Final Report for the 2012 National Trust Preservation Fund grant "Historic Pueblo Cultural Landscape, Cedar Mesa, Utah"

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Introduction

This report summarizes studies done since 2009 that contribute a better understanding of the Pueblo period cultural landscape of the Cedar Mesa region (Fig. 1). In addition to other funding received by my colleague R.G. Matson, I received National Trust grants for this project in 2011 and 2012. A major objective of these studies has been to document the value and importance of preserving Cedar Mesa as a relatively intact example of a prehistoric Puebloan cultural landscape. Results specific to the 2012 grant are summarized on pages 7 through 10 below, and in the summary section of this report.

The Cedar Mesa region of southeastern Utah is well known for the cliff dwellings and rock art panels that occur in the entrenched canyons (Rommes and Lipe 2013), but there are also thousands of less-well preserved Ancestral Pueblo sites on the mesa itself. The peak population of the area was between about AD 1060 and 1270, when both canyons and mesas were occupied by Pueblo farmers. They lived primarily in dispersed small homesteads located close to their fields, rather than in the kind of compact villages that the label "Pueblo" ordinarily brings to mind (Matson et al. 1988). One question posed by this type of settlement pattern is whether we can identify some of the "special" sites where activities took place that helped these dispersed households form and maintain social and cultural ties across the region. The Pueblo Cultural Landscape project described below was designed to pursue that goal.

Matson and I have focused on documenting the sites that were instrumental in creating socially integrated communities and a regional sense of shared cultural understandings on Cedar Mesa. These include sites having evidence of a great kiva or a plaza where people could occasionally have gathered for feasts and ceremonies. In addition, we have recorded several probable shrines or shrine-like features, and have described "road" traces at several sites. Much of the Inspiration for this work has come from earlier and concurrent studies carried out by colleagues Winston Hurst and Jonathan Till in southeastern Utah. They have documented traces of "roads" that linked people and places over wide areas and have recognized great
houses, shrines, and shrine-like features (Hurst, et al. 1993; Hurst and Till 2008; Till and Hurst 2011).

Great kivas and plazas represent archaeologically visible features where significant numbers of people from scattered habitation sites would have gathered periodically. Such gatherings would have created and reinforced the social bonds necessary to maintain a community and to give its members a sense of common identity. The shrines we have documented also would have been recognized and visited by individuals or small groups who lived in habitations scattered over the region. They would have been symbolic repositories for beliefs that linked people to a mythological past and to the spiritual forces that they believed operated in their day-to-day world. Several are located on visible prominences commanding large "viewsheds." This may indicate that the spiritual power focused there was believed to apply to people living over a wide area. The roads surely must symbolize connections between people and places on the mesa and likely also played a role in ritual practices. Together, all these "special places" or "places of attraction" would have helped promote social interactions that linked people who lived in the Cedar Mesa area. They would also have physically represented the beliefs and stories that gave individuals, families, kin groups, and communities an understanding of how and why their world came to be.

This built environment—the special sites, as well as the many small habitations scattered over the mesa—thus helped created a "cultural landscape" that oriented the lives of the Cedar Mesa Puebloans (Till and Hurst 2011; Lipe et al. 2012). Like all people, they must have used natural features such as high points, caves, canyons, and unusual rocks as mnemonics for stories about the historical and mythological events that had shaped their way of life (e.g., Basso 1996; McPherson 1992). During the mesa's period of maximum population between AD 1060 and 1270, residents amplified this meaningful natural landscape by constructing not just houses, but the buildings and features noted above that themselves became symbols of community identity and shared cultural beliefs. These constructions were part of "domesticating" the landscape. The total population of central Cedar Mesa in the Pueblo periods was small —500 to 1500 people at any one time (Matson et al. 1988)—and scattered. Their use here of constructions to make a natural landscape socially and culturally meaningful can be seen as a simple example of a common process that has played out through time all over the world (Bowser and Nieves Zedeno 2009). Truly complex cultural landscapes resulting from this universal process would include Teotihuacan and Washington DC.

