

# Nine Mile Canyon Archaeology Update

May 2019

## An Amazing Year of Community Engagement

by Connor Clark and Christine Vogt, Arizona State University

This past fall, our community engagement project at Nine Mile Canyon successfully concluded its second year of open-to-the-public archaeological excavations. As the prime goal of this project is to protect and preserve our treasured history on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), members of the community were able to give back to their public lands through sharing the exciting task of excavating the “Cottonwood Village” site originally built by the ancient Fremont people. In total, 81 adult and youth volunteers, sponsors, and organizing team members took part in the Fall 2018 excavation season. Several school groups returned for a second year, while other groups came for their first experience. New volunteer groups in the Fall 2018 excavation included family groups from the Price and the Greater Salt Lake City areas, the University of Utah’s Archeology Club, and students from Blessed Sacrament Catholic School in Sandy. We were happy to once again welcome students from Salt Lake Community College, the University of Utah, and American Leadership Academy in Spanish Fork.

Project staff from Arizona State University conducted additional marketing and publicity activities this year to help spread awareness and to further engage the community in our work at Nine Mile Canyon. Central to our communication efforts is the Nine Mile Canyon website ([ninemilevolunteer.weebly.com](http://ninemilevolunteer.weebly.com)) and volunteer Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/152910701902341/>), with 87 members. During the peak outreach season in early fall, our website had over 1,000 visits in one week! Following each of the five weekends from this season’s excavation, highlights and updates were shared on our “Reports from the Field” blog ([ninemilevolunteer.weebly.com/reports-from-the-field](http://ninemilevolunteer.weebly.com/reports-from-the-field)). Another method of engaging the community came through the fun and innovative “Agents of Discovery” app for youth. Jody Patterson of Montgomery Archaeological Consultants headed up this effort, which was funded with a competitive grant from National Environmental Education Foundation in recognition of National Public Lands day. This app enabled youth to play educational games at Nine Mile Canyon on a smartphone during their visit.

A lot of work behind the scenes goes into pulling off another successful year at Nine Mile Canyon. Leading into the 2018 volunteer season, we contacted approximately 70 Utah teachers and youth organizers at schools and organizations around the state, focusing on Carbon County and the nearby region. We were in touch with representatives from more than 20 local and statewide organizations with related missions, several of whom shared our project information via their newsletter or ListServ.

Our successful completion of another year of excavation at Nine Mile Canyon would not have been possible without our amazing volunteers and sponsors. Many of you spent long hours in the sun digging in the dirt, filling up buckets, and finding artifacts through the dusty job of sifting. Excavating an archaeological site is not for the faint of heart, as many of you reading this newsletter now know. On behalf of the Nine Mile Canyon organizing team, we thank all of you for your help on this cooperative project!

**ASU** center for  
**sustainable tourism**  
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*Brought to you by Arizona State University, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Green River District (GRD), Montgomery Archaeological Consultants, Colorado Plateau Archaeological Alliance, and Utah State University Eastern Prehistoric Museum*



Photo: Connor Clark



Photo: Connor Clark



Photo: Gyan Nyaupane

## 2018 fieldwork by the numbers...

- Total Participants: 81
  - Youth: 27
  - Adult Leaders/volunteers: 22
  - Sponsoring participants: 15
  - ASU/BLM coordinators: 12
  - Other volunteers: 5
- Volunteer program days: 14

## Blessed Sacrament Archaeology Club Excavates at Nine Mile Canyon

by John McHugh, teacher and club leader

Over the September 28-30<sup>th</sup> weekend, the Blessed Sacrament Catholic School Archaeology Club took part in the excavation of an eight-hundred-year old Fremont Indian pithouse at picturesque Nine Mile Canyon located in south-central Utah. The effort was coordinated through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Arizona State University Center for Sustainable Tourism, and was supervised by Montgomery Archaeological Consultants of Moab, under the guidance of field archaeologists Jody Patterson and Patricia Stavish.

The Archaeology Club has been up and running at Blessed Sacrament for over a year now. It was started in August of 2017 by 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, John McHugh, who is also a professional archaeologist. Club supervision is shared with Mrs. Christine Green, who holds a degree in Anthropology from University of Utah. Last year the Club met once a week, and went on monthly field trips to various archaeological sites – which involved hands-on archaeological experience that included tasks such as cataloguing prehistoric artifacts at the museum at Fremont Indian State Park, screening for historic artifacts at Fort Douglas, and stewarding prehistoric Native American rock art at archaeological sites throughout Salt Lake and Utah counties. The Club goes by the handle “Shovel Bums,” which is the term for an entry level archaeologist.

The goal of the Nine Mile Canyon excavation team was to learn more about an intriguing rectangular pithouse that dates to approximately 1200 AD. Although the work was grueling, the Archaeology Club students worked tirelessly and found numerous artifacts, including several knife-like tools that archaeologists refer to as a *biface*. Two other artifacts included manos used for grinding either seeds or plant matter. Club members also found upwards of 80 shale or slate beads. The latter finds suggest that the pithouse was not used as a living quarters, but instead functioned more like a “work shop” that produced necklaces for the Fremont people and for trade with surrounding tribes.

When not excavating, the Club was led on tours to see the astounding Fremont rock art panels all around the excavation site. The words of 6th grader Jade Wilson summarize how everyone felt about their excavation experience: “I find it enjoyable and fascinating to learn things about the past. I wish to preserve rock art because it holds information about the past and holds stories about the native people who created it.” ♠



Archaeology Club students pose in front of the Great Hunt rock art panel: (front) Isabella Pickers, Emma Manross, Sara Brunslík, Sebastian Duarte, Kenshiro Terhaar; (back) Rainy Hinckley, Alison Green, Jade Wilson, Danny Sosa, Rustin Hansen, John McHugh (supervisor), Emmeline Green (mascot), Christine Green (supervisor). At the far left and far right are archaeologists Jody Patterson and Patricia Stavish.



