

## The People of Pecos

At midpoint in a passage through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the ruins of Pecos pueblo and a Spanish mission share a small ridge. Long before Spaniards entered this country, this town commanded the trade path between Pueblo farmers of the Rio Grande and the hunting tribes of the buffalo plains. Its 2,000 inhabitants could marshal 500 fighting men. Its frontier location brought both war and trade. At trade fairs here, Plains tribes—mostly nomadic Apaches—brought slaves, buffalo hides, flint, and shells and exchanged them for the pottery, crops, textiles, and turquoise of the river Pueblos. The Pecos Indians were middlemen in this trade, transmitters and partakers of the goods and cultures of the very different people on either side of the mountains. They thus became economically powerful and practiced in the arts and customs of two worlds.

These cultural blendings did not change the essential nature of their life. The Pecos Indians remained Puebloan in culture, practitioners of an ancient agricultural tradition that had spread north

from Mexico, borne by the seeds of sacred corn. By the late Pueblo period—the last few centuries before the Spaniards arrived in the Southwest—people in this valley had congregated in multi-storied towns overlooking the streams and fields that nourished their crops. In the 1400s these groups gathered into Pecos pueblo, which became a regional power. A Spanish *conquistador* saw the pueblo in 1584. It sits on a “high and narrow hill,” he wrote, “enclosed on both sides by two streams and many trees. The hill itself is cleared of trees . . . It has the greatest and best buildings of these provinces and is most thickly settled . . . They possess quantities of maize, cotton, beans, and squash. [The pueblo] is enclosed and protected by a wall and large houses, and by tiers of walkways which look out on the countryside. On these they keep their offensive and defensive arms: bows, arrows, shields, spears, and war clubs.”

The Pecos, like other Pueblo groups, enjoyed a rich cultural tradition, with an inventive architecture and beautiful crafts. Their

### Before the Spaniards

The first settlers here were a pre-pueblo people who lived in pit-houses along drainages about AD 800. Around 1100, the first Pueblos began building their rock-and-mud villages in the valley. Some two dozen villages rose here over the next two centuries, including one where Pecos pueblo stands today. Sometime during the 14th century, settlement patterns changed dramatically. Within a single generation, small villages

were abandoned and Pecos pueblo grew larger. By 1450 it had metamorphosed into a well planned frontier fortress, five stories high with a population of 2,000. Why this sudden growth? The answer is unclear. Perhaps there was a need to gather on a rocky ridge to free up land for farming. More likely, there was a need for defense against newly arrived Plains Indians. Whatever the reason, Pecos soon became a force to be reckoned with.

### Land and Life

The land surrounding the pueblo was a storehouse of natural products which the Pecos knew intimately. They used virtually every plant for food, clothing, shelter, or medicine and turned every part of the game they hunted into something useful.

Farming supplied most of their diet. The staple crops were the usual trio of corn, beans, and squash,

cultivated along Glorieta Creek and the numerous drainages in the area. Water was as important to the Pecos as to us. They built check dams to slow runoff and planted their crops where the topsoil collected. Yields were apparently considerable. When Coronado came through in 1541, he found the pueblo’s storerooms piled high with corn, three years’ supply by one estimate.

