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Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

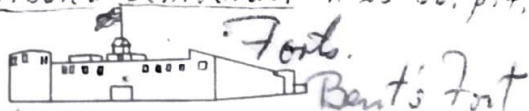
Report from Bent's Old Fort

La Junta Tribune Democrat

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BENTS OLD FORT

La Junta Tribune-Democrat, 11-25-66, p. 4, c. 3



A series by William Featherstone, superintendent

CATALOGUING THE ARTIFACTS

"What did you do with all the things you dug up?" a visitor will frequently ask us. To many, it would seem, the whole purpose of digging in old ruins is to find something as a souvenir. In the case of the archeological excavation of Bent's Old Fort, however, the primary objective was the location and preservation of the walls and features of the structure itself. We did not expect to find much in the way of artifacts, knowing that William Bent carried away everything of value when abandoning the Fort in 1849, and that most everything else would have been damaged in the fire which followed.

Nevertheless, many thousands of individual objects were carefully removed, put in bags marked with the level and location where they were found, and set aside to be cleaned, examined and classified when we had time.

Now we have the time and the man to do the job of cataloguing some thirty thousand artifacts. Richard Carillo, a student at Otero Junior College taking, among other courses, one in anthropology under Galen Baker, worked closely last year with archeologist "Smoky" Moore, and is quite familiar with the objects he is cataloguing. Even so, it is a slow operation, for each fragment of ceramic ware, each different piece of broken glass, each rusted iron object gets its own catalog number and full treatment in recording the item.

The catalog number is written in india ink on a small lacquered surface of the object, then covered with shellac to protect it. The catalog card is then made out which records the object's broad classification (geology, archeology, ethnology, history), and four other breakdowns of an increasingly specific nature. Thus, a broken piece of a dinner plate would be classified as "History, social-political, furnishings, ceramic, earthenware." Then a complete description is given with measurements of the piece, type of design, where it was made (if known), the exact location where it was found (by reference to a certain trench, the depth in inches below a surveyed starting level, the distance from a surveyed base line), and its age. Finally, a value is given the object depending on its rarity and its completeness.

This cataloguing job will take several years to finish, but the result will be something future researchers will find extremely helpful. In fact, our regional office feels that "prospects are good for achieving the best cataloguing and preservation of a park collection in the history of the National Park Service."