

CCSS Rallies in Grand Junction

May 2002

By Don Campbell

The April edition of Points of Interest outlined the activities scheduled for the joint three-day CCSS function hosted by the Chinle Chapter in the Grand Junction area. Following are some specific highlights of actual happenings during this special weekend.

About 40 members of CCSS participated on one or more days of the weekend. We averaged slightly over 30 individuals during each of the three days. Unfortunately only 11 members from the Front Range were able to join in the festivities. The weather cooperated beautifully throughout the entire weekend. We were generally ahead of the main gnat season and what few gnats were out and about were shooed away by the balmy zephyrs.

Even though the winter-spring precipitation in western Colorado was well below normal, the cacti in Colorado National Monument were starting to bloom. Penstemon, paint brush and other wildflowers provided some additional color and interest for the group that hiked up the Old Gordon Trail on Friday afternoon.

Prior to the Friday evening picnic we gathered at one of the scenic viewpoints overlooking the Grand Valley and Colorado National Monument. Here, retired geologist, Bill Hood gave an excellent presentation covering the past 1 1/2 billion years of geologic history of the Grand Valley and Colorado National Monument. Following Bill's presentation, he and his wife Sandy joined the CCSS bunch in the Saddlehorn Picnic Area for a pleasant interlude of food, drink and conversation.

Early Saturday morning the group gathered at the Fruita Welcome Center for carpooling prior to departing for the San Rafael Swell. The drive along Interstate 70 provided constantly changing views of the north end of the Uncompahgre Uplift, the Bookcliffs, the LaSal Mountains, and some very beautiful and desolate desert landscapes. Just west of Green River, Utah, the highway climbs up through the tortured and very spectacular geology of San Rafael Reef. North of the Interstate, on our way to the Wedge, we were treated to marvelous views of Bottleneck, Assembly and Window Blind Peaks.

The first point of interest (not counting the restroom) was the Buckhorn Wash Pictograph Panel. This BLM Site contains some beautifully restored examples of prehistoric rock art. The more we looked, the more detail became apparent in the many enigmatic renderings on the sheer rock wall. Driving the length of Buckhorn Wash provided a visual smorgasbord of sculpted cliffs, desert scenery and ancient contorted cottonwoods spotted along the dry wash. Everyone was awed by the huge encampment of recreationists located in one small segment of the Wash. By late morning the group was tip-toeing through the pinyon-juniper forest near the Wedge Overlook searching for the diminutive and extremely elusive *Pediocactus despainii*. The tardy spring precipitation limited the plumping and flowering of these unusual plants, making them quite difficult to locate. The largest of these little ball cacti are not much over an inch in diameter, most are in the 1/2 to 3/4 inch range. The tops of many were barely above the surface

of the rocky soil. However, the persistence of over sixty eager eyeballs resulted in locating about 30 specimens of this teeny-weensy cactus. Also spotted were at least two species of scorpions and a couple of interesting *Sclerocacti* (*S. Wrightiae?*). By noontime, everyone had found their way back to the where the vehicles and the box lunches were parked. Marvelous views into the Little Grand Canyon of the San Rafael River from the Wedge Overlook provided a very special lunchtime ambiance.

Returning from the Wedge Overlook, we again stopped to view the Rock Art Panel in indirect afternoon lighting. A few miles further down the road the historic one lane suspension bridge across the San Rafael River attracted our attention. This wood decked bridge is no longer used by vehicles, however, is available for foot traffic. Interestingly, a large number of small lizards were seen scurrying among the deck planks.

Ordinarily the remainder of the return trip to Grand Junction would be uneventful. However, the Rabbit Valley exit just east of the Utah State Line, provided one last opportunity for viewing some outstanding cactus specimens. About a mile from the exit we were privileged to wander through a fairly extensive colony of *Sclerocactus parviflorus*. Many of these cacti are “huge,” some of the largest in western Colorado. Interspersed among the Scleros were several “trophy sized” clumps of *Echinocereus triglochidiatus*...in full bloom. Quite a nice ending to the day.

Sunday morning the group met at Grand Junctions Botanical Garden to inspect progress on the new CCSS sponsored cactus & succulent bed. To date, the salt barrier has been installed, a sprinkler system is in place, soil has been added, and parts of the rock walls and path liners constructed. This is definitely a work in progress with much remaining to be done before plants are added. Hopefully, this will all fall into place in the near future.

The next stop was at the CSU Cooperative Extension Office where we discussed and admired the rapidly maturing C&S Demo Garden. Most visitors are impressed by the fact that this beautiful garden is less than two years old. Additional non-succulent xeric plantings are scheduled to be added prior to June 1st. Interestingly, this garden has matured to the point that we are beginning to prune, thin and actually remove some of the original overgrown plants.

From the Demo Garden, we drove to Cactus Park and up the Divide Road for some native plant collecting, utilizing the Club's BLM Wilding Permit. Following the collecting, all but two of the Front Rangers headed home. Preliminary reports indicate that the participants considered the weekend an overall success and most would favorably consider attending a similar event next year.