

HOLE IN THE ROCK

News

Preserving the History and Sharing the Legacy

Volume 9 Winter 2010



BEAUTIFUL BLUFF: FOUNDED 1880



The San Juan River, by the cliffs of Bluff, is running slow and cold and muddy. Boating trips have stopped. The cliffs around the little city of Bluff make a perfect background for the trees that turn brilliant gold in November. What a rough, rocky, and majestically beautiful area!

Change is coming, but nowhere more so than in the fort, that now sports one more log cabin completed by the Decker families—what talented and congenial families. Indeed, the Deckers needed a cabin to honor their Hole in the Rock ancestors who labored, loved and left many family members on Cemetery Hill. The rock chimney in the Decker cabin is also finished. All we need now are their stories and pictures to make the cabin their home. Thank you Danny and Annette Decker for organizing and gathering your families for this project. Now they know the way that leads back to Bluff.

The fort visitors center is closed for the season. We want to thank LaRue Barton for managing the center. It was a big job, but LaRue and Karl were right there to make sure the Fort visitors were well cared for. We also want to thank them for their service while members on the Hole in the Rock foundation board.

In 2010, from March 1st to October 31st, 15,000 visitors signed in at the fort. They will continue to come. Our challenge is to keep the fort property inviting with shady areas for guests to rest and learn about the incredible journey our pioneer forefathers made.

Our sincere “thank you” to all the Blanding girls who came each week to volunteer in the visitors center and work at the fort. We also extend a special “thank you” to Grant and Earlene Taylor from American Fork who stayed for six weeks, Ron and Lorraine Barton from St. George who stayed for three weeks, and Corine and Howard Hurst of Paradise, CA who stayed a total of five weeks. They were a great help. We couldn’t have done it without them. And we especially want to acknowledge our sweet Nina Taylor for her great planning and cooking the meals we have had for the cabin workers each time. She is now famous for her huge trays of freshly baked cookies. Who needs any other food when her warm zucchini lemon cookies are in sight? Of course, the Navajo fry bread, made on site by Mary Rose, is always a treat.

The fort’s new restroom building should be finished in the spring of 2011. Bids will be going out for the reconstruction of the stone Co-op store, the jewel of the fort, which was the center of old Bluff commerce and its social life. When completed, it will be a dream come true. It will call for a great celebration, with bells ringing and dancing ‘til midnight, as they celebrated in yesteryears. So get your dancing shoes ready and hitch your horses to the buggy for this event. In the meantime, the Hole in the Rock Foundation board extends our deepest thanks to all fort patriots for your continued support, and we send you our love for the coming year. Remember the Jens Nielson motto: “IF YOU HAVE PLENTY OF ‘STICKY-TA-TUDY’ YOU CANNOT FAIL.”

Corinne Roring, HIRF President



TRICK OR TREATING PIONEER-STYLE

Descendants of the Decker pioneers gathered at Bluff Fort in October to erect a cabin in commemoration of their ancestors.

The spirit of the Decker ancestors was felt during the last weekend of October 2010 as descendants and friends started construction of the thirteenth cabin to be built at Bluff Fort. Only fifteen short years have passed since the initial vision of using this forgotten piece of land. It now is a place to honor the valiant pioneers that bravely ventured into this harsh terrain.

Within a few short hours our truckload of logs had been hoisted into place and screwed down tight with huge long bolts. The large center gable was swung into place and then smaller ceiling logs were added along the ridgepole to form a sturdy roof. Our expert cabin builder, with chainsaw in hand, cut openings in the large logs to make a door and windows. Magically our pile of logs looked like a home. Our first day was complete as the sun went down. We were all grateful for the hearty dinner prepared by the ladies of Bluff Fort.

