

P A R T I
Southwestern Cultural Landscapes

Stone flakes scattered by an ancient hearth. A star pecked on the surface of a boulder. (Plates 8 and 9) Building stones spread across a hillside. The physical remains of the past speak to us in a quiet voice. To us, who journey through the present on our way to our children's past.

In sherds, flakes, and glyphs, the archaeologist perceives clues, pieces of a complex and expanding puzzle. A picture slowly emerges, never quite reaching completion. Patterns of human behavior reveal themselves, and the scholar is compelled to go on. To the artist, such signs from the past hold inspiration: to make a picture, write a poem, compose a piece of music. Then there are the descendants of the flake makers: in a pottery vessel, a stone hammer, or an earthen mound, they find a link to their history, to cultural memory, and discover a window to deepening self-identity. (Plate 76) Information, inspiration, identity: three intangible dimensions of archaeology and artifacts.

Finally, there is the landscape itself. It embraces all and holds meaning, too. In the rock strata geologists catch glimpses of a past whose scale exceeds our minds' grasp. The landscapes of the American Southwest have durability; even the elders among us are unable to perceive their slow metamorphoses. (Plates 14, 15, and 44) The mountains, pinnacles, and canyons may be constants, but the legends about them evolve in the tellings.

Alfonso Ortiz, the late anthropologist from Ohkay Owingeh (formerly known as San Juan Pueblo), once remarked that in remembering and recounting their history, Pueblo people are less concerned with individuals and dates than with places, places where events happened, events with historical and religious significance. Landscape features are visible, tangible points of

reference. We can go to them and hold them in respect. Grown-ups tell stories about such places to their children. The places have spirit and memory, and over time they grow sacred.

Photography is a curious mix of mechanics, chemistry, and electronics. The honesty of photographs surpasses our own vision, which bends the perceived world to suit our bias and accommodate our memories. Photographs, when unmanipulated, record the world by means of reflected light passing through a lens at a moment in time. But the photographer directs his viewfinder to select what to put on film or chip or to eliminate. Photographs record the present moment but also reflect multiple dimensions of time: images etched on a rock centuries ago, the sun breaking through clouds to illuminate horses grazing in a meadow, a storm bringing rain. (Plate 60) At such moments, clues to a past action lead to conditions in the present that portend an event about to happen.

And so the places we know—as individuals, families, or communities—can be infused with memory and spirit, and landscapes can have soul. The stories contained may speak of creation, gods, mythic monsters, and culture heroes. Or they may hold narratives that remind us of triumphs and defeats, sorrows and joys. A place is more than a static landform; it can evoke emotion, transmit knowledge and wisdom, and even show us how to live.



Some years ago, while photographing the remains of Kinishba, an ancestral Pueblo village near Fort Apache, Arizona, I noticed several Apache women strolling around the hillside above me. They were closely inspecting the ground, and occasionally one of them would bend over to pick up an object. They noticed me photographing,

and one came over and asked if I would take a picture of her grandmother with her mother, her daughter, and herself—the four generations. I agreed, of course, and I asked her what they were doing. Looking for things from the old times to use in ceremonies, she said. Opening her hand, she showed me a collection of stone flakes and pottery sherds. Then she asked what I was doing. I said I liked photographing places from the old times, like those ruins across the way.

As we made our way up the hillside, she told me more about her grandmother, that she was very old and had lived nearby all her life and remembered when the American soldiers were stationed at the fort. We chatted awhile longer, then she assembled everyone and I made the portrait with the crumbled walls of Kinishba in the distance.

The incident led me to reflect on human continuity, the sequence of generations, the memories of elders, and the meaning of place. Each member of this family wore a different style of clothing, reflecting her particular generation. Now they stood together on that hillside. Many generations before, their forebears had settled nearby. The village behind them was from an even earlier Puebloan time. Down the slope from where we were standing, the White River was flowing to the brim of its banks, engorged with snowmelt from the nearby mountains. The river, older than the hills themselves, had been a life-giving presence since time immemorial. It, too, had a spirit and a story. And before the river? Well, one can speculate only so far.



The desert Southwest is an archaeological archive, a museum in nature. Even after the passage of centuries, the walls of some ruins still stand stories high, cotton cloth survives with its intricate designs intact, and paintings on cliffs continue to hold their colors. The preservation of architectural wood allowed archaeologists to reconstruct a detailed and accurate dating sequence of the ancient world and led to a breakthrough in our understanding of Southwestern chronology.

Well-preserved archaeological sites are a central component of America's national patrimony. Their survival is a gift to us all: scholars, students, artists, tourists, and travelers. In recognition of their value, many have been set aside as public and private preserves and some named World Heritage sites. Present and future generations should have access to these places for study and education as well as for personal enjoyment. For to enter an eight-hundred-year-old room with its original ceiling beams and wall plaster intact or stand in front of a two-thousand-year-old painting on a cliff face is about as near as we can come to stepping into history itself.

However, in the Southwest as in other regions of the country, various forms of development—from mining to energy exploitation to urban sprawl—presently threaten many places containing the physical remains of the past. Pothunters dig up long-buried villages, loot caves, and steal rock art in order to make quick profits in the world antiquities market. An educated and appreciative public can help counteract these criminal activities by supporting conservation groups, serving as site stewards, participating in research, and becoming advocates for conservation.



I grew up in New England, where evidence of human activities from antiquity rarely shows on the landscape. In the woodlands, ancient wood-built habitations reveal their past existence as darkish stains in the soil. Yes, archaeologists excavate soil stains. It's a far cry from the arid lands of the Southwest, where the remains of prehistory have substance and immediacy. We kids learned about Indians not by exploring stone pueblos and cliff dwellings but by reading books or the few sentences inscribed on stone markers along the edge of roads.

As a child, I recall my mother reading one of these inscriptions to me as we took a walk near our home. The message was chiseled on a granite boulder along the road where a family had been killed by Indians on the doorstep of their cottage. At a later time, someone had recalled the incident and taken the trouble to tell about it. When I heard the words, that plot of land acquired special meaning. It was a sentence in a story about my collective past. The place now had history and mystery.

Now I live in the Southwest and have crawled through rooms of ancient dwellings and seen the fingerprints of their long-ago owners impressed in the dry plaster. I've shone my flashlight on pictures painted eight hundred years ago and held my hand over a painted handprint on the face of a cliff. On such occasions, who cannot feel the presence of those who came before?



Surrounded as we are by technological conveniences, it is easy to forget that to subsist our human and protohuman ancestors hunted game and collected wild plants. Agriculture made its appearance late in our history, industry is a newcomer, information technology still arriving. Here in the Southwest, human signatures are visible on the landscape going back some twelve millennia, a mere fraction of a second in the *Homo sapiens* continuum. Only in the 1920s did the scientific community come to realize that the Americas had been inhabited for such a long time. It was then that researchers uncovered a spear point embedded in the bones of a long-extinct bison that was eroding from a stream bank on the Folsom Ranch in eastern New Mexico. The bones previously had been discovered by George McJunkin, an African American cowboy. Subsequent investigations in Blackwater Draw uncovered evidence of the even earlier Clovis Culture. Today, archaeologists are poised to further push back the era when people first colonized the Americas.

