

Archeological Research Bares Prehistoric Past

Archeological researchers in Canyonlands NP and Glen Canyon NRA have recently documented an intense and almost continuous Archaic Period occupation in southeastern Utah dating from at least as early as 8,600 radiocarbon years ago until the time of Christ. Around 3,500 years ago, these groups camped on shores of now extinct lakes and used the plentiful associated resources in what are now steep-walled, slickrock canyons. The rare presence of post-Pueblo Period brush structures dating to AD 1400 also has been documented.

In conjunction with this archeological research, Northern Arizona University's Quaternary Studies Unit (Department of Geology) headed by Dr. Larry Agenbroad has been working with NPS to reconstruct the Holocene environment. This will help us understand prehistoric occupational patterns and uses of the Canyonlands country. As an ancillary result of these efforts, the presence of Harrington's mountain goat (*Oreamnos harringtoni* Stock), mammoth (*Mammuthus*), Yellow-bellied marmot (*Marmota flaviventris*), ground sloth (*Nothrotheriops*), camel (*Camelops*), and shrub-ox (*Euceratherium*) has been well established in terminal Pleistocene contexts in the Southern Utah parks. It also has been established that alluvial sediments remain in the canyons that date back at least 40,000 years and include the rare Pleistocene/Holocene boundary.

Draft Prehistoric Ruins Stabilization Plans, documents comparable to Historic Structures Preservation Guides, have been completed this fall for Canyonlands, Glen Canyon, and Natural Bridges National Monument through multiyear ruins stabilization programs. These are the first such NPS plans developed to guide park-specific ruins stabilization activities in conjunction with the preservation maintenance required to protect the nearly 100 sites that have been stabilized.

Archeological and paleontological test excavations carried out this past summer in Wind Cave NP produced evidence of an unbroken stratigraphic record of the Holocene from about 1,500 to 10,000 radiocarbon years ago – a first for the Black Hills area. The most intensive human occupation of the rockshelter appears to be from 3,500 to 6,000 years ago. Deeper deposits believed to represent an early Archaic component have yet to be dated.

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