

10
Celebration
of the 10th
Anniversary



THE
WILDERNESS
SOCIETY

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument
September 18, 2006



Introduction

The Presidential designation of Grand Staircase-Escalante as the nation's second largest National Monument on September 18, 1996 not only preserved a spectacular 1.9 million-acre natural treasure for future generations to enjoy, but it also heralded a new era of federal landscape conservation. Prior to 1996, the land now encompassed by the Monument was managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) much the same as the rest of the agency's 262 million acres across the United States (18% of the country's total land mass). However, by means of the Proclamation, the President officially recognized this special area as a frontier and declared it the new flagship Monument for the BLM. The designation of the Monument broke with long-standing precedent. Instead of transferring management to the National Park Service— as had usually happened in the past— the President explicitly entrusted the BLM with its management.

The Escalante River cascades off the southern flank of the Aquarius Plateau, winding through a 1,000-mile maze of interconnected canyons known as the Canyons of the Escalante. This magical labyrinth is one of the scenic wonders of the West. Even though Spanish explorer and priest Silvestre Velez de Escalante never saw the river, his is the namesake given by the Powell survey crew that discovered and named the Escalante River in 1872.



Not surprisingly, the designation sparked controversy. But now, ten years later, the Monument has become an established presence in southern Utah and is rapidly maturing to meet its full potential. The intent of the Monument designation was to protect the area in a primitive, frontier state, and to provide outstanding opportunities for scientific research and education. BLM has used its first ten years to make great strides toward these goals.

On this 10th anniversary, we celebrate the progress of this remarkable American resource.

“The monument has a long and dignified human history: It is a place where one can see how nature shapes human endeavors in the American West, where distance and aridity have been pitted against our dreams and courage.”

Presidential Proclamation, September 18, 1996

Highlights from the Monument's first 10 years

Visitors from around the World

Visitorship is growing each year, and is now estimated to be approximately 600,000 annually. Some visitors choose to experience the Monument's seemingly endless back-country where they can hike for days in a true wilderness experience. However, many day visitors are concentrated on the 908 miles of designated motorized routes through the Monument and in key scenic or interpreted sites. These popular sites include such places as the Grosvenor Arch, Devil's Garden, the Paria Movie Set, Calf Creek, and Scenic Highway 12. Over 60% of these visitors are visiting the Monument for the first time, and they travel great distances to see it – 23% are visiting from other countries, 14% are from Utah, and the rest visit from across the United States.

New Facilities

Four impressive and informative visitor centers have opened in surrounding communities, offering assistance to the visiting public. Meeting rooms and facilities are also made available to local communities. The interactive displays at these visitor centers have themes tied directly to science and have been created with information from actual research programs on the Monument.

- Kanab: Geology and archaeology
- Escalante: Ecology and biology
- Big Water: Paleontology
- Cannonville: Influence of the landscape on humans

For example, the Big Water Visitor Center contains the 76-million year old fossil skeleton of a duck-billed dinosaur that was unearthed on the Monument, and the Kanab diorama of an archaeological excavation is a reconstruction of an actual site.



Scientific Discovery

The Monument is well on its way to being a world-class living laboratory for biological, cultural, and paleontological resources. Over 30 research projects were underway in 2004 alone, and included study on such topics as archaeology, vegetation, aquatic and other invertebrates, recreation, paleontology, hydrology, history, botany, and wildlife. Key discoveries and ongoing research at the Monument include:

- World-class dinosaur excavations, including more than 22 since 2000. Fossils in the Monument have yielded more information about land-based ecosystem change at the end of the dinosaur era than almost any other place in the world. Many of the dinosaurs were previously not known to have inhabited this region, and several were completely new species, including an 80 million year old small ceratopsian dinosaur that researchers are rumored to consider naming *Monumentasaurus*, after the Monument.

- The Southern Utah Oral History Project, begun in July 1998 to preserve the cultural history of the surrounding rural communities. The Project interviews and records longtime residents of the area about the people and land use of the late 20th century, particularly about the influence of the landscape on people as they settled in the region. To date, over 200 interviews have been collected, transcribed, and archived in local community libraries.
- Archaeological research to develop a prehistoric chronology for the region, source and date obsidian, and develop rock art conservation methods.
- Bee entomology which revealed that the Monument contains over 600 species of bees, 20 of which are new to science.

“Even today, this unspoiled natural area remains a frontier, a quality that greatly enhances the monument's value for scientific study.”

Presidential Proclamation, September 18, 1996

- Real-time flash flood data and information provided by eighteen climate stations located throughout the Monument.
- Ethnographic studies that are complete or underway for the Kaibab Paiute Band and the Hopi Tribe.
- NASA investigations to gain an understanding of the surface of Mars by studying “Moki marbles” or “blueberries” on the Monument which are similar to structures found on Mars. On the Monument, these structures could only form in the presence of water, which gives NASA researchers insights into the possible presence of free-flowing water on Mars.

The BLM partnered with a virtual alphabet of universities for this research, including Utah State University, Northern Arizona University, Colorado State University, Brigham Young University, University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, South Africa), Kutztown University (Pennsylvania), University of Utah, New Mexico State University, University of Nebraska, Clemson University (South Carolina), and Southern Utah University. Other institutions included the Kaibab Paiute Tribe, Hopi Ethnography Interpretation, Utah Museum of Natural History, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Utah Geological Survey, the American Museum of Natural History, and NASA (yes, the space agency!).