America's Paleoindian explorers spread across the continent living by the chase and foraging for edible plants. They were hardy and few, they traveled light, and they left only sparse evidence of their presence. During the next six or seven thousand years, hunter-gatherers of the Archaic period continued to follow a highly mobile way of life. By then, the large herd animals, or megafauna, had become extinct and the people sought smaller game while harvesting a wide variety of plants for their seeds, leaves, fruits, tubers, and nuts.

In the arid, resource-poor Southwest, people needed a large territory to collect food, and they developed innovative methods and patterns of survival. In the places where they camped—on ridges and slopes, in rock shelters, and near water—archaeologists often find no more than

a few reddened, fire-cracked rocks, a lens of ash, or a scatter of stone flakes discarded by a flint knapper. Dry cave and alcove sites, on the other hand, if not plundered, have produced perishable organic objects: yucca sandals and fiber baskets, wooden spear throwers, food remnants, pollen, and animal bones. (Plates 17, 18, 26, and 27)

Although the Archaic phase technically extends from about 6000 BCE to 500 CE, some Native American groups—especially in the hot, dry stretches west of the Rockies—continued their hunting and foraging way of life well into the nineteenth century.



When I was a kid of eleven or twelve, I saved up enough by mowing lawns and trimming shrubs to buy a .22 rifle. One spring morning I set out on my first hunt in the woods behind our house. I wanted to shoot a squirrel and attach its tail to the back of my cap.

I remember standing under a beech tree and catching sight of one, a grey squirrel with a bushy tail foraging in the bushes. When it saw me it leaped to a tree, climbed up the back side of the trunk, bounded out on a limb, and peered down. How safe it felt on its high perch. I took aim and pulled the trigger. At first nothing happened, and I thought I'd missed. But then, silently, the squirrel floated down between the branches and landed with a thump on the soft earth at my feet. My heart thumped as well—first with surprise, then triumph. I stared at my prey, amazed at the accomplishment. Now I was a hunter.

Then I saw that, in fact, the bullet had not killed the squirrel but only torn open

its stomach. I watched its glistening pink internal organs bulge out and onto the carpet of leaves. It lay on its side, its black eyes looking up, silently informing me of what I had done. My legs weakened. I apologized. Then I shot it in the head, covered the body with leaves, and went home.

In the fall we kids collected horse chestnuts from under the widely spreading branches of a tree we used to climb. We'd split open the spiny shells between two stones and extract the slippery black and brown nuts. They were inedible, of course, but for us they had value, and I would fill my nut bag to bursting. At home, we'd drill holes in the best ones and run strings through them to make necklaces for our mothers, who received the gifts graciously. Then we cached the remaining nuts somewhere and forgot about them. When they turned up in the spring, they were dried out, faded, and cracked.

The hunter and the gatherer are in us still, for the most part unemployed, but alert, awaiting instructions. We are more than just ourselves; we are everyone in our collective past. What we are not, yet, is our future.



Desert Archaic people left another sign of their presence on the landscape—designs and figures pecked in the patina of rock surfaces and painted on the walls of alcoves and cliffs. Outstanding collections of this earliest American art can be seen in the lower reaches of the Grand Canyon, in Canyonlands National Park, and along the lower Pecos River in Texas. (Plates 49–52)

Other examples exist throughout the West and Southwest where small kin-related groups of these early Americans lived and traveled. Whether abstract or representational, the particular characteristics of Archaic rock art shift from region to region; still, certain elements of style and subject are consistent and differ markedly from that of later periods.

Some canyon walls in southeastern Utah contain aesthetically stunning painted panels of late Archaic art. Anthropomorphic figures, often armless and hollow eyed and life-size in scale, appear to float in their lithic domain, specters watching us from a spirit world. Some wear horns or elaborate headdresses and are accompanied by small animals, thought to be spirit helpers.

The prevailing theory holds that this art tradition derives from shamanic practices. In the course of carrying out healing and religious ceremonies, shamans strove to obtain power by contacting supernatural beings. Inducing a state of trance, they transported themselves from the here and now to another realm of consciousness. Upon return from their journey, they made pictures to record the visions they had witnessed. In this way, they not only gave some permanence to their experiences but also made it possible to show others what they had seen. Later, when they needed to access ritual power again, they had the sacred images to refer to.



We had heard of the paintings in the Maze of Canyonlands and obtained directions. (Plates 50 and 51) We drove to Utah and crossed the Colorado River, then followed a jeep track forty miles across dry canyon and mesa country until we arrived at a cliff overlooking the Maze. It was a mild, sunny late afternoon in mid-October, and from

the edge of the overlook, we gazed down at the awe-inspiring labyrinth of canyons that extended to the horizon. In the middle distance we spotted our landmarks: a series of dark, rectangular spires known as the Chocolate Drops (Plate 14). To find the pictographs, we were to head for these spires.

That evening, with the light fading, we cooked our dinner under a gnarled juniper. Afterward, we sat on a ledge by the overlook and smoked. Venus appeared, followed by a brilliant panoply of stars. As darkness fell over the canyons, we rolled out our sleeping bags on a sandy place along the edge of the cliff.

We had hardly slept an hour when a stiff breeze waked us, puffing sand against our faces and in our hair. Then the real wind blew up, gusting unimpeded across the open spaces and between the buttes and mesas. The temperature dropped, too, and we slid deeper into our sacks for warmth. Twice I got up and shook out sand. Later we felt the first cold, dust-laden raindrops, sporadic and widely spaced. We had no tent. At first, we did not speak of the rain and tried to sleep, but we knew it would worsen. Finally, it came down hard and steady, wind-driven; we were in a storm. We got up and carried our dampening bags to the jeep and draped them over us for warmth. It was a long night.

In the morning, we made our coffee early, the weather still rough and uncertain. Shower-laden cloud banks sped across the sky over the Maze, alternating with patches of blue and sunlight. We were captivated by the drama, and I made some photographs.

It took time to find the hand- and toe-hold trail down the cliff; then, with the aid of a rope, we carefully descended to the canyon floor and entered the maze of twisting, meandering branches. Surrounded by steep rock walls, we could not see our landmarks and we lost our sense of direction. Rain showers came and went. At midday, with hopes of finding the pictographs dimmed, we stopped to rest and eat. Afterward, we set off again, turned a corner, and there they were—tall, elongated, ghostlike anthropomorphic figures, some with striped bodies and horns, others with bulbous heads and thin, fragile legs. One had its arm outstretched, rabbits running along the forearm and a plant sprouting from the delicate fingertips. Further along the cliff, a goggle-wearing humanoid stared at me forbiddingly as I photographed. (Plate 51) Each gave the illusion of hovering in a space of its own, somewhere between solid rock and air. From an intangible dimension between worlds they watched us in silence. They had an aura of death and life without end.

