



THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

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Rio Mesa Center An Outdoor Lab on the Colorado Plateau

Imagine an ancient floodplain with a wild river, surrounded by towering cliffs and red-rock canyons...

A place to learn about the ecological, cultural, and geological wonders of southern Utah...

A place served by ecologically-sensitive facilities for research, education, and other academic pursuits...

This is the vision for Rio Mesa Center.



Looking east from the Rio Mesa campground

Photo by Philippe Cohen

The University of Utah received an early Christmas present in mid-December when it took ownership of the Rio Mesa Center, located in the red-rock country of southeastern Utah. The 400-acre property is a gift to the U from Texas businessman and philanthropist David Bonderman, who bought the property in 2008. David serves on the boards of several national environmental organizations and was committed to protecting the site from development. He found an enthusiastic partner to join him in that effort in the University of Utah, which had been managing the site since 2006. Now, with the transfer of ownership to the U completed, David's initial intention to protect the land is assured. Written into the site's master plan is a pledge to preserve the integrity and open "wildness" of the site while promoting restoration and exploration of the natural world.

Rio Mesa Center is located about 40 miles northeast of Moab along a three-mile stretch of the Dolores River. Archaeological findings indicate that the area has been occupied, at least intermittently, for the last 4,000 to 5,000 years. More recent history of the property dates back to the late 19th century when it was the site of a pioneer-homesteaded cattle ranch.

For the past decade, under University of Utah management, the property has become a gathering place for students and researchers to work on projects that explore issues around water, ecology, and human interactions with the environment on the

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We thank the following supporters for their generous gifts received between October 1, 2015 and December 31, 2015.

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Rio Mesa Continued



Environmental science students play volleyball near the shade pavilion.

Photo by Christine Baczek

Colorado Plateau. Courses offered range from bird and plant ecology and landscape painting to civil engineering and architecture studios. The center also provides opportunities to engage with the local community by offering GIS training for K-12 teachers, arranging artist-in-residence visits, and engaging Grand County High School students.

With capacity to accommodate up to 40 people, the center's campground is completely off-grid and offers a solar-powered bathhouse, shade pavilion, outdoor cooking facility, and canvas safari tents on raised platforms. Additional space allows visitors to pitch their own tents. Classes are held in a 30-foot yurt. (Funds are still needed to build a multi-use field house, which will allow the center to be fully operational year-round.) For researchers, two indoor facilities offer electrical service and a local Wi-Fi network served by satellite Internet. There is no cellular or LAN line phone service on the property.

The vision for Rio Mesa Center is to become a modern, multi-disciplinary, outdoor laboratory where science, architecture, engineering, and art come together to question the notion of what it means to live on the Colorado Plateau. It's off to a great start.

Learn more about Rio Mesa Center online at www.riomesa.utah.edu.



Students gather around a campfire to hear from locals about ecology on the Colorado Plateau.

Photo by Christine Baczek