

**Documentation of Perishable Artifacts from Southeastern Utah at the  
National Museum of the American Indian**

**Final Report**

**Canyonlands Natural History Association Discovery Pool Grant 13-4-BLM**

**Federal Partner: Monticello Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management**

**Laurie D. Webster, Principal Investigator**

**May 23, 2017**

## **Statement of Research**

This report summarizes work completed for Canyonlands Natural History Association Discovery Pool Grant 13-4-BLM to photodocument 368 archaeological perishable artifacts from the Hyde, Whitmore, and Kunz collections at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. The artifacts were collected between 1892 and 1897 by Richard Wetherill, Charles McLoyd, and Charles Cary Graham from alcoves in Grand Gulch, Cottonwood Wash, several tributaries of Glen Canyon, and the surrounding area. This project is part of a long-term effort to survey and photograph the more than 4,000 archaeological textiles, baskets, wooden implements, hides, and other perishable artifacts collected from alcoves in southeastern Utah during the 1890s by Wetherill, McLoyd, Graham, and others from federal lands currently managed by the Monticello Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The 368 perishable artifacts at NMAI were originally part of Hyde, Whitmore, and Kunz collections at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, but were removed from that institution by former curator George Pepper in 1909 and sold to George Heye for his newly established Museum of the American Indian in 1916. In 1989, these collections became part of the Smithsonian Institution's new NMAI in Washington, D.C.

## **Methodology and Personnel**

The survey was conducted between January 13 and February 8, 2014. Textile specialist Erin Gearty assisted Laurie Webster during the first two weeks of the project, and feather, fur, and wood expert Chuck LaRue assisted Webster during the third week. To reduce hotel costs, we shared a suite at the Marriott Residence Inn in Alexandria, Virginia, and used the Washington Metro train service and the Smithsonian van shuttle to commute to NMAI's off-site storage facility in Suitland, Maryland.

The following information was recorded on a survey log and digital spreadsheet for each artifact: object type (e.g., basket, fabric, sandal, digging stick), basic technology (e.g., coiled, plaited, twined, carved), textile or basketry structure (e.g., plain weave, 2-rod-and-bundle foundation, 2/2 diagonal-twill plaiting), raw material (e.g., yucca, cotton, turkey feathers), physical dimensions, and other relevant observations. Multiple digital photographs were taken of each object. Because these artifacts were originally part of the AMNH collections in New York, we created an AMNH/NMAI cross-reference database and attempted to link the NMAI artifacts to their original field documentation and former AMNH catalog numbers whenever possible. While Heye had erased all field and AMNH numbers from the artifacts when he cataloged them into his Museum of the American Indian collection, we were able to discern traces of the numbers on many of the artifacts and link others to their original proveniences through their field catalog descriptions.

## **Staff Involved in the Project**

Laurie D. Webster, Ph.D., Project director and perishables specialist  
Erin Gearty, M.A., Project assistant and textiles specialist  
Chuck LaRue, Project assistant and feather, fur, wood, and hide specialist

## **Projected and Actual Results**

During our 18 days of work on the project, we surveyed 320 textiles, baskets, wooden implements, and other perishable artifacts and generated approximately 1,200 digital photographs. Because we lost two days of work to a snowstorm, approximately 50 perishable artifacts remained to be surveyed at the end of our four-week visit. In October 2015, volunteer Susy Ellison and I returned to NMAI for a week with funding from the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society and surveyed all but eight of the remaining artifacts, which were on loan to NMAI's New York City branch for its "Infinity of Nations" exhibit. In February 2016, we surveyed these final eight artifacts while working in New York for our CNHA-funded American Museum of Natural History project. In May 2017, Webster completed the processing and labeling of the 1,400 digital images produced by the project.

Funding from this grant was also used to process five radiocarbon samples collected from the Field Museum of Natural History. The samples were submitted to the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry laboratory at the University of Arizona in Tucson. The objects yielded dates ranging from A.D. 100-1100. The budget originally requested funding for six samples, but money for one sample (\$550) was moved to our travel budget in consultation with Cindy Hardgrave to accommodate the high cost of lodging in Washington, D.C.

## **Conclusions and Future Research Needs**

Our survey of the 368 perishable artifacts from southeastern Utah at the NMAI is now complete, and all photographs generated by the project are labeled. Since 2011, the project has surveyed 2,650 artifacts at the Field Museum, the Museum of Peoples and Cultures at Brigham Young University, and the American Museum of Natural History. Approximately 1,500 artifacts remain to be surveyed at the American Museum, the University of Pennsylvania Museum, and the Phoebe Hearst Museum at Berkeley. Last month, the project was awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Bureau of Land Management, which will cover our travel costs to conduct this survey work, which we expect to complete by 2019-2020. We will then turn our attention to the creation of an on-line database of artifact information and images, followed by planning for a final publication. Until then, we will continue to share our findings with academic and public audiences through numerous presentations, including our annual talk at the Canyonlands Natural History Association's Visitor Center in Moab, Utah.



Figure 1. Basketmaker II, S-shaped throwing stick collected by Richard Wetherill in Grand Gulch for the Hyde Exploring Expedition.



Figure 2. Basketmaker II dart maker's kit collected by Richard Wetherill in Grand Gulch for the Hyde Exploring Expedition.



Figure 3. Pueblo III decorated twined sandal collected by Richard Wetherill in Grand Gulch for the Hyde Exploring Expedition.



Figure 4. Pueblo III turkey-feather blanket decorated with 80 white squares collected by Richard Wetherill in Grand Gulch for the Whitmore Expedition.



Figure 5. Pueblo III miniature yucca plaited ring basket with bifurcated base collected by Richard Wetherill in Grand Gulch for the Whitmore Expedition.



Figure 6. Pueblo III cottonwood gambling cup and five cane dice collected by Richard Wetherill in Grand Gulch for the Whitmore Expedition.