

# Choose Any Canyon, Just Start Walking

## Southeastern Utah's Canyon Country – Gateway to Ancient History

WRITTEN BY Mark Wade



The video and photography crews were up early traveling to our shooting location before sunrise. West of Blanding, Utah, several vehicles followed caravan style down a short dirt road that led to ancient Native American ruins. We had been tasked with creating a new Website and promotional video for southeastern Utah. Our guides were Pam Hanson and Allison Yamamoto, local area experts from the San Juan County office of tourism. The skies were overcast and we were worried about the light as one crew got situated and another crew departed to a different location.



Research online provided information about a ruin called House On Fire, named for the rock striations that resemble flames above one of the historic structures. A small crew of three drove to a spot where we hoped we would find this unique 800-plus-year-old house. As we entered a narrow canyon on foot, we were startled by a large mule deer exploding from concealment and bounding away. Carved by years of flooding rains and melting snow, this canyon was a rugged cut in the earth that stretched for several miles. Continuing on, we spotted the ruins on the north slope of the canyon, 20 feet above the valley floor. Three stone structures stood in stately repose beneath a thick rock overhang. The sky was still a little gray, but this did not dampen our enthusiasm for being the only visitors to this secluded spot.

We spent the better part of an hour shooting video and photographs and exploring the canyon. Our experience was heightened as we gazed into the interiors of these ancient homes trying to fathom the lifestyle of the people who lived here. Experts say that this was part of the Chaco culture that settled northwestern New Mexico and expanded into Arizona, Colorado and Utah. They were known for their more elaborate structures, and I was quite astounded at the difference between these homes and the more simplified pit-houses I had often explored in western Utah. We were not eager to leave, but with our tight shooting schedule we were soon on our way toward Moki Dugway, Muley Point, and the Goosenecks of the San Juan River. Our other crew was headed off to Natural Bridges National Monument, and then toward Lake Powell and a deep chasm known as Fry Canyon.

On this project an exciting part of our work was the opportunity to shoot video footage using a six-foot long remote control helicopter. One crew member operated the helicopter remote

control and another managed the position of the video camera, housed in a gyro that allowed rotation in any direction. Whether a few feet above the ground or high in the air, the aerial perspective provided by this apparatus offered broad views of the surrounding grandeur.

The scenic diversity of southeastern Utah is almost beyond description, but the human history in this region is similarly remarkable. As a tourism consultant, I spend much of my time identifying what is unique about a destination, and then finding ways to explain these unique qualities to travelers. For southeastern Utah it was readily apparent that the ancient human history of this area is one of its greatest assets.

On the third day of our shooting schedule, I had the opportunity to interview the director of the Edge of the Cedars State Park/Museum. Teri Paul is originally from Iowa and I was very interested to hear what she had to say. I queried her about the ancient history of the area.

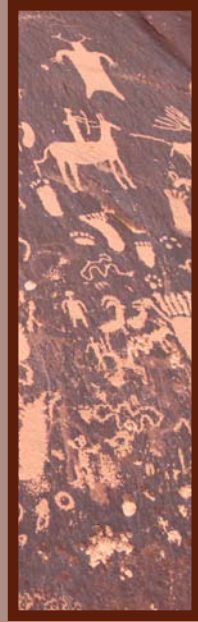
"In terms of the quantity of historic sites, how does Utah's San Juan County compare with other counties in the United States?" I asked.

"San Juan County has the largest number of sites, per square mile, of any county in the country!" was her reply.

I continued, "If you were to tell your friends how to most easily find these ancient sites, what would you say?"

Her answer was very succinct, "Choose any canyon; just start walking!"

Teri went on to explain that more than 800 years ago there were between 150,000 and 200,000 people living in this area



of southeastern Utah, and today there are only 14,000. I can't help but contemplate the dynamics of such a large number of people. Certainly there must have been a thriving community that encompassed a somewhat complex economy and social structure.

Today visitors from around the world come to this region that is promoted as Utah's Canyon Country, a term that is used primarily because county boundaries are ambiguous lines for travelers. However, within the confines of San Juan County you will also find Canyonlands National Park, Monument Valley Tribal Park, Valley of the Gods, Lake Powell and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Hovenweep National Monument, and just like the Energizer Bunny the list just keeps on going.

In my position it is sometimes a challenge to find positive things to say about a destination. In this case my only difficulty has been deciding how I can find additional time to personally explore more of Utah's Canyon Country.é

### *Interested in More Information?*

To learn more, visit [www.UtahsCanyonCountry.com](http://www.UtahsCanyonCountry.com).

Look for their new Website and video in February 2012.

