



Morning mist rolls through Tsegi Canyon

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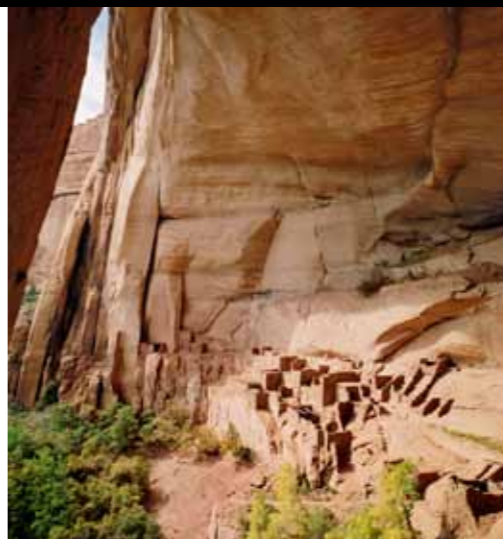
Aspen stand below Betatakin dwellings

© MARC MUENCH



Keet Seel dwellings

© GENE BALZER



Betatakin dwellings

© MARC MUENCH



Keet Seel dwellings

© LAURENCE PARENT

Home and Family in Canyon Country

Walk on a rainbow trail; walk on a trail of song, and all about you will be beauty. There is a way out of every dark mist, over a rainbow trail.

—Edward A. Navajo

Named for the people who now occupy the region, Navajo National Monument protects Betatakin, Keet Seel, and Inscription House—remarkably well-preserved dwellings built hundreds of years ago by Ancestral Puebloans. In the cliff faces and terraces of the Tsegi Canyon system, modern Navajo life carries on side by side with the distant past.

Nomadic hunter-gatherers came and went from this area for thousands of years. Around 2,000 years ago people became increasingly adept at farming, and a distinct culture emerged in the Four Corners region—the Ancestral Puebloans (sometimes called Anasazi). By 1200 the land surrounding today's national monument was dotted with the farms of the Ancestral Puebloan

people. Their villages, clusters of masonry rooms, stood nearby. Wide-ranging trade brought items like cotton, turquoise, sea shells, and parrot feathers. Rainfall was as scarce then as now, but usually there was enough to sustain their drought-adapted crops. Even so, harder times repeatedly prompted the people to move their farms and villages. While many probably remained in the bottomlands, others took shelter in the cliffs. The three cliff dwellings at Navajo National Monument date from around 1250 to 1300. There were countless other structures on the canyon rim and floor, but these three survive protected by sandstone alcoves.

The cliff dwellers flourished here for five decades, then began to move away. There are many theories: drought, erosion, social pressures, religious dictates, or other influences that we know nothing about. Some say that the Ancestral Puebloans joined other peoples in the Southwest in regional migrations, underwent cultural shifts, and became the contemporary Hopi, Zuni, other Pueblo groups, and other tribes.

What's in a Name?

Anasazi Navajo name meaning “ancient ones” or “ancestors of the aliens.” Though this name is still sometimes used, the preferred term is Ancestral Puebloans.

Ancestral Puebloan The ancient people of the Four Corners region. Besides the cliff dwellings at Navajo National Monument, they lived at Mesa Verde, Chaco Canyon, Aztec Ruins, Wupatki, Walnut Canyon, and elsewhere.

A:shivi Zuni name for their own people.

Diné, Dineb Navajo name for their own people.

Hisatsinom Hopi name for the ancient pueblo people of the region, who they claim as ancestors.

Talastima Hopi name for Betatakin, meaning “place of the blue corn tassels.”

Betatakin Navajo name meaning “ledge house.”

Kawestima Hopi name for Keet Seel.

Keet Seel Rough translation of Navajo name meaning “broken pottery scattered around.”

Tsu'ovi Hopi name for Inscription House, meaning “place of the rattlesnake.”

Modern Navajo people are not Puebloans, but some traditional Navajo trace their ancestry back to the prehistoric cliff dwellers through clan ceremonies and oral histories. When Spanish explorers and missionaries brought horses, sheep, and goats, the Puebloans and later the Navajo became expert herders. Sheep and cattle ranching are crucial to today's way of life, and you can see livestock grazing on canyon terraces as they have for hundreds of years.

As the ancient dwellings of the Southwest were rediscovered in the late 1800s, they suffered looting and damage. The Antiquities Act of 1906, signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt, allows U.S. Presidents to proclaim national monuments protecting natural and cultural treasures. In 1909 Navajo National Monument was established to incorporate Keet Seel, and later Betatakin and Inscription House.