The cultural landscape would also have served as the setting for competition over social status and influence among would-be leaders in a decentralized society. The construction and maintenance of "places of attraction" would at times have been part of strategies to attract followers or to physically stake out a claim to a territory or a spiritually important place. That hostilities sometimes took place is attested by the presence of defensive structures and site locations toward the end of the Pueblo occupation, at a time when evidence of violence occurs over much of the Pueblo
Southwest. Both the rivalrous and the socially integrative aspects of Cedar Mesa society would have played out on a cultural landscape based on common understandings and ways of representation.

The prehistoric Cedar Mesa cultural landscape can still be recognized and appreciated, if not fully understood in its original terms, by people who visit the area today. In fact, Cedar Mesa is one of the very best places remaining in the Southwest for gaining a sense of how Ancestral Pueblo people made a region their cultural home. Cedar Mesa is virtually all undeveloped federal or state land; only a single small parcel is private, and it is a long-fallowed farm. The only permanent building on the mesa is the small BLM ranger station at the head of Kane Gulch, and there are no year-around residents. Because the Pueblo sites are so abundant, and the signs of present-day civilization so few, Cedar Mesa is an exceptional place for visitors to experience a sense of the past and of a culture different from their own yet one still pervasive through its highly visible archaeological traces.

Although this landscape is well preserved relative to other areas of the Southwest, the archaeological sites of Cedar Mesa are increasingly threatened by off-road recreational vehicle traffic, by unauthorized wood-cutting, and by the prospect of renewed exploration for oil and gas. In addition, the good preservation and spectacular settings of the canyon sites makes them vulnerable to being "loved to death" by visitors who unintentionally dislodge stones from walls, create trails that erode middens, or damage rock art by touching or trying to make rubbings. The numerous sites on the mesa proper are more accessible by vehicle, and continue to be preyed upon by surface collectors and in some cases by "diggers" who typically desecrate burials in search of pottery vessels left as grave accompaniments.

Cedar Mesa needs more protection, and the BLM, which manages it, needs more funding for protection and especially for visitor contact and education so that the "wear and tear" on the sites can be reduced. We need to move away from a focus on preserving individual sites or types of sites (e.g. only the most intact canyon sites) to one that recognizes that Cedar Mesa as a whole is one of the best remaining and most publicly accessible examples of a prehistoric cultural landscape. It is hoped that the studies briefly summarized below (some of which were partially funded by NTHP) will contribute not only to the recognition of the Pueblo cultural landscape of Cedar Mesa, but to its preservation. Establishing a Cedar Mesa National Monument or National Conservation Area would contribute greatly to achieving this goal.
Cedar Mesa Cultural Landscape Studies

2009—Mapping Two Chaco-related Great Houses and a Possible Isolated Great Kiva

The fieldwork in 2009 (Lipe et al. 2011) did not involve financial support from the National Trust, but did document the Et Al and Owen "great house" sites (Matson and Lipe 2011). These must have been important nodes of social and religious interaction in the Puebloan cultural landscape. Their distinctive architectural features would have communicated cultural understandings and also symbolized recognition of, if not actual connections to, the major cultural center of Chaco Canyon in northwest New Mexico (Hurst and Till 2008; Cameron 2002, 2008; Kantner and Mahoney 2000). In addition, the HST site (42SA28201) was mapped in 2009 (Matson and Lipe 2009; Lipe et al. 2011). This site was thought to represent a possible isolated great kiva associated with a road swale that may connect it to the Et Al site located several kilometers to the south (Hurst 2009).

The Et Al and the Owen great house sites were mapped and placed chronologically through study of the styles of their surface pottery and dating of roof beams that survived atop masonry rubble mounds. The Et Al site (42SA18431) appears to have been established in the very late AD 1000s/early 1100s, and to have continued to be used in the late 1100s and early 1200s, perhaps with a period of little or no occupation in the middle 1100s. Most Cedar Mesa sites had relatively brief occupations—a generation or less—but Et Al appears to have been an important place for well over 100 years—throughout most of the Pueblo occupation of the Mesa (Matson et al. 1988, 1990; Lipe et al. 2011).