With frost on the ground, our second day's work began. It was as well organized as the first day, with jobs for even the littlest of hands. Eagerly, we awaited instruction on how to chink the gaping holes in the newly constructed log walls. The men continued working: finishing the fireplace framing, putting the rest of the smaller logs on the roof, applying a waterproof underlayment on top, and covering it with tons of dirt. They also framed the pre-cut doors and windows and laid a nice wood floor down. The finishing touch on the cabin was a beautiful rock path and patio that will welcome visitors. Inscribed in wood and hanging from the hitching post, the Decker name made it complete. There was a lot of work and no time for slacking off. However, a few lucky souls went on a four wheeling excursion to see San Juan Hill. There they saw some of what our Decker forefathers had to overcome to reach their destination.

Hearts were turned to their fathers as we all felt a greater appreciation for our pioneer ancestors. This was an experience that we will all cherish. Privileged to have had the opportunity to erect this cabin, we worked hand-in-hand with our brothers and sisters, building friendships and renewing family ties. Thanks to the vision and hard working individuals at Bluff Fort, they have created such a wonderful place for future generations to enjoy.

Trick or treating might not have been a pioneer event, but Friday night we all enjoyed the festive atmosphere. Lighted jack o' lanterns were created by the families and placed at the door of each cabin. Children dressed in Halloween costumes laughed and giggled as they made their way around to each door. This made for a fun ending to a great experience. We'll all remember where we were this past Halloween.

—Marilee Royle



Raising the Decker Cabin



FIND BLUFF FORT ON FACEBOOK!

You can now find Bluff Fort on Facebook! Search for us using the keywords "Bluff Fort." Our page is the one marked as an "organization." On our Facebook page you can see numerous recent photographs of the Bluff Fort property including the cabin interiors, the new restored Relief Society building, and the hogan and teepee. You can also view photographs of the original Bluff Fort settlers.

Leave a comment on our page and check back often for updates and news about what's going on at the fort. Be sure to click the "Like" button at the top of the page, and tell your friends!

COMING SOON: the Bluff Fort blog.

FIRST PHASE OF THE ESCALANTE HERITAGE CENTER NEARS COMPLETION

The future Escalante Heritage Center will showcase the settlement of Escalante and the vital role it played in the Hole in the Rock pioneer trek.

Construction on the first phase of the Escalante Heritage/Hole in the Rock Center began in May 2010 when CK Construction Company from West Haven, UT was awarded the contract.

The first phase was made possible through a grant from UDOT in the amount of \$650,000 which will be used for an in-road, parking lot, sidewalks and other walkways, landscaping, mural walls, an information plaza and restrooms. Work progressed rapidly during the summer with the installation of two paintings on the mural wall and the information panels around the plaza. Work on the first phase is nearly complete.

Escalante artist Lynn Griffin has completed two paintings: one depicts the story of Stanford and Arabella Smith starting down the Hole in the Rock crevice alone with their wagon while their children waited on a blanket for them; the other is of a wagon going down through the crevice with ten men straining to hold on to the ropes which are preventing the wagon from over running the team. These two paintings will be enlarged to 9 feet by 12 feet and placed on a mural wall. Lynn received the Award of Merit from the Springville Art Festival for his paintings.

The second phase of the Escalante Heritage/Hole in the Rock Center will be a large information visitors center that will house a video theater, gift shop, and room for exhibits that will tell the Hole in the Rock trek story, the settlement of Escalante, and Escalante's involvement in the San Juan settlement. Ken Naylor of the architectural firm Naylor, Wentworth and Lund has produced a rendition of the future building. The estimated cost is 2 million plus.

It has been exciting to see the first phase of our project get underway with construction. A dedication of the first phase is planned for May 28, 2011 as part of the Escalante Heritage Day Festival. Events will begin at 8:00 a.m. and last throughout the day. An original play about the Hole in the Rock trek will be presented that evening at 7:00 p.m. in the high school auditorium. The Heritage Center is pleased to extend an invitation to everyone.

