

Range Creek Rock Art, 2002. The First Year

The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of an archaeological reconnaissance inventory conducted in August 2002 on the Waldo Wilcox Ranch in Range Creek Canyon of eastern central Utah. The reconnaissance was directed by Jerry Spangler, with assistance from Duncan Metcalf, K. Renee Barlow (both from University of Utah), and Kevin Jones (Utah State Historical Society). The Utah Rock Art Research Association (URARA) was invited to assist in locating and documenting rock art sites. URARA members who participated were: Craig Barney, Nina and Craig Bowen, Gary Burningham, Dell Crandall, John Maccumber, Steve Manning, Layne Miller, Troy Scotter, and Margaret and Glen Stone. Layne Miller (this edition) has discussed how Range Creek Canyon became public land and the politics of protecting this valuable resource.

THE RANGE CREEK CANYON RECONNAISSANCE

The reconnaissance took place on and around the Waldo Wilcox Ranch, which was recently sold to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The ranch has been privately owned since the late 1800's. The purpose of the reconnaissance was to provide the BLM with information on the diversity, distribution and density of archaeological sites on the ranch property.

The area investigated for rock art was, with two exceptions, cliff and rock surfaces that were easily accessible from canyon bottomlands and the road. The reconnaissance was an intuitive and directed survey. Investigators searched for rock art sites in locations that appeared to be obvious, in areas where previous investigators had located rock art sites and in locations indi-

cated by Mr. Wilcox. In addition, Gary Burningham had been in the canyon with Waldo Wilcox several years earlier and had learned about several rock art panels.

ENVIRONMENT

Range Creek is in central Utah in the western section of the Book Cliffs. It drains a portion of the western 10,000-foot high Tavaputs Plateau and enters the Green River at about 4250 feet above sea level. The upper boundary of the 900-acre Wilcox ranch is at about 6760 feet. A small permanent creek flows in the upper portion of the canyon. Small fish were observed in the stream near the upper boundary of the ranch. The climate in Range Creek varies with elevation, from semi-arid at the Green River, with greasewood and saltbush, to heavily forested in the upper elevations, with Douglas Fir and Ponderosa. In the central portion of the canyon there are sagebrush flats; Cottonwoods, Box Elder, Willow and Tamarisk line the creek bottoms, and Pinion and Juniper stands cover the adjacent benches. Range Creek contains areas suitable for irrigation and farming, and it was homesteaded by several individuals and families over the years. The remains of their cabins and fields still exist. Range Creek contains many side canyons that contain springs and numerous rock faces.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The early archaeologists who explored the canyon were doing so to answer three basic questions: who were the people who lived here, when did they live here and where did they come from. The archaeologists believed that there was an Anasazi related phenomenon existing in the area, which we now know as the

Fremont, and they were interested in discovering what that was.

From 1927 to 1931, an extensive inventory of the cultural resources along the Green River and most of its tributaries was conducted under the auspices of the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. Funded by two Boston businessmen, William H Claflin and Raymond Emerson, this expedition broadly covered most of the "Fremont" areas in Eastern Utah. The expedition resulted in a definition of the Fremont Culture by Noel Morss who participated in the survey of the Fremont River area. Most of the expedition's findings were not reported however, until 1969 by James Gunnerson. In his publication, Gunnerson reexamined the collection and compiled the field notes into a comprehensive report on the expedition's findings along with a functional synthesis of the Fremont and their cultural dynamics.

The Claflin-Emerson expedition recorded 20 archaeological sites in Range Creek Canyon (Gunnerson 1969: 82-87). Sixteen of these were archaeological sites with masonry storage structures on rock ledges, four were rock shelters with signs of occupation and four were open sites with structural remains. Rock art was noted in association with four masonry storage structures and in one rock shelter. No isolated rock art sites were apparently recorded. The early archaeologists obviously spent most of their time looking for the finest examples of structural sites while ignoring the rock art, unless it was associated with significant cultural remains.

In 1936, Leonard Leh, an assistant professor of anthropology from the University of Colorado, recorded nine archaeological sites in Range Creek Canyon. These sites consisted mostly of masonry granaries and ceramic/lithic scatters.

Kenneth B. Castleton visited the canyon in May 1975 and noted the presence of 10 rock art sites while observing that several other small ones were bypassed. He stated, "All or nearly all the

rock art can be assigned to one of the Fremont styles." (Castleton 1978:108).

Range Creek is most famous for the elaborate and well preserved figurines that were found by Mr. Pillings, a rancher, in a tributary of Range Creek Canyon (Morss 1954).

Smithsonian site numbers were assigned to the 20 sites recorded by the Claflin-Emerson expedition.

FINDINGS

Archaeological and rock art sites were found to exist from Range Creek's confluence with the Green River to the upper end of the Wilcox Ranch. Thirty-five sites with pictographs and/or petroglyphs were documented. Cultural affiliation ranged from Archaic to Ute. As expected, most of the images were Fremont. Because the ranch was protected behind a series of locked gates for about the past 100 years, the panels have suffered no vandalization, with two exceptions.

Several panels with distinctive Fremont anthropomorphic images were discovered that were painted in red (10 R 4/6) and a light to dark yellowish-orange pigment (10 YR 6/6). I discovered several sources for the yellow ochre pigment near the upper end of the ranch. Two were in the back of alcoves (one large and one small) that contained pictographs. Layne Miller and I recently visited a panel in Whitmore Canyon, which is just west of Range Creek, that also contains these same colors and distinctive images, and I discovered a site in the San Rafael Swell area a few weeks later that also has these same colors, and in the same context within the figures.

It was anticipated that the rock art in Range Creek would be nearly identical to that found in Nine Mile Canyon, which is just over the ridge at the top of Range Creek. The pass has an elevation of about 6,760 feet. The style of many of the images is the same as those located in Nine Mile Canyon. However, while the rock

art was culturally similar, the rock art was also different. In addition to containing unique images, there are essentially five differences between rock art in the two canyons.

- **First**, there was only one large rock art site in Range Creek Canyon. In Nine Mile Canyon there are many. Nearly all of the panels and individual sites consisted of less than 10 figures.
- **Second**, the rock art was not heavily concentrated in some areas, as it is in Nine Mile. The sites seemed to be more evenly distributed throughout the survey area and the canyon.
- **Third**, there were a surprisingly high percentage of rock art sites containing pictographs. In Nine Mile Canyon, pictographs are rare - likely less than a few percent. In Range Creek, pictographs constitute nearly half of the rock art sites located to this date.
- **Fourth**, there seems to be a greater diversity of styles and types of rock art in Range Creek than in Nine Mile Canyon. This may be due to Range Creek's proximity to the Anasazi Culture area to the south. In addition, the Colorado and Green Rivers could have been a travel corridor bringing the Anasazi northward into Range Creek (see Manning 1992).
- **Fifth**, the yellowish-orange pigment that occurs naturally in the canyon was used often in the creation of the pictographs.

RECORDED SITES

Apparently, only one of the archaeological sites with rock art that were recorded by the Claflin-Emerson expedition was relocated. Out of Castleton's 10 sites, eight were positively identified

(sites 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9), and two (sites 6 and 10) were apparently not found. Identification is problematical because Castleton did not photograph the panels, and all that exists is a very cursory description.

Photographs of some known and previously unknown panels are shown here. A comprehensive report of these images and a discussion of their significance along with a comparison to other panels is in progress.

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