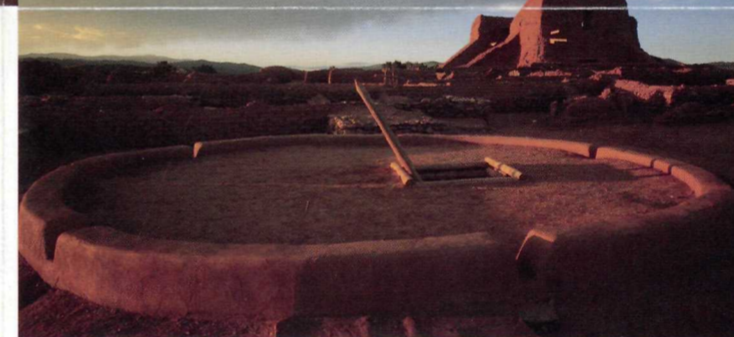
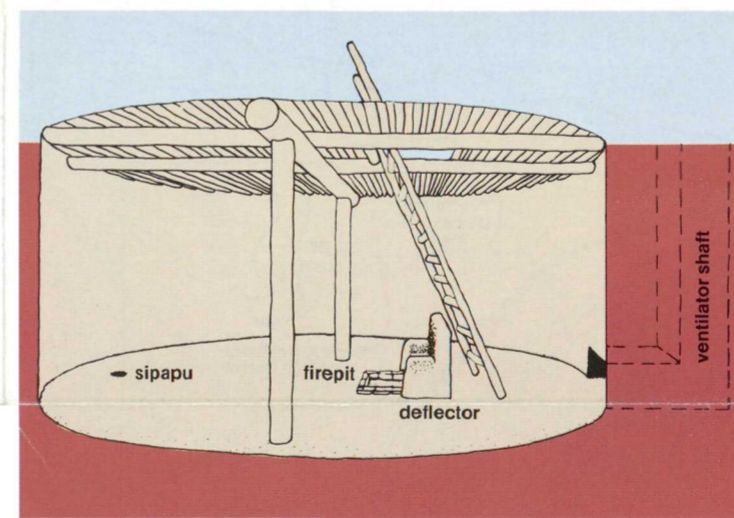


Photo by David Muench



### Kiva

Kivas are special places to Puebloan people. They are ceremonial and social spaces located between the underworld, where the people originated, and the world above, where they now dwell. Architecturally, they derive from the semi-subterranean pit-houses that preceded the surface houseblocks of later Pueblo times. Spiritually, they represent a step back toward their origins, allowing a closer communion with the spirits of the underworld.

The shapes and sizes of kivas vary. Common to most kivas are the ventilator shaft, the deflector, the firepit, and the sipapu, the hole in the floor that symbolizes the place of mankind’s emergence and the point of access to the spirits dwelling below.

In large pueblos like Pecos there were many kivas. As in modern pueblos, they were used by different clans or societies. Each performed ceremonies and rituals attuned to a specific spirit

or power. These powers in turn granted or denied the needs of pueblo life: abundant crops, plentiful rain, good hunting, health, success in war. The kiva ceremonies, rituals, and offerings together formed a mosaic of duties by the people to the gods. If these duties were not performed, the world would become unbalanced and the life of the people would suffer. No wonder the Franciscan fathers could not stamp out the kiva.

▲ Pueblos, Plains Indians, and Spaniards swap goods during an autumn trade fair in this view of Pecos pueblo about 1625

by artist Louis S. Glanzman. Its location beside a natural corridor across the mountains made Pecos a meeting ground

for three cultures—Indian, Spanish and Anglo—that have shaped the American Southwest.

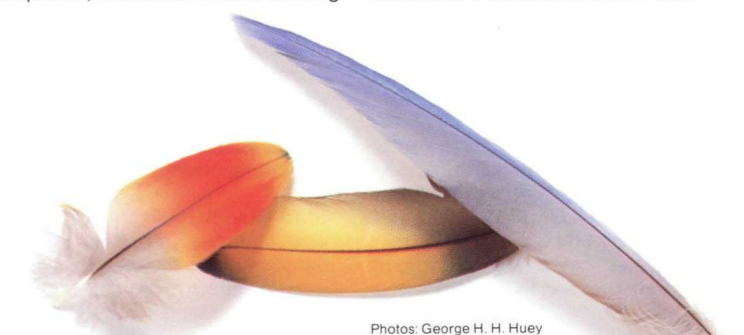
elaborate religious life, evidenced by many ceremonial kivas, reached out to the nurturing spirits of all things, animate and inanimate. Their finely tuned adjustments to their natural and cultivated world rested on a practical science infused with spirituality, transmitted by tradition-bearers who by story and dance conveyed the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of centuries past. Regulation of individual, family and social life stemmed from a religion that bound all things together and counselled balance, harmony, and fitness as the highest ideals.

