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ARCHAEOLOGY

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A publication of the Archaeological Institute of America

September/October 2007

EXCLUSIVE

**Chariot
Sacrifice**

Gladiators Spared


**A New Find
Escapes Looters**

**Lost Church
of Armageddon**

**Ice Age Cultural
Revolution**

Gladiator relief from
a first-century B.C.
tomb north of Rome

Sweden ■ Peru ■ Turkey ■ Mexico ■ India ■ Spain



FOUR ROWS OF BRIGHT RED TRIANGLES connect on the rock face above our heads. "Maybe it's a form of counting how many bushels of corn they had," speculates my guide, archaeologist Jerry Spangler. The triangles, he explains, are commonly found around prehistoric food-storage sites in this part of the Southwest. Then again, the shapes could also be a clan symbol, or some other message. We are exploring an unnamed, sparsely visited side canyon in the rugged backcountry of Utah's Nine Mile Canyon.

Spangler, a newspaper reporter-turned archaeologist, spent three days showing me around Nine Mile Canyon, often referred to as the world's "longest art gallery." Its towering walls are covered with North America's largest concentration of petroglyphs and pictographs. Estimated to contain some 10,000 rock-art sites with hundreds of thousands of images, Nine Mile—actually 80 miles long—was once an outdoor canvas for the Fremont people. For nearly a millennium these nomadic farmer-foragers lived mostly in Utah before disappearing around A.D. 1300, leaving behind renderings of bighorn sheep, hunters with spears, bizarre abstract designs, and figures with triangular bodies, splayed hands, and bucket-heads. Much of this archaeologically significant stretch of central Utah's red-rock wilderness is owned by the federal government.

Dirtraker

Using the tools of an investigative journalist, archaeologist Jerry Spangler is on a crusade to save sites on public land.

by KEITH KLOOR

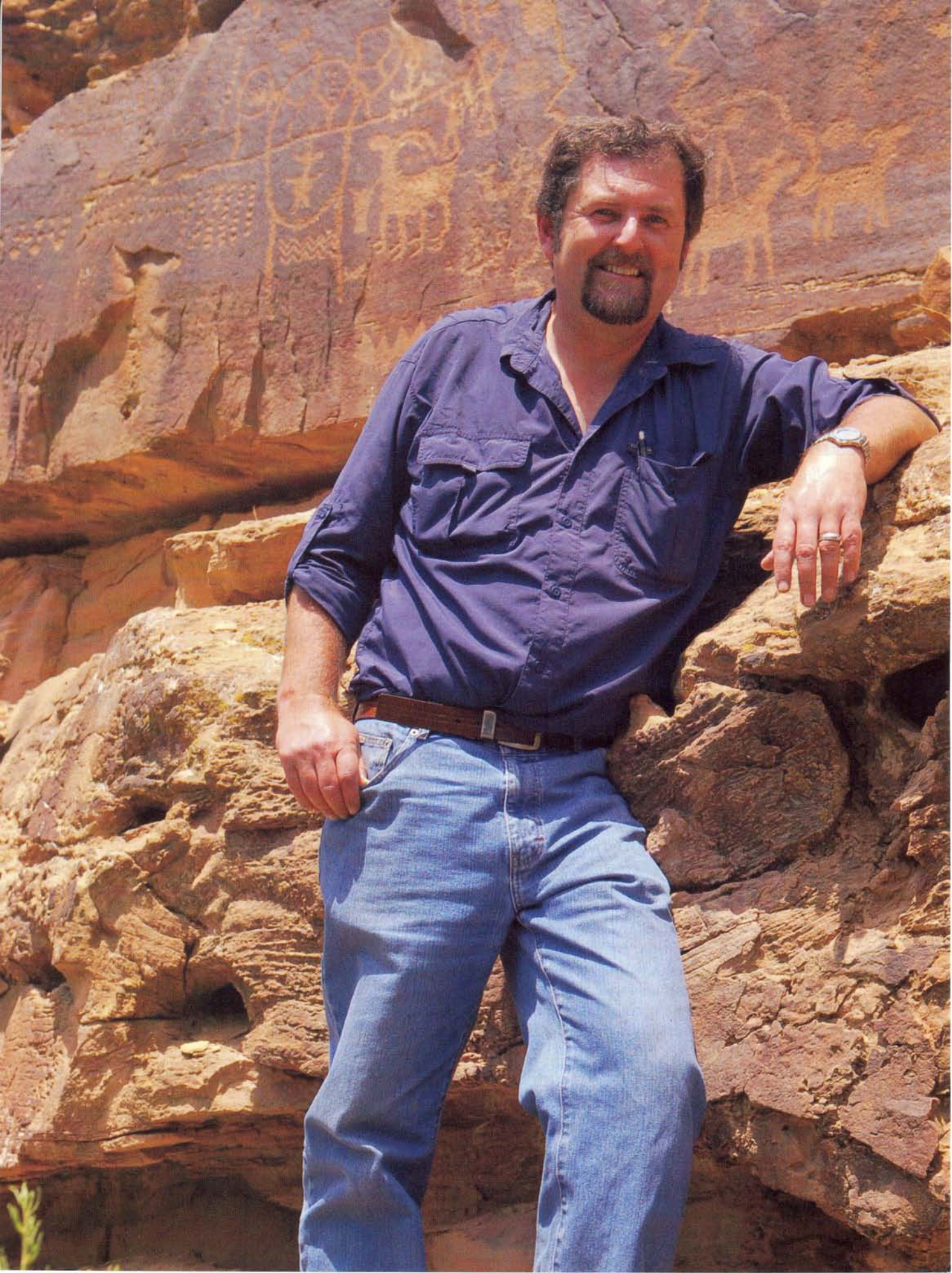
It is managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which is the steward of both its archaeological heritage and its abundant natural gas deposits, estimated to be worth some \$2.5 billion. At the time of my visit in the summer of 2005, BLM's dual missions—both to protect and exploit the land it oversees—were coming into stark conflict in the canyon. It was not a pretty sight.