Blessed Sacrament Catholic School principal, Bryan Penn, enjoys the wonders of a one-thousand-year-old Fremont Indian rock art panel with Archaeology Club members Rustin Hansen (middle) and Sebastian Duarte (left).



Photo: Connor Clark

## Excavation Report

by Jody Patterson, *Montgomery Archaeological Consultants (MOAC)*

A second season of excavation at Cottonwood Village brought many new and exciting discoveries to the volunteer crews. As we continued our excavation of the prominent square room lined with massive vertically-set boulders, we continued to recover chipped stone tools, ground stone, and scores of carefully manufactured beads made from shale. It took quite a bit of digging, but we eventually started to find a bit more pottery too. Over the course of five weekends, our intrepid group of volunteers managed to excavate most of the second half of the 56 square meter (603 square foot) structure. Despite warm temperatures and cloudless skies, the potential to unlock the secrets of the structure kept us all working diligently. Of course, it wasn't all backbreaking labor. Local canyon guides and experts helped us explore many facets of Nine Mile Canyon. Rock art experts from the Utah Rock Art Research Association led tours of nearby rock art sites providing various interpretations of how the rock art was made and what it might represent. Folks from the Nine Mile Canyon Settlers Association provided tours of a nearby homestead and regaled us stories of the early settler life in the canyon. And of course, the Nine Mile Stewardship Day festivities provided considerable opportunities for public engagement, learning, and just plain fun.

Our focus on the structure, however, provided fodder for hours of conversation and speculation. As we dug deeper and exposed more of the structure, it became evident that the structure had a fairly interesting history.

Based on the hard work of the volunteers from the first two years of the project, we have now identified three distinct occupations and have a better understanding of how it was constructed. Its earliest use, which was the last to be identified, dates back to AD 1000 or maybe as early as AD 900. Buried beneath the rock structure is an older pit structure, probably circular in shape. Short of identifying this structure, we barely had a chance to investigate it before our fieldwork was finished for the year. It was during the second occupation that the large boulders were placed. This construction episode required that the area be leveled by digging into the hillside on which the village site occurs. This second structure had no interior walls or discernible doorways, but two separate hearths were found on its floor. It was during the most recent use of the structure that interior walls were added. We know this because the walls were built over one of the hearths. Geologists and archaeologists refer to this as superposition and can use this concept to provide relative chronologies of site formation.

The new discoveries add considerable insight into architectural variation and sociocultural change throughout the Fremont use of the Nine Mile Canyon. But like with all good scientific endeavors, it leaves us with many new questions to explore and ponder. With any luck, we will have a third season at the site to further excavate the deeply buried pit structure under the large boulder walls that will provide the data necessary to examining how and why the form, style, and function of the structure changed through time. This important excavation will also provide invaluable information to help tie together data from several other excavations in the Cottonwood Canyon vicinity that lack features and artifacts that span the middle to late Fremont use of Nine Mile Canyon. ♠



## Looking Forward to a Successful Year

*by William Brant, Bureau of Land Management, Price Field Office*

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Green River District (GRD) partnered with Arizona State University (ASU) in 2016 to professionally excavate, stabilize, curate, and interpret cultural materials from the Fremont Village Hands on the Lands site. The agreement provides Tribal and area youth with an interactive Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) experience as well as heritage tourism experiences for visitors. Since its inception, the agreement has exceeded all expectations in terms of public benefit. 2018 was a great year for the program. With the cooperation, hard work, and dedication of the BLM GRD, ASU, the many collaborating schools and organizations, and our amazing volunteers, 2019 will be an even more successful year.

## In the Spotlight: Jody Patterson

Jody Patterson of MOAC deserves a special shout-out for all of his contributions to this project. Recently, the Utah Youth Program at the BLM recognized Jody as a "Youth Superstar" for his contributions to educating young people. He received this recognition as a result of coordinating with the BLM Green River District for the past seven years, partnering with the BLM Price and Vernal field offices on three separate National Public Lands Day events, and teaching hundreds of area youth about resource conservation. Jody has trained over 115 youth and adult volunteers on archaeological techniques in Nine Mile Canyon, donated equipment and hundreds of hours of his time, and helped win an award from the "Agents of Discovery" program to use NMC as a beta test site for the Agents of Discovery app.



## Learning from the Experts

Over the course of the five weekends that made up the Fall 2018 excavation, volunteers were privileged to be a part of ranch tours, rock art tours, evening talks, and other presentations given by several different sponsor organizations with deep knowledge of Nine Mile Canyon. Topics ranged from pioneer history, to rock art interpretation, to career paths in archeology. The experience simply wouldn't have been the same without our sponsors. Thank you for participating!

The Fall 2018 Excavation Sponsor groups and their representatives included:

Shawn Lambert and Whitney Seal - Utah State Historic Preservation Office

Project Discovery

Lorena Thornton, Norma Dalton and Alene Dalton - Nine Mile Canyon Settlers Association

Steve Acerson - Utah Rock Art Research Association

Jody Patterson and Patricia Stavish - MOAC

Tim Riley - Utah State University Eastern Campus



Photo: Connor Clark

## 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 Rock Art Research Association  
Castle Valley Archaeological Society  
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](http://ninemilevolunteer.weebly.com)

Join us on Facebook at: [Nine Mile Canyon Archaeology Volunteering](#)

Please direct questions and comments to:  
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