

# **Project Completion Report Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (RM-CESU)**

**Project Title:** Comb Ridge Heritage Initiative Project

**Type of Project (Research, Technical Assistance or Education):** Archaeological Survey

**Funding Agency:** Bureau of Land Management, Utah

**Partner University:** University of Colorado

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**Start Date of Project:** May 1, 2005

**End Date of Project:** Sept. 30, 2010

**Funding Amount:** \$752,434.55

**Number of Students Involved, and Type of Student (Undergraduate, Graduate, Post Doctorate):** A number of graduate students participated as field crew (Ben Bellorado, Zonna Barnes, Alison Bredthauer, Jakob Sedig, Jason Chuipka). Alison Bredthauer used data from the project for her MA thesis and was significantly supported by project personnel during the data gathering phase of the project.

**Project Summary, including descriptions of project deliverables, work accomplished and/or major results. If the information is restricted (e.g. location of endangered species or cultural resources), indicate the title and location of the final report.**

The Comb Ridge Heritage Initiative Project accomplished a sample archaeological surface inventory of an area covering 1768.6 ha (43702 acres), encompassing most of Comb Ridge and the adjacent Comb Wash and Butler Wash drainages in southeastern Utah [map].

Approximately 15.4% (271.6 ha, 6713 acres) of the total area was intensively surveyed at 100% pedestrian coverage, and extensive parts of the rest of the study area were covered at a reconnaissance level. Approximately 1000 archaeological sites were documented at some

level, including 778 that were intensively documented for the first time; 44 that had been previously recorded but were rerecorded at a more intensive level; and approximately 200 that were documented at a less intensive level. Approximately 400 features or significant artifacts were documented at the “Isolated Find” level, between defined site boundaries.<sup>1</sup> Documented remains span the terminal Pleistocene and entire Holocene epochs from ca. 12000+ BC to the twentieth century, and include significant expressions of human cultures representing the Paleoindian, Archaic (Early, Middle, Late), Basketmaker (II and III), Pueblo (all periods Pueblo I – IV), Ute/Paiute, Navajo, and Historic Euroamerican occupations.

Comb Ridge is a long, spectacular, serrated, monoclinical sandstone ridge that defines the eastern edge of a major bulge in the Earth’s crust, the Monument Upwarp. It intersects and crosses another major feature, the San Juan River, in a massive cruciform pattern that marks the heart of the Colorado Plateau. Both the river and the ridge are features and locations of profound ritual and mythological importance to many of the region’s Native cultures, an importance that is reflected in the archaeological record going back several thousand years. The sheer western escarpment of the ridge has always constituted a significant though permeable barrier to east-west traffic, and during ancient Pueblo times, marked an approximate and variable cultural boundary between the mainstream Mesa Verdean communities of the northern San Juan region, and their hardy frontier cousins of the far western San Juan. Its numerous Indian Ruins have been the objects of sporadically widespread and intense episodes of looting since the late 1880s. In the last half century, its easy proximity to modern highways and communities has made Comb Ridge one of the most popular recreational hiking destinations in the west outside of the designated Parks and Monuments, much of that traffic focusing on the area’s spectacular rock art and Indian ruins.

Despite Comb Ridge’s clear cultural and geographic importance, and the huge impacts of uncontrolled looting and recreational visitation, previous archaeological investigations in the area were sporadic, willy-nilly, unsystematic, mostly superficial, and wildly inconsistent in the quality and value of their collected data, leaving most sites in the region undocumented and in many cases unrecognized. The haphazard body of available data was plagued by locational misplots, site number duplications, data inconsistency and other sources of confusion, resolution of which demanded a major focus of Comb Ridge Heritage Initiative Project effort, and significantly complicated production of requisite site documentation records and reports. These issues as they relate to project sites are still not completely resolved as of January 2012, and have significantly impeded final data analysis and reporting.

The Comb Ridge Heritage Initiative Project has effectively transformed the documented archaeological record of the Comb Ridge area, effectively trebling the number of documented archaeological sites and significantly upgrading the quality and consistency of documentation of many of those that were previously documented. In addition to the archaeological contributions, it drew important ethnohistoric and cultural information from Native American and Anglo informants, with the assistance of and in collaboration with historian/ethnohistorian Dr. Robert S. McPherson. The resulting data have contributed and will continue to contribute significantly to our understanding of the prehistory of the Comb Ridge landscape and its importance in the greater Colorado Plateau, on a number of dimensions and levels:

- Paleoindian presence in southeast Utah.
- Archaic occupations

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<sup>1</sup> Totals are approximate pending certain final decisions regarding site or IF status and site number resolution decisions for a small number of features and sites that are still under discussion. Site and Isolated Find locations are protected and therefore not presented in this report.

