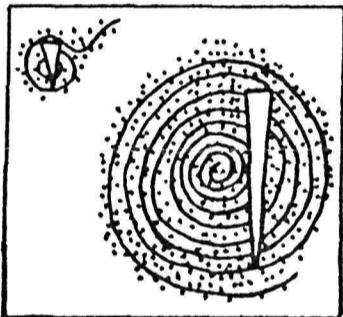


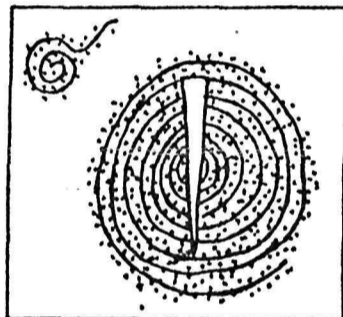
## FAJADA BUTTE SOLSTICE MARKER



On a cliff face near the top of Fajada Butte, three large upright slabs of rock stand in front of two spiral petroglyphs, or rock carvings. A dagger-shaped beam of sunlight appears at various points on the spirals during the spring and fall equinoxes and winter and summer solstices. This site is known as the Fajada Butte solstice marker. It is possible that the marker was used as a sun shrine and as a calendar. The butte was undeniably an important feature in Chaco Anasazi life.



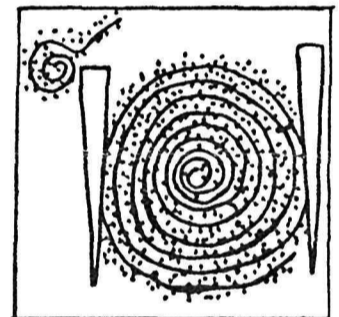
Spring Equinox



Summer Solstice



Autumnal Equinox



Winter Solstice

Modern southwestern pueblo cultures believe the solstices are crucial to their societies ceremonial and agricultural needs. They have solar and lunar sky watchers who announce the seasons by monitoring the cycles of the sun and moon. The sun appears to hesitate for a few days at the solstices before it changes direction. In winter, the pueblo people have ceremonies to encourage the sun to move back toward the north so that the days will again become longer. This is a very important time of year, for it signifies renewal.

The Chaco Anasazi incorporated a variety of solar orientations into their architecture and art. These alignments indicate that they had an understanding of astronomy and this knowledge played an important role in their domestic and ritual lives. Although we cannot precisely date the solstice marker, there is little doubt that it was used by the people of the canyon.

Following the time the "Three Slab Site" on Fajada Butte was recognized as a solstice marker, by artist Anna Sofaer in 1977, there was considerable visitation to the site. Unfortunately this visitation threatened the stability of the marker and other sites on Fajada Butte. To preserve and protect these fragile archeological resources, the National Park Service closed Fajada Butte in 1982, allowing only limited access for continuing research and monitoring, and traditional Native American use.

On summer solstice 1989, it was discovered that the sundagger solstice marker had shifted, projecting an off-center and irregular shaft of light onto the petroglyph. Following this discovery an evaluation team studied the site to determine the causes of the deterioration. It was concluded that even though access has been restricted, the human impacts have accelerated the normal erosion. Boot soles grinding on the soft sandstone, foot traffic disturbing plant cover, and paths worn into the fragile soils have added to the rain and wind erosion.

Access to Fajada Butte and the solstice marker is temporarily closed to everyone, including researchers and Native Americans practicing traditional uses, until a Fajada Butte management plan and emergency stabilization is completed.

Unanswered questions remain about the site including the relationship between the marker and the lunar cycle, the significance of a noon marker rather than a sunrise or sunset marker, and others.

Fajada Butte, like all sites in Chaco, holds important clues to the cultural past. The importance of preserving these sites is paramount so that future generations can continue to search for answers to questions this generation does not yet know how to ask.

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