Local and National Educational Programs

The Monument's education programs are geared towards teaching about the environment and scientific discoveries at the Monument, and try to engage science-lovers of all ages. Science outreach from the BLM is often targeted toward local schoolchildren. One of the program's goals is to encourage a life-long interest in science, and even to foster potential future Monument researchers and managers. Successful outreach programs include:

- Field trip programs for grade school children are interactive and tied directly to the themes at each visitor center with a “be a scientist” approach. Examples include learning about the past through fossils, steps paleontologists take from discovering a dinosaur to moving it to the lab

for further study, learning the story of John Wesley Powell and his 1869 expedition through skits and role play, and using Mormon and Paiute artifacts (and replicas) to learn about the different tools used in everyday life.

- Summer lecture series and winter brown bag lunches in communities surrounding the Monument have become extremely popular and feature researchers discussing their research and findings.
- Distance learning opportunities feature on-the-ground discoveries at the Monument. For example, virtually every dinosaur excavation has an educational component that allows the public to see or visit scientists working in the field. One distance learning program in partnership with the Museum of Northern Arizona and BLM's National Training Center produced a video, still in syndication, that reaches up to 1 million students nationwide.
- Internship programs give local high school students opportunities to build professional skills in science and administration. Several graduates of the Monument's high school intern program have been granted the Sterling Silver award, which is sponsored by the Deseret News and KSL Television, and includes a financial award for college. (*continued next page*)

Support from the Community and Other Stakeholders

Volunteers and other stakeholders have stepped up to support the Monument in numerous ways, for example:

- Grand Staircase-Escalante Partners is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization which local residents formed in 2004 to support the Monument by raising public awareness, funding, support, and volunteerism (www.gsenm.org). The Partners boast over 200 members and recently teamed up with local businesses to support four local summer jobs and a college-level internship at the Monument.
- Local and visiting volunteers give between 6,000 and 10,000 hours annually to assist BLM staff and scientists with a wide range of projects from repairing fences to preparing specimens for exhibits. For example, in the past three years, the American Hiking Society's "Volunteer Vacations" program has donated hundreds of hours to restore and relocate popular trails in areas like the Paria River and Calf Creek to reduce visitor impacts.
- Monument Advisory Committee (MAC) has 15 members that advise the BLM on science issues, the achievement of management plan objectives, and communication and outreach to communities and stakeholders. The MAC has 15 members including scientists from a range of disciplines and representatives from the state of Utah, Kane County, Garfield County, and from the education, outfitter and guide, and environmental community.

The Monument Continues to Face Enormous Challenges

Despite its remarkable success, the Monument endures persistent challenges that endanger its very mission and long-term sustainability. Lawsuits and agency decisions threaten to open the backcountry to noisy off-road vehicles that disturb wildlife, cultural sites, vegetation, and peaceful backcountry experiences. And even though the Monument Management Plan was finished in 2000, many decisions have yet to be implemented.

A more hidden problem is the gradual erosion of the BLM's funding for the Monument. Congress has cut the budget by \$1.5 million, or 25%, over the last 5 years. These cuts wreak havoc on the ground as staff are overworked, visitor service and law enforcement rangers are overwhelmed, and the science program is cut. In 2005, the Monument had 4 law enforcement rangers to patrol 1.9 million acres. These budget cuts have contributed to cultural site vandalism and unmanaged off-road vehicle activity that creates new cross-country trails and damages

cultural and ecological resources. Meanwhile, the level of scientific exploration is being cut back as BLM staff scientists are reassigned. **Congress and the Administration must reverse this trend if the Monument's remarkable accomplishments are to continue.**

Background on the Monument

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is a national treasure. It is located in southern Utah approximately 290 highway miles south of Salt Lake City and 250 miles east of Las Vegas. The 1.9 million-acre monument features a dramatic, multi-hued landscape that is rich in both natural and human history. It contains outstanding resources including incredible, exposed geology, world class paleontological resources, rich cultural and historical sites, and a system of healthy and intact ecological processes. From elk that migrate to lower elevations in winter to pronghorn and pack rats, the Monument is home to more than 300 species of amphibians, birds, mammals, and reptiles.

Now that it stands protected as a National Monument, Grand Staircase-Escalante is the center jewel in a ring of public lands that include some of our most iconic National Parks, such as Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. National Monuments are "protective" units, meaning that their primary purpose is to protect and prioritize management of particular resources for the whole American public, rather than use the land for commercial development or high-impact recreation.

As BLM's first National Monument, the Grand Staircase-Escalante is a cornerstone unit of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), an innovative network established in 2000 to encompass the crown jewels of the public lands managed by the BLM. This new conservation system consists of more than 26 million acres: National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National and Scenic Trails.




For more information contact:

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument
<http://www.ut.blm.gov/monument/>

The National Landscape Conservation System Coalition
www.discovernlcs.org

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Partners
www.gsenm.org



“Remoteness, limited travel corridors and low visitation have all helped to preserve intact the monument’s important ecological values.”

Presidential Proclamation, September 18, 1996

The Grand Staircase is a series of great geological steps that ascend northward across the southwest corner of the Monument. These Chocolate, Vermilion, White, Gray, and Pink Cliffs span five different life zones from high desert to coniferous forest. The name comes from Geologist Clarence Dutton, who described “a grand stairway of sequential cliffs and terraces” in his 1880 *Report of the Geology of the High Plateaus of Utah*.



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