My first day there, we were driving along Nine Mile Road, which cuts through the heart of the canyon, when Spangler pulled over to allow a gas truck to speed ahead. The driver thanked us with a blinding, hundred-foot-long cloud of dust. Many of the most important rock-art panels happen to be accessible right off what is now an industrial thruway.

Few people know their way around Nine Mile Canyon better than Spangler. He's been studying the archaeology here since the early 1990s, first for his master's thesis, then for a book about the canyon's cultural history, titled *Horned Snakes and Axle Grease*, cowritten with his wife, Donna Spangler. Few scientists possess his people skills, muckraking instincts, and sustained outrage—qualities that Spangler honed as a journalist and is now putting to good use as a crusading archaeologist. Recently, he founded the Colorado Plateau Archaeological Alliance (CPAA), a nonprofit organization that brings together a diverse group of scientists, environmentalists, and industry representatives who work to preserve archaeological sites on public lands facing threats from energy developers and off-road vehicles (ORVs). If his group is successful, they could change the way sites are protected in the Southwest.

In 2004, Spangler and many archaeologists were livid that BLM officials had given energy companies the go-ahead to drill for natural gas in Nine Mile Canyon. The agency even ignored the concerns of one of their own archaeologists, Blaine Miller, who reviewed the initial drilling proposal and warned of possibly "significant" impacts on Nine Mile's archaeology from dust and vibrations generated by truck traffic. They ultimately barred him from working on anything

Archaeologist Jerry Spangler stands by a rock-art site in Utah's Nine Mile Canyon, named after a 9-mile triangulation on a map from the 1869 expedition of explorer John Wesley Powell.





Nine Mile's most iconic rock-art panel depicts hunters pursuing bighorn sheep. Until recently, the canyon's main road ran just a few yards from the site.

related to Nine Mile Canyon after a gas company executive complained about his damage assessment.