These ideals did not always prevail. Warfare between Pueblo groups was fairly common. The frontier people of Pecos had to be especially vigilant in their relations with the nomadic Plains Indians, who varied war and trade unpredictably. Neighboring pueblos viewed the Pecos as dominant. The Spaniards, about to make their *entradas*, soon learned that the Pecos could be determined enemies or powerful allies.

### Trade

Location, power, and the ability to supply needed goods made Pecos a major trade center on the eastern flank of the Puebloan world. The Pecos Indians bartered crops, clothing, and pottery with Apaches and later with Spaniards and Comanches for buffalo products, alibates flint, and slaves. These Plains goods were in turn swapped west to other pueblos for pottery, parrot feathers, turquoise, and other items. Trading

could go quickly or take weeks. The rings left by tipis set up for long spells of bartering are still visible in the area. Because of uneasy relationships between Pueblos and the Plains tribes, hostilities were a continual threat. The rock wall circling the pueblo is also a relic from trading days. Too low to serve a defensive purpose, it was probably a boundary that other tribes were not allowed to cross.



Photos: George H. Huey

### Encounters with the Spaniards

The idea of a "new" Mexico—another land of great cities weighted with gold—appealed to the latecomers who thronged into Mexico City after the conquests of the Aztecs and Incas. These ambitious seekers needed only direction. When the shipwrecked Cabeza de Vaca stumbled back into Mexico in 1536 after his long wanderings through New Spain's northern frontier, he brought back tales of rich cities farther north. This news combined with tantalizing legends of lost bishops and their seven cities somewhere in the wilds provided that direction. This was the vision that Francisco Vázquez de Coronado pursued in 1540.

Leading an army of 1200, he made his way into the country north of Mexico. Six months into the march, he rode into a cluster of Zuñi pueblos—Cibola—near present-day Gallup. At Háwikuh, a principal town of the group, Coronado attacked the Zuñi and took over the town and its food stores for his famished soldiers. At Cicuyé (later called Pecos), 150 miles east, the reception was different. The Indians welcomed the Spaniards with music and gifts. When a Plains Indian captive at Pecos told of a rich land to the east called Quivira, Coronado set out in spring 1541 to find it. Wandering as far as Kansas, he found only a few villages. When his Indian guide confessed he had lured the army onto the plains to die, Coronado had the man strangled. The expedition turned back. After a

bleak winter along the Rio Grande, the explorer led his broken army back to Mexico, disillusioned, empty-handed, harassed by Indians most of the way. During Coronado's sojourn, the Pecos Indians and their Pueblo neighbors had felt the wrath of a powerful world. They had seen gray-clad priests plant crosses for their gods. But the strangers went away, and the Pueblos settled back into their old ways.

#### Colonizers and Missionaries

Nearly 60 years passed before Spaniards came to New Mexico to stay. During this time New Spain's frontier had slowly advanced with the discovery of silver in northern Mexico. From these bases, beginning in 1581, explorers prospected for silver in the land of the Pueblos. Their failures foreshadowed a truth that determined a large part of Spanish New Mexico's history: In that province were neither golden cities (as the revived legends insisted) nor ready riches. But settlers could farm and herd there. This reality focused the joint strategies of Cross and Crown: Pueblo Indians would be converted, their lands colonized.

The first to pursue this mixed objective was Don Juan de Oñate in 1598. Taking settlers, livestock, and 10 Franciscans, he marched north to claim the land across the Rio Grande for Spain. Right away he assigned a friar to Pecos, the richest and most powerful of New Mexico's pueblos. The new religion

got off to a shaky start. After episodes of idol-smashing and consequent Indian resentment, the Franciscans in 1621 assigned the veteran missionary Fray Andrés Juárez to Pecos. He came as a healer and builder. Under his direction the Pecos built an adobe church south of the pueblo. It was the most imposing of New Mexico's mission churches, with towers, buttresses, and great pine-log beams hauled from the mountains.

