Hole in the Rock Foundation
Bluff Fort Historic Site

Newsletter Fall 2026

Comments from the Board

By Grant Taylor

"Your work here at Bluff Fort is just beginning," said Bishop Keith B. McMullin,* counselor in the Presiding Bishopric of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints at the dedication of the Stone Co-op Store in October 2013. I remember making eye contact with Corinne Roring, then President of the Hole in the Rock Foundation, who was seated next to me that morning. We thought that when we had finished the construction of the Co-op, had designed the interior to take you back to the 1880's and had created an amazing interactive video presentation, our work might be done. However, as Bishop McMullin had prophesied, much work was still ahead.

I remember sitting at a board meeting discussing how many volunteers we might need to man the Co-op and visitors site thinking that two or three couples might be enough. I don't think the Board of Directors realized how many volunteer man hours it would take to run such an amazing historic visitor site. We were blessed with these man hours that came in the form of the able contingent of San Juan County Docent volunteers, Senior Missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a host of other volunteers whose skills enhanced the fort experience. There certainly was a "divine hand of providence" talked about by Kumen Jones, 2nd Bishop of Bluff. Whenever a certain talent or skill was needed, we were blessed with exactly what we needed at just the right time.

Again, this year, visitors from around the world are finding their way to Bluff. Visitor comments help us understand the experience that visitors have at the Fort. The comments we hear about friendly staff, well-tended facilities, as well as fresh cookies and soft ice cream, help us understand the direction of future changes. When you add the stories of undaunted courage and determination, visitors come away with a greater understanding of what "Stickie ta tudy" really means.

The story of the Hole in the Rock Pioneers continues to inspire our visitors. Sharing their stories of faith and courage helps people realize that that same pioneer spirit can be a part of their lives as they navigate life's challenges. We so appreciate your support and hope you come often to check on us and to learn more.

*Bishop McMullin passed away September 30, 2026 as we were compiling this newsletter. We appreciate his prophetic statement.

Hole in the Rock Foundation
P.O. Box 476 (550 East Black Locust)
Bluff, UT 84512

435-672-9995
blufffort@gmail.com
www.hirf.org

Directors Report

Pete and Connie Hunt are our current directors and have created a wonderful environment for visitors to learn, experience and be immersed in the sacred feeling at the Fort.



Monticello Temple Trip: Before our Docents leave, who have done such a faithful job in helping out during the summer at the Fort, we planned an early session at the Monticello Temple. Thanks to Robert Turk who learned the art of making ice cream cones, we felt comfortable leaving the Co-op and Kitchen in their hands. Starting at the left we have Roger Chamberlain, Larry Stout, Pete Hunt Connie Hunt, Steve Anderson, Joe Spaulding Chris Young. Second row Peggy Stout, Caroleen Chamberlain, Tresa Roberts, Ric Roberts, Tannis Spaulding, and Kathleen Madsen.

We are new to your newsletter so let us introduce ourselves: Pete and Connie Hunt, residents of St George, Utah, but lived for 33 years in Springerville Arizona where we owned and operated a lumber-hardware store. We arrived on December 1, 2025, to begin our service as missionaries at the Fort.

Presently the Fort has eight couples and one single sister, and three more couples are scheduled to arrive in October. Scheduling and work assignments are the same as they have been for years, "If something works don't change it." We have encouraged creativity in the wood department and sewing.



In the Sewing Department we have found the best native American fabrics, experimented with different aprons and found they are very popular with the guests, but the ties have surprised us more than we ever expected. The last two weeks we have sold over seven ties in each week. We didn't realize so many of our guests might be attending church. Or maybe it is for weddings?



Children find this place a child's dream land, where they can run and roam. Gold panning is always popular, and they love the free ice cream after completing the scavenger hunt.



Our gardens were hit by cold weather and then raising a garden in Bluff soil is a learning curve if you come from greener land. However we have had many evenings of the best sweet corn, cucumbers, zucchini, and watermelons.!! Even more fun, we have the biggest bright orange pumpkins decorating the Fort for the fall season, We and the guests are enjoying the feeling of fall in the air.