- Trails across Comb Ridge dating as far back as the late Pleistocene Clovis period.
- Clarified resolution of ancient Basketmaker and Pueblo settlement clusters and communities and their shifting form and distribution across space, including relationships to great houses, great kivas and other features of community-scale importance
- First recognition and documentation of an impressive concentration of Puebloan shrines and shrine-like features, ranging in age from at least as early as the ninth century through the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.
- Insights into regional ceramic production, including recognition and documentation of a surprising array of pottery-firing kiln features extending southward the full length of Comb Ridge from a previously-recognized clustering of kilns on the eastern slope of Elk Ridge to the north.
- Significant contributions to Native American rock art studies in the Comb Ridge area, including evolution and dating of styles, and content significance.
- First recognition and documentation of a previously neglected but significant Ute/Paiute archaeological record in the region, including tipi and wickiup residential camps; complemented by significant additions to the body of documented Ute rock art
- Documentation and confirmation of a previously poorly-understood archaeological record of a significant Navajo occupation of the area, supplemented by significant documentation of Navajo rock art, and important new informant information regarding Navajo place names, historical traditions and sacred geography.
- Documentation of a rich and previously unrecorded historical-archaeological landscape of wagon and early motorized vehicle roads, old fences, sheep camps, corrals, cabins, trails and livestock troughs; supplemented by historical research into unrecorded or poorly documented historic events, livestock operations, trading posts, mining/prospecting operations, and so forth.
- Compilation and synthesis of the history of archaeological investigations in Comb Ridge area, including a massive investment of time and effort in the relocation, replotting, reassessment and site number reconciliation of hundreds of previously recorded sites, some of them with multiple duplicate site numbers and feature designations.

These findings and more will be discussed at depth in the forthcoming synthetic report. More imminent deliverables will include the 1000+ formal site forms and a descriptive-level report, along with a substantial body of supporting digital and paper data, to the Bureau of Land Management in late winter or early spring 2012. The publishable synthetic analytical report should be completed within the following year. Interim reporting in the form of periodic professional papers and public presentations focusing on various aspects of the project has taken place during the course of the project: Papers and publications utilizing data from the Project include:

#### Papers, Reports and Publications:

- 2006 Hurst, Winston, Catherine M. Cameron, and Deborah Westfall. Archaeological Survey in God's Navel: The Comb Ridge Survey Project. Presented to the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Pecos Conference, Navajo Reservoir, New Mexico.
- 2006 The Highland Lady & the Ram's Scrotum: A Personal Homage to Comb Ridge. *Blue Mountain Shadows*, Spring 2006.
- 2007 Hurst, Winston B., Catherine M. Cameron, and Hugh Robinson. New Developments in the Comb Wash Heritage Project, Utah. Presented to the 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Pecos

Conference, Pecos, NM.

