

# Managing Archaeological Resources for the Future: A Monumental Task

Bill Lipe, Washington State University and Crow Canyon Archaeological Center

**T**HE 2000 CENSUS showed that Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah ranked first through fourth, respectively, among the 50 states in percentage of population increase since 1990; New Mexico was twelfth. In the twenty-first century, the Southwest's public lands will increasingly be asked to meet multiple demands. This includes outdoor recreation for these growing populations, as well as traditional uses such as grazing, mining, logging, and hunting. In addition, Native Americans will increasingly seek to influence management decisions on public lands they consider ancestral. In this context of growing, and often conflicting demands, the designation of certain public lands as national monuments is highly significant. What are the implications for the future of Southwestern archaeology?

In the new monuments, large numbers of archaeological sites remain relatively intact in environments with considerable ecological integrity. These qualities are likely to become increasingly rare as urbanization and development fragment the Southwestern landscape. There is, however, exceptional potential for the public to benefit, including new information about the past from archaeological research, opportunities for the public to learn about archaeology, and preservation of sites that are culturally important to Native Americans. These benefits ultimately provide the justification for protecting and managing archaeological sites. Land managers have the daunting task of balancing site protection with delivering these benefits now and into the distant future.

Recreational use will certainly increase in the new monuments, and with it, the threat that sites may be vandalized or "loved to death." Channeling visitors to a few exceptional sites that have been "hardened" in the national park mode seems impractical and inappropriate for most, if not all, the new monuments. Instead, land managers will need to educate visitors about "site etiquette," as well as an area's cultural history. If a critical mass of concerned and informed visitors can be created, the knowledgeable ones will help educate those naive

about backcountry site etiquette and will constrain or report the few malicious ones bent on causing damage. Volunteer site stewards and a program of training and licensing backcountry trip providers can also help multiply the efforts of agency personnel. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has shown national leadership in archaeological education and public outreach, and thus, is well positioned to carry out such strategies.

What should be the role of research in these new "archaeological preserves" full of irreplaceable archaeological sites? Should excavation be postponed to some indefinite future when archaeological methods will permit ever greater amounts of information to be obtained from ever smaller holes in the ground? While once I might have supported such policies, I have learned over the years that things are not this simple. Archaeological research does more than satisfy the curiosity of a few archaeologists – it provides a flow of information that maintains public interest in archaeology. Research moratoriums eventually create informational "black holes" and undermine a major justification for protecting sites in the first place. Furthermore, over the past 30 years, archaeologists have developed sophisticated field techniques and sampling designs that allow them to acquire a great deal of evidence from excavating only a tiny percentage of a site. Of course, research projects in the monuments must be well-justified and carefully designed, but the public educational and scientific goals expressed in the Antiquities Act require research to continue.

In implementing management plans that respond to multiple values and interests, the BLM has extraordinary opportunities and challenges. All of us who care about the archaeological component of the new monuments need to let the agency know our concerns. We must also work to ensure that those charged with managing the archaeological resources have the financial, administrative, and moral support required to get the job done properly.

## CLOSING GALLERY . . .

*Left and center: petroglyphs, Ironwood Forest. Right: painted plaster wall at cliff dwelling, Canyons of the Ancients.*