The Et Al site (Figs. 2 and 3) has a number of architectural features that likely represent emulation of and at least symbolic connections to the much larger great houses of Chaco Canyon (Hurst and Till 2008; Kantner and Mahoney 2000). These features include a two-story masonry "great house" building that contrasts strongly with the very unostentatious "ordinary" Cedar Mesa habitations; southeast orientation of the great house, which also has a "blank" back wall; larger-than ordinary kivas "blocked-into" the great house building; mounded midden features; associated "road" swales; a depression south of the great house thought possibly to indicate a great kiva; and on the outskirts of the site, the remains of a small habitation dating to the early part of Et Al's occupation (Lipe et al. 2011; Matson and Lipe 2011). The Et Al great house is a small one by Southwestern standards, with only an estimated 34 rooms, but it contrasts in many ways, including size, with the much smaller habitations contemporary with it. At the time of initial construction, most Cedar Mesa habitations consisted of just a few rooms, and many had walls of poles and mud (jacal) rather than of stone masonry.

As noted, one of the road swales visible at the Et Al site has been traced north for several kilometers to the HST site and beyond (Fig. 4) (Hurst 2009). It perhaps is
part of the road trace that Severance (2008: 155) reports he followed for nine miles on central Cedar Mesa. Other road traces have been noted on the mesa. These would have tied the Et Al site to parts of the Cedar Mesa population that lived too far away to frequently visit the site. A 2 km radius is usually considered to define a local community where people interacted regularly on a "face to face" basis (Varien 1999). Et Al is likely to have been an important—perhaps the most important—node in the network of connections that would have helped knit the dispersed population of Cedar Mesa together socially and symbolically into a loosely bounded regional society. Fast (2012) speculates that the Et Al and Owen great houses were initially established by rival socio-religious leaders, but that Et Al eventually won out in the competition for loyal followers.

While the Et Al road swales were being examined, several Hopi yellow ware potsherds dating to the AD 1400s (Fig. 5) were found in the trace several hundred meters north of the Et Al site (Hurst 2009). This suggests that long after Cedar Mesa's resident population had emigrated, individuals from Hopi were making pilgrimages up into the area, perhaps to visit shrines or other culturally significant places such as the Et Al site. It is possible that the Hopi connection extends all the way back to the early 1100s, when there was a brief period of strong cultural influence from the Kayenta area of northeastern Arizona (Lipe and Glowacki 2011; Matson and Lipe 2011; Lipe et al. 2011). The Kayenta archaeological tradition is the one most closely associated with ancestral Hopi culture.

The Owen site (42SA24584) (Fig. 6) is located approximately 14 kilometers north of the Et Al site, and less than a kilometer west of the upper part of Grand Gulch. On the basis of associated surface ceramics, it appears to have been occupied predominantly in the very late 1000s and/or early 1100s (Lipe et al. 2011). This was the period when Chacoan influence north of the San Juan River was at its strongest (Lipe 2006). It has a "Chacoan footprint"—a two-story masonry building that ostentatiously contrasts with ordinary habitations; an associated road trace; and a large depression indicative of a great kiva. Several small habitations are located within a few meters of the great house—something not uncommon at the small Chaco-related centers north of the San Juan River at this time (Hurst and Till 2008).

