

# **“Excavation of Two Virgin Branch Puebloan Sites at the Proposed Jackson Flat Reservoir, Kane County, Utah”**

**By**

**Robert Nash  
Bighorn Archaeological Consultants**

**To**

**Dixie Archaeology Society  
June 8, 2011**

## **Summary**

Bighorn Archaeological Consultants, LLC (Bighorn) is involved in on-going cultural resource mitigation work on several archaeological sites located within the proposed boundaries of Jackson Flat Reservoir near Kanab, Utah. This work has included the excavation of two Virgin Branch Puebloan residential sites dating from the late Basketmaker II period to Early Pueblo II period, roughly AD 250 to AD 1050. Virgin Branch Puebloans occupying these sites not only hunted and gathered wild resources, but also farmed maize, as indicated by numerous pithouses, large storage facilities, and a wide variety of artifacts. Bighorn will present their discoveries at these sites, and discuss their importance in furthering our understanding of the prehistoric occupation of Southern Utah.

Robert took us through the process undertaken at the Jackson Flats project. The project was funded by in part by the Kane County Water Conservancy District because the area will be flooded after the construction of a dam.

Initially a proposal had to be made to secure funding to work on the project. The proposal involved research questions that would come from the project. These included:

- Timing for the Archaic transition to horticulture
- Relative importance of hunting in the Kanab area vs St. George
- Evidence of site reuse and remodeling
- Environmental shifts on agriculture
- Timing of Numic migration into the region

The steps in the actual archaeological process were explained using the Jackson Flats site as an example.

1. Cultural Resource Inventory was made
2. Date recovery
3. Surface collection of artifacts helped define likely areas for detailed investigation

4. Backhoe trenching to reveal a cross section of a site. This was made to a depth of about 3-4 feet.
5. Feature profile to identify walls of pit houses and other architectural features.
6. Detailed work to define the features and search for artifacts and other items of archaeological interest.

### **Site 42KA6160**

The first site that Robert described was a complex of three pit houses that dated to the Basketmaker 2 period (AD 81-246).

The pit houses were round and faced south east. They consisted of a hearth, deflector stone, an entry way, post holes and a bench. There was a storage pit associated with this complex.

The artifacts found at this site included atlatl points, chert (sp?) from Jasper and quartzite, stone drills, bone tools and painted shaped stones.

Robert estimated that 5-6 people may have lived in a pit house at any one time.

### **Site 42KA6165**

The second site that Robert described was dated to AD 450 – 1050 (basket maker 3 to pueblo 2 periods). Within this site were three areas of investigation.

The **Area 2** pit houses contained metates and foot drums. Black on white pottery was also found.

Burials were found in the midden area adjacent to the Area 2 pit houses. In total there were 30 burials of 40-50 individuals. They were both male and female and ranged from infants to adult. The infants and sub-adults burials contained “grave goods”. The burials were about 6 feet deep.

The reburial of the remains has not yet taken place, but they will likely be reburied on the general site.

The **Area 3** site contained two room blocks from the Basketmaker 3 period. The floor was “paved” and painted. The walls were plastered. There was evidence of “wattle and daub” construction in the walls and around post holes. The floor was at the “caliches” level with some features going below the “caliches”. There was evidence of “lots of corn”.

Robert went to great detail to explain that the pit houses were used over a long period of time by many groups of people. He showed evidence where certain architectural features

were modified. There were many examples where hearths were modified and their locations changed.

One large pit house contained evidence that it was constructed over one or perhaps two smaller, earlier pit houses.

### **Artifacts**

The artifacts found consisted of:

Stone pipes

Shell beads

Stone beads

Shaped bones

Shaped bone game pieces

A turquoise cache

Matates

Black on White pottery

The detailed analysis of the artifacts is ongoing.

### **Final Comments**

It is important to note that while the general site consisted of a large number of pit houses in a village arrangement, not all pit houses were in use at the same time, making a population estimate difficult.

At the conclusion of the current work, the excavated sites were either destroyed with the construction of the dam or they were reburied.

More archaeology work at the site is necessary, but is currently on hold waiting funding.

John Mangels