The Spirit of these first settlers is still felt by us and our guests. Hearts are touched when they walk the grounds and watch the videos. It is a joy to be here and serve. *by Connie and Pete Hunt*

A Typical Day *by Terry Liechty*

One day, some reluctant teenagers, driven by their ambitious grandparents, pulled up to Bluff Fort. It was not a stop they had anticipated so the kids were still just waking up as some pioneer women and cowboys passed outside their windows. "Where ARE we..?" they grumbled. Following their insistent grandparents, they ambled into the co-op. Without prodding, they easily found many souvenirs that they were suddenly excited about, and that their grandparents acquiesced to buy.

Responding to an invitation to watch the film that tells the pioneer story, the teens easily lapsed back into their familiar and comfortable positions. Twenty minutes later, however, one teenager was actually wiping tears and the other two had questions and comments. Grandparents were pleased! Although they had planned on spending only 20 minutes or so on this unexpected stop, the crew did not leave for two hours. The stories at each cabin had enthralled them! Envisioning how it really must have been to live in the 1880s gave the teenagers a broader appreciation of their comfortable lives. The bakery was a hit, too, of course, as was ringing the bell at the meeting house. When they drove away, all five thanked the volunteers who worked there and promised to tell their friends about this hidden gem. It was another great and very typical day at Bluff Fort.

What's Coming?

New messages are being added at the Fort along with content that will tell more stories about the pioneer spirit that brought these strong saints to follow a Prophet of God - Bluff City News broadcast and additional women appearing in the Relief Society Building.

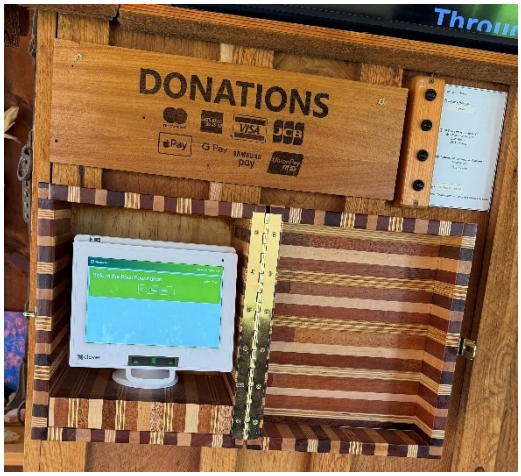
Cemetery

We have been working on the historic portion of the Bluff Cemetery and now have ownership of all the historic graves. Plans are in the works to help families and friends extend their Hole in the Rock experience by visiting the cemetery.

We will be adding a sexton sign that will help visitors find graves and learn of their relationship using a Family Search

experience. QR codes seem to be the new thing to access information quickly and so we will have three on the sign to enhance visitors' experience at the Cemetery.

Tap and donate



Having learned to steal from the best, Grant was at Grey Friars churchyard in Scotland a few years ago and noticed a credit card tap and donate post in the churchyard. It has taken a few years and a number of different volunteers to get the project finally operational, but now visitors and guests can use the credit card "tap and donate" site located under the veranda by the pantry. In fact, it is in plain sight when visitors are enjoying the cookies and ice cream - especially the free ice cream that their children are eating. We have found that many visitors do not travel with cash, making a credit card tap and donate option a much easier and more universal way to donate, and giving the choice of donation amount.

We also have a Venmo account at that site to give an additional option for donation if desired.

Histories Added to the Bluff Fort Website

Fort Montezuma, 1879 -1884, Crucible of Devotion © 2018 R.F. McDonald, with written contributions and editing by Debra Holm. The San Juan Mission story begins with the history of Fort Montezuma. This history of the Fort Montezuma settlement is comprised of 102 pages, 100 photos, and maps. In addition to the story of Fort Montezuma and its settlers, Ron McDonald's comprehensive research includes site locations, the wagon route between Bluff and Fort Montezuma, ferry sites, and gravesites.