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Abstract imagery produced by Desert Culture folk does not lend itself to easy interpretation. (Plate 35) At first glance—at least to modern eyes—some examples appear to have been carelessly or haphazardly executed. Indeed, early scientific observers tended to dismiss them as doodling, failing even to record these images in their site reports. Due to the length of time elapsed and the degree to which cultures have evolved, the meaning of the designs that are etched, pecked, and painted on rock surfaces eludes us. Most serious investigators of this oldest artistic expression limit their remarks to descriptions of style and rough date estimates.

However, some scholars who are familiar with shamanism and the mental effects of trance have taken a neuropsychological approach to interpreting the origin of some early rock art. The anthropologist David S. Whitley has written, “During a trance, our optical system commonly generates a series of mental images—light patterns known as entoptic (‘within the eye’) phenomena, including designs such as zigzags, meanders, grids, and spirals.” Such effects can be induced by anyone (without using drugs) simply by closing the eyes, putting pressure on the eyelids, and concentrating. Like dreams, the memory of what one experiences in trance is short-lived and must be recorded as soon as one awakens.



When I was a child and lying in bed at night, I discovered that I could induce enthralling, cinema-like sequences of abstract images. Eyes tightly closed, I would imagine the surrounding blackness as the universe and peer far into its depths. Soon, from out of the void would appear a swarm of multicolored pinpoints of light, like a cluster of bright, shimmering stars. The tiny lights advanced, slowly at first, then gathered speed. As they drew near they stretched out and streamed by like a school of brilliant tropical fish. Then suddenly, as if on command, they halted and transmogrified into a jagged pattern of vibrating lines of yellow, blue, and green against black. A moment more and they vanished.

I described my visions to my mother once as she tucked me into bed. She said nothing, and I never raised the subject again. That was sixty years ago. Today, I can

still evoke the sparkling dots, which stream out of the cosmos, and I continue to thrill at the lightning-like patterns shimmering in the darkness.



By 300 BCE, ancestral Pueblo people in the Four Corners region were raising corn as a staple—along with squash and later beans—and making a transition from foraging and hunting to a more sedentary way of life. Archaeologists have found some of the earliest farming sites in the foothills of the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado. Since then, for sixteen centuries, ancestral Pueblo culture evolved and spread over much of the American Southwest. The Mesa Verde, Kayenta, and Chaco districts became distinct centers, but groups of farmers spread further into outlying, marginal areas, even into the rugged, dry sectors of what is now Canyonlands National Park.

Anthropologists describe these expert arid-land farmers as “sedentary” because they lived in solid, stable houses and hamlets; in truth, however, they relocated whenever their needs dictated. Often, they would simply use up key natural resources in a given locality: soil fertility would become depleted, game populations would decline, and people would have to travel too far to gather fuel wood. Then it would be time to move on. Other factors motivating mobility were shifting weather patterns, droughts, and floods, all of which could cause poor harvests.

One particularly devastating drought in the Four Corners region began in the mid-1270s, when regional populations were high, and lasted for more than a generation. This extended dry spell brought on food shortages and malnutrition and caused many to abandon their scattered

farmsteads and hamlets and consolidate in defensively built villages located close to springs and seeps (Plate 45). Eventually, however, violence and warfare broke out.

In the last years of the century, families, or what was left of them, simply gathered up their transportable possessions and left. The Four Corners region became vacant, or nearly so. Archaeologists have found it difficult to reconstruct exactly who went where; however, the general migration trend appears to have been to the south and southeast, where climatic conditions were less severe and existing communities could take in the refugees. Around this time, populations in the Chama and Rio Grande Valleys of northern New Mexico swelled, as did those along the Little Colorado River and in the lands of the Zunis and Hopis.

Popular literature has long spoken of the “Anasazi,” the ancient inhabitants of the Four Corners region, as having mysteriously vanished. Mystery is marketable and tourism profitable. However, archaeological findings agree with the traditional Pueblo knowledge that the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona are the descendants of the Anasazi. To correct popular misconceptions, the term “ancestral Pueblo” is currently replacing “Anasazi.” As a Hopi authority once put it, “For a long time the Hisatsinom [Hopi ancestors] moved around from place to place looking for a home to settle down. As they went, they stopped to live for a while in the places you now call your national parks and monuments.”

To fully understand the challenges faced by ancient farmers, one needs to have had personal experience subsisting in the arid lands of the American Southwest. The ability of the land to support crops and of the skies to water them is of utmost importance. Soil, terrain, and water: they determine all.



It was July 14, the feast day of San Buenaventura, about two in the afternoon, and we were driving to the dances at Cochiti Pueblo. It was hot that day; we had been building our house and decided to take the afternoon off. The sun was high in a flawless blue sky, the kind of sky I know will show every tiny speck of dust on film.

My nieces were in their early teenage years, visiting from Vermont. One of them asked why the Indians were dancing. It's a Corn Dance, I said. The Indians dance to bring rain for the corn. We drove south down the interstate, and I opened the windows of our Volkswagen bus to let in air. It was somewhere around Waldo that we noticed the cloud, a single white puff rising above the Jemez Mountains to the north. By the time we exited the interstate, it had built into a stepped pyramid, its belly already darkening. We headed north toward the pueblo, the cloud now in front of us, mounting ever higher and spreading our way. It was the only weather in the vast sky, but it was on the move, gathering energy, burgeoning like a mushroom.

We parked along a street within the pueblo and walked in the direction of the drums and chanting chorus. The energy of the event, still out of view, became palpable, and the girls grew excited. We arrived just as the cloud's shade extended over the plaza and the dancers and the onlookers. The air temperature dropped. A dust devil spun across the plaza space, whirling up papers and hats. To the beat of the drum, the dancers shuffled in neat, choreographed lines. The first drops were fat and cold and raised dust around our feet. We could feel each one as it fell on our

shoulders. A murmur arose among the dancers and ran through the crowd. Then a clap of thunder caught everyone's attention. A pause followed before the rain came down in earnest, water gushing from the roof canales and streaming into the plaza. The women laughed, pulled off their moccasins, and danced barefoot. My niece looked at me. "Does it always happen like this?" she said.



Moisture is scant in the high desert; rain showers are spotty and unpredictable. A storm will drench one place and leave another dry. The vagaries of wind currents determine which creek will flow and which will stay dry and which cornfield will thrive while its neighbor withers. Rain is a blessing that lies beyond the control of mortals. To bring moisture, one must appeal to the gods through the ageless rituals of song, dance, and prayer. It has always been so.

Thin desert soils blow off in winds and wash away in downpours. Winter freezes drop to below zero, summer heats rise to over a hundred degrees. The Southwest is, indeed, a rough environment in which to sustain human life, and yet, one way or another, people have subsisted in these dry lands for some twelve thousand years. Over the course of so many generations and lifetimes, the mountains and mesas have not shifted, nor have the canyons perceptibly deepened. Against such formidable permanence, clues to the land's experience with human beings are usually subtle and hard to perceive. *Sites*, archaeologists call them, and each one adds a sentence or two to our long human story.

