

**Documentation of Perishable Artifacts at the
American Museum of Natural History**

Final Report

Canyonlands Natural History Association Discovery Pool Grant 17-01-BLM

Federal Partner: Monticello Office of the Bureau of Land Management

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Statement of Research

This report summarizes work completed for Canyonlands Natural History Association Discovery Pool grant 17-01-BLM to photodocument 400 archaeological perishable artifacts from the Hyde, Whitmore, and Kunz collections at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City. This project is part of a long-term effort to survey and photograph the approximately 4000 archaeological textiles, baskets, hides, wooden implements, and other perishable artifacts excavated from alcoves in southeastern Utah during the 1890s by Richard Wetherill, Charles McLoyd, Charles Cary Graham, and others from what are now federal lands managed by the Monticello Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Dating to the Basketmaker and Ancestral Pueblo periods, the 1700 perishable objects in the Hyde, Whitmore, and Kunz collections at AMNH comprise the largest group of artifacts recovered from sites in this region during the 1890s.

Methodology and Personnel

Textile specialist Erin Gearty, wildlife biologist Chuck LaRue, and I began work at the American Museum on January 23, 2017 and spent four weeks on the project. We shared a townhouse in Brooklyn, New York and commuted to the museum via subway. During our 19 days of work, Gearty and I documented and photographed more than 400 textiles, baskets, wooden implements, and other perishable artifacts and generated about 1100 digital photographs (Figures 1-6). We also gave Don and Marsha Simonis a one-day tour of the collections. The following information was recorded on a survey log and digital spreadsheet: 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. We also entered field catalog entries into the spreadsheet and resolved cataloging and provenience issues. LaRue completed his analysis of all of the wood, horn, feather, and fur artifacts in the collection. I am now entering the survey data into an Excel spreadsheet and labeling each photograph with a catalog number and caption. An itemized spreadsheet of grant expenditures is appended to this report.

In June 2017, I will be joined at the museum for four days by Pueblo weaver and cultural specialist Louie Garcia and Zuni belt and basket weaver Christopher Lewis, who will offer native perspectives on the collections. All CNHA funds were expended during our January-February trip, so I will fund this summer's travel with private donations raised through the Friends of Cedar Mesa website, <https://www.friendsofcedarmesa.org/perishablesproject/>.

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
Louie Garcia, M.A., Pueblo weaver and cultural specialist

Projected and Actual Results

The stated goal in our proposal was to document and photograph 400 artifacts. We exceeded that goal by documenting and photographing 411 objects.

Conclusions and Future Research Needs

Of the 1700 perishable artifacts in the Hyde, Whitmore, and Kunz collections at the AMNH, 1150 have now been surveyed and approximately 650 remain to be documented and photographed. I plan to return to the museum with volunteer help for six weeks in late 2017 or early 2018 to complete this documentation. After the AMNH survey is complete, I will turn my attention to the final two museums with southeastern Utah perishables: the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia and the Phoebe Hearst Museum at UC Berkeley. I expect to complete the documentation phase of this project by late 2018 or early 2019. When the surveys are complete, I will begin the process of creating a perishable archive of project photographs and data at the Edge of the Cedars Museum in Blanding, Utah, and a digital version for tDAR (the Digital Archaeological Record) on the Arizona State University campus.

One of the major strengths of this project is its public appeal. During the past year, I have presented public programs to four Colorado and three Arizona archaeological society chapters, the Four Corners Lecture Series (Cortez, Blanding), the Moab Information Center, Aztec Ruins National Monument, and the Celebrate Cedar Mesa weekend. The project also had a fundraising table at the 2016 Pecos Conference. I also gave presentations to professional audiences at the 2016 Society for American Archaeology meetings in Orlando and the 2017 Big MACC archaeology conference at Crow Canyon in Cortez. The March 2017 issue of *American Archaeology* magazine features an article about the project.

Additional Reading

Curtis, Wayne

2017 Reexcavating the Collections. *American Archaeology* 21(1):12-19. Spring.

Webster, Laurie D.

2014 Documenting Early Collections of Perishable Artifacts from Greater Cedar Mesa. *Archaeology Southwest Magazine* 28(3-4):15-27. Summer-Fall.



Figure 1. Erin Gearty measuring and documenting 1,500 to 2,000-year-old Basketmaker coiled baskets at the American Museum of Natural History.



Figure 2. Chuck LaRue documenting a tray of prehistoric wooden implements at the American Museum of Natural History.



Figure 3. Basketmaker II unfinished yucca twined bag containing original cornmeal, collected in Grand Gulch by Richard Wetherill for the Hyde Exploring Expedition. American Museum of Natural History.



Figure 4. Basketmaker II coiled basket containing original maize kernels, pinyon nuts, and squash seeds, collected in Grand Gulch by Richard Wetherill for the Hyde Exploring Expedition. American Museum of Natural History.



Figure 5. Basketmaker II bird snare sticks with intact human-hair nooses, collected in Grand Gulch by Richard Wetherill for the Hyde Exploring Expedition. American Museum of Natural History.

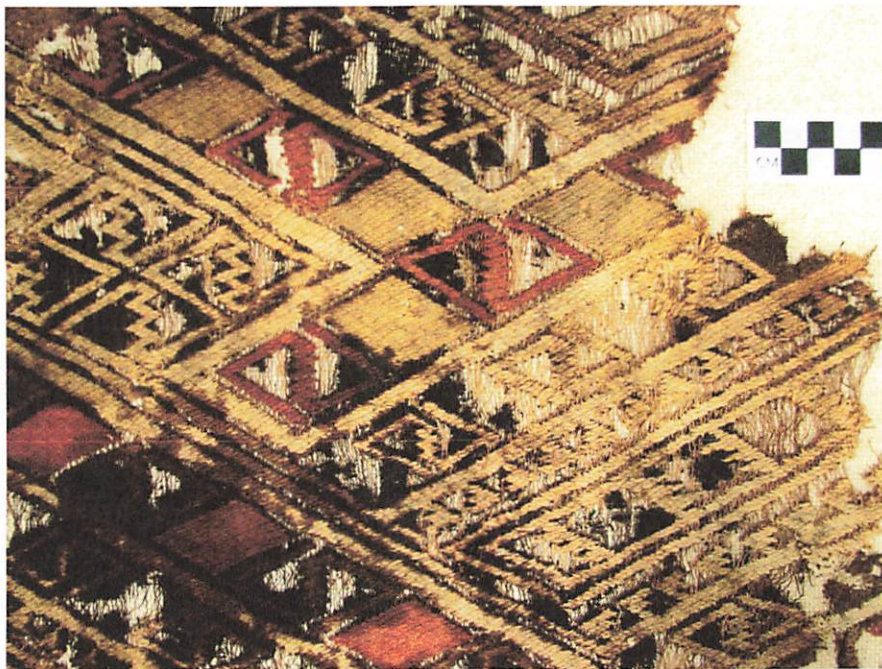


Figure 6. Pueblo III polychrome cotton blanket woven in diamond-twill-tapestry technique, collected in Grand Gulch by Richard Wetherill for the Whitmore-Bowles Expedition. American Museum of Natural History.