speakers): 99
- Volunteer program days: 18

Above: This structure northeast of the mouth of Cottonwood is one of four or five prehistoric residences clustered together. Photo: Jerry Spangler
Why here? Archaeologists are always in pursuit of those answers, and rarely do we all agree. Personally, I suspect it has to do with the three L’s of real estate: location, location, location. Cottonwood Canyon provides the easiest access to the high plateau country to the south where deer and elk and bighorn sheep would have been an important source of protein. And even more, it provides the most direct access to Range Creek – a sister drainage to the south that also has its own bewilderingly complex catalog of residences, granaries, and rock art. As humans do the world over, we develop social and economic relationships with our neighbors, for good or bad.

Surprisingly, the excavations here at Cottonwood Village mark the first time since 1931 that trained archaeologists have sunk spade and trowel into a prehistoric residence in this area with the specific intent to understand everything we can about the people who once lived here: When they lived here, what they ate and it what proportions, the seasons they lived here, and how they distributed themselves on the landscape.

It is but a first step, admittedly. We need to understand how the other sites in this same area are interrelated. Was this one large kin group that shared their food and managed their precious water resources? Or were they small clusters of families unrelated by blood and marriage in a constant state of competition with one another?

The importance of the excavations at Cottonwood Village lies not in the artifacts recovered from archaeologists’ screens, but what they can teach us about the people who once thrived here in numbers not seen before or since that time.

As each 10 centimeter level of feature fill was removed from the feature, the form of its interior began to take shape. Although only about half the structure was excavated during the course of six autumn weekends, archaeologists were able to delineate a small interior room with walls constructed of more vertically set and horizontally laid sandstone boulders. A clay floor was also found at the base of the small room, though time did not permit a thorough examination of it. Despite time constraints, hints of other floor features were uncovered. Archaeologists found two post holes that hint at some form of roof covering at least part of the structure. Charcoal in the sediments increased with depth suggesting the potential that a hearth or other fire-related feature still remains hidden within the small room. Dozens, if not hundreds of large boulders strewn throughout the fill indicate that at one time, the interior and exterior walls were considerably taller than they appear today. Outside the small interior room, but still within the confines of the structure, the clay floor is missing. Some of the artifacts are different too. Most of the shale beads, stone drills, and stone material were found outside the small room. Are different parts of the structure used for different activities? Once the excavation is complete, we will have a more detailed understanding of its purpose.

Excavation Report
by Jody Patterson
Montgomery Archaeological Consultants (MOAC)

Digging slowly, centimeters at a time, a volunteer crew of 72 students and adults partially excavated one of the largest Fremont structures in Nine Mile Canyon. The structure, located at the Cottonwood Village site, consists of a large square room demarcated by hefty, vertically set sandstone boulders; the structure is nearly 8 meters (25 feet) long and 7 meters (21 feet) wide. It is the most prominent feature at the village site, which also includes several small rock shelters, smaller pit structures, rock art, and dark stained sediments representing refuse deposits. The function of the structure is unknown, but archaeologists have hypothesized that it is a communal structure used by the Fremont people inhabiting the greater Cottonwood Canyon area. With its excavation, we are beginning to understand how it was constructed and what purpose it served.

As is often the case, scientific excavation is a slow and tedious process and the work at the structure was no exception. The sediments that filled the structure since its abandonment were deeper than anticipated. The fledgling archaeologists took the tedium in stride and were often rewarded by finding traces of numerous prehistoric activities. Flakes from the manufacturing of chipped stone tools, beads and bead making materials, broken pieces of ceramic pots, and grinding stones were recovered from the screens through which all the fill sediments were sifted. These artifacts, and where they are found, help archaeologists reconstruct not only the different activities that occurred in the structure, but also how erosion and other processes have altered the structure since it was abandoned. In all, archaeologists recovered 69 shale beads, 362 lithic flakes, 15 pieces of ground stone, and a wide variety of chipped stone tools such as drills, knife fragments, hammerstones, stone cores, and the ubiquitous Fremont stone balls. Hundreds of shale fragments, representing the manufacturing of beads, were also recovered. Small, charred kernels of ancient corn were also found that imply food consumption occurred in the structure.

