

FIRST DRAFT

World's longest art gallery' in Utah makes Nine Mile Canyon unique

The team of archaeologists and students who arrived in Utah from Harvard University's Peabody Museum in 1931 were familiar with the abundance of prehistoric ruins and images throughout the region. Even so, Nine Mile Canyon surprised them.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

In field notes, Donald Scott, the leader of the expedition, described the canyon as "almost a continuous picture gallery."

Guide and photographer David Rust was a Utah native who had led archaeologists and others to ancient sites across much of the Colorado Plateau. But the extent of such sites in Nine Mile Canyon caused him to write several journal entries such as "ruins everywhere" and "ruins all around."

Nine Mile Canyon, roughly 45 miles long, cuts through the West Tavaputs Plateau, beginning about 15 miles northeast of Price, Utah. Nine Mile Creek, which flows through the canyon, empties into the Green River from the west near the start of Desolation Canyon.

The variety of rock art throughout Nine Mile Canyon is clear evidence that ancient peoples — including those we now call Fremont — lived in or visited the desert canyon for millennia. They built rock dwellings, shelters, granaries and what appear to be lookout buildings high on cliff tops. They grew maize and other crops here.

But the canyon didn't attract white settlers until 1886. That's when the U.S. Army constructed a road through the canyon to link Fort Duchesne, in the Uinta Basin, with the railroad at Price.

"For some twenty years (it) was probably the most heavily traveled wagon road in eastern Utah," according to Edward A. Geary, whose grandfather drove horse-drawn freight wagons over the road.

Geary added that the road "was aptly termed the 'Lifeline of Uinta Basin.'"

Prior to the construction of the Army road, some ranchers likely grazed cattle in the canyon intermittently, and residents of communities such as Price, Wellington and Helper probably explored in the area. But the first hardy settlers didn't appear in the canyon until after the road was built.

The obvious question is: Why is the canyon called "Nine Mile"? There's no good answer to that.

The earliest written references to a Nine Mile Canyon are from 1871 in the journals of men with John Wesley Powell's second expedition down the Green and Colorado rivers. Powell included the same canyon name in his 1875 book about the expedition.

However, as author Jerry Spangler noted in his book about Nine Mile Canyon, the canyon named Nine Mile in the Powell documents is actually 42 miles downstream on the Green River from the canyon today called Nine Mile.

What Powell and his men called Nine Mile is now known as Rock Creek.

One story says that the Nine Mile name was applied to the canyon because the surveyor for Powell's 1871 expedition used a nine-mile triangulation process.

Another claims that the name wasn't related to distance at all. Instead, it involved early settlers named Miles, who had seven children. So, there were Nine Miles in all.

But Spangler debunks both of those stories in his book. And no firm explanation for the origin of the name has been given.

But it was clearly known as



SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

The Hunting Scene petroglyphs in Nine Mile Canyon in Utah are clear evidence that ancient peoples — including those we now call Fremont — lived in or visited the desert canyon for millennia.

Nine Mile Canyon in July of 1931, when the Claffin-Emerson Expedition from Harvard's Peabody Museum arrived.

Team members spent about two weeks exploring Nine Mile on horseback, while other members visited nearby Range Creek and Desolation Canyon. The Harvard men documented some of the most important ancient Native sites in the canyon, while ignoring or missing other prominent sites. Unfortunately, David Scott's report summarizing the expedition's 1931 efforts was never published.

Much of what the expedition accomplished was unknown to the general public until Spangler and a colleague explored Scott's report and field notes from other members of the expedition at the Peabody Museum early in this century. They published a book about it in 2018.

The Harvard men weren't the first scientists to explore Nine Mile Canyon. At least since the 1890s, amateur and professional archaeologists had been visiting the remote canyon.

Like so many explorers of the time, most were more interested in collecting artifacts and selling them either to museums or to private collectors than in carefully excavating and documenting what they found.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, better organized and documented explorations of Nine Mile and other parts of Utah had begun.

