

Project Summary
Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: Testing and Assessment of Archeological Sites at Bent's Old Fort and Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Sites

Discipline: Cultural
Type of Project: Research
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Other Partners/Cooperators: Colorado State University
Effective Dates: 3/15/2011 - 2/28/2012
Funding Amount: \$ 10,177

Investigators and Agency Representative:

NPS Contact: Fran Pannebaker, Chief of Resources, Bent's Old Fort NHS, 35110 Hwy 194 East, La Junta, CO 81050, phone: 719-383-5016, fax: 719-383-2129, fran_pannebaker@nps.gov

Investigator: Jason LaBelle, Assistant Professor, Dept of Anthropology, Colorado State University, B-219 Andrew G. Clark Bldg, Fort Collins, CO, 80523, phone: 970-491-7360, fax: 970-491-7597, jason.labelle@colostate.edu

Project Abstract: Surface indications on four prehistoric sites at Bent's Old Fort NHS (BEOL) are sparse and inconclusive as to the true nature of the sites. Although limited investigation was conducted at the sites in 1995, the work was incomplete and results ambiguous. Small sites in the park unit are rare and poorly understood; thus, park management cannot make informed decisions about how to protect and manage these sites. This work will undertake to properly define site boundaries, and to determine the depth, nature, and chronological range of subsurface deposits at each site. In addition, there is an early 20th century trash dump eroding out of an irrigation canal bank that needs immediate documentation, analysis, assessment, and management/preservation recommendations.

Sand Creek Massacre NHS (SAND) proposes to clean up a small historical dump site that draws attention because it is visible from the park overlook. The site currently has two time periods of use: an earlier Depression-era component, and a more recent non-historic component dating from c. 1960 to 2000 when it was used to discard numerous large ranch/farm items. The dump is in a ravine and contains pieces of fence wire, bed springs, a twisted stock tank filled with chunks of concrete, cans, and broken bottles. SAND proposes to remove the stock tank and concrete chunks, cut the bed springs and wires at ground level and remove them, and bury the remaining earlier, historic cultural materials under weed-free fill provided by the county. The fill will be leveled to three inches or less so that grasses and shrubs can grow through the fill. Before any of the clean up occurs, the dump must be defined and documented as an archeological site, including shovel testing to define the extent and depth of the dump, and in-field historic artifact analyses to determine the exact time range of these deposits.

BEOL Field Work / Data Collection: Archeological crews shall visit each of four previously recorded prehistoric archeological sites at BEOL that require boundary and depth definition, dating, site type evaluation, National Register assessment, condition assessment and management recommendations. These sites include 50T141, 50T534, 50T536, and 50T537.

Site 50T141 has been recorded, collected and excavated several times in the past and may be a residential (i.e., village) site. Local oral history and previous archeological findings indicate that human remains were encountered at the site, as were projectile points and ceramics, and fire-cracked rock (FCR) features that indicate intense use as roasting pits/hearths. One FCR pit yielded a single date range between the 11th and 15th centuries (A.D. 1000s to 1400s).

Site 50T534 also has FCR pits and may have been a campsite, while 50T536 has subsurface deposits, and a lithic assemblage of primarily chert instead of the more common basalt. Although site 50T537 recently underwent a condition assessment that extended the site boundaries based on additional surface artifacts, this is not the best method to determine boundaries so it needs reevaluation. The current site boundaries of the four prehistoric sites have not been established using shovel testing, only by mapping the distribution of surface artifacts which can be misleading.

The shovel testing plan will involve one or more sets of perpendicular grid lines based either on cardinal directions or topographic conditions at each site. Shovel tests will consist of c. 30-cm-diameter holes placed every 5 to 10 meters, depending on the current known size of the site and ended when three negative shovel tests in a row are obtained. Each shovel test will be excavated to sterile soil or to a depth of 80 centimeters. The fill will be removed in 20 cm layers and screened through ¼ inch mesh. This will be a non-collection investigation with artifacts analyzed in the field and returned to their shovel test hole after analysis. The only exceptions to this strategy will be if a particularly unique type of artifact is encountered (e.g., paleo-indian point). All

shovel test locations will be documented by GPS, dimensions, and sediment description. A field site sketch map shall be prepared based on the boundaries and features defined by the combination of shovel tests and surface indications.

Additionally at BEOL, there is early to mid-20th century trash eroding from an irrigation canal bank. The homestead with which the dump was associated is gone; however, the trash dump needs to be recorded, boundaries defined, dateable artifacts located and analyzed, and a determination of eligibility and preservation/management recommendations prepared. Shovel testing will proceed as described above and refined as needed to define the site boundaries.

SAND Field Work: Similarly, the SAND trash dump will require a similar approach as above to define the site boundaries, document the site, and make eligibility and management recommendations. The large modern pieces of trash that the park plans to remove will be recorded photographically before they are removed, and the other artifacts will be recorded in the field before they are covered by the layer of weed-free fill.

Outcomes with Completion Dates: **December 5, 2011**

Keywords:**Archeological assessment, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, Colorado State University**