An alliance of archaeological advocates, a kind of precursor to the CPAA, emerged to fight the BLM's action. The nonprofit National Trust for Historic Preservation put Nine Mile Canyon on its 2004 list of endangered historic places (where it remains to this day). Environmentalists joined loosely with apoplectic archaeologists in an all-out political and legal battle to save Nine Mile. But their collective efforts eventually failed. Today, energy companies are working out of the canyon. Visitors are forced to dodge a phalanx of massive 18-wheel rigs servicing recently installed pipelines and gas wellheads in Nine Mile's finger canyons and a compressor station on the main road.

"What happened in Nine Mile was a real wake-up call for us," says Pam Eaton, a deputy vice president with the Wilderness Society. "To have a place that special, with those kinds of archaeological resources, so well-known, and yet the BLM was so aggressive in going forward with oil and gas development... It made us think that the places [on public lands] that aren't as well known are really at risk."

Recently the National Trust released a report finding that of the 261 million acres of federal land the BLM administers (mostly in western states) only about six percent has been surveyed for archaeological sites. Of this six percent, the BLM has identified 263,000 cultural properties—nearly all of them archaeological sites. These statistics suggest there are as many as 4.5 million cultural sites on all public lands under BLM's purview.

When I met up with Spangler in Nine Mile Canyon in 2005, environmentalists and archaeologists had yet to move beyond the defeat in Nine Mile and tackle the larger public lands issue in a coordinated fashion. But Spangler was already thinking ahead. "There needs to be an independent entity that's focused on the preservation of archaeological resources," he told me. "There really isn't an organization that's advocating

lands. The objective, he said, was to push state and federal agencies to take on more active roles in conservation. "We won't be looking to shut stuff down, necessarily, but based on scientific criteria, we'll be able to say, 'Hey, if you put up a road here or there, you're going to damage sites.'"

Spangler's heady plans sounded like the ideal way to protect a class of endangered archaeological sites that, up to then, had too few advocates. But I couldn't help wonder how he was going to pull this off. At the time, he still had his day gig as a harried reporter.

IN THE THIRD GRADE, Spangler told his teacher he was going to be an archaeologist. Growing up in Oregon, he remembers being "totally enamored with the Maya and Aztecs, Troy, and ancient Egypt—the mystery of long-vanished cultures. I read everything I could about them in the local library, which wasn't much."

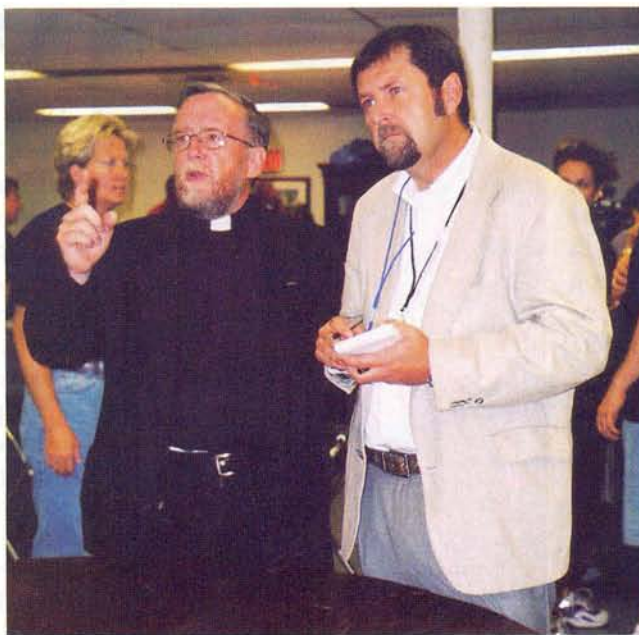
By high school, though, he found he had a talent for writing and put himself through college doing freelance magazine work for inflight magazines, specialty publications, and even true-crime reporting. Archaeology remained his passion, but writing paid the bills. In 1980, he joined Utah's *Deseret Morning News*, a Salt Lake City-based daily paper. "Seven or eight years into a journalism career, I realized the archaeology itch was not going away and probably never would," Spangler says. So in 1989 he enrolled in Brigham Young University, the only graduate school that would allow him to keep his day job while he took classes. Somehow he juggled the two professions for the next 15 years without losing his mind or angering his editors. "I always had a firewall between my job at the paper and my archaeology work," Spangler insists. He passed his days covering cops and courts, politicians, the environment, and just about every kind of story in Utah—except those related to archaeology. He spent evenings, weekends, even vacations writing peer-reviewed studies, monographs, and technical reports on the Fremont and other prehistoric cultures of the

northern Colorado Plateau. "It taught me 16-hour days and multitasking," says Spangler, still youthful looking at 49.