The ministry of Fray Juárez (1621-34) coincided with the most energetic mission period in New Mexico, now a royal colony. It was a time of expansion and mission-building under Franciscan leadership. This success bred conflict between church and civil officials, who vied for the labor, tribute, and loyalty of the Pueblo Indians. These struggles for wealth and power came down on Indian heads as religious and economic repression.

#### War and Reconquest

Spanish demands and Indian resentments over the decades climaxed in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. The Indians in their scattered pueblos united to drive the Spaniards back into Mexico. At Pecos, loyal Indians warned the local priest of the conspiracy, but most followed a tribal elder and joined in the revolt. They killed the priest and destroyed the church. In a gesture central to their discontent, the Pecos Indians built a forbidden kiva in the very convento of the

mission. Led by Diego de Vargas, the Spaniards came back to their lost province 12 years later, peacefully in some places, with the sword in others. Vargas expected fighting at Pecos, but in the interval opinion had shifted. The Indians welcomed Vargas back and even supplied 140 warriors to help him retake Santa Fe. A new and smaller church was built on the ruins of the old church. It was, fittingly, the first mission reestablished after the Reconquest. From then to the end of Spanish rule, the majority of the Pecos helped sustain that rule. In return, the Franciscans moderated their old zeal, tribute was abolished, and the Pecos—as allies and traders—became partners in a relaxed Spanish-Pueblo community. By the 1780s, disease, Comanche raids, and migration had reduced the Pecos population to less than 300. Perhaps long-standing internal divisions between those loyal to the Church and things Spanish and those who clung to the old ways contributed to the decline of this once powerful city-state. Pecos's function as a trade center faded as Spanish colonists, now protected from the Comanches by treaties, established new towns to the east. Pecos was almost a ghost town when the Santa Fe trade began flowing past in 1821. The last survivors departed in 1838, leaving a decaying pueblo and an empty mission church. They joined their Towa-speaking relatives at Jémez pueblo, 80 miles west, where their descendants live today.

The encounter of the Pueblo and Spanish cultures brought exchanges of food, clothing, weapons, animals, and technology beneficial to both. Illustration by Louis S. Glanzman.



A.V. Kidder, Pecos, and Southwestern Archeology

The mysterious ruins of Pecos inspired much romantic speculation among Santa Fe travelers, who veered from the main trail to camp here. In a hidden recess burned the "ancient flame of Moctezuma." Coiled somewhere was the "feathered serpent of the Aztecs." These stories vanished when archeologist Alfred Vincent Kidder began to dig in the ruins in 1915.

Kidder had come to Pecos because of its extensive trash mounds. "There is . . . no known ruin in the Southwest," he said, "which seems to have been lived in continuously for so long a period." He wanted to try out his theories of dating by stratigraphy. He knew that the bottom layers of a site would naturally be the oldest. By seeing the

changes in pottery and other remains layer by layer, he expected to be able to date sites, relatively if not absolutely, and to work out the general chronological sequence of sites over a wide area of the Southwest.

Kidder's twelve field seasons at Pecos laid the groundwork for the new science of Southwestern archeology. The great trash mound on the lee side of the pueblo, which appeared to be a natural part of the ridge, proved a time capsule. When he trenched into the mound, Kidder found centuries of discard in exact chronological order. It was a trove of scientific data. Without the benefit of sophisticated dating methods commonplace today, Kidder identified the periods of occupa-

tion at Pecos through changes in pottery styles and techniques. In 1927 he invited archeologists working at sites throughout the Southwest to come to Pecos and develop a classification system to help identify the cultural development of the Southwestern peoples. The system they came up with—Basketmaker and Pueblo—is still in use today, and the Pecos Conference is still an important annual meeting for archeologists of the Southwest.

