

Echoes of Pipe Spring¹

Pipe Spring is one of our prettiest, but less-visited national monuments. Located on the Arizona Strip, the bit of land north of the Grand Canyon below the Utah border, the monument consists of 40 acres surrounded by the Kaibab Indian Reservation.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the monument was the core of an extensive cattle ranch that spread over the adjoining lands. As many as 5,000 long horn cattle once grazed on the arid plateau and water was always at a premium. In fact, water is at the heart of the Pipe Spring story.

Throughout the historic period, three springs bubbled to the surface. All are located at the base of a hill side near the center of the monument. Geologic evidence indicates that the number and location of springs has varied over time, but surface water has been available for as long as 20,000 years.

Today, interpretation at the Monument centers on Mormon occupancy which began in the 1860s. Historic sandstone buildings built in the 1870s include a large fortified house, known as “Windsor Castle,” and two cabins. Also noteworthy are the structured ponds in front of the Castle dating from the 1890s.

While the story of Mormon colonization is fascinating, I am more intrigued by an older tale. The springs which give life to Pipe Spring have been attracting people for far longer. Archaic sites in the area give evidence to human occupation dating back at least 8,000 years, and it is probable that Paleo-Indian people used the springs as well.

The Anasazi were well established in the area by the end of Basketmaker II. Archeological surveys report that 74% of the monument shows evidence of Anasazi occupation and only areas subject to historic construction are “clean.” Significantly, archeologists working on the Castle’s foundations encountered so many sherds and lithic fragments that they gave up counting them.

During three months volunteering at Pipe Spring, I was able to study ceramic and lithic fragments in the museum archives and walk the grounds at my leisure. Among other items of interest, I encountered a large pit house village and associated work areas, a few scattered petroglyphs, two unexcavated pueblos, and an unexcavated great kiva. None have been studied with the care they deserve, but examination of stone and pottery fragments as well as surface remains suggest a probable chronology.

There was a substantial Anasazi population here spanning Basketmaker III and Pueblo I eras. Population was sparse during Pueblo II and the area may have been at least partially abandoned. Population rebounded during Pueblo III, and the great kiva and at least one of the pueblos may date from this era.

Local peoples believe the Anasazi never left. The Southern Paiute occupy the reservation and trace their ancestry to the Anasazi. They call the ancient people “E'nengweng” and believe they did not give up when other branches of the society collapsed during the

¹ I spent three wonderful months guiding visitors at Pipe Spring. More reliable sources include the Monument’s Administrative History and Revised Application for the National Registry of Historic Places, both online at <http://www.nps.gov/pisp/index.htm>

thirteenth century. Instead, they believe that Anasazi merely adopted a more nomadic lifestyle that survived until Mormon settlers arrived.

Why do I call this essay “Echoes ...?” You may be able to see for yourself when you visit. Leave the bulk of visitors behind and walk the nature trail behind the fort. Your route will take you past the Mormon quarry, up the hill, and through the heart of a pit house village. Just below the crest of the ridge, stop at the unexcavated Basketmaker kiva. Listen carefully. If you are quiet, the wind is still, and you are lucky, you may hear the echoes yourself.