



Archeology



Listen carefully while you stand at the rim above Horsecollar Ruin. Can you hear voices in the wind? Listen for the rhythmic grinding of mano on metate as corn is turned to flour. Turkeys cackle in a pen while dogs bark. Children laugh as they play among the rocks. The soft song of a potter at work is interrupted by the shouts of a returning hunting party carrying a bighorn sheep. The sharp pecking sound you hear may be an artist or shaman carving a new petroglyph.

Migrations: A Hopi Perspective

“The Hopi today live on or near three mesas in Northeastern Arizona. In the past they lived other places as well. Their history is a story of many migrations—the movements of clans and villages. The ancestors of the Hopi, called *Hisatsinom*, once inhabited many parts of the American Southwest, including the Natural Bridges area. Archeologists often refer to them as ancestral Puebloans. Throughout their migrations the Hisatsinom clans left markers (pictographs and petroglyphs) to show where they had been. Often they left artifacts from special religious societies in place and they left markings on walls to indicate that particular ceremonies had been performed before the people left. Religious society leaders gave permission for

such sacred symbols to be put on the walls. These images make up much of the ‘prehistoric’ rock art now enjoyed by visitors to the Southwest.”

Mr. Walter Hamana, Hopi Elder
1992 visit to Natural Bridges rock art sites



Pictograph representing the Migration of the People

Migrations: An Archeological Perspective

Archeologists believe that the ancestral Puebloans occupied this area during three distinct periods. Between these occupations were periods of 200 to 300 years when few people, if any, lived here. Were these the migrations Mr. Hamana refers to?

A.D. 200 to 400

While hunters and gatherers may have passed this way earlier, settlement first occurred during this period. Corn was farmed,

but wild plants and game made up more of the diet. The bow, arrows and pottery were not made yet, but spears and baskets were. Homes were small, slab-lined “pithouses.”

A.D. 650 to 725

After 250 years of abandonment, people returned to Cedar Mesa. They brought beans, and pottery to cook them in. The cultivation of beans enriched the soil with nitrogen which growing corn had depleted. The bow

and arrow appeared at this time. Larger homes of connected rooms above ground replaced pithouses as populations grew.

A.D. 1060 to 1270

Three hundred years after their ancestors left, the farmers returned. They built homes of sandstone masonry or mud-packed sticks,

both on the mesa tops and in alcoves in the cliffs. South-facing caves provided passive solar heating and cooling. They often chose sites near seep springs where water could be found. The last canyon dwellers left about A.D. 1270.

Connections and Abandonment

Styles of masonry, ceramic decoration and other artifacts suggest that the people here were related to those of the Mesa Verde region to the east. Influences are clearly evident from the Kayenta region to the southwest and the Fremont culture to the north. Like these people, the inhabitants of Cedar Mesa left this area for the last time around A.D. 1270.

Theories and speculation surround this great abandonment. Some would suggest that raiding nomads forced the ancestral Puebloans first into the cliffs for defense, then out of

the region entirely. Little evidence is found to support this theory and it is believed that groups like the Navajo, Apache, Ute and Paiute did not arrive until well after the abandonment. Another theory suggests that the people had overused the fragile soil and timber resources. This would have caused increased erosion and reduction in crops, wild game and water supplies. Still others believe that the people simply reached the end of their migrations when they arrived where their descendants, the Hopi, Zuni and Rio Grande peoples, live today.



Protection: Why? How?

These places are critically important to all of us. Mr. Hamana and others have their roots here. Hundreds of years of their history are written on the stone walls of these canyons. We frequently see these ruins and rock art only as curiosities, but perhaps they can teach us about our history and our future.

It is easy to distance ourselves from the ancestral Puebloans through time and technology. After all, what can we learn from a “primitive” culture such as theirs? Quite simply, they were people with the same basic needs as people today. They faced hunger, population growth, floods, drought and war. We face many of the same problems hundreds of years later: hunger, exponential population growth, rapid technological change, diseases from cancer to AIDS, and wars fought over scarce resources, religious differences and skin color. Our advanced culture has much to learn from the successes and failures of those who dealt with similar problems in the “primitive” past.

Archeological sites are extremely fragile, they often hold spiritual significance for Native Americans, and their scientific value depends on artifacts remaining exactly where they are. All of these sites are protected by strictly

enforced federal and state laws, notably the Antiquities Act of 1906 and the Archeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979. These laws provide substantial fines and jail terms for site damage or the removal of even one small artifact such as a piece of pottery or part of an arrowhead.

Remember, if an artifact is taken or rock art defaced, no fine or jail term can replace or repair it. Its spiritual, scientific and educational value are lost to all of us forever.

If you find an archeological site, observe the following:

1. Don't touch, chalk or make rubbings of rock art. Skin oils will destroy it.
2. Don't enter rooms or sit, stand or lean on walls. Most are not stabilized. Enjoy sites from a distance.
3. Leave everything exactly as you found it. Interesting artifacts should be left and reported to park rangers.
4. Watch children and other visitors, and tactfully explain these rules if they seem unaware of them.
5. Leave each place as you would like to find it. Your children will thank you!

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