Later in his newspaper career he pursued more investigative and enterprise journalism. In 2001, Spangler coauthored a prize-winning series of articles called "Toxic Utah." The stories documented the state's poisonous legacy from uranium mining and other industries, particularly the lasting public health effects and ecological damage caused by unchecked hazardous waste disposal. Meanwhile, Spangler's manic pace never missed a beat. That same year, he produced a 1,105-page monograph on archaeological research in Utah's Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

By this time, Spangler was focusing his archaeology career on preservation-related initiatives. George W. Bush had just taken office and soon began opening federal lands to increased development and off-road vehicle use. "That is when I began helping with conservation projects, doing on-the-ground analyses of potential impacts within the context of the National Historic Preservation Act," says Spangler. One project involved working with the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) to assess ORV impacts in the Vermilion Cliffs, a BLM-administrated national monument in Arizona that has a high concentration of ancient Puebloan sites. "These were pro bono projects with no expectation other than

A Halliburton truck passes a natural gas compressor on Nine Mile Road.



Spangler, in his previous life as a journalist, interviews Reverend Terry Troia in a Staten Island soup kitchen during the 2004 Republican National Convention.

maybe I could help preserve the archaeology of the West in some small way. The more I got involved, the more passionate I became about it and the more rewarding it was," he says.

But it was the discovery of Range Creek Canyon's ancient ruins in 2002 that crystallized, in his mind, the need for a much more thorough inventory of archaeology on public lands, as well as expanded government

oversight to ensure their protection.

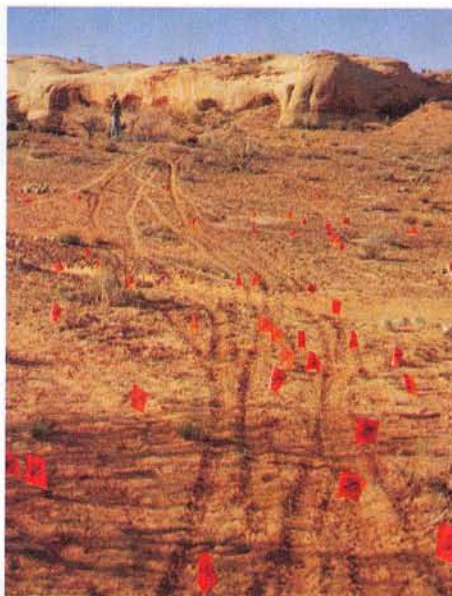
Waldo Wilcox, a reclusive rancher, had recently sold his 4,800-acre spread in central Utah's Range Creek to the federal government in a complicated transaction that deeded ownership to the state. Wilcox and his family had kept quiet about the canyon's rich archaeology for 50 years and left its many Fremont sites virtually undisturbed ("Utah's Ancient Ones," November/December 2004).

Having worked in nearby Nine Mile Canyon for a decade, Spangler was among the first archaeologists to enter Range Creek after Wilcox sold the place. He was asked to do an initial survey so state and federal authorities could get a handle on what was there. He hastily assembled a team and they were flabbergasted by what they found. "We recorded 75 sites in just a week," he recalls. "It was so amazing. The archaeology was so undisturbed."

Soon after, the University of Utah established a field



Off-road vehicle tracks cut straight through an open-air site in southern Utah. Each flag represents an artifact found by Spangler's team.



school and a multidisciplinary research program at Range Creek Canyon. Spangler stayed on for a few years as a field school supervisor—after working out a deal with the *Deseret Morning News* to take summers off. To date, researchers have documented more than 400 sites at the old Wilcox ranch and expect to find thousands more.