A scatter of stone flakes on the ground reveals where a hunter knapped spear points. A few cracked, reddened rocks may be all that remain of a hearth around which a family stone-boiled

its meal in a basket sealed with pine pitch. A polished slick, barely visible on the surface of a rock, points to where someone ground seeds into flour, again and again, year after year. A series of pecked niches in the rock wall of a canyon, now too eroded to use, are all that shows of an ancient trail. Other sites are more noticeable, of course—the rubble of a tumbled wall or an earthen mound where a pueblo once stood. (Plates 30 and 31) In these places people once told about their day, drank tea, threw dice, fed their dog.



Some years ago—it was midday in August—I was hiking out of Tsegi Canyon in northeastern Arizona in search of a way over a mesa to Kiet Siel Canyon. The temperature was approaching a hundred degrees, and sweat trickled into my eyes from under my hat brim. A hell of a time to be in this place, I was thinking. In my backpack I had a change of clothes, food, camera and film, and a back pad and blanket. Bungee cords held my tripod secure on top, and my canteen swung by its side. The trail steepened, grew faint, then fainter, and finally disappeared altogether; I realized I was walking on a cow path. I sat on a rock and checked my topo map, swigged some water, and figured I had better find the right trail soon. So I scrambled back down the slope to the canyon floor and started over. This time, thankfully, the trail switchbacked up to a cairn on the rim of the mesa and continued on.

I stopped and surveyed the countryside. The air was still. In the middle distance, dust plumes drifted up over Black Mesa: Peabody coal trucks were on the move. Far to the east faintly rose the outlines of the Lukachukais. I listened to the

sound of a bumblebee as it visited the blossoms of a thistle. I untied the kerchief from around my neck and lifted my hat brim to wipe sweat from my forehead. This was the heart of Navajo country.

The thought flashed through my mind that maybe hiking alone in such a remote area was unwise. I could faint, stumble, turn an ankle. But had I ever done so? Why today? As I plodded along the trail, I focused on the singularity of each plant I passed and monitored the evolving shapes of clouds. I spied a towhee scratching under a juniper. When I'm alone, the little details of the world intensify and my sense of time alters, too. Now time was reduced to a sequence of isolated moments, visual snapshots. And there was the heat, the evaporative heat—I was growing light-headed in it.

We all know our bodies are made up mostly of water. Had I enough? Perhaps, gradually, I would harden and grow crisp like the desert plants around me. I took another drink. Farther down the trail, I had the odd sensation of being separate from my body, of viewing it from above as I progressed step by step, a bipedal stick figure. I shook myself and clapped my hands to regain a sense of reality. At the sound, a jay burst from a tree beside the trail. I wondered if I should have stayed with the others in Tsegi Canyon. By now, surely, they would have found a shady place to stop for lunch, perhaps by a spring.

A stinkbug pulled its tank-like corpus resolutely across the path in front of me,

leaving patterned prints in the sand. A juniper passed by on the right, then a four-winged saltbush. Ahead, a lizard, sensing my approach, did push-ups on a sun-baked boulder. To measure my progress, I counted my steps and glanced behind at my receding boot prints.

Then, unexpectedly, I arrived at the edge of the mesa and gazed below into Kiet Siel Canyon, where a glistening line of water threaded between rocks and reeds. I wound my way down the trail's switchbacks and headed upstream to where a delicate waterfall slid over a ledge and splashed in a shallow pool. I slid off my pack, pulled off boots, stripped off clothes, and stood naked in the cooling spray.

Mossy vegetation draped from the rock wall under the ledge. From a slender root dangled an abandoned hummingbird nest. Tiny black tadpoles basked at the pool's edge, and fairy shrimps, only faintly seen, twitched rhythmically in the deeper shallows. Dense reeds, willows, and knee-high grasses along the far bank gave this desert microenvironment a lush, semi-tropical look. I crossed the creek, a slender lifeline in the surrounding dryness, and saw where a small rodent had recently impressed its sharp toes in the mud along the water's edge. Above its trail, a patch of wild sunflowers bloomed.

After I had cooled and rested, I remembered my purpose—to photograph the cliff houses of Kiet Siel. I pulled out my map and saw they were only a couple of miles upstream; I would arrive by late afternoon. The heat would be a little less by then,

and I would make camp. Tomorrow I'd hike up to the ruins. The morning light would reflect softly on the high, sweeping sandstone wall behind the ancient dwellings. (Plates 17 and 18)



Southwesterners first began placing maize seeds in the ground some four thousand years ago in what is now southern Arizona. Slowly and erratically, the practice of cultivation spread north to the Colorado Plateau and gave rise to a culture of village-dwelling farmers: the ancestral Pueblo Indians. But even after acquiring seeds and learning how to farm, not everyone took it up. Why go the effort of tilling fields, waiting for rain, and chasing off rabbits when hunting and gathering still worked well?

Over the generations, Puebloan people became expert arid-land farmers and developed innovative methods to deal with scant moisture, poor soils, and a harsh climate. They built terraces and low stone walls to divert rainwater to their planted fields and spread gravel mulch over their gardens to conserve moisture and extend growing seasons. They saved seeds from the most productive plants to put in the ground the next year; in this way, corn adapted to the aridity and short growing seasons of the Southwest.

At another level, Pueblo religious leaders developed complex ceremonies to appeal to higher powers to send rain and promote harmony between people and nature. At the same time, farmers acquired the knowledge, experience, and spirituality to produce fruitful harvests even in marginal environmental conditions. They also had the wisdom and foresight to store a portion

of what they grew in productive seasons as insurance against years when harvests were poor. When this happened, as it did repeatedly, the Pueblos fell back on their old tradition of hunting and foraging.



My first (paying) job as a photographer came in early 1972, when the School of American Research hired me to record the ongoing archaeological excavations at Arroyo Hondo Pueblo, a fourteenth-century village near Santa Fe, New Mexico. The site consists of multistory adobe and stone apartment blocks surrounding a series of plazas. One day, the crew discovered a large quantity of preserved, fire-charred corn, which had been stacked in a lower-story room that had burned.

Soon afterward, I was visiting a Hopi family on Second Mesa in Arizona. While my companion, an art dealer, was negotiating a purchase of pottery, the grandfather showed me around. He led me to a wood shed in back of the house and proudly opened the door. Sunlight slanted in through cracks in the slatted walls. In the dim light, I could make out an immense quantity of corncobs neatly stacked on shelving from floor to ceiling, sufficient to feed the family for a year, perhaps longer. We talked awhile about farming. At one point I asked, naively, "So what do you do about rabbits?" The critters had been relishing our vegetable garden with impunity.

"We eat them," he replied with a puzzled look.

Although the old ways continue in some instances among the Pueblos, many

have faded into oblivion. A few years ago, while researching the growing of blue corn, I asked an official at Santa Clara Pueblo if I could photograph the community's gardens. To my surprise, he told me that no one was growing blue corn anymore. But what about for your ceremonies, I asked. We go to the supermarket, he replied. So I went to nearby Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, where a summer program had been started with the goal of interesting teenagers in traditional farming in the pueblo's fertile, fallow fields along the Rio Grande. The disheartened program manager explained to me that the program was faltering; farming is hard work, he said, and McDonald's was paying better.

In Pueblo societies today, continuities and discontinuities intermingle and traditions vie with innovations. During the Arroyo Hondo excavations, I had occasion to photograph the formal burial of a scarlet macaw along the edge of a plaza. Some six centuries earlier, a trader, probably from the city of Paquimé in present-day Chihuahua, Mexico, had transported the colorful bird by foot in a cage to northern New Mexico. (Plate 40) One wonders how he or she accomplished the task, macaws being short-tempered birds with extremely powerful beaks. A zookeeper experienced in coping with macaw temperaments once commented that she could not imagine anyone trying to carry one of the birds hundreds of miles in a handmade wooden container; the creature, she insisted, would soon grow irate and frustrated and tear the cage apart. However, the Arroyo Hondo burial—and many others like it throughout the Southwest—stands as proof of the accomplishment.

That same summer, while attending a Corn Dance at San Ildefonso Pueblo north of Santa Fe, I spied a scarlet macaw tethered to a perch in a tree in a front yard. The strikingly beautiful bird cocked its head as it sized me up, and I remained at a safe distance. Later, its owner told me it had been a family pet for many years. They had never plucked it, she said, but they did donate its molted feathers to the religious societies for use in ceremonies.



It was fashionable in generations past for anthropologists and popular writers to characterize the Pueblo Indians as a passive, sedentary, peaceful folk living in a harmonious, egalitarian society. The Pueblos were the “civilized” ones, so-called for their settled farming life in well-kept villages that resembled those of Europeans. Spaniards and Americans alike contrasted them to the *indios bárbaros*, the roaming, rapacious, plundering, thieving, kidnapping, mounted nomads from the Plains who did not live in houses, plant crops, or own land.

Although such stereotypes occasionally still appear in print and film, they have been discarded in anthropological literature, where, ironically, some researchers have been focusing on violence, warfare, and even cannibalism in ancient Pueblo society. Some popular writing, predictably, has embraced these marketable themes, too.



Daylight fades as I walk along the canyon rim. Storm clouds march in phalanxes over distant hills to the north, pushed by winds unfelt here. Across the cleft stand the remains of an ancient building and tower. They call it a castle. The fallen stones

of collapsed walls are piled across a talus below. Lightning blinks softly at the edge of the clouds.

I make my way down to a ledge, affix camera to tripod and shutter release to camera, and watch the storm advancing, like a cat stalking a bird. A pair of ravens drifts across my line of vision, black on grey, above stunted junipers. I gauge the light and set the aperture. Nearby, a lizard rustles in the leaves as it settles down for the cool hours. And on the horizon to the east, Sleeping Ute Mountain awaits nightfall. The sun sinks and slips beneath a bank of clouds at the earth's edge. At that moment, its filtered rays rake the landscape and settle on the stone walls across the way. It's the last light. I trip the shutter. (Plate 38)

Now cool air slips into the canyon and a freshening breeze carries the scent of rain. I pack up my camera, pull on my jacket, and head back. Lightning flickers again, followed seconds later by a rumble of thunder. It's been a long day and I have food on my mind.

A figure approaches along the path, and we pause to exchange greetings. You're going the wrong way, I say, you'll soon get wet. When he asks what I'm photographing, I nod toward the citadel. He says he's a reporter from L.A. and has been covering the riots. I got worn out, he says hesitantly. My editor told me to take some time off. So I got in my car and just drove. It's amazing—Los Angeles, and then the desert. He glances around. You know about this place? I tell him people lived here

eight hundred years ago. He looks at the castle. Then he says, What do you think about Rodney King? Rodney King?

By now darkness has inundated the landscape, only the sandstone cliffs reflect a lingering afterglow. As I slowly continue along the trail, heavy raindrops slap the slickrock. I glance back. The man is gazing across the canyon.



As farming caught on, ancestral Pueblo people stayed in one place longer and built stronger, more permanent dwellings. Their initial settlements consisted of clusters of snug pithouses with slab-lined walls, timber supports, and wood and earthen roofs. But by the 1000s, above-ground farmsteads and hamlets of stone and mud had become common. Often they were fronted by a ramada, a kiva or two (round underground rooms), and a small plaza.

In the late ninth century, an innovative and inspired type of architecture began to make an appearance along the Chaco River and Wash in the central San Juan Basin of what is now northwestern New Mexico. It is an arid, desolate region that seems inhospitable to human settlement. The builders, who may have migrated from the north, built several structures, called *great houses*, in Chaco Canyon that had a scale of magnitude and formal design never before seen in the Southwest. This development, commonly referred to as the Chaco Phenomenon, gathered momentum in the tenth century as the Chacoans constructed the monumental buildings called great houses in the canyon. It reached its apex a few generations later, spreading outside the canyon and far into the surrounding Puebloan world.

Chacoan great houses, which sometimes reached four or five stories, are remarkable for their massive walls of hand-hewn stonemasonry, spacious rooms and kivas, and grand public spaces. (Plates 30 and 39) In the hinterlands, their builders often sited them on an eminence from which their occupants—believed to have been power-holding elites—could survey the surrounding community of modest farmsteads.

Archaeologists have long and vigorously debated the function of great houses. Some have thought that they were large communal habitations; others believe that they served as regional depots for the storage and distribution of food; still others regard them as venues in which ceremonies were performed for hundreds, even thousands, of celebrants who traveled to the canyon from far-flung communities. The majority view, for the time being, is that the buildings housed families of an elite religious-political class that organized periodic rituals, probably including trade fairs, attended by pilgrims from around the San Juan Basin. Puzzling man-made alignments on the ground that lead to great houses—the well-known “Chaco roads”—may have served as processional ways for pilgrims and religious celebrants. Some of these roads, having widths of thirty feet, connect distantly separated great-house communities. Huge semi-subterranean structures, or great kivas, usually located near a great house, may have accommodated large public gatherings.

In the late 1000s and early 1100s, Chaco’s influence spread far north into the Mesa Verde region and south and west as well. Trade links reached farther still, to the Pacific Coast, the Rio Grande Valley, and into Mexico. However, by around 1140, Chaco Canyon had lost its vitality as the center place. Soon, its monumental buildings—Pueblo Bonito, Chetro Ketl,

Peñasco Blanco, and others—became vacant. Blowing sand and dust drifted through doorways, roofs collapsed, and irrigation ditches filled up. What happened to Chaco’s power? Most scholars think that it dissipated during years of drought and that the ruling families of the canyon moved north to a new center along the Animas River, known today as Aztec Ruins. There it continued for another century.

Chaco Canyon thrived for three centuries, longer than the United States has been a nation. From about 1030 to 1130, it played a central, inspirational, and possibly dominating role in Southwestern Pueblo culture, its influence and ideology extending over a vast territory. Today, the reflection of that faded power still can be felt, though somewhat sadly, in the crumbling monuments and unexcavated mounds of the canyon.

27



There’s a dream I have about returning home after a long absence. The trip back evokes feelings of both apprehension and excitement. It occurs to me, I should have called ahead to let everyone know. As I walk up the driveway, I wonder how my parents will look after all these years.

I see the house and its surroundings as a series of snapshots. The hedge along the driveway, once regularly trimmed, has grown into a line of trees, and the lawn, which I mowed as a kid, has turned into an overgrown field. And doesn’t the house look neglected! But the oak tree is there and still alive, even if the swing is gone from its lowest branch. I approach the front door and note that paint has peeled and decayed leaves are matted on the steps.

When my knocking brings no response, I suppose they must be off on an errand—perhaps they went to town. But a glance in the window reveals a dark and empty hallway. The furniture is gone and the silence turns my apprehension to anxiety. Could more time have passed than I remember?

I decide to ask our neighbors—surely they'll know where my family is—and cross the field to their house. But when I ring the bell, the door is opened by a woman I don't recognize. She regards me warily as I introduce myself. Does she know my family's whereabouts? At first she shakes her head. But then she says that perhaps people of that name lived over there once, but they were gone long before she came. But what about the family who lived here in this house? They went away, too. I mention other names. Everyone has gone, moved elsewhere, far away, years ago.

I walk slowly back to my house, and it's obvious to me now that the place has been abandoned for longer than I'd realized. Not only has the paint peeled, but roof shingles are missing, shutters hang askew, and the bulkhead lid has rotted and collapsed down the cellar stairs. The lilac bushes that reached my parents' second-story bedroom window are mere dead stalks, and the once distant woods have spread over the horse pasture and even encroached on the back lawn—the lawn where we kids played at running bases, our bare feet skidding in the moist spring grass.

What happened? Whose house is it now? Where did everyone go? (Plates 25, 26, and 27)



After the great buildings of Chaco Canyon had fallen silent, Southwesterners living north of the San Juan River began to experience a phenomenon of their own.

Mesa Verde looms as a far-spreading escarpment southeast of the present-day town of Cortez, Colorado. The mesa is riven by a series of steep-banked canyons in which early Euro-American explorers and ranchers discovered scores of cliff dwellings. These canyons and others across the Colorado Plateau contain vaulted alcoves, rock overhangs, and recessed ledges that for centuries have sheltered and preserved stonemasonry pueblos, houses, and granaries of the ancestral Pueblo culture. Early Euro-American settlers and later scientific researchers uncovered a trove of artifacts: stone and bone tools, ceramic vessels, and even fragile cotton cloth and rabbit-fur blankets. In some cases, the former occupants left their possessions in place as if they had decided to leave suddenly.

It is easy to see why Pueblo people liked cliff houses. Who would not enjoy protection from the elements—wind, rain, snow, and the periodic wildfires that swept over the mesas? In addition to offering their occupants a degree of physical comfort, alcoves also reduced the labor required to maintain rain-battered walls and leaky roofs every season. Most cliff dwellings face southward; thus, they benefited from passive solar heat gain in the cold months when the sun cycled low in the sky, and from summer shade when it rose high overhead. As any farmer well knows, keeping foodstuffs and especially seed corn secure from dampness and rodents is critically important, and cliff dwellings offered excellent storage conditions.

The rising population of the Four Corners region in the thirteenth century placed a

premium on arable fields, and cliff dwellings did not take up valuable farmland. Then, too, there was the matter of defense, especially when neighboring communities competed for scarce food and water resources. Most sites are difficult to access, and some have seeps or springs providing fresh water. Raiding parties would have found themselves at a tactical disadvantage, at least for a while; but if they laid siege, that disadvantage might have been reversed.

For more than a hundred years, the aesthetic appeal of cliff dwellings and their settings have drawn tourists from afar, and Mesa Verde National Park has been named a World Heritage site. What attracted archaeologists (and, regrettably, looters) was the wealth of intact artifacts they found scattered about, often untouched since their owners departed eight hundred years ago. Today, many of these treasures, which offer clues to the lives of their former owners, remain in public and private collections in America, Europe, and elsewhere around the world. Architecture, too, offers insights to the past; the layout and design of rooms, kivas, and public spaces reveal clues to the nature of ancient Pueblo social organization. And on a larger scale still, researchers can map groups of cliff dwellings and the trails connecting them to gain insight into how the sites were linked to form integrated communities.

Those who chose to live in the cliffs and on the open mesas of Mesa Verde developed innovative ways to harvest and conserve water for domestic and agricultural use. They constructed dams to create long-lasting reservoirs and built terraces and small check dams to help slow runoff and divert surface water to their fields. As people increased in numbers, however, they took a heavy toll on the surrounding environment, and life grew ever harder to sustain.

The cliff dwelling—“a little city of stone, asleep,” Willa Cather described one—is a thing of beauty and romance to modern eyes and a source of inspiration to writers, artists, and photographers. (Plates 20, 21, and 24) Early professional observers assumed that the cliff dwellers belonged to a distinct culture that became extinct. Given their lack of knowledge of the hundreds of contemporaneous hamlets and pueblos that dotted the Colorado Plateau, their misconception is understandable. Scholars today realize that only a small portion of ancestral Pueblo people built and resided in cliff houses and this type of architecture was mostly a thirteenth-century phenomenon. The majority of the inhabitants of the greater Mesa Verde region, in fact, made their homes—whether farmsteads, hamlets, or villages—in less protected, open lowland settings across the Montezuma Valley and Great Sage Plain. These sites now appear as brush-covered mounds and depressions on the rolling landscape. Many of them have been leveled by contemporary farmers in the course of cultivating bean fields or inundated by the damming of the Dolores River.

This Mesa Verde region is favored by rich loess soils, adequate rain and snow, and growing seasons that are normally long enough to produce harvests of corn, beans, and squash. What is more, the surrounding highlands offer hunting grounds for deer, sheep, and elk, and a network of rivers and streams, such as the Dolores, La Plata, Mancos, and McElmo, provided reliable sources of water and riparian habitats. Little wonder that the region became a magnet for human settlement.



It was late in October and we were camped under a grove of cottonwoods along the San Juan River in southeastern Utah. My wife, Ruth, and I had spent the warm, sunny, autumn days in Butler Wash and Slickhorn Gulch, climbing to the top of Comb Ridge in our shirtsleeves and sitting on the banks of the river watching the water flow by. Darkness came earlier each evening and the temperatures dropped below freezing at night. Each morning I broke ice out of the water bucket to make coffee and oatmeal and brushed new-fallen yellow cottonwood leaves off the car.

One day, we decided to go to Mesa Verde.

On the way from Bluff to Cortez, cloud banks moved in from the west and the sky grew leaden. More than a whiff of winter filled the air. As we drove the switchbacks up the north side of Mesa Verde, snowflakes swooped up and over the front of the car and windshield. The cedars and scrub oaks along the roadside turned grey.

At the trailhead to Spruce Tree House, the odds of making a picture seemed remote; still, I packed up my gear and hiked to the overlook at the edge of the slick-rock. The air temperature had fallen and a wind sprang up, numbing my cheeks. I wished I had gloves. More important, the light fell and grew flat. The needle on my light meter read empty. But stubbornness set in, and I put up my tripod and focused my camera on the cliff dwelling nestled in an alcove across the canyon. I made a guess at the lens aperture and set the shutter speed at an eighth of a second. When the snow began falling again, I transferred my hat to the camera. Then I shoved my

hands in my jacket pockets, hunched my shoulders, and wondered if the coffee shop was open off season.

The wind gusted up the canyon swirling snowflakes every which way. All of a sudden, and only momentarily, a faint light glowed through a passing thin patch of clouds. I lifted the hat and pressed the shutter release. (Plate 21)



Southwestern rock art encompasses a wide variety of forms and styles. Some pecked or painted markings appear to have been executed hastily and casually, while other, more elaborate figures reflect a planned, thoughtful approach and show artistic sophistication. The latter can be deeply compelling and moving even to present-day viewers, especially when they exhibit spiritual and religious dimensions. Territory marking, hunting magic, and storytelling appear to have motivated other images and panels. (Plates 33, 36, and 47)

In their studies of rock art, anthropologists have recorded thousands of individual glyphs and many panels with dozens, even hundreds, of figures. Some clearly are associated with nearby habitations, and such proximity makes it easier to determine the figures' age and cultural affiliation. To enhance their analyses, scholars employ sophisticated technological methodologies and increasingly solicit insights from Native American groups. Based on these sources, anthropologists have developed an organized descriptive vocabulary for the imagery as well as a rough chronology and associations between artistic styles and prehistoric cultural groups. As a result, an extensive and growing rock art literature has come into existence,

enhanced by pictures, archives, and films. Public and academic interest also is reflected in the existence of numerous regional and national rock art associations dedicated to research, recording, and conservation.

In spite of the impressive body of published research, however, the meaning of much imagery pecked and painted on stone remains obscure, and interpretation is often speculative. Indeed, it is doubtful that we will ever know just what was on the minds of the ancient glyph makers. Too many generations have gone by and too much cultural change has taken place to let us into their minds.



We explored one afternoon—my wife, Ruth, and I—along a mesa where black lava boulders, engraved with the forms of spirits, had tumbled down. As usual, I went glyph hunting along the talus. She walked on. An hour passed as the winter sun sank toward the horizon and shadows lengthened.

Glyph beings sometimes withdraw shyly to the shadows and become invisible. On other occasions they emerge in full view and I am surprised to find them boldly observing me. They have their own agenda. If you wish to make contact with them, go to where they live, walk about quietly and without expectations, and see what happens; beyond that, it's their call. This afternoon, I thought, they had other matters on their minds than being photographed.

The sun sank and swelled and turned deep yellow as it hung a few fingers'

widths above the edge of the mesa. The branches of chamisa stretched their delicate shadows across the path. Rounding a corner, I came upon Ruth sitting on a rock, watching the ritual of the end of day. I had yet to make a picture. I leaned my tripod against a rock, stored my camera, and sat down beside her. The sun's last rays were nipping the crests of the grasses. "Finished?" she asked. "Yes, the petroglyph spirits are elusive—no pictures."

"Look over your shoulder," she said. I turned around. There, from behind tall, illuminated grasses, a Katsina figure quietly observed us. (Plate 11)

35



The Mesa Verdean, or northern San Juan, culture in the ancestral Pueblo world covered a wide territory. At its center were the Mesa Verde escarpment with its famous alcove villages and the large open-site communities of the Great Sage Plain and Montezuma Valley. Researchers have estimated the peak population of this central region at upward of twenty thousand people. Puebloan farmers also lived around the western and eastern fringes of the central region. These hinterland folk shared common traits with those in the central area but led their own separate and relatively isolated existence.

Beginning in early Basketmaker times (about 1000 BCE), horticulturalists thrived along the San Juan River and its tributaries and up on Cedar Mesa. The large anthropomorphic figures pecked into the cliffs, with their broad shoulders and decorated trapezoidal torsos, resemble the Archaic shamanic figures of Canyonlands and the later human-like bodies depicted in the

Fremont culture to the north. The fringes of the ancestral Pueblo world have attracted less archaeological research than the large communities on and around Mesa Verde. Many sites are remote and difficult to access, while others, consisting of low, eroded mounds, lack the appeal of multistory pueblos and well-preserved cliff dwellings. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, these rural people, who chose some of the most scenic places in the Southwest to live, made up a significant part of the overall prehistoric Pueblo world.



From the north side of the river, Ruth and I could see the alcove with its grand vault eroded into the sandstone bluff. We crossed the swinging footbridge, stepping over missing wood slats, the waters of the San Juan churning beneath. On the far side, we followed a farm road and circled around a field in which a Navajo farmer on a tractor was plowing under corn stubble. Then the road followed the cliff with the alcove, which contained a long single-story cliff dwelling. Sixteen-Room House, it's called, and it is so well camouflaged—sandstone walls against sandstone cliff—that some seekers have missed it altogether. We climbed up the talus by a winding trail. Columbine grew in the alcove's shade.

It was a bright, crisp late October morning, with cottonwoods turning yellow in the valley. I stood for a while on the ledge that ran along the top of the slope and watched the tractor looping back and forth across the field, a small white dog bounding alongside. The volume of the alcove amplified the sound of the tractor's

motor. From time to time, the driver glanced over his shoulder to check his furrows. A jet's arrow-straight contrail cut across the deep blue vault of the sky, its tail spreading as its point streaked upward. At the end of one run, the tractor driver angled off the field and drove down the road until he was directly below my perch. He stopped at a small storage shed, in front of which, scattered about, were various pieces of rusting farm equipment. He cut the motor, climbed down, and disappeared into the shed. Now I heard the clear, sharp voice of a radio announcer speaking in Navajo. The white dog trotted into the road and stood square-legged, facing me, ears pricked forward. He gave a sharp bark and launched up the trail. Soon he was panting at my side.

I collected my camera gear and made my way along the ledge toward the cliff dwelling, the white dog leading. I stopped to photograph a row of painted handprints on the wall beneath an enigmatic series of black dots. What had someone been recording eight centuries ago? Set on a long arced ledge, the cliff dwelling looked more like a theatrical set than a dwelling. Above it, as if swept up by an ancient tide, crested a wave of stone, and over that rose the black-streaked vault of the alcove. (Plate 25) It was a dynamic and fluid scene literally set in stone. The white dog looked at me, intent with expectation, while I set up my equipment. Finally, out of patience, he dashed ahead, leapt up the ledge, and disappeared through a crumbled doorway.



Archaeologists, in addressing questions about history and past human behavior, concentrate on the more measurable and quantifiable aspects of human culture. They survey, excavate, analyze, interpret, and publish. Their fieldwork focuses on *sites*—lithic scatters, camps, field houses, settlements, pueblos. They explore vertically, delving through layers of deposits that mark sequences of occupation, and horizontally, trekking miles of terrain as they inspect the ground for the tiniest of clues.

38

But today, some archaeological anthropologists are studying geography, too, pondering how those who preceded us marked their presence on the landscape. People traveled significant distances from where they lived to forage, hunt, socialize, and conduct religious ceremonies. Evidence of their presence and activities has endured through the centuries. Hand- and toe-hold trails give evidence of human travel routes, as do the enigmatic alignments known as Chacoan roads. Ancient Indians also built stone cairns, circles, crescents, and shrines, and they pecked hieroglyphic designs to mark the solstices and equinoxes.

