Comments on the Cultural Resources of Area 6, San Juan County, Utah

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Area 6 has a high density of sites, including a number of very large ones
The National Trust’s Proposal for a National Conservation Area
Area 6 has extensive oil and gas resources (Utah Geol. Survey)

Region outlined in red is shown on next slide
Many wells have been drilled in this area since the 1950s
(Utah Geol. Survey)
This area was one of the first in the US to be recognized for its archaeological values.

Hayden Expedition, 1876. Photo by W.H. Jackson of a site in Montezuma Canyon.
Hayden Expedition, Montezuma Canyon, 1876. Probably the Coalbed Village Site. Sketch by W.H. Jackson
Hayden Expedition, 1876. W.H. Jackson and party being checked out by Utes (they treated him to dinner...)
Recent map of Coalbed Village, at the junction of Coalbed and Montezuma Canyons. Coalbed Village was a residential village, and also a center for the surrounding community of smaller residences.
The Mesa Verde or Northern San Juan Culture Area, showing major sub-regions and “Community Centers” for the Period AD 1150-1300. The subregion marked by the arrow includes eastern San Juan County.
Part of “10-Acre Ruin” on Alkali Ridge, mapped by A.V. Kidder in 1908, published in 1910. This site dates mostly to the late AD 1100s and 1200s.
J.O. Brew of Harvard did excavations at Site 13 on Alkali Ridge in the 1930s. Published in 1946.

Site 13 dates to the late AD 700s (Pueblo I period) and was one of the first large community centers in the area.
T. Mitchell Prudden did extensive surveys of the San Juan country in the early 1900s, as well as these excavations on Bug Mesa in the early 1900s. These photos were published in 1917.
Writing in 1903, Prudden noted widespread damage to sites in southeast Utah as a result of unsystematic digging for artifacts:

“Few of the mounds have escaped the hands of the destroyer. Cattlemen, ranchmen, rural picnickers, and professional collectors have turned the ground well over and have taken out much pottery, breaking more, and strewing the ground with many crumbling bones” (Prudden 1903:263)

This and other accounts of site destruction in various parts of the Southwest eventually led in 1906 to the passage of the Antiquities Act, which made it illegal to excavate in archaeological sites on federal lands without a permit. This provision was replaced by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979. However, the section of the Antiquities Act that gives the President the authority to establish national monuments by proclamation is still in effect.
In the 1990s, the Crow Canyon Center mapped the Bug Point site complex where Prudden had dug in the early 1900s. The complex has been renamed the Hedley Ruins group and has been purchased by the Archaeological Conservancy.
Partially excavated kiva, Main Ruin, Hedley Complex

Crow Canyon also did some limited excavations in areas that had been opened up by looters

Surface room wall, Main Ruin, Hedley Complex (clearing of pothunted room)
Crow Canyon also documented an early ceremonial gathering place on a promontory at the tip of Bug Point. It dates to the AD 600s (Basketmaker III period).

The site is called the Alden Hayes Dance Circle Site, after veteran archaeologist Al Hayes, who brought it to Crow Canyon’s attention.
Crow Canyon’s youngest staff member at the Dance Circle site
Conclusion:

The Crow Canyon Archaeological Center supports expansion of Hovenweep National Monument to connect units and protect the Monument’s viewshed.

The Center also supports the National Trust’s proposal for a National Conservation Area in the area of highest site density in Area 6

Whatever land classification category is decided upon, it is essential that continuing economic development be carried out in a coordinated way, to avoid the “cumulative impact” of many small, independently conducted, and often overlapping projects such as construction of well pads, access roads, etc.

In some areas of the Southwest, intensive energy development has resulted in massive degradation of cultural resources because of this type of cumulative impact, even though large amounts of money were spent to “avoid and preserve” archaeological and other cultural sites.

Actions taken to protect sites and to mitigate impacts of economic development must be designed to produce public benefits in the form of new research results, public education and recreation, and maintenance of heritage values for descendant groups.

The Crow Canyon Center thanks Sen. Bennett and Brad Shafer for this opportunity to discuss public lands issues in San Juan County.