The HST site (42SA28201) (Fig. 7) is located approximately 7.5 kilometers north-northeast of the Et Al site. It appears on the basis of associated surface ceramics to have been occupied in the early 1100s, making it approximately contemporaneous with the initial occupation at Et Al and the main occupation at the Owen site (Lipe et al. 2011). In addition to a 12 X 15 meter shallow depression thought possibly to indicate a great kiva, there is a fairly extensive but thin midden deposit and three patches of sandstone rubble that may represent locations of small non-masonry surface structures. A prominent road trace passes through the site, close to the large depression (Lipe et al. 2011). Winston Hurst and Jonathan Till found evidence that the road trace continued both north and south of the HST site. They hypothesized that the southern part linked the HST and Et Al sites (Hurst 2009).
2011—Defining the Community Associated With the Et Al Great House

In the summer of 2011 and with partial funding from the National Trust, WSU MA student Natalie Fast, assisted by Lipe, Matson, two other graduate students, and several volunteers, documented 71 sites of all time periods in an approximately 3.6 km² area centered on the Et Al site (Fig. 8) (Fast 2012). Of these, 25 were Pueblo II-III period habitations. A number of the other sites were identified as Pueblo II-III limited activity or special purpose sites.

Three definite Pueblo period shrines plus one probable one were documented, including a large stand-alone shrine (42SA30000) located on the top of a very prominent landform approximately 1.1 kilometers southeast of the Et Al site (Figs. 9-11). This consists of a circular masonry enclosure with an eastern rectilinear extension and a possible small plaza just to the west. These features cover the entire semi-level space at the top of the landform, which slopes steeply away on all sides. Surface artifacts are sparse, indicating this feature was probably not used as a camping or living place. Its size precludes its having been the location for large gatherings, and the small pottery assemblage indicates that feasts probably did not take place there.

A smaller circular shrine outlined by a low dry-laid masonry wall is located approximately 1.1 kilometers northeast of Et Al (Fig. 12). It is on a narrow extension of a low butte and commands a good view of the terrain to the north and south. It is part of a previously recorded site (42SA4146) but had not been recognized as a probable shrine at the time that site was initially mapped as site BU 12-1 by the Cedar Mesa Project surveys in the 1970s (Matson et al. 1988, 1990). The third shrine is located within a larger site (42SA4334) near the edge of a canyon approximately 600 meters west of Et Al. It is marked by a very low circular outline of stones, and also had not been previously recognized when the site was recorded in the 1970s by the Cedar Mesa Project surveys.

Based on other studies (e.g., Varien 1999), Fast (2012) assumed that a "face-to-face" community of regular interaction would live within a 2 km radius of the Et Al central site. Using data from the 2011 and earlier surveys, she estimated that between 44 and 62 people would have lived within this 2 km radius, including those residing at Et Al. This indicated that the settlement density immediately around Et Al was no higher than elsewhere in this part of central Cedar Mesa—in other words, Et Al did not appear to be a "magnet" for close-in settlement. Her estimates also indicated that the "face-to-face" community was too small to reproduce itself biologically, in the sense of individuals’ ability to find mates of suitable age within a group of that size.

Using additional data from previous Cedar Mesa Project surveys, Fast (2012) inferred that a "self-sustaining" population of at least 475 people probably lived
within an 8 to 14 km radius of the Et Al site. This led her to suggest that although Et Al must have been a socio-religious center for the small face-to-face surrounding community, it likely also served a "community of participation" composed of people living within the larger radius or perhaps even beyond. People residing as much as a day’s walk away could have visited Et Al on special occasions without undue hardship. Fast (2011, 2012) assembled evidence that feasts took place at the Et Al site, and as previously noted, one of the "road" traces extends north to areas well outside the 2 km primary community radius (Hurst 2009). This suggests that the roads represent symbolic connections to other parts of Et Al’s spatially extensive "community of participation".

The fact that there are only two of these small great houses (i.e., Et Al and Owen) on Cedar Mesa also indicates that they must have drawn visitors from beyond their immediate surroundings, and perhaps from the entire Cedar Mesa area. Furthermore, the "Chaco-esque" characteristics of the site architecture and layout indicate at least occasional connections by the occupants of the Et Al site with people and places across a much larger portion of the Four Corners area of the Southwest. Using site architecture and layout to visibly demonstrate such connections might well have amplified the status and influence of the persons who built the Et Al great house and who later organized feasts and group ceremonies there.