Beyond such specific man-made sites on the landscape, topographic features such as mountains, buttes, and canyons held special significance as territorial markers, the homes of supernatural beings and ancestral spirits, or places of legend. With trees and grasses, boulders and cliffs, clouds and rivers, these elements form a dynamic sacred landscape. Cardinal and astronomical alignments comprise clues to the cosmological significance of places, whether natural or constructed. Although the concept may be novel to many modern urban Americans, indigenous peoples have long recognized meaning in landscape, and they have honored the

spirits of places, left glyphs and feathers as prayers, and told stories about them through long winter evenings.

Combining cultural sensitivity with scientific methodology, some researchers today are recording how buildings were aligned with cycles of the sun and moon. Sometimes, Native Americans collaborate and offer their own interpretations about these phenomena and each group opens up to the perspectives of the other. Although traditional tribal knowledge and scientific views do not always reconcile, they occasionally find common ground. But other times, the baggage of colonial experiences and attitudes has created gulfs that need more time to cross.

39



Luck plays its part in photography. I well recall one brilliant late summer morning in southeastern Utah when I set off in my road-weary Toyota Corolla in search of pictures. I expected it to be a short excursion up Montezuma Creek. At first, relaxed and confident, I made good time along the straight, hard-packed, two-track road that paralleled the dry stream. Then without warning, the road rounded a bend and plunged across the wash; a moment later the car was sunk to its axles in dry sand.

I shut off the motor to assess my predicament. What first struck me was the profound silence of the place. My map indicated I was forty miles from Blanding, twelve from the nearest habitation, which was a trading post. The sun was up and the temperature rising. I had a quart of water and an apple, but no shovel. Cell phones had yet to be invented.

My first plan was to find shade, wait until evening, then hike to the trading post, hoping not to find it abandoned. Meanwhile, someone might come along and pull the car out. The plan didn't sit well, and I came up with an alternative: do something, try to get myself out of what I'd gotten myself into.

With my bare hands, I began to scoop sand from around the rear wheels. After a foot or so I'd removed the dry, fine top layer and reached gravel, which tore at my fingers. A flat stone solved that problem and helped me increase the pace. A heap of excavated sand accumulated alongside the vehicle. When one wheel was free, I proceeded to the next and the next. I began to perspire and took a swig from my canteen. Then I consumed the apple. At one point I thought I heard horse hooves and called out, "Hallo? Hallo!" But the sound of my voice only drifted away with no response.

When all four wheels were extricated, I dug out the axles, then removed sand blockage from in front of the vehicle. In the back of my mind the expectation lurked that as soon as the car pulled out of this hole, it would submerge itself in another and then another; and it was a long way across. Perhaps, next week, some rancher would be interviewed on television about the desiccated body he had found grasping a crude stone shovel. I glanced up to see if buzzards were circling: so far so good.

When at last I was ready to roll, it came to my attention that many of the cottonwoods along the arroyo were dead, with loose strips of bark hanging from their trunks. Eureka. The next hour was absorbed gathering bark and branches, which I

laid down in front of the tires to form a traction mat. When I was ready, the sun was high overhead and my water was gone.

The car started (how we can lose faith in moments of adversity). I eased it out of its sandy hole and up onto the bark and stick track and soon lurched up the far bank. My topo map, however, indicated more arroyo crossings ahead, and I realized I had to go back. I turned around and set about restoring, widening, and extending my first bark track so that it reached entirely across the wash, some fifty yards, to the far bank. When I was done, it was midafternoon, the hottest part of the day, and I stood back to survey the job. It would be a one-shot chance. There was no Plan C.

I backed up the Toyota and took the plunge. The car gathered speed down the embankment and lurched onto the track, branches snapping under the wheels. Halfway across it slid off and I felt a sinking sensation. But then momentum brought it back on course. In a few more moments I reached solid ground, stepped on the gas, and let out a yell of joy and relief.



What are the linkages between archaeological sites and living American Indian groups? The question has scientific and cultural dimensions as well as political overtones, especially when land claims are at issue. In cases where the temporal and spatial distance between prehistoric sites and present-day communities is but a few generations, archaeologists usually can demonstrate a chronological occupational sequence. This then makes for a scientifically reconstructed history. But as the distance lengthens, the conclusions of researchers become more

speculative. As a case in point, not long after many people left the Mesa Verde region in the thirteenth century, the population of the northern Rio Grande Valley, which is hundreds of miles away, markedly increased. But were the Rio Grande newcomers actually Mesa Verdean immigrants? Archaeology has yet to produce a definitive answer.

Although many oral narratives have disappeared under the effects of acculturation, Native Americans hold a wealth of traditional knowledge about their own history in their myths, legends, oral accounts, and dances. This type of information, passed down over many generations, contains cultural, educational, and religious value that is quite apart from what Euro-Americans consider historical or scientific accuracy. Linear, chronological recording marks a more Western European than Native American approach to history. Even so, oral narratives can be specific about the places where ancestors lived and can help guide scientific research. Both traditions—the cultural and the scientific—can contribute to our understanding of the past. When the mistrusts and skepticisms accumulated over the course of colonial experiences can be overcome (a process that can take generations and lifetimes), collaborations between native elders and non-native researchers will occur in ways that benefit both sides.



For me, the experience of photographing cultural landscapes is a kind of meditation, a time for reflection and communion with both nature and history. Conditions of weather and light are of paramount importance. Occasionally these elements combine in a fortuitous manner to offer at least the possibility of a successful picture. But even at those special moments, when all seems right (and this may imply a

certain perversity on my part), I sometimes find myself hesitating to do the deed. Maybe it is enough just to reach such a point of congruence, and as the ancient Greeks believed, to carry the process further risks offending the gods. Of course, the wished-for harmony does not always occur. Then photography is like fishing. You work a stream all day without getting a rise but still have a good time.

Regardless of the time, planning, effort, and expense invested in the process of photography, when a fine picture does come my way, I often feel that some higher power has been at play. Such pictures are true gifts, and I thank the invisible spirits of the place that bestow them.

I remember one particular cold and overcast autumn afternoon when I was on a picture hunt. After trekking up and down hills, I noticed a cluster of ancient handprints pecked on a basalt boulder. The rich, broad valley of the Rio Grande spread out below me, the river itself being hidden in a distant grove of cottonwoods. Farther away, I saw that clouds were coalescing, foreshadowing rain. The light was fading and flat, and I saw little promise of laying down an image on a negative. Moreover, I had only a single frame left on my roll of film. To wait or quit was the question. I chose the former, of course, and set up my tripod. I screwed my camera on, adjusted the settings, and looked for a place to sit. Just then, and only for a moment, a stream of sunlight broke through the clouds and illuminated a patch of meadow in the valley where a white horse was grazing. The spirits were feeling generous. (Plate 60)

*The hunter and the gatherer
are in us still, for the most part unemployed,
but alert, awaiting instructions.
We are more than just ourselves;
we are everyone in our collective past.
What we are not, yet, is our future.*