Anyone wishing to donate may do so by sending their contribution to:

The Escalante Heritage Center
Box 439
Escalante, UT 84726

—Jerry C. Roundy

NEW RESTROOM FACILITY TO BE BUILT AT BLUFF FORT

Imagine how relieved the original Hole in the Rock pioneers would have been to arrive at Bluff and find a luxurious bathroom facility already in place! We know that the numerous bus tours, youth groups and other tourists that visit Bluff Fort today feel the same way, so in November 2010 we began the construction of a new restroom building.

The foundation and cement slab was contracted to Hurst Construction, and Redd Mechanical installed the plumbing. A group of volunteers under the expert guidance of Ron Snowden put up the walls and ceiling beams and covered them with plywood. Construction on the bathroom facility will continue through the winter months.



Thank you to everyone who has helped with this construction project. To learn about future work projects and volunteer opportunities, contact LaMar Helquist at 801-225-9096 or lchelquist@gmail.com.

THE FORT SPEAKS

Every year, the Fort receives thousands of visitors. Two of our visitors this year were so touched by the story of Bluff that they sent the following letter with an enclosed donation.

Dear Foundation Members,

We greatly enjoyed our visit to Bluff on October 1, 2010. We were passing through Bluff on vacation, ate a picnic lunch at the clean and attractive park on the west side of town and saw the sign for your visitors center. The video at the center and the other information available there educated us on a piece of history previously unknown to us. It was especially meaningful to have it explained by a descendant of the original settlers. My wife and I talked about what we learned and experienced at Bluff many times during the remainder of our vacation, especially when there were other references to the Mormon pioneers in other parts of the region.

Please use the enclosed donation to further your work.

Sincerely,

Jim and Debbie K.

COMMENT FROM THE VISITORS CENTER LOG BOOK

"We thought this would be a 5 second stop. We have been here an hour and a half." —Florida

HO TO THE SAN JUAN! THE BLANDING STAKE TREK

In the past several years, it has become a popular activity for LDS stakes to re-enact pioneer treks. It is a way for LDS youth to get in touch with their heritage and gain an appreciation for what the early Mormon pioneers endured.

In 2005, members of the Blanding Stake completed the Martin's Cove Trek, and we had planned to take the same trek again in 2010. But we realized that we have our own pioneer legacy of faith and sacrifice here in San Juan county. So we cancelled our Martin's Cove reservations and began planning our own "Ho to the San Juan" trek of faith experience.

After fasting and prayer, we called a historian specialist, organized our trek members into "families" including "Ma's" and "Pa's", and began to plan our trip along the actual Hole in the Rock trail.

In preparation for our trek, each group held "family nights" and worked with historian specialists to research our pioneer ancestors. We collected and shared stories from the journals of those who made the original Hole in the Rock trek. We also created an "Undaunted Award" which each participant could earn by completing various tasks and inviting the Lord to help them on their journey.

After hundreds of hours of organization and preparation, the week of the trek arrived. Participants received a "Ho to the San Juan" t-shirt and made a necklace to wear that would remind them to have the cheerful "sticky-ta-tudy"* attitude that the original pioneers exemplified. (*as original Hole in the Rock pioneer and settler Jens Nielson used to say.)

We first took a bus 24 miles to Bluff Fort to perform service projects such as chinking the cabin walls, spreading mud between the logs in the hogan, staining the wood of the handcars, building fences, and laying rock paths. We took breaks in the old log meeting house and listened to stories and watched a video in the visitors center.

After setting up camp and changing into our pioneer clothing, we concluded our first evening with a bonfire and a square dance with fiddling, songs, stories and some time for family reflection and prayer. Spirits were lifted and hearts were touched.

Early the next morning the companies loaded their 5-gallon buckets into their family carts and began their trail experience. The 6-mile trail was hot, and knats and mosquitoes afflicted the trekkers. The youth met historical characters along the trail and stopped to rest in what shade was available to hear the characters' stories.

The companies arrived at the base of San Juan Hill mid afternoon and set up camp. The youth rotated through a series of pioneer activities like making handkerchief dolls, button spinners and arrowheads as well as carvings, etc. As they participated they received tokens that could be traded for

snacks and cold drinks at the old Barton Trading Post.