Fast’s study lends further support to the concept that traces of a Pueblo cultural landscape can still be detected on central Cedar Mesa. The constructed and natural features that made up this landscape served to direct and focus the social interactions that knit together a widely dispersed population. They also served as mnemonics for the cultural beliefs and practices that underlay this population’s way of life and identity.

2012—Additional Investigations of "Places of Attraction" on Central Cedar Mesa

With partial funding from a 2012 National Trust Preservation Funds grant ("Historic Pueblo Cultural Landscape, Cedar Mesa, Utah"), a small party led by Lipe and Matson, and assisted by remote sensing specialist Guy Cross, investigated several possible great kivas, as well as a large shrine and a mesita site with defensive characteristics that probably also served as a place for gatherings. Several of these sites or features were mapped for the first time, and the possible great kivas were investigated by a combination of ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and hand augering (Lipe et al. 2012).

Great kivas

The presence of a great kiva (Feature 2) at the Owen site (42SA24584) was verified by GPR mapping and augering, and its diameter estimated at between 13.6 and 15 meters, well within the range of such structures across the Pueblo Southwest.
Auger testing identified the floor level, but did not encounter evidence that the roof had burned.

At the Et Al site (42SA18431) a large shallow depression (Feature 10) south of the great house building was considered as possible evidence of a great kiva. This expectation was based in part on the frequent occurrence of a great kiva in this position as part of the spatial patterning of Chaco-related great house sites in the Northern San Juan region (Hurst and Till 2008). In 2012, Feature 10 was investigated by hand augering and GPS mapping. The results indicated that the ground surface had been artificially lowered in this feature, but that a fully developed great kiva was not present. Bedrock was encountered at depths ranging from 65 to 110 centimeters below the present ground surface. Most auger tests within the eastern end of the depression encountered 20-30 centimeters of cultural fill that included sherds, flakes, and fragments of charcoal. The shallow depth of the feature, the lack of a level "floor" and the absence of a clear boundary to the depression argued against interpreting it as a great kiva. The depression does appear to have been created by excavation, and it has several associated rubble and artifact scatters on its peripheries (Features 4, 6, and 12). These characteristics suggest that although Feature 10 was not a great kiva, it may have been constructed and used as a focus for gatherings.

As noted in the description of the 2009 fieldwork, features at the HST site (42SA28201) include a large depression, a midden area, and three scatters of small-sized sandstone rubble thought to possibly indicate the presence of non-masonry surface structures. Auger testing and GPR mapping of the large depression indicated that it does not represent a great kiva. A kiva was identified, but it is an "ordinary" one with an estimated diameter of 4.7 to 7.2 meters and a probable diameter of 5 to 6 meters. It was not lined with masonry, and the large depression surrounding it had been created as the sandy loam soil slumped and washed into the kiva pit as it filled. The site features indicate that the HST site is a "Prudden unit" type of habitation site, probably occupied by a single family. This is a common site type on Cedar Mesa, but the presence of a road immediately adjacent to the site is unique in the extensive survey data compiled so far (Matson et al. 1988, 1990).

Another possible great kiva site (42SA30148) was also mapped and a 15 meter diameter surface depression was examined by auger testing and GPR (Fig. 13). This site is located in the Todie Flats area, approximately 7.6 kilometers north-northeast of the Et Al site and 6 kilometers northeast of the HST site. In addition to the large depression, the main part of the site has several extensive midden areas, as well as several patches of sandstone rubble probably indicative of small surface structures. Also, approximately 30 meters west of the large depression are the remains of a habitation area consisting of a small kiva depression and several associated surface rooms. Only a few artifacts were associated with this western habitation unit, indicating it was only briefly used. In the main part of the site, the relatively large ceramic assemblage from the midden area located just southeast of the large depression indicated an occupation primarily in the very late 1000s and early 1100s.
AD (late Pueblo II period), though with some sherds that may have been deposited in the late 1100s or early 1200s.

Hand augering and GPR mapping of the large depression demonstrated that it also was produced by sediments slumping and eroding into a relatively small kiva pit that had not been lined with masonry. This "ordinary-sized" kiva was estimated as being 5.2 to 7.2 meters in diameter, with a probable diameter of 5.5 to 6.5 meters.

