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Cindy, Matt-- I am turning in this year's annual CR report to the SO this week. Mostly it's just boring numbers, but they do ask for a narrative of some sort every year. Usually it's a year-round wrap-up sort of thing, but this year they wanted one specific story from each office to highlight what we do. Attached is my narrative for this year, FYI.
Matt Z

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument
2017 Cultural Resources Annual Report, Project Narrative

M. Zweifel
7 September, 2017

In the summer of 2015, GSENM was contacted by Chet Felix, a concerned citizen who had found an apparent artifact in a small rock overhang near the Escalante River. Chet forwarded a picture of the artifact, which appeared to be a basketry object of some sort. Chet was concerned for the safety of the object, and wanted appropriate BLM personnel to take a look at the object and assess the potential for loss. The artifact was described as being in an unlikely spot and difficult to find, and Chet could not give directions to the location. He instead offered to take BLM personnel to the object, but due to Chet's location (the Salt Lake area) it was late 2016 before we could arrange to meet with Chet.

In October of 2016, Chet met with GSENM Backcountry Ranger Bob Stevenson and took Bob to the artifact location (the GSENM Archaeologist was not available, as he was attending mandatory annual meetings in Vernal at the time). It was indeed off any usual trail and difficult to find, and the object was still in place. Bob forwarded additional photos to the GSENM Archaeologist, and in November the weather finally cooperated enough to again allow access to the site. Bob and the GSENM Archaeologist visited the site, and the artifact was confirmed as a traditional and diagnostic Southern Paiute "water basket." The is essentially a canteen, made as a tightly woven, jug-like basket and then water-proofed with pine pitch. It appeared to be in perfect condition. The basket was briefly examined, and then left in-situ for further consideration. Besides being found in a fairly safe location, at least for the moment, it was noted that the basket may well represent a prehistoric Paiute offering or shrine, and consultation with the local Paiute would be necessary prior to further consideration.

In January, following consultation with the Kaibab Paiute and again waiting for appropriate weather, GSENM personnel including Bob Stevenson, GSENM Law Enforcement Officer Mike Thompson, and GSENM Archaeologist Matt Zweifel along with Glendora Homer, Becky Homer, and Charley Bullets of the Kaibab Paiute Tribe, visited the site. The artifact was found as it had been left, undisturbed. After examination of the basket and its location on the landscape, Glendora offered the explanation that this site represented a "medicine spot" where someone would come for spiritual purposes. The presence of a few lithic flakes on the small flat immediately below the cleft containing the water basket helped form Glendora's opinion, in that "making a small tool, like an arrowhead or something, can be an important part of the medicine process." There is also a very small, sand-floored overhang nearby that would have served well for an individual's overnight location. The site is about a mile from the Escalante River, in an area of seasonal water and a wide variety of resources, and offers a great degree of solitude.

The water basket was indeed in almost perfect condition, and all present marveled at the skill involved with its construction. Glendora Homer is a Paiute weaver, and identified the basket materials as red willow. It was important that Glendora Homer be able to visit the site at this time in that, as a Paiute speaker, she would be able to communicate with the spirit of the basket's owner and assure that person

that we meant no harm, and instead visited the site out of respect. A very considered discussion followed regarding the fate of the water basket. Chet had stated that he wanted the basket to be left in its original location, so that he might revisit the site in future years and see it as he left it. In addition, both the Paiute and GSENM wanted to leave the water basket undisturbed. However, in light of current social media and the very good potential that images of the artifact may have been posted, and the location compromised, it was decided by both the Kaibab Paiute and GSENM to collect the basket.

Upon careful examination of the water basket, it was noted that a small piece of pine pitch had become detached from the interior. The Paiute and GSENM looked at this as an opportunity to date the artifact without any physical damage to the artifact itself, and a sample of the pitch material was submitted to Beta Analytic for carbon dating. However, Beta noticed that the pitch was “not holding up” to the pre-treatment process, and suggested dating some of the small plant materials included in the pitch. Both pine needles and tiny bark fragments were found, and following discussion with Beta, it was decided to date the pine needles as there was less potential for an “old wood” date from the needles as opposed to bark fragments. The process revealed several potential dates, including (95% probability) AD 1685-1730, 1810-1925, and post-1950, and (68% probability) AD 1695-1725, 1815-1835, 1880-1915, and post-1950. The post-1950 date can obviously be discarded, and the 1880-1915 date is perhaps unlikely in that historic canteens or containers would have been readily available by that time. Either of the earlier dates may be more applicable. The water basket is currently housed in the Kaibab Paiute repository, a curatorial facility shared between the Kaibab Paiute and Pipe Springs National Monument.

A final, interesting note regarding the basket location also came to light as the site was being recorded. An historic stock trail leads from the bench rim rock at this point down to the rugged canyon bottom below. The water basket was within 30 meters of this trail, in clear sight of cowboys and area hikers for all those years, yet remained unnoticed. It was located just far enough into a small cleft in the rock that it remained protected from the weather and elements, in a location that, had anyone looked carefully, would have been in shadow but visible. There is no good reason to climb that 30 meters of sloping slickrock face below the basket niche, but thankfully it was Chet that finally did just that and found this artifact.

This is an example of the kind of cooperation that Federal land management agencies (and especially archaeologists) strive to create and support. A concerned citizen found an invaluable artifact, and had the good sense to leave it undisturbed and report it to the appropriate personnel. Following that, GSENM realized what a rare and important artifact this was as such, but also recognized the potential for current cultural importance of the artifact to the Kaibab Paiute. The Paiute agreed that this was likely an offering, left intentionally at the site by the basket’s original owner, and therefore of importance elevated far above that of just a beautifully constructed piece of Paiute basketry. Although all concerned would rather have the water basket left in place, it was a cooperative effort to decide how the artifact would be handled and ultimately protected.

(b) (3) (B)



Above: Location of the Paiute water basket, in the niche above and to the left of GSENM Backcountry Ranger Bob Stevenson. The photographer is standing on the historic stock trail. Below: the water basket, in situ within the niche. The rocks were placed in front of the basket by Chet Felix after his discovery of the artifact, in an effort to obscure it from other hikers.

(b) (3) (B)



Detail, Paiute water basket. Note pitch adhering to the exterior.

(b) (3) (B)



Paiute water basket, details. Above: neck and rim of the vessel. Below: handles and pitch coated exterior. Note the excellent condition of the vessel and the fine workmanship involved in its construction.

(b) (3) (B)



Paiute water basket site; Mike Thompson and Bob Stevenson with Glendora Homer considering the location and view from the rim immediately above the basket niche.

(b) (3) (B)



Paiute water basket site, view into the canyon below.