Hopi

According to Hopi traditions, their ancestors—the Hisatsinom—built these cliff dwellings. The Hopi have identified pictographs on canyon walls as clan symbols. Fire, Flute, and Bighorn Sheep clans lived at Keet Seel. Betatakin was home to the Deer, Fire, Flute, and Water clans. Inscription House is a Rattlesnake, Sand, and Lizard clan village. These places are active spiritual and physical links between past, present, and future. Here various clans developed and refined rituals and ceremonies that they took to the Hopi mesas when they migrated.

Today the Hopi occupy the three fingers of Black Mesa, completely surrounded by the Navajo Nation. They have strong ties to the Ancestral Puebloans, and Hopi elders make regular pilgrimages to the old villages. Ceremonies are an integral part of daily life, and many focus on the corn crop. Artisans are known for silver jewelry, pottery, baskets, and kachinas.

Navajo

You are on Navajo Nation land, which covers an area about the size of West Virginia. The traditional boundaries of the Navajo homeland are four sacred mountains: Blanca Peak in southern Colorado; Mount Hesperus in southwestern Colorado; Mount Taylor near Grants, New Mexico; and the San Francisco Peaks north of Flagstaff, Arizona. This has been home to the Navajo, or Diné, for centuries. As you travel through Navajo country, listen for people talking in their native language.

The Navajo first learned silversmithing from the Spanish, and have since developed distinctive jewelry styles. With the arrival of the railroads—and tourists—in the late 1800s, the Navajo made and sold a wide variety of crafts. Most prized are their sheep's wool rugs hand-woven on vertical looms.

San Juan Southern Paiute

By the 1850s, bands of San Juan Southern Paiutes were living along the Tsegi Canyon system (where Betatakin and Keet Seel are) and Nitsin Canyon (location of Inscription House). Today they have been granted land within the Navajo Nation—in Hidden Springs near Tuba City and a smaller parcel near Monument Valley in Utah. Strong ties remain to the canyons of Navajo National Monument.

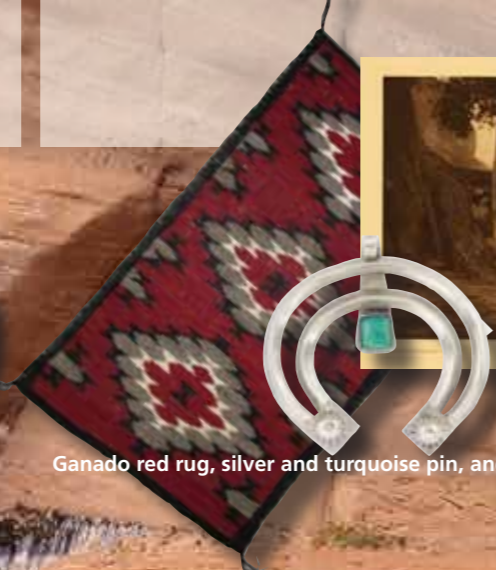
Though they share a common heritage with Southern Paiutes of Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California, the San Juan Southern Paiutes have a distinctive language and culture. Tribal members depend on raising livestock and subsistence farming. The tribe is also known for its hand-woven baskets using traditional techniques. Designs and materials are passed down from generation to generation. Many baskets used in traditional Navajo weddings are made by Paiute women.

Zuni

The Zuni, or A:shivi, have lived in the Southwest for thousands of years. They consider the Tsegi Canyon region—the “northern canyons”—an integral part of their traditions. Tsegi Canyon was one of the many stops for the Zuni as they traveled through the Southwest in search of the “Middle Place.” They say that several of their clans originated here and eventually migrated to Zuni Pueblo in western New Mexico where they live today. Betatakin and Inscription House are celebrated in Zuni songs, traditions, and lives. Today Zuni Pueblo is the largest of the New Mexico pueblos, with over 11,000 people. Daily life is filled with ritual and ceremony, reflecting their spiritual belief in the interconnectedness of all life. Most Zuni are involved in the creation of arts and crafts, the tribe's major industry. Besides jewelry and pottery, they are especially known for fetishes—*wema:we*—small animals carved from semi-precious stone. Fetishes signify respect for the animals represented.



Olla, Hopi potter, and seed pot



Ganado red rug, silver and turquoise pin, and Navajo weaver



Baskets and San Juan Southern Paiute weaver



Turquoise bear fetish, olla, and Zuni woman



Betatakin dwelling

BACKGROUND: © GENE BALZER; ABOVE: OLLAS, SEED POT, SILVER PIN, BASKETS, BEAR FETISH—NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN; NAVAJO RUG—NPS; HISTORIC PORTRAITS BY EDWARD CURTIS—MCCORMICK LIBRARY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY