

A Quick History of the San Juan Country

Geologic Time

240mya –

Inland seas, tidal flats and wetlands, and great sand deserts covered this part of North America leaving the sediments that are now part of the stratigraphy of the San Juan River basin.

60mya –

The Cenezoic Extinction brought the end of dinosaurs

Compression caused by a subducting plate began the upward folding of the Rockies, the Monument Upwarp that encompasses Comb Ridge and Monument Valley, and, locally, Doc's Hollow

20mya –

Uplift of the Colorado Plateau accelerated erosion of the limestones, shales and sandstones deposited during the late Paleozoic and Mesozoic eras (250 - 60mya)

Comb Ridge and Monument Valley, as we know them, were exposed by the erosion

The San Juan River which drains the southern Rocky Mountains cut down through uplifting layers of limestone, sandstone and shale to form the present day canyons

Recent time

15,000 to 10,000 years ago

Large mammals, including mammoths, mastodons, sloths, and giant bison, roamed the Ice Age forests and prairies of the Colorado Plateau.

Paleo Hunters come to North America across the Bering Strait.

Hunting pressure was exerted on Ice Age Mammals for the first time.

By 12,000 hunters were camped above the San Juan on Lime Ridge and hunting in the side canyons.

10,000 to 8000 years ago

A period of global warming begins.

In another great extinction Ice Age megafauna, including mammoths, horse, camels, sloths and dire wolves, died out in North America. In all likelihood their passing was accelerated by hunting pressure.

The warming, drying trend results in diversified climates with relic islands of Ice Age flora and fauna isolated on mountains and along streams.

By 8000 years ago, a Desert Archaic culture with a hunting and gathering economy dependent on grass seed, pinyon and juniper, and small game roamed the Colorado Plateau.

7000 to 5000 years ago

By 7000 years ago corn was domesticated in the highlands of Mexico.

The flora of the high deserts of the Plateau and the associated woodlands were in place.

2000 years ago into historic time

By 2000 years ago corn agriculture was imported to North America from the south and practiced by farmers we call Basketmakers. Their rock art is widespread in the Bluff area.

By 1000 years ago Pueblo agriculturists in Bluff and across the southern Plateau experimented with beans, squash and cotton. Pottery became popular.

Around 700 years ago, a prolonged drought sent farmers to well-watered refugia on Black Mesa and elsewhere. The Hopi settled at Oraibi. The Kachina cult was born.

By 1200 - 1700 Utes and Navajos settled in the San Juan River basin

1500 (Or so) the Spanish arrived on horseback

In the 1850's and 60's US exploring expeditions came to the San Juan River country

In 863 the US Cavalry rounded up Navajos and escorted them to New Mexico on The Long Walk. The surviving Dine trickled back after four years of internment

Civil War to late 1800s

John Wesley Powell began his exploration of the Colorado River Country in 1869

The next year Mormon pioneers settled in along the San Juan and named their settlement Bluff

The great grazing extravaganza and the Gold Excitement took place in the 1880s and 90s

Late 1800s – present

The Mormon pioneers moved up the road to Blanding Utah to dry farm

Tamersisk, Russian thistle, Russian olive, cheat grass, and cattle are a few of the species introduced on the Plateau. The gray wolf, grizzly bear, bison, black-footed ferret, and countless unnamed species were extirpated.

The uranium boom came to the Colorado Plateau in the 1950's. Bluff, revived by the uranium industry, got electricity in 1958.