The Rebirth of the Historic Old Hole-in-the-Rock Trail as a Recreational Trail, a thesis by LeGrand Black, 1995, is comprised of 190 pages and 83 photographs. This thesis documents the amazing efforts by pioneer descendants and HIR trail enthusiasts to access the most challenging portions of the Hole-in-the-Rock Trail between the Hole-in-the-Rock crevice and Clay Hills Pass. Today, reaching difficult portions of the HIR Trail, such as Slick Rocks, the Chute, and the top of Cottonwood Hill, is a technically difficult 4x4 / ATV journey. Prior to the early 1950's, access was only possible via horseback. LeGrand Black documents early horseback expeditions as well as the efforts of Lynn Lyman, Kent Frost, and others to make it possible to access the trail with 4x4s.

These histories can be found in the "Learn More" / "Histories" section of the Bluff Fort Website: https://hirf.org/histories/

YOUTH CONFERENCES



Our youth conference season for 2026 was a big success. It began this year with a kickoff fireside in Kanab on April 12. All the youth and leaders in the stake were invited. We showed the Youth conference video and gave presentations about what to expect at the upcoming youth conference. The McAllisters and Lymans each gave presentations about Bluff and Camp Sticky and talked about what to expect when their stake came for their youth conference.



The Kanab stake attended May 27-30 with 100 youth and 60 adults. The Brookhurst ward came June 4-7 and had 20 youth and 6 adults. (This was Grant Taylor's home ward, and most of the pictures are of this group.)

These youth conferences proved to be fun and exciting experiences where personal bonds were strengthened,



physical limits were stretched and testimonies of the Savior were increased.

The youth conferences could not have taken place without the efforts of the following great volunteers. Todd and Holly McAllister, Jed and Candice Lyman, Mike and Terri Liechty, Eric and Allison Dastrup, Frank and Elaine Rowley. These volunteers helped provide wonderful activities including San Juan Hill, find a route, challenge course, Bluff cemetery and tours of Bluff Fort.



Through these activities, the participants learned the story of the San Juan Pioneers and how they overcame hardships and obstacles set before them by using the following eternal principles--obedience, faith, hope, courage and perseverance. One of our goals of the conference is to teach the youth that by using these same principles they too can overcome trials and "do hard things" in their own lives.



After the conferences we received many positive comments from youth and adults. They said that they had felt the Spirit and their testimonies had been strengthened.





We are looking forward to the 2027 season. We still have openings for wards and stakes. If you are interested please contact: Todd McAllister 435-896-7707.

New Interpretive Signs

In cooperation with the BLM, the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation sponsored and installed new interpretive signs at Comb Wash and San Juan Hill. Two signs near the highway turnoff and the start of the four-wheel-drive road to San Juan Hill offer visitors an overview of the San Juan Mission/Hole-in-the-Rock trek and early USGS exploration in the area. The project also replaced the weathered Navajo Springs and San Juan Hill signs originally installed by the Foundation and BLM in 2006. The new signs feature updated images and historical text.

Hole in the Rock and Comb Ridge Overview signs



Navajo Springs



Navajo Springs Installation



Installing the Hole in the Rock trek overview sign



San Juan Hill



San Juan Hill - Drilling



Special thanks go to Misti Haines, Outdoor Recreation Planner with the BLM Monticello Field Office, and others in that office who helped make these signs possible.

We also thank the installers: Josh Sherrock, BLM Supervisory Park Ranger, who also assisted with earlier Hole-in-the-Rock Trail sign installations; Joe Spalding, Bluff Fort missionary; Carl Ball of Hamer, Idaho, who served twice at the Bluff Fort and has supported trail-marking and interpretive projects for many years; and Lamont Crabtree. We are also grateful to those who removed the old signs: Rick Jones, former Bluff Fort director; Wayne Taylor, Bluff Fort missionary; Pete Hunt, current Bluff Fort director; and Lee Warren, Bluff Fort missionary.

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blufffortnewsletter@gmail.com

Feel free to forward this newsletter to others who would enjoy it.

Laurie Fifield, Editor