

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Utah (page 2 of 4)



Human Occupation and Land Use



All-American Man Pictograph, Needles District, in nearby Canyonlands National Park. So-called because the anthropoid figure seems to have an American flag on his belly. Photo © 1999 [Ray Wheeler](#).

Although estimates of the number of archaeological sites within Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument range from 18,000 to 100,000, detailed excavations have been limited in number. Existing evidence suggests that humans have used the lands within the current monument boundaries for at least 8,000 years, beginning with the nomadic [Archaics](#). Artifacts of this ancient culture within the monument consist only of scattered flaked stone tools, indicating only that Archaic peoples foraged on the [plants](#) and animals of the region.

By 400 A.D., both [Anasazi](#) and [Fremont](#) peoples had settled in the area, remaining until the widespread exodus of the region by both cultures in the 1300s. Most of the settlements of these two cultures consisted of small villages of [pithouses](#) and adobe pueblos, although several larger villages with large structures of forty to fifty rooms were also located in the area. The Anasazi and Fremont both grew crops of [maize](#) and beans, foraged native plants, and hunted game such as deer, bighorn sheep, and rabbits. Several archaeological sites in the monument represent cultural mingling between the Anasazi and Fremont, a rare event in southwestern prehistory. Around 1000 A.D., several new cultural influences moved into the area: Shoshonean peoples, ancestors of the modern [Southern Paiute](#) and other tribes; [Athabaskan](#) peoples, ancestors of the [Navajo](#) and Apache; and Kayenta Pueblo peoples.

Southern Paiutes view the monument area as their tribal homeland. For many centuries, small bands of the tribe harvested local plants, hunted game and grew irrigated crops within the area. The Southern Paiute were one of the few North American tribes that did not incorporate horses into their culture, as the sparse vegetation of most of the Grand Staircase-Escalante region could not readily sustain grazing. Like many Native American tribes during the 17th and 18th

centuries, the Southern Paiute were subjected to slave trading at the hands of recently arrived [Spanish explorers](#) and aggressive bands of Navajos and [Utes](#). This practice continued until the establishment of [Mormon](#) settlements in the 1860s. By this time, Southern Paiutes occupied most of the monument, with Utes inhabiting the northeast corner. In addition, [Hopi](#) peoples occasionally made use of the land's seasonal resources.

Between 1860 and 1880, several Mormon communities were established in the region, including Escalante, Boulder, Tropic and Kanab. These historic settlements were largely limited to the periphery of the modern monument's borders due to the difficult topography, arid conditions, and great distances between reliable water sources. The boundaries of the monument were carefully drawn to exclude these towns due to traditional local opposition to increased protection for public lands.

Despite the imposing landscape, the Mormons were determined and hardy, building homes, dams, irrigation systems, reservoirs, and trails across south-central Utah. As with other settlements across the west, the settlement of the monument region was part of their religious mission to gain control of large expanses of "unclaimed" land in order to freely practice their faith. Much of the "unclaimed" land settled by Mormons was, of course, the traditional land of Native Americans. This led to conflict between the newcomers and the natives, especially since the Mormon pioneers were attracted to the most verdant agricultural and prolific gathering areas. Most of the conflict was between the Mormons and Navajos, although some occurred with the Southern Paiutes. Yet some Southern Paiutes also went to work for the Mormons, receiving food, clothes, and other goods. In 1917, the Kaibab Reservation was established in northern Arizona, southwest of the monument, allowing the Southern Paiute an opportunity to preserve their traditions and culture.



Cattle drive on Brigham Tea Bench, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Photo © 1987 [Ray Wheeler](#).

While early Mormon settlers subsisted on agriculture, the scarcity of water and arable land restricted this economy. By the turn of the century, livestock operations were the basis of the local economy in the towns bordering the monument. In later decades, tourism and filmmaking became increasingly important sources of employment.

Today, the presence of Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef National Parks, [Glen Canyon](#) National Recreation Area, and numerous national forests, wilderness areas, and state parks in the regions surrounding the monument has continued to both cause and reflect a shift from traditional activities such as [mining](#), agriculture and [logging](#) to [recreation and tourism](#). These shifts in the economy of southern Utah have had mixed impacts.

Although traditional jobs have been lost, the increasing demand for recreational open space is increasing both the economic value of these protected lands and the associated [job opportunities](#) for the residents of southern Utah.

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