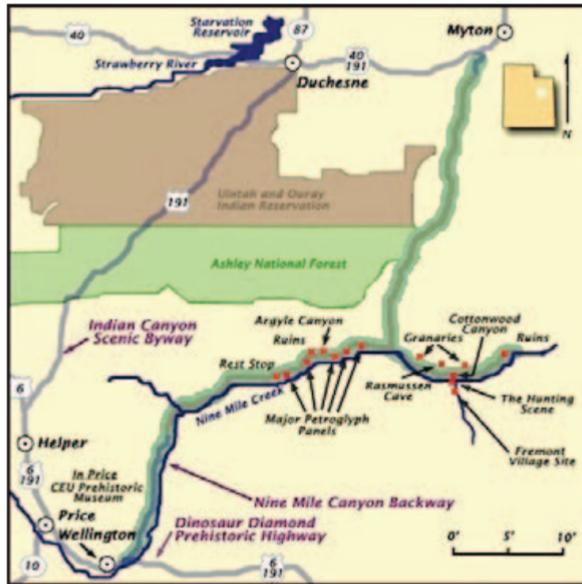
The first solid definition of what we now know as the Fremont Culture was offered by another Harvard man named Noel Morss. He visited Nine Mile Canyon and other parts of Utah in 1928 and 1929 in association with the first efforts of the Claffin-Emerson Expedition.

Morss published several papers about the agrarian Fremont society that thrived in western Utah, parts of Nevada, Idaho, Arizona, Wyoming and Colorado from roughly AD 1 to 1300 AD, and perhaps later.

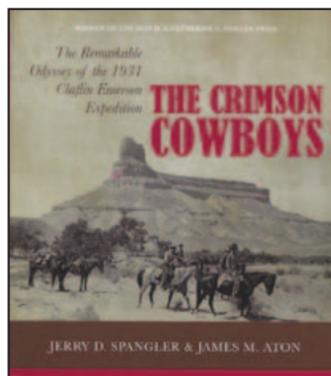
But it was his 1931 treatise, "Ancient Culture of the Fremont River in Utah," that firmly established the Fremonts as a distinct group, similar to the Ancestral Puebloan people of the Four Corners, but with significant differences.

Other researchers would later demonstrate that the Fremont people who lived in Nine Mile Canyon exhibited somewhat different artistic and building styles than their better-known counterparts who lived along the Fremont River and the San Rafael Swell.

One man who did extensive work to explain the prehistoric residents of Nine Mile Canyon



Amateur explorers can take a 70-mile auto tour and stop at important sites in Nine Mile Canyon and read plaques about the area's prehistory. Much of the canyon is Bureau of Land Management property.



was John Gillin, who for two years headed the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Utah.

In 1936, Gillin and a small team of volunteer archaeologists excavated a handful of ruins near the upper end of Nine Mile Canyon. They also visited and described a number of other sites and rock art panels in the canyon.

Gillin's 1938 paper, "Archaeological Investigations in Nine Mile Canyon, Utah," remains an important source today about the prehistory of the canyon.

Over the next decades and on into the 21st century, archaeological exploration of Nine Mile Canyon occurred sporadically. Planned gas drilling near the canyon accelerated research early in this century.

The most recent research shows that Fremont people inhabited the canyon for longer than what was previously believed. They may have arrived as early as AD 250 and intermit-

tently inhabited Nine Mile until as late as 1200 AD. Several rock art styles not associated with the Fremont Culture have also been found in Nine Mile Canyon.

In fact, Spangler noted, "Classic Fremont anthropomorphs (human-like characters) are quite rare."

But rock art is abundant. The prevalence of such art in Nine Mile Canyon "exceeds anything reported elsewhere in the state of Utah and maybe even the United States," Spangler wrote.

And yet much of the canyon has yet to be investigated by archaeologists.

Amateur explorers can take a 70-mile auto tour and stop at important sites in Nine Mile Canyon and read plaques about the area's prehistory.

Much of the canyon is Bureau of Land Management property.

Sources: "Nine Mile Canyon: The Archaeological History of an American Treasure," by Jerry D. Spangler; "The Crimson Cowboys: The Remarkable Odyssey of the 1931 Claffin-Emerson Expedition," by Jerry D. Spangler and James A. Aton; "Nine Mile: Eastern Utah's Forgotten Road," by Edward A. Geary, in *Utah Quarterly* magazine, winter 1981, reprinted in fall, 2017; "9 Mile Canyon" on blm.gov.

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Two Denver shootings kill 3, wound 6

Two men died in a shooting around 10 p.m. Saturday in the Park Hill neighborhood. Two women and a man were wounded, according to police.

One of the women had non-life-threatening injuries and the other two victims' conditions weren't publicly known Sunday, police spokesman Jay Casillas said.

Police did not immediately release details about how the shooting unfolded or what preceded the shots, the Denver Post reported.

No arrests had been made. "We're asking for the public's help to help us with the suspect information and what led to this shooting," Casillas said.

Another shooting in the Denver suburb of Commerce City early Sunday killed one person and wounded three others, Commerce City police said.

— The Associated Press

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