The Fortified Mesa Site (42SA3680)

On the basis of surface ceramics, this site dates primarily to the Pueblo III period in the early-mid 1200s (Fast 2012). It is located approximately 5 kilometers north of Et Al site (Figs. 14 and 15). The main portion of the site is atop a steep-sided mesita commanding a very large viewshed. Geographic features visible from the site include the Bears Ears and Woodenshoe buttes on Elk Ridge to the north and northwest, the Mossbacks buttes and the Red House cliffs to the west, and Navajo Mountain and Paiute Mesa to the southwest on the Arizona/Utah border. The top of the mesita is dominated by a massively-built 4-room central structure with walls still standing up to 1.5 meters high. Adjacent are two plaza spaces enclosed by standing masonry walls. Several granaries and possible temporary habitation structures are located on the peripheries of the site, and there is a substantial midden area to the west. This site may well have served as a defensive redoubt at a time when conflict appears to have been ramping up in the Four Corners area (Kuckelman 2006). The size of the midden, the lack of habitation structures, and the presence of the formal plaza spaces suggest, however, that it was also constructed as a place for large group assemblages.

Fast (2012) analyzed ceramics from both the Fortified Mesa and Et Al sites to see if they revealed evidence of feasting. Large gatherings for ritual and social purposes are often accompanied by consumption of food, either as provided by the hosts or as "potluck" offerings brought by visitors (Dietler and Hayden 2001; Mills 2004). If this activity is frequent enough, it may be detectable by increased frequencies of large serving or cooking vessels, or disproportionate amounts of decorated wares in the pottery assemblages of the sites where the gatherings occurred. Fast's analysis showed relatively higher proportions of decorated ware sherds to gray ware sherds at both Et Al and Fortified Mesa, as compared with "ordinary" small habitation sites in the surrounding area of Cedar Mesa. Inferred rim diameters also indicated that Fortified Mesa and Et Al had significantly larger decorated ware vessels, on average, than did ordinary residential sites. Et Al and Fortified Mesa also proved to have higher frequencies of bowls than jars. These three measures all indicate that feasts made a larger contribution to the pottery assemblages at Et Al and Fortified Mesa than at the standard residential sites. A study of the pottery assemblage from the Owen site by Williams (2009) also found evidence of contrasts with ordinary residential assemblages that was indicative of feasting. Thus both pottery and architectural evidence from the Et Al, Owen, and Fortified Mesa sites supports the hypothesis that they were locations for occasional large gatherings.
The Snow Flats Road Mesita (42SA6179)

This is the most architecturally prominent of several possible shrine sites discovered so far in the central part of Cedar Mesa. The site is located approximately 7.3 kilometers east-northeast of the Et Al site (Figs. 16-18). It is on top of a small mesita located on the eastern side of the central portion of Cedar Mesa, and commands a view of an enormous area to the northeast, east, and southeast. Geographic features that can be seen from this location include the Abajo Mountains to the northeast, Comb Ridge to the east, and the Carrizo and Lukachukai buttes to the southeast on the Arizona/New Mexico border. The top of the small mesita was intensively occupied as a habitation site in late BM III-early PI times (late AD 600s-mid-700s), but also has three dry-laid circular or semi-circular masonry structures that we are classifying as shrines. Only a few post-Pueblo I period sherds occur at the site, but these and the use of masonry indicate the three shrines probably date to the late Pueblo II or Pueblo III period.

The largest of the three is ca. 10 m in diameter and has a massive dry-laid masonry enclosing wall. The area in which it occurs has large quantities of BM III and a few possible PI sherds on the surface, but the area inside the shrine enclosure has almost no occurrences of pottery. This suggests that the enclosed area was cleared during or after construction of the enclosure. This seems more likely than the hypothesis that the structure both predates and was kept clear of the early pottery while it was being deposited in large quantities just outside its wall. The circular walled feature at the Snow Flats Road site is large enough to have accommodated sizable groups, but if we are correct about its date, the paucity of associated pottery indicates it was visited rarely or only by individuals or small groups. This large shrine feature is similar in size and construction to another large circular dry-laid shrine located atop Comb Ridge (Till 2001) to the east. It is also similar to the previously noted shrine feature at site 42SA30000 in being a fairly elaborate construction, occupying a prominence that has a very large viewshed, and having relatively few associated artifacts.