The discovery of Range Creek was a watershed event. “By 2003 and 2004, we all had come to realize how unique and pristine the archaeology was,” Spangler recalls. And that realization was just settling in when Range Creek’s sister canyon, Nine Mile, was being converted by the BLM into an industrial zone.

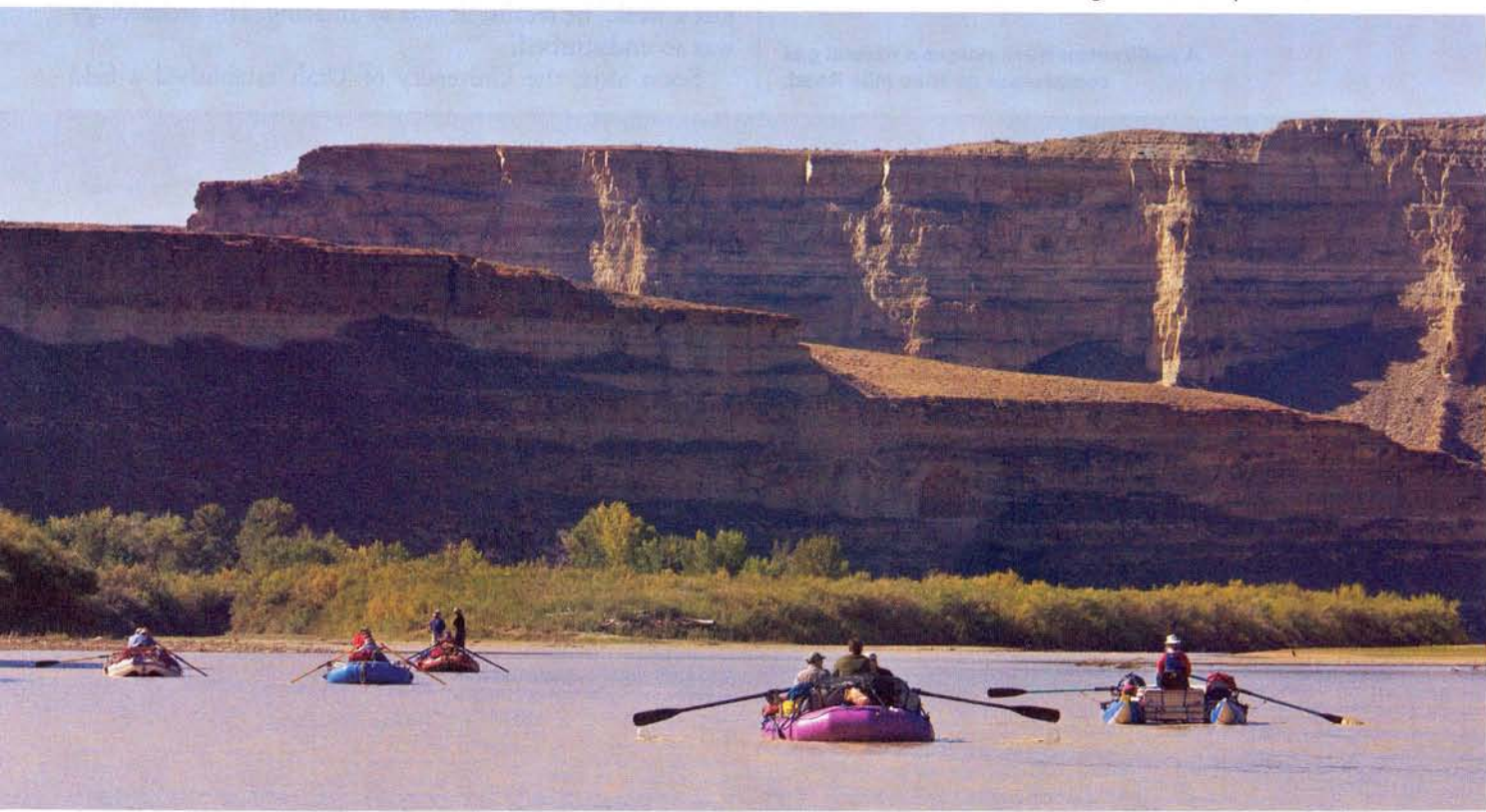
Spangler quit his newspaper job in 2005, shortly after our time together in Nine Mile Canyon. “Balancing the two careers became more difficult, with journalism becoming more of a distraction to what I really wanted to be doing,” Spangler says. Besides, he felt an urgent calling: he had to find other Range Creeks “hidden away in roadless wilderness” before they got crisscrossed with ORV trails or oil and gas pipelines.

