

The Southeast Utah Group

The Southeast Utah Group, consisting of Arches National Park, Canyonlands National Park, and Natural Bridges National Monument, holds a museum collection of over 300,000 items. Far from remaining hidden away in storage, many of these items have been used for exhibitry, publications, and research.

Exhibits

Over the past few years, a number of the visitor centers in the Southeast Utah Group have added new exhibits. Each of these has used museum collection items. A temporary exhibit at Arches National Park has displayed biological specimens to explain to visitors the Quaternary studies being conducted in the area. Scientists from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff have excavated packrat middens to learn about climatic, floral, and faunal conditions of the Quaternary period. New wayside exhibits along the main road at Arches make use of a number of photographs from the park's archives.

Both the Island in the Sky (ISKY) and Needles districts of Canyonlands National Parks have renovated their visitor center exhibits recently. The ISKY exhibits include the coffee pot once used by Superintendent Bates Wilson when showing officials the remote areas of the park in hopes of bringing about the establishment of Canyonlands National Park. The Needles exhibits include an Anasazi mug found by visitors who set the proper example by reporting the find rather than moving the object from its place in the field. Also in the exhibits are objects from the cowboy era such as branding irons and horseshoes.

Natural Bridges National Monument is building new exhibits as well. Photographs from the archives will play a prominent role in these exhibits.

Publications

Three years ago, the Southeast Utah Group (SEUG) began a project to compile archives for the three parks. Since the beginning of that project, the archives have been used by a variety of authors and researchers. Bill Noll of Kansas State University is writing a Master's thesis on Mission 66. His use of Natural Bridges NM as an example of an area completely transformed by the program has brought him to the Group's archives for documents as well as photographs. A distant relative of the Wolfe family (whose former home is preserved at Arches NP) combed the archives for information

she is using in a novel. Noted author David Lavender has made use of the Canyonlands archives in researching his upcoming book on the Moab, Utah area.

Information and photographs from the archives have also been used in articles for the quarterly journal of the Dan O'Laurie Museum, a county museum located in Moab. In addition, a locally-published monthly newspaper has begun carrying a "50 years ago" column. Excerpts from the Arches monthly reports of 50 years ago, pulled from the park archives, are used in the column.

Other parks have benefited from the SEUG archives as well. A contractor writing the administrative history of Capitol Reef National Park used the SEUG archives for documentation regarding livestock grazing issues.

Research

The Southeast Utah Group has a very active research program in the natural sciences. Projects range from faunal surveys to an effort to discover how the mysterious geological formation known as Upheaval Dome was created. These projects sometimes generate large collections of specimens that can be used by other scientists as well.

The educational value of the collections was a feature of a win-win arrangement made with Colorado State University entomologists. Arches National Park had an uncatalogued collection of some 350 insects. Without an entomologist on staff, we were unable to make use of the collection. Boris Kondratieff, CSU entomologist, took the collection on loan to use in his teaching. His identification of specimens will greatly facilitate our ability to catalog and use the collection. Meanwhile, his students have an opportunity to see insect specimens collected in the 1950s and 1960s, many of which are of species they have never before studied.

As our collections grow, we continue to try to find ways to use the museum collection to support management efforts to understand and preserve park resources while also expanding public appreciation of them.

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