Summary and Conclusions

The studies reviewed here show that the Pueblo people who occupied the Cedar Mesa region between about AD 1060 and 1270 constructed a cultural landscape that facilitated social ties among the occupants and that must also have served as a mnemonic for the cultural beliefs that made their lives meaningful. They must have "domesticated" the natural landscape by designating particular places and landforms as locations that evoked cultural memories, or where people would regularly meet to reinforce social relationships. They built features that in some cases appear to have amplified the importance of particular landforms, while in others, the constructions themselves created new meaningful places.
These constructed "places of attraction" include two Chaco-style "great houses", several circular shrines, and "road" traces that must have both symbolically and physically linked families and groups living in the central part of Cedar Mesa. Details of the architecture and layout of the great houses also show efforts to at least symbolically affiliate the regional Cedar Mesa community with the influential and powerful center at Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico.

The multitude of humble single-family dwellings scattered over central Cedar Mesa, as well as the patchwork of cleared and recently fallowed fields that accompanied them must also have given the Pueblo inhabitants of Cedar Mesa a sense of belonging both to a social group—no matter how loosely structured—and to the place itself. It is the constructed features documented here that demonstrate that the society that occupied Cedar Mesa in those times was more than the sum of those individual homesteads. The great houses, shrines, and roads are evidence of social and cognitive processes that would have enabled the Cedar Mesa people to see themselves as sharing an identity distinctive to that place and time.

Constructing and maintaining social bonds within in this large area and over a 200-year period must have been a process that varied through time and place. The location and architectural features of the "cliff dwellings" in the Cedar Mesa canyons, and even in some of the mesa-top sites point to an epidemic of violence in the AD 1200s, in the last decades of Pueblo occupation of the area. It is not clear whether this reflects neighbors fearing neighbors or a concern for raids emanating from outside the area. Perhaps it was some of both. Even then, it is clear that people continued to share detailed patterns of architectural and artifact construction, including patterns such as building kivas that represented beliefs about the original emergence of people into this world from those below. And sites such as Fortified Mesa may have served as places for people to gather for social and ritual purposes as well as being defensive redoubts to be used if the need arose.

This kind of "place-making", using both natural and constructed features, must be a universal process in human societies, but we generally don’t see evidence of it in archaeological record of the built environment until societies cross a varying threshold of population density and sedentism. Cedar Mesa provides a wonderfully preserved example of the early stages of this process of using both built and natural features to construct a meaningful cultural landscape.

Unfortunately, Cedar Mesa’s archaeological sites are increasingly threatened by off-road vehicle use by recreationists and wood-harvesters, as well as by artifact collectors. And as the number of visitors who come primarily to "see the ruins" increases, inadvertent damage (e.g., leaning on fragile walls) and casual vandalism (e.g., graffiti on cliff walls) also increases. The Bureau of Land Management, which manages Cedar Mesa on behalf of the American public, needs additional resources so it can more effectively protect and manage this cultural landscape and educate visitors about its significance and how to enjoy it without damaging it. National Monument or National Conservation Area designation would would help bring more
funds for these purposes. The implication of the studies reported here is that
preservation measures need to be focused on Cedar Mesa as a whole, and not just on
particularly well-preserved archaeological sites, and not just on the sites in the
canyons.

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Figures

Figure 1. Regional map, showing location of Cedar Mesa
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Figure 17. View from west of setting for site 42SA6179.

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Figure 18. Map of 42SA6179, showing outline of level area of mesita and three shrines with dry-laid masonry walls. Part of Structure 2 is shown in the Figure 16 photo.