Kidder dealt in more than just chronology. He pieced together a picture of ancient life here. His work and others who followed help us understand the powerful and complex people who flourished for centuries in this spacious valley.

### Visiting the Park



Pecos National Historical Park is 25 miles southeast of Santa Fe, N. Mex., off I-25. If traveling north on I-25, exit at Pecos-Glorieta Interchange 299, go east on NM 50 to the town of Pecos, and turn south on NM 63. The park is 2 miles south. If traveling south on I-25, exit at Rowe Interchange 307 and go north on NM 63 for 5 miles to the park entrance. There is no public transportation to the park.

The ruins of Pecos embrace a thousand years of human history. For an introduction, go first to the visitor center and see the film and exhibits. In summer Native Americans and Hispanics demonstrate traditional crafts.

**Tours** Guided tours are not regularly scheduled but groups can make arrangements in advance for a guided tour by calling (505) 757-6032.

**Ruins Trail** A 1½-mile self-guiding trail starts at the visitor center and winds through the ruins of Pecos Pueblo and the Mission Church. You are invited to enter the two reconstructed kivas. Pick up a guide to the trail at the visitor center.

**Accommodations** The park has no overnight lodging, but the town of Pecos, 2 miles north of the park, has two small inns and a guest ranch 21 miles north operates during summer. Write for information.

**Camping** No camping is permitted in the park. The nearest camping is in Santa Fe National Forest, just north of the park. For information, write: Santa Fe National Forest, Pecos District Ranger Station, Box 429, Pecos NM, 87552.

**Access** The visitor center and about 80 percent of the Ruins Trail is accessible by wheelchair. A signed version of the park interpretive film is shown upon request.

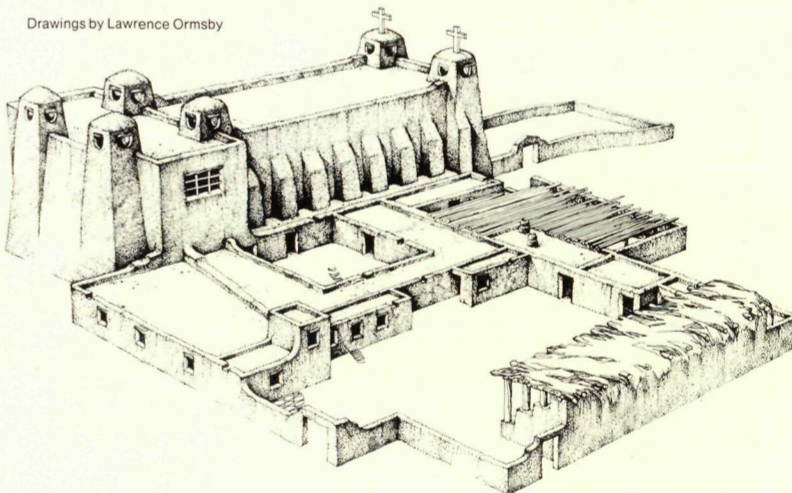
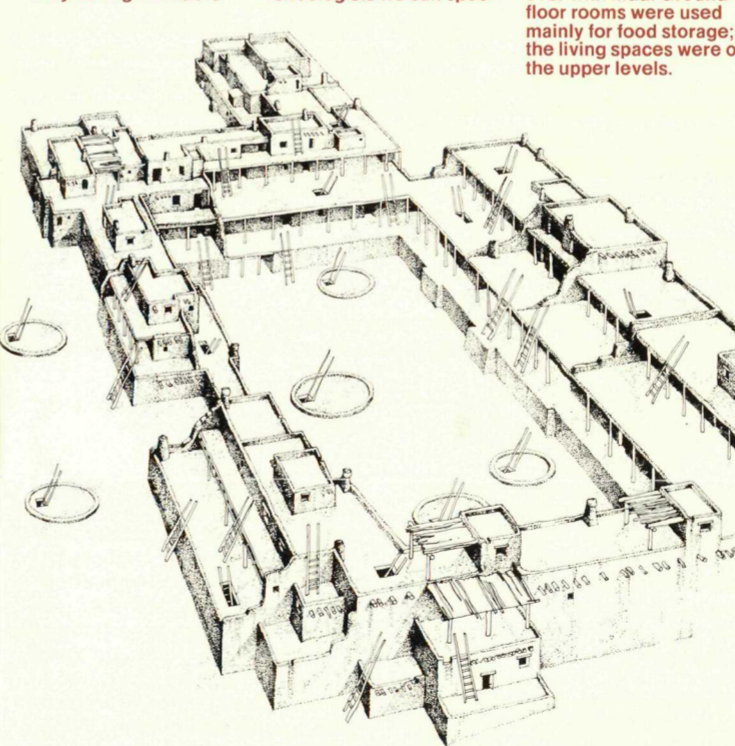
### The Way it Was

