

# HOLE IN THE ROCK NEWS

*Preserving the History and Sharing the Legacy*

Volume 6 Spring 2009



## THREE WEEKS IN BLUFF!

*Corine and Howard Hurst served as volunteers at the Bluff Fort Historic Site for three weeks. Corine loved her time at Bluff Fort and willingly shared some of her thoughts with us.*

When we left Temple Square in the middle of March 2009 after 18 months of missionary service there, I thought I knew a little about appreciation and gratitude for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and what those early converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints went through so that we could have the gospel in our lives today. After three weeks at the Bluff Fort, I find my feelings have become more deeply rooted for those venerable early settlers. Their spirits, faithfulness, courage and total dedication to the will of the Lord and his living prophets have become more alive in me as I walk these sandy soils and watch the DVD that tells of their trek to the San Juan.

I cherish the privilege I have had of meeting and telling guests that I am a great granddaughter of Jens Nielsen. His “sticketety-too-ity” is engrained in me, unwaivering and solid. I am in awe of the Bluff settlers as I learn more of the private details of their challenges. They were firm in their faith in the mission. Like the red rocks that surround this beautiful spot and the steadily-flowing San Juan River, we, the settlers’ descendants, need to be constant in teaching our descendants these same principles of faith and determination. Your job will be made easier after a visit here. Visiting San Juan Hill, you’ll experience the story of courage and strength beyond their own that allowed the Hole in the Rock pioneers to settle Bluff. It is that strength which flows in your veins and will continue in your posterity.

Shortly after we arrived in Bluff, a beautiful guest from Ogden stopped at the visitors’ center and watched the short DVD, *The San Juan Mission*, with a group of visitors. When she heard the name Jens Nielson, she asked herself, ‘could this be the same Jens Nielson I learned about on a trek with my stake? The same Jens who was in the Willie handcart company?’ She was in tears as she shared her experience re-enacting to role of Elsie, wife of Jens, on the stake pioneer trek. “I can’t believe that I am meeting real live descendants of Jens Neilson. I studied their lives, and reported on them in stake meetings.” This sister left a nice donation and promised to return. This experience and many others with guests from places far and near have made volunteering at Bluff Fort a wonderful way to contribute to a great cause.

The volunteers at Bluff Fort are doing a wonderful job, giving

countless hours to turn this spot into a tourist attraction we can all be proud of. I want to express my gratitude to these modern-day pioneers as well as our ancestors who made that perilous journey through the Hole in the Rock and settled Bluff Fort.

Corine Hurst

*Would you like to experience history and get in touch with the incredible spirit of the Hole in the Rock pioneers? We invite you to volunteer at Fort Bluff for a week, two weeks or longer. Those living in communities near Bluff can serve a few days a month or even on a morning or an afternoon three or four times a month.*

*We need your help. Come experience the joy that service at this historic site brings. We have need for volunteers during the months of July, August, September and October. If you feel you can help, please contact Corinne Roring at 1-435-587-2484 to discuss scheduling and housing arrangements.*

## THE FORT SPEAKS

“Fascinating. Good luck with future adventures.” —UK  
“What a wonderful project you are doing.” —Grand Junction  
“Impressive” —Colorado  
“Excellent” —Germany  
“Awesome” —New Mexico  
“Thank you. It is wonderful” —New Mexico

## THE CABIN BUILDING CONTINUES

June 29-July 1st the Lyman and Perkins families will be building two cabins at Bluff Fort in honor of their ancestors! Those interested in raising a cabin in honor of a San Juan pioneer can contact Grant Taylor at 801-971-5306.



The Redd cabin completed!

## BLUFF FORT PROJECTS

Full Speed Ahead! Bluff Fort has been a busy place lately. There are five new log cabins at the fort. They honor James Monroe Redd, L.H. Redd, George B. Hobbs and their families. The Amasa Barton cabin will be a blacksmith shop to commemorate Barton's contributions to the community as a blacksmith. The fifth cabin will honor Thales Haskell, a peacemaker and a missionary to the Native American tribes.

The descendants of Platte D., Walter C. and Joseph (Jody) Lyman as well as Benjamin & Hyrum Perkins will be raising two cabins June 29th-July 1st. They will finish in time to celebrate the July 4th in Blanding.