- 2008 Hurst, Winston, Benjamin A. Bellorado, Catherine M. Cameron, Hugh L. Robinson, and Tucker J. Robinson.  
Raise High the Roof Beams: Early Puebloan Multi-Story Roomblock Construction in the Western Mesa Verde Region. Presented to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Vancouver, B.C.
- 2009 Hurst, Winston and Hugh Robinson  
The Comb Wash Campground Survey: An Archaeological Surface Inventory of 2,200 Acres in San Juan County, Utah. Submitted to USDI Bureau of Land Management, Monticello Field Office by Catherine M. Cameron, Principal Investigator, University of Colorado.
- 2009 Robert S. McPherson  
*Comb Ridge and Its People; the Ethnohistory of a Rock*. Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah. (The project contributed significantly to, and benefitted greatly from McPherson's compilation of the archival and informant data that went into this book.)
- 2010 Hurst, Winston and Jonathan Till  
The Spider Woman's Matrix: Ancient Puebloan "Roads" in Utah as Integrative Monumental Features. Paper presented in the symposium "the Archaeology of Perspectives," organized and chaired by Douglas Comer. Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, St. Louis, MO.
- 2010 Winston Hurst, James Allison, Jonathan Till and Hugh Robinson  
Et Tu, Pueblo I? Early Defensive Citadels in the Western Mesa Verde Region. Poster presented at the Southwest Symposium, Hermosillo, Mexico.
- 2011 Winston Hurst, Francis E. Smiley and Michael R. Robins  
Early Farmers at the Earth's Backbone: Basketmaker II in the Comb Ridge Area. *The Kiva* 77(2&3):89-102
- 2011 Benjamin A. Bellorado  
Leave Only Footprints: The Dating and Context of Pueblo III Sandal Imagery in the Comb Ridge and Cedar Mesa Areas. Big Meeting at Crow Canyon, Cortez, Colorado.
- 2012 James R. Allison, Winston B. Hurst, Jonathan D. Till, and Donald C. Irwin  
Meanwhile, in the West: Early Pueblo Communities in Southeastern Utah. Ch. 3 in *Crucible of Pueblos: The Early Pueblo Period in the Northern Southwest*, edited by Richard H. Wilshusen, Gregson Schachner and James R. Allison. Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA.
- 2012 Chacoan and Post Chacoan Pottery Production and Circulation at Great Houses in the Comb Wash Locality, Southeastern Utah. Poster presented to the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Memphis, TN.
- 2012 Several articles in the special issue entitled "Deep History II: San Juan County's Archaeological Record," *Blue Mountain Shadows; the Magazine of San Juan County History*, V. 44:  
--Benjamin A. Bellorado, "Leave Only Footprints: The Dating and Context of Pueblo III

- Sandal Imagery in the Comb Ridge and Cedar Mesa Areas," (pp. 39-43).
- Ann Phillips, "Kachina Panel Drawing," pp. 44-45.
  - Winston Hurst and Jay Willian, "Ute and Navajo Archaeology in the Comb Ridge Area," pp 49-57.
  - Winston Hurst, Hugh Robinson and Jay Willian, "History and Surface Archaeology of the Rincon Trading Post Historic Site," pp. 63-74.

Site records: Appr. 1040 individual site documentation records. Many of these site records, though file documents not intended for public access, are essentially reports in themselves, equivalent to individual papers or articles. These and the project reports will be filed at the Bureau of Land Management Monticello Field Office and at the Utah Division of State History, Antiquities Section.

In Prep: Descriptive report summarizing all aspects of the project, with descriptions and basic management data for all sites.

In Prep: Interpretive report including

- Historical/cultural background
- Detailed history of previous archaeological investigations
- Individual chapters expanding on various of the above-listed papers/posters and all of the bulleted contributions listed above.

Synthetic

(a number of these chapters will also be submitted for publication as journal articles.)

#### Public Outreach Presentations:

Feb, 2007: "Reading the Land: Changing Perceptions of the Comb Wash Great House Community," Winston Hurst to the Hitsuasi Chapter of the Colorado Archaeological Society, Cortez, Colorado.

Jan 2008: "Odd Socks: Rambling Thoughts About the Archaeology of San Juan County, Utah." Winston Hurst, to the Colorado Archaeological Society Chipeta chapter, Montrose, Colorado.

Apr 2008 "Odd Socks: Rambling Thoughts About the Archaeology of San Juan County, Utah." Winston Hurst, to the San Juan Basin Archaeological Society, Durango, Colorado.

Mar, 2010 "Seeing Through Their Eyes: Understanding the Development and Spread of Rock Art Traditions in the Comb Ridge Area and Landscapes Beyond." Benjamin A. Bellorado, Bluff, Utah.

Oct, 2010: "Context, Context, Context: Fuzzy-brained Ramblings on The Gestalt of Place and the Contextual Spiral." Winston Hurst, address delivered to the Utah Rock Art Research Association Annual Symposium, Blanding, Utah.

May, 2011: "Sweating the Small Stuff; Some Neglected Aspects of Comb Ridge's Archaeological Record," Winston Hurst, Bluff, Utah,

Feb, 2012 "Talking Comb: Ramblings on the Deep Human History of the Earth's Backbone." Winston Hurst, Edge of the Cedars Museum, Blanding, Utah.

Apr, 2012 "Tsekaan: Finding Comb Ridge's Deep History." Winston Hurst, Southwest Seminars, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Professional and public presentation of project results will continue through the next year and beyond.