North Pueblo Pecos was at the peak of its power and influence from 1450 to 1550. "The houses of this pueblo are arranged in the form of house blocks . . . four and five stories high," wrote a Spanish visitor in 1591. "They use light ladders

that can be pulled up by hand. Every house has . . . 15 or 16 rooms, very neat and thoroughly white-washed." While no one knows exactly what either the north or south pueblo looked like, thanks to Kidder and his fellow archeologists we can spec-

ulate about their general form and extent. This conception of the north pueblo shows few openings in the outer wall, suggesting that it was constructed for defense. The pueblo was built of shaped stone plastered over with mud. Ground floor rooms were used mainly for food storage; the living spaces were on the upper levels.

Drawings by Lawrence Ormsby



**Mission Complex** To Spanish Franciscans, "mission" meant both an idea—the conversion of Indians to Catholic Christianity—and a place—the mission complex of church and convento where this work took place. The convento was the heart of the mission. Here were the priest's quarters, workshops, corrals, stables, kitchen, kitchen garden, and dining room. In this part of the mission the priest taught the Indians new ways of construction, carpentry, and the care of domestic animals. The

mission ruins show two distinct periods of building. The first church (above) was finished in the early 1600s. It was huge—150 feet from the entrance to the altar—and the convento was relatively small. The second church, completed in the early 1700s, was built within the foundations of the first church, but its convento was twice the size of the earlier one. This expansion reflected more emphasis on teaching trades to the Pecos than on conversion.

#### Administration

Pecos National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 418, Pecos, NM 87552-0418, is in immediate charge.

**Regulations** All natural and cultural features within the park are protected by law. Please do not remove or disturb any artifact. The centuries-old ruins walls are fragile: do not climb, sit, or lean on them. Pets are allowed on the Ruins Trail if on leash but are not permitted in park buildings.

**For your safety** The elevation at Pecos is 7,000 feet. Persons unaccustomed to the altitude should use caution. Rattlesnakes are occasionally found along park trails in summer. Please do not disturb them; report sightings to a ranger.

#### The Park of the Future

New lands authorized by Congress in 1990 greatly expand the park's scope and mission. The Forked Lightning Ranch adds 5,500 acres surrounding the core park. Its resources include a mile and a half of the Pecos River, several early Puebloan sites, a 19th-century Spanish frontier settlement, Santa Fe Trail ruts, and the old Kozlowski's

Stage Station, a tavern and boarding place on the Santa Fe Trail. A short distance west two 300-acre tracts were set aside to preserve sites associated with Civil War engagements at Glorieta Pass. Planning for public use of the new land will take several years. Some parts of the expanded park will

not be opened until this process is completed, and resources are inventoried. The Glorieta units are still in private ownership. Please respect the owners' rights and do not trespass on their land. Check with a park ranger about facilities and programs open to the public.