After a delicious dinner the families headed to the top of San Juan Hill for an evening fireside and testimony meeting with the theme "We Thank Thee O God." It was a spiritual experience as all realized that with the Lord's help, we can do all things. Many tears were shed and the bonds of friendship filled our souls.

The spiritual mood continued the next morning with a devotional at which the Stake President (Trail Boss) addressed the youth and encouraged them to trust in the Lord as they trek through life. He then sent them off to enjoy their private solo time to pray and reflect and enjoy a letter of love from their parents. As the youth crossed slick rock mountain returning from their solo experience, it seemed as if they were accompanied by angels.

Once again the companies hit the trail, meeting historical characters along the way. Time passed quickly; the cares seemed lighter and the families were close that day.

Our trek experience ended with a Sunday fireside and a slideshow. Over 60 Undaunted Awards were presented, and everyone reflected on the life-changing experience we had shared. We had gained a new appreciation for our ancestors who had built a legacy of faith for us, the San Juan Mission pioneers.

—Chris Webb



THE BLUFF FORT CO-OP STORE: OUR BIGGEST UNDERTAKING YET

In the early 1900's, the co-op store was at the heart of the community of Bluff. It was originally organized with Platte D. Lyman, President; Jens Nielson, Vice-President; Charles E. Walton, Kumen Jones and Hyrum Perkins, Directors; L.H. Redd, Secretary; Benjamin Perkins, Treasurer; and Joseph A. Lyman, salesman.

The community's co-op store was located in the northeast corner of Bluff Fort. This cooperative venture provided a means for buying, selling and trading, and it became very successful. Navajos and Utes frequented the store and traded their wool, pelts and woven goods.

Near the turn of the century, the original log structure was replaced with a two-story stone building. In a letter to Joseph F. Barton dated January 16, 1900, Jens Nielson wrote, "Our co-op store is now so far completed that we can pile goods in the lower part, and [we] had all our holiday dances on the upper floor. The building cost \$2,700 to date and will cost about \$300 more to finish it. The store has cleared \$2,700 in two years."

In 1925 a bank robber, under the alias Fred Starr, used too much dynamite when attempting to break into the safe. That caused the demise of both the co-op store and Fred Starr.

In January 2011, the Hole in the Rock Foundation will begin the reconstruction of the Bluff Fort Co-op Store. The new building will house the Bluff Fort Visitors Center. While we have obtained a grant to rebuild the actual structure, more funding is needed to create the inside displays and panoramas that will teach visitors about the Hole in the Rock trail and the early San Juan colonization efforts.

We invite you to be a part of this great endeavor and help us preserve the story of the Hole in the Rock pioneers and Bluff Fort by sending your donations to:

HIR Foundation
PO Box 476
Bluff, UT 84512

—Beverly Vowell and Judy Lyman

THE RELIEF SOCIETY BUILDING AT BLUFF FORT



For several years a small wood frame building sat on the fort lot. It had previously been moved to Bluff from the LDS Church lot where it had once served as the Relief Society building. It was used for church services after the Bluff LDS church building burned down. Steve Bronson remembers being a deacon and passing the sacrament in the building.

The building that sat on the fort lot was an eyesore. The siding was gone, the windows were broken and the floor was uneven because of damaged floor joists. The building was the focus of many discussions. Some board members suggested that it be torn down or moved onto another property, but Corinne Roring, Hole in the Rock Foundation president, insisted that the building had historical value and should be preserved.

The structure was probably originally built in the 1920's. But it wasn't the first. The first Relief Society building was built in 1899. We learn of its construction from a letter written by Bishop Jens Nielson to Elder Joseph F. Barton. "The Relief Society is going to build a hall on part of the co-op lot that was once sold to the county. They also will build an adobe house, the adobes being now on ground. They have already bought their doors and windows and shingles, and part of the lumber is on hand."

The Hole in the Rock Foundation finally decided to use the building to tell the story of the women's contribution to the settlement of Bluff. It was moved to a cement slab on the northeast corner of the fort lot. The building was then dressed up with new wood shingles, repaired floor joists and new flooring, and then was surrounded with adobe bricks. Lyle Helquist built a new cabinet for the building using doors and drawers from the 1920's building. In addition to being an appealing addition to the fort, the building will also be used for humanitarian projects.

Thanks go to all who have helped with the remodeling and restoration of the Bluff Fort Relief Society building. Thank you Fred Jones for contributing \$9,000 to this restoration project. With united effort, what was once an eyesore has become the most attractive building at Bluff Fort. Come by and see it!



STEVE BRONSON IS NEW VISITORS CENTER DIRECTOR AT BLUFF FORT

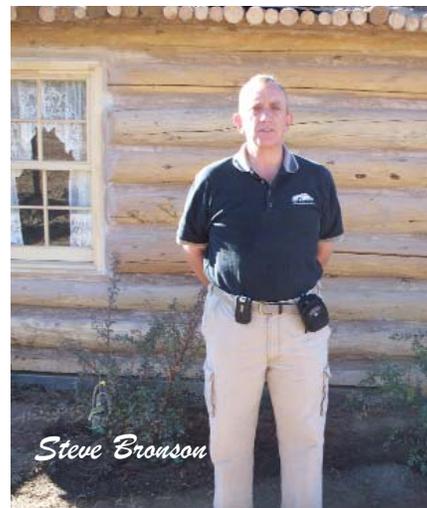
As the year draws to a close for the Bluff Fort visitors center it is time to reflect on all that has happened and to thank all those who made it possible.

The Jens Nielson and Charles Walton cabins were erected in May, and the Decker cabin was erected in October. The new restroom facility is currently under construction and will be ready for use during the next season. The Blanding Stake youth and the Kanab Stake youth came for a 3-day trek experience in June. You should have seen the young people work, sing and dance. We were pleased with their willingness to work so hard for a worthy cause. All of the fourth grade students from Blanding also spent a day at various activities at the fort. Several families came for reunions, and over 15,000 visitors from all over the world visited the fort and learned about the Hole-in-the Rock Trail and the settlement of Bluff.

We can never list everyone who made this possible, but we want to thank all the volunteers who willingly gave their time. The work at the Bluff Fort visitors center could not go on without you. We would particularly like to thank LaRue Barton, outgoing visitors center director, for the great work she has done. She has worked tirelessly for the past three years to advance the mission of Bluff Fort. She will continue as a volunteer. LaRue said, "I have enjoyed being a volunteer at the center for the last three years and encourage any of you with

just one day a week to volunteer for next year. The people you will work with are great and the experiences will be some of the best you will ever have."

The board of directors would like to announce that Steven L. Bronson is the new director of the Bluff Fort visitors center. Steve and his wife Pamela have recently retired and returned to San Juan County after 26 years in San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Bronson has many years experience in business and has worked the past 16 years as an insurance agent. Since his return to San Juan County Steve has worked part-time at the Blanding visitors center. Regarding Mr. Bronson's appointment Corinne Roring says, "I am thrilled to have Steve Bronson working with us at Bluff Fort. He was reared in San Juan County and has a deep love of the history, the people and places of San Juan. He has red rocks in his blood." Steve looks forward to his new assignment and would like to encourage all who are interested in Bluff Fort to step forward and volunteer.

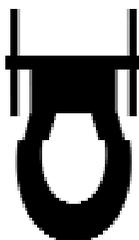


HELP PRESERVE HISTORY

If you would like to donate to the preservation and reconstruction of the old Bluff Fort and the trail taken by the original Hole in the Rock pioneers, mail your check to:

HIR Foundation
PO Box 476
Bluff, UT 84512

The Hole in the Rock Foundation is a non-profit 501(c) (3) organization. **All donations are tax deductible.**



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