The cooks at the fort are excited about having a kitchen in one of the truck bays in the old state road garage. There are two stoves, two refrigerators, and three sinks! When we say "cooks" we mean you who come with your families for a good time at the Fort. The kitchen doors open onto a wraparound patio with a new roof for shade. The new roof was built in two days by volunteers like Mike and Rob Atkinson who stopped to see the fort. They returned with hammers and gloves and worked alongside Neal Roberts, Ned Hall Jack Muterspaugh, and Dale & Jennie Major and members of the Hobbs family. The heavy timbers and boards flew into place under Ron Snowden's supervision. All the cars parked around the fort block indicated that something big and important was happening. Howard & Corine Hurst came from California to man the visitor center which was busy all week.

With the Hobbs cabin finished, and a new kitchen and patio roof, there was reason to celebrate, and celebrate we did with a supper and program by Dale Major and his daughter Jennie. With Dale's guitar and Jennie's violin music as well as cowboy poetry and songs, the work day ended on a high note. We were honored to have our county commissioners, Lynn Stevens and Bruce Adams and their wives join us.

Recently, a Blanding High Priest group came and shared ancestors' story of coming to Bluff in 1880. There stories bonded them to us. At the fort, we get to see how the stories of our ancestors and our origins can unite a community, a region and beyond. We are grafting ourselves into the tree of our ancestors. The more we learn about them, the more we learn about ourselves. At Bluff Fort there is a wonderful mix of people...spirit-related...who come to the fort to converse and to share. Their

ancestors become "adopted ancestors" of the fort. Our roots run deep, and on some level, we recognize the common ancestry of us all.

The stacks of cedar posts diligently barked by volunteers in May have been used to complete a Navajo Hogan. The cedar is colorful and beautifully configured into an eight-sided dwelling that is surprisingly cool inside on a hot summer's day. It was built by Charles Burand and given the stamp of approval by two Navajo grandmas who said it was *nizhoni* (beautiful) and *ya'at'eeh* (it is good).

All of the new growth at the fort is possible because of the many volunteers who work long hours. Their labor makes our donated dollars go twice as far. We are so grateful to those who have donated time and money. We invite everyone to come to the fort—to work, to converse or to sit and enjoy.

Corinne Roring, HIRF President

## THANK YOU'S

In 2009 the Hole in the Rock Foundation has received generous donations from businesses and foundations.

George & Dolores Eccles Foundation  
One Foundation, Inc.

Redd Investment Corp.  
San Juan County Office of Tourism  
Sorenson Legacy Foundation  
Utah State Office of Museum Services

We have also received valuable and generous donations from individuals. We want to thank each individual, business and foundation for your contribution. Without your generous support we could not continue our mission to keep alive the memory of the pioneers who settled Bluff.

Thanks to HIRF's board members and friends who have donated time and talents to improve Bluff Fort. Thanks to Nina Taylor and Linda Snowden for their help planning and preparing meals, and thank you Max Black, John and Brandon Cox for helping build the new kitchen.

We also express our thanks to the descendants of George B. Hobbs and L.H. Redd Jr. who helped fund and raise the two new cabins at the fort. Thank you L.H. Redd Jr. family for stripping the logs for the Hogan which will help us tell the story of Bluff Fort more effectively.

And finally, thank you to Grant, Erlene, Dell & Mary Taylor and Howard & Corine Hurst for their service in the visitors center and other projects at Bluff Fort.



## BENJAMIN PERKINS



One of the most prominent individuals on the Hole in the Rock expedition was Benjamin Perkins, a native son of Wales. Benjamin had grown up underground as a coal miner. He came to Utah in 1867 with the dream of meeting up with the Latter Day Saints in Utah and creating a new life for himself.

Benjamin was joined two years later by his sweetheart, Mary Ann Williams. They married and made a home for themselves in Cedar City, UT where they were living when the President of the Church of Jesus Christ, John Taylor, issued a call for missionaries to make an arduous trek across southern Utah to settle the southeast corner of the state. These settlements would act as buffers and the settlers as ambassadors with the Native American inhabitants and others moving into the state. Ben and Mary Ann answered President Taylor's call. They had small children to consider, so they asked Mary Ann's sister Sarah to come along as a helper.

When the pioneers encountered the formidable walls of Glen Canyon, Ben's experience with explosives was put to good use. With the use of explosives, the narrow slit in the canyon was widened sufficiently for wagons to go through and down.

It was Ben who came up with the plan to drill holes into the rock face and insert oak staves to create a road that would literally hang in mid-air. It's not known how he came up with this idea. Perhaps he had seen something like it done in his coal mining days. Maybe it was inspiration. Regardless of its source, the idea was a risky one that could potentially cause loss of life and property. However, Silas Smith and Platte Lyman, the leaders of the expedition, saw merit in the plan and decided to move forward with it. Ben's skill with blasting powder came in good use as he and his brother Hyrum, assisted by the other men in the expedition, blasted the holes that would hold the oak staves. They earned themselves the nickname "the Blowers and Blasters from Wales."

When it came time to test out the hole-in-the-rock road, tension was understandably high. Would the road hold? Who would risk sending their wagon down first? Ben had two wagons, and he decided that the risk should be his. Ben's first wagon was driven by good friend and expert teamster Kumen Jones. Ben followed in his second wagon. Both wagons made it safely to the bottom with no incident. The road was proclaimed safe and the remainder of the group traveled down without mishap.

Upon reaching Bluff, Ben set to work building a cabin for his wife and children. Sarah was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ shortly after their arrival in Bluff, having been converted to the gospel by seeing the faith in the eyes of the traveling saints as they faced challenge after challenge. Sarah then started preparing for her journey back to Cedar City, but Benjamin acting on a strong prompting-asked her to become his second wife. Sarah returned to Cedar City for a year, but was then afterwards sealed to Ben Perkins in the St. George temple, and she rejoined the saints in Bluff.

Benjamin Perkins was a remarkable man. Together with his two wives, he represented faith, integrity, and absolute obedience to the will of the Lord. Ben died at the age of 82 and his body was interred in the Monticello cemetery.

*This article was written by Tristi Pinkston, the great-, great granddaughter of Ben and Sarah Perkins. Tristi has written a novel about the Perkins family entitled Season of Sacrifice. Tristi mixes historical facts with creative storytelling to create a novel that is both informative and entertaining. The story begins in Wales and follows the characters through the Hole in the Rock expedition. You can purchase the book for \$20 by sending a request to Hole in the Rock Foundation P.O. Box 476, Bluff UT 84512 (includes shipping and handling.) You can also purchase the book at the Hole in the Rock visitors center for \$16.95. To learn more about Benjamin, Mary Ann and Sarah Perkins, visit the website [www.tristi.org](http://www.tristi.org).*

## CHILDREN HELP RESURRECT THE OLD BLUFF FORT



Elle Jones, age four, looked up at her mother at the end of the first day building a new cabin at old Fort Bluff and asked, "How many days are we going to be

here?" Her mother said, "Two more days, Elle." She was afraid her daughter might be tired of being there already. To her surprise, Elle responded enthusiastically, "I wish we could stay here forever!"

What made Elle so happy in Bluff? Perhaps it was catching lizards with her cousins or riding in handcarts. Maybe it was chinking the cabins, playing in the mud or making new friends.

Elle's cousin Collette, age 12, carefully "antiqued" the cabins by painting mud into the chinking. She loved adding her handiwork to the history of Fort Bluff. Collette helped paint three cabins before she wore out.

Collette also participated in the evening pioneer programs by fiddling hand-clapping, foot-stomping, fun-filled pieces on her violin. She made friends with her second cousins Melanie (age 8) and Graigry (age 14) who played their violins as well. All together they enjoyed giving the smaller children rides in the handcarts.

Joe Taylor, age eight, was somewhat of a legend among the

children. He was the champion lizard catcher. He tamed one he called Squirm so that the lizard wouldn't run away. The children could hold him in their open hands and even set him on the ground and the lizard remained. All the children scoured Bluff Fort looking for their very own lizard. This took hours of careful searching.

Tyler Jones, age six, and Taylor Lewis, age five, found friendship in the water that formed mud as it ran off of the sod roof on the pioneer cabin. They were dubbed "muddy buddies" by Collette. First they waded in; then they knelt down; finally they were up to their waists in mud. When asked later in the day if he wanted to take a bath, Tyler said, "No! I want to be like this all day!" And so he was. He proudly wore his mud-caked shirt and shorts the rest of the day and into the evening.

The children enjoyed this wonderful place where they could play and stay dirty all day! With everything going on, what child wouldn't love Bluff Fort and want to stay there forever? Elle was right.

Gay Taylor Jones



The Hobbs cabin work crew

## THIRTEEN HUNDRED MILES: A WALK IN THE PARK COMPARED TO THE HOLE IN THE ROCK TRAIL



Montell Seely built a handcart and pulled it 1300 miles to Salt Lake as he and members of his family participated in the 1997 pioneer reenactment commemorating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Mormon pioneers in Salt Lake Valley.

The following year, wanting to have another pioneering experience, Montell pulled his handcart over the entire Hole in the Rock trail. This was met with the challenge

of a broken axel in Cottonwood Canyon, the rugged canyon across from the Hole in the Rock crevice. With pioneering ingenuity and nothing more than a small pocket knife, Montell fashioned a new axel from a juniper tree.

When he and his daughter arrived in Bluff, Montell said that, "pulling a handcart 1300 miles from Winter Quarters to Salt Lake City was like a walk in the park compared to the Hole in the Rock trail. Now I have had a real pioneering experience." Jens Nielson and Mons Larson, Hole in the Rock pioneers who originally came to Utah via handcarts, both expressed similar sentiments when they arrived in Bluff in 1880.

On August 19, 2008 Montell Seely and 13 year-old Hannah Wagstaff, a family friend, were tragically killed in an accident as they were participating in a pioneer reenactment of Montell's forefather's journey to Castle Valley.

Montell and his wife Kathryn are both descendants of the Hole in the Rock pioneers. Montell is a descendant of Samuel W. Mackelprang and Kathryn is a descendant of Silas S. Smith. Montell was proud of his pioneer heritage and promoted activities that honored the pioneers who settled Utah. He wrote numerous histories, instigated and participated in many pioneer reenactments and authored the Castle Valley Pageant. If you have had the opportunity to see the Castle Valley Pageant, you have likely seen Montell and Kathryn dancing together and having a wonderful time.

One never-to-be-forgotten occasion, the Seely's celebrated their love for their Hole in the Rock heritage by recreating the Bluff settlers' Christmas. Montell, Kathryn and their children spent Christmas Eve in a pioneer-style tent at Dance Hall Rock.

Montell was a true pioneer, a man who was in his element when sitting on a wagon seat, driving a covered wagon and team. Montell was a genuine friend to all who had the privilege of meeting him. Thanks to men like Montell, the legacy of our pioneer forebearers will never be forgotten. Montell will be sorely missed.

You can view video clips of Montell demonstrating wagon breaking and rough-locking in the history section of our website [www.hirf.org](http://www.hirf.org).

Lamont Crabtree



Montell Seely

## THE REDDS RETURN



Lucia Zina Smith

The Redds returned to Bluff, not in covered wagons but in minivans and sedans on paved roads (some covered in snow from a nasty spring storm) with children watching DVDs in comfort and stopping along the way for fast food. We came, 70 descendants strong, to help reconstruct Bluff Fort by building a small log cabin in honor of Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr. We came from Blanding, La Sal, Monticello, Moab, Provo, Logan and Salt Lake City. The youngest “trekker” was less than

one year-old and the oldest over 70. Most of us were pen-pushing city dwellers, but we used our muscles and teamwork to build a cabin in three days. We found ourselves under the capable direction of seasoned members of the Hole in the Rock Foundation. Thanks to their instruction and hard work, we accomplished the seemingly impossible.

One hundred and twenty-nine years earlier, on April 6th 1880, L.H. Redd, his wife Eliza, and their young baby Lula were among the 80 families who made the bold trek across the brutal topography of the southern portion of Utah. After six grueling months, they collapsed 15 miles short of their destination in a beautiful spot later named Bluff. There was no time to rest. “A roof over every head,” became their mantra.