The excavations at Cottonwood Village provide an important opportunity to understand the way of life of the people who once occupied this area. With the completion of the excavation, we will have a more complete picture of their daily lives, their relationships with each other and with their environment, and the factors that contributed to their eventual abandonment of this site.
accurate picture of how the different partitions within the structure were used and what activities occurred in them.

An initial hypothesis concerning the structure, based partially on its large size, is that it may represent some type of communal structure possibly used by groups of people living in the greater Cottonwood Canyon area; however, the artifact assemblage so far recovered from the feature is diverse and reflects numerous domestic activities that occur at other structures excavated in the canyon. As we continue to excavate the feature and analyze artifacts we frequently update our hypotheses, keeping those that have the most explanatory power and discarding those that don’t. What we learned in the first season of fieldwork will guide us as we continue to excavate at Cottonwood Village and try to piece together the most accurate representation of Fremont culture in the canyon that we can.

Next Steps
By Timothy Riley, Utah State University Eastern

Greetings from the Lab!
While most people think of the fieldwork when they think of archaeology, much of the important work happens once the artifacts, paperwork, and maps have been brought inside. This is an integral step of the excavation and frequently neglected in many volunteer and field school opportunities. Patterns observed in the field can be confirmed, human errors in the records can be caught and corrected, and artifacts can be cleaned for closer examination. The lab analysis is where the real understanding of the site and the people who used it can be gained from the objects and features they left behind. We are excited to have our first group of students, from Carbon High, in the lab in January!

Sharing Knowledge
During the six weekends of excavating, we were very fortunate to have a wide range of specialists join us to speak to our volunteers for evening or mealtime programs. Topics ranged from early settlers and family histories in the canyon, to Utah archaeology and rock art, to career paths in both art and science. Many of our speakers travelled great distances to be a part of these events, so we sincerely thank you for your participation! 2017 guest speakers included:

Elizabeth Hora Cook - Utah SHPO
Nathan Thomas - BLM Utah State Office
Dennis Willis - Nine Mile Canyon Coalition
Norma & Alene Dalton - Nine Mile Canyon Settlers Assoc.
Troy Scotter - Utah Rock Art Research Association
Steven Lee Adams - Adams Fine Art
Jody Patterson and Patricia Stavish – MOAC
Nicole Lohman - BLM Price Field Office
Tim Riley - Utah State University Eastern

Nine Mile Canyon Gets the [Fine Art] Treatment It Deserves

Our team was excited when local painter Steven Lee Adams contacted us about participating in the excavation project in the way that he knows best, through art! He joined volunteers in the field for plein air painting, and also continued his Nine Mile inspired works in his Helper studio. Check out his beautiful works below. For information about Steven and more examples of his work, visit www.stevenleeadams.com.

Thank you to the following agencies and organizations for their guidance, support and encouragement:

Bureau of Land Management
Utah Division of State History
Project Discovery Utah
Nine Mile Canyon Settlers Association
Nine Mile Canyon Coalition
Utah Statewide Archaeological Society
Utah Rock Art Research Association
Utah State Board of Education

…and another big THANK YOU to our hard-working excavation volunteers!

Stay involved!
For more updates and announcements: NineMileVolunteer.weebly.com

Facebook: Nine Mile Canyon Archaeology Volunteering

Please direct questions and comments to: jada.lindblom@asu.edu

Above: Volunteers during Week 6. Photo: Jody Patterson

Photo left: Jada Lindblom; Photo right: Steven Lee Adams

Nine Mile Canyon Gets the [Fine Art] Treatment It Deserves

Five Mile Canyon Gets the [Fine Art] Treatment It Deserves

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Above: Volunteers during Week 6. Photo: Jody Patterson