Last fall Spangler organized an 18-person expedition through Utah’s Desolation Canyon. The team recorded 20 previously unknown sites.

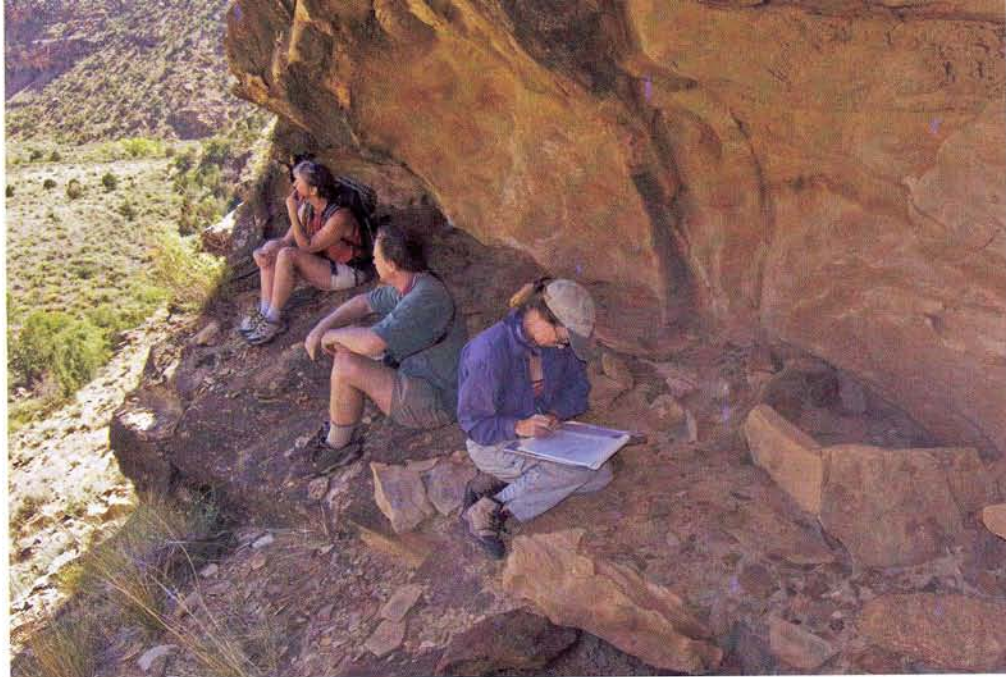
WITH THE HELP OF A \$100,000 grant from the Washington, D.C.-based Wyss Foundation, Spangler founded the Colorado Plateau Archaeological Alliance in December of 2005. He opened up the Rolodex he had spent years building as a journalist and hit the ground running. He now employs several archaeology graduate students and recent graduates on a temporary basis to help with fieldwork. He also hires rock-art experts and other specialists when needed. Instead of renting office space, Spangler converted the 1,500-square-foot basement of his Ogden, Utah, home into an office, lab, and library.

Broadly speaking, Spangler says, the CPAA’s mission is to help protect archaeological sites in the Colorado Plateau and Great Basin. Public outreach programs and the publication of educational materials play a role in these efforts.

That is the organization’s happy face. The real down and dirty work is the archaeological equivalent of watchdog journalism. The CPAA’s main role is to monitor sites to determine how public visitation, illegal collecting, ORV trails, and the cumulative effects of oil and gas development are impacting the archaeological record on the Colorado Plateau. According to Spangler, his organization also benefits from the expert knowledge offered by sympathetic bureaucrats and federal archaeologists who want to remain anonymous but are passionate about preserving the archaeology. “Some of the government archaeologists will even leak information to me that warrants further investigation,” he says.