*They built their houses side by side in the shape of a hollow square, a fort, with the doors and windows opening to the inside...[The] roof had to be of dirt, and generally the floor of the same durable material. The never-straight cottonwood logs went into the walls of each man's dwelling according to his taste or his skill, and the fort came into being, a closely-knit community of rude log houses, looking each other honestly and trustfully in the face. Lem Redd's humble dwelling, sheltering his young wife and child, looked like all the rest.*

Albert R. Lyman, *Lemuel Hardison Redd, Pioneer-Leader-Builder*

When Lem's progeny arrived April 16, 2009, we found a patch of concrete which, to me, looked as big as a postage stamp. With the help of a hired contractor, we assembled the pre-cut logs into a “lincoln log” structure. Before long, a crane appeared to hoist the heavy logs above our shoulders. Walls and roof went up in one day.

Other family members set to work on projects that were needed to complete the fort. Some worked on shade shelters and benches while others stripped cedar logs needed for a Navajo Hogan which would incorporate the culture of the Native Americans who shared the surrounding areas with the pioneers. The weather was perfect. It was the calm after the previous day's storm and we worked in ease and comfort.

We ate like royalty. The old bell on the school rang out and like Pavlov's dogs we stopped what we were doing and gathered for grub-not just any grub, but lovingly and carefully prepared delights. I would stay on at the fort and build forever just for the lemon zucchini cookies warm from the oven.

The next day and a half, we chinked the walls, added windows and floor, planted hardy shrubs, added a stone porch, erected a log fence, admired our work and finally dedicated the little cabin that we had become so fond of. The postage stamp of concrete was now covered and cozy. With walls, a floor, windows and a door, it now felt quite roomy. The feeling of shelter was overwhelmingly wonderful. We can only imagine how Eliza must have felt to have a safe, sheltered spot to care for her baby and the next two that would be born within those walls.

We had become friends with relatives that we'd never met. We'd caught up on the lives of those we rarely saw. We laughed and joked and had lengthy discussions about how to chink the cabin with the color of our name and the rocks that surrounded us. We felt the bond that comes only with a shared purpose. We enjoyed our unique experience together and marveled at the strength of those that came before us.



Mason Redd

On my journey home, in the novel I was reading, these words leapt off the page: “I have no need for the past, I thought like a child. I did not consider that the past might have a need for me.” This quote, plus the words of my grandfather Amasa Jay Redd, seems to me a fitting conclusion for my experience there, connecting the past, present and future generations and illuminating the need we have for each other.

“But for them, these righteous and rock-hewn leaders, we could not be who we are, where we are, or have within us the capacity for what we may become.”

Thank you to the Hole in the Rock Foundation for making this marvelous experience possible.

Melanie Redd Mayer



## FLYING HIGH AT THE FORT

As the early morning shadow of the rapidly ascending balloon passed over the old Bluff Fort, I could clearly see the rebuilt church with the bell on top, the old Barton home, the new cabins and, most clearly of all, the stone wall remains of the Kumen Jones home. The view from the air gave me increased admiration for those who devoted so much in the past and those who are devoting so much now to restores what their ancestors had constructed and used so many years ago.

I was fortunate to be on my third hot air balloon flight over the Bluff area and doubly blessed to have the balloon, in which I was riding, pass close to a near perfect aerial view of the old Bluff Fort.

For ten years the Bluff Balloon Festival has been held each January and attracted balloon pilots and crews for what they consider to be one of their most beautiful rides of the year. To help with expenses and provide riding opportunities for local folks, local organizations including the Hole in the Rock Foundation have sponsored a balloon team.

There was an air of excitement when the crews and support organizations met on Thursday evening to get acquainted and review the all-important weather forecast. The final fly or no-fly decision is made before the dawn of each day—Friday, Saturday and Sunday. This decision is made by experienced pilots who put flight safety about all else.

After the decision to fly was made, the crews and riders scattered to several sites in and around Bluff to launch. My heart beat faster as the large airships began to fill the crisp air with an array of beautiful shapes and colors. When the balloon I was riding in cleared the ground, only the brief noise of the burners and the barking of a few dogs interrupted the total quiet and serene feeling we experienced floating over the world below.

The pilots were masters of control as they changed altitude to catch layers of air movement that can take them in any direction. But the prevailing and unfeled wind usually carries us to the West, past Cottonwood wash and out into black brush country. After about an hour the balloons set down near a road and were carefully put away ready for the next launch.

Kay Shumway