Spangler relies in part on volunteers to conduct his surveys. From left, Lori Nicholls, Scott Gutting, and Kristen Jensen at the site of a stone granary in Desolation Canyon.



Spangler is also a savvy operator—he knows how to schmooze sources and work a room, skills that are second nature after spending 17 years of his career covering the Utah Legislature and Congress. Many of these sources are people he can call on in his current capacity as CPAA's executive director. Or, as he put it to me another way, "I know people who know people."

Perhaps equally valuable was watching and learning the legislative process up close. "I learned how public policy was developed and implemented, not on the floor of the House or Senate, but in the hallways and back rooms. Call it lobbying or good-ol'-boy politics, but it was how things got done," Spangler says.

Like a good politician, he's found a way to attract disparate interests to his cause. One month, he'll be fighting alongside an environmental group as it tries to convince the BLM to keep ORVs from trashing an ecologically sensitive landscape—and the archaeology on it. Another month, he'll be heading out into the wilderness with BLM rangers, teaching them how to identify and monitor prehistoric sites for a vandalism study. Then there is his partnership with Questar, one of the energy companies building a natural gas pipeline in Nine Mile Canyon. The company donated \$20,000 to help pay for a publication Spangler put together on the archaeology of the Tavaputs Plateau. But the relationship is not just monetary; Spangler and other Nine Mile advocates convinced Questar to reroute their project away from areas with sensitive archaeological sites. "We're trying to find a solution to protect a resource," Spangler says.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect to Spangler's balancing act is his good-cop/bad-cop relationship with the BLM. He doesn't hesitate to butt heads with BLM land managers, especially over the ORV issue. "We're dealing with millions of acres of public land across the West that the BLM has never really managed for ORVs—millions of acres just in Utah," says Spangler. "What's happened over the last decade is this explosion of motorized vehicles. And the technology of these machines is such that they can go anywhere." In 1990, some 9,000 ORVs were registered in Utah. By 2006, that number had jumped to 325,709. Earlier this year Spangler went to southern Utah, in the Four Corners region, to investigate the problem in Arch Canyon, where ancient Pueblo sites are still important to the present-day Hopi.

Spangler documented ORV tracks leading right up to and through one pueblo. At other sites, he found vehicle tracks through possible middens below cliff ruins. He recommended

restricting access to the canyon, but the BLM has recently declined to take action. "This astounds me, because it's so important to the Hopi," Spangler says.

Yet, he is also working closely with the BLM on a multi-year archaeological study involving Utah's Desolation Canyon, the massive corridor through which the Green River flows for 80 miles. One of Spangler's main objectives is to identify impacts on archaeological sites from recreational use of the river and previous oil and gas development in the vicinity. The idea is to quantify where the greatest damage is occurring along an open-access route, so that information can be incorporated into a revised management plan.

"Most archaeological sites on public lands are being managed after the fact," Spangler explained to me over lunch this summer near Harvard University's Peabody Museum. He is doing archival research there, looking at pictures taken of sites during a 1930s expedition to Desolation Canyon and comparing them with modern photographs to determine if any looting occurred in the intervening years.

In the Desolation Canyon study, Spangler will determine if there are recreational trails leading up to archaeological sites. If so, he'll then assess if those trails have gone through middens and exposed artifacts. What then? "We'll ask, 'Is there a better way to route people into it so it has less impact? Is the site located in such a place where it has to be off-limits?'"

The objective, Spangler says, is to provide the BLM with data so it can make informed management decisions. "This could be the model for other large public land areas across the Southwest where ORVs and oil and gas developers are receiving preferential treatment and impacting irreplaceable archaeological sites," he says. "These are public lands owned by all Americans, not oil companies or off-roaders. There's supposed to be this balance of multiple interests, between preservation, recreation, and oil and gas development. Right now we're out of balance." ■

Keith Kloor is a senior editor at Audubon magazine.