

Mural from Kiva #3, Layer G-26., Kuaua. Photograph courtesy Sun Father's Way: The Kiva Murals of Kuaua by Bertha Dutton. University of New Mexico Press. 1963.



## Kuaua—Time Capsule of Culture

Like silent sentinels that gradually yield their watch to the ever-downward pull of Mother Earth, the earthen remains of Kuaua (a once-thriving Pueblo Indian farming village located on the western bank of the Rio Grande in northern New Mexico), stand to tell their story. Kuaua (pronounced “Kwah-wah” and meaning “evergreen” in the Tiwa language) is part of a bigger picture, an epic drama that spans two millennia. The scene is set in a landscape of desert and mountains stretching from the Four Corners region of the American Southwest southward into Mexico.

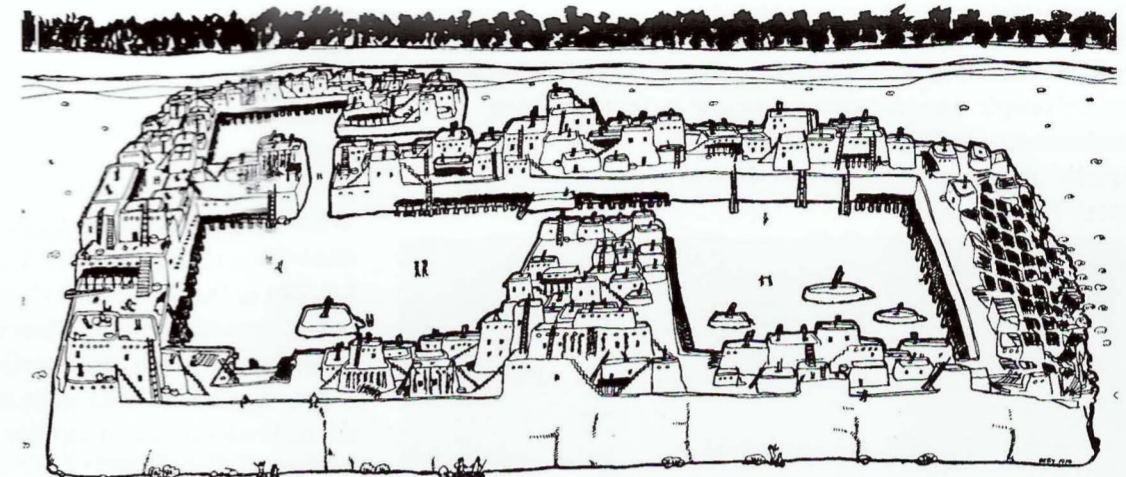
By 2,000 years ago people were living in the vicinity of Kuaua, hunting game and gathering wild plants for food, medicine, clothing, and shelter. By A.D. 600, members of the ancestral pueblo (formerly known as “Anasazi”) culture

had constructed pithouses (semi-subterranean earthen dwellings) several hundred yards from today’s Coronado Visitor Center. Drought-driven immigrants from settlements to the west and to the north, such as Mesa Verde in southwestern Colorado, joined groups living along the Rio Grande during the 13th and 14th centuries.

Our understanding of Kuaua has come about through historical records, beginning with 16th-century Spanish journals written by members of the 1540-42 Coronado expedition; archaeological investigations that took place from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and oral traditions of contemporary Pueblo Indians, whose ancestors handed down stories to them.

The drama of Kuaua can be divided into three chapters, or periods of activity, that have contributed to its identity:

- Chapter 1: A.D. 1300- 1540;
- Chapter 2: A.D. 1540- 1940;
- Chapter 3: A.D. 1940- Present.



Artist's conception of Kuaua Pueblo in A.D. 1500.  
Drawing by Betsy James.

## Chapter 1: A.D. 1300 — 1540

### Subsistence

Generations of Kuauans began building their multi-storied village of adobe (mud and straw mixture) in the early 1300s. By the 1500s; 1,200 rooms connected together to form a *pueblo* (the Spanish word for “town”). Spanish explorers referred to people who lived in villages as “Pueblo” Indians). Survival depended on an abundance of natural resources and the coordinated efforts of all members of the pueblo. Wild animals, including foxes, coyotes, prairie dogs, wild turkeys, migratory fowl, and pronghorn antelope, flourished on the plains, while deer, elk, bears, mountain lions, and bighorn sheep roamed the Sandía

and Jémez Mountains. Adults and children joined in communal hunts for cottontails and jackrabbits. Animals provided food, clothing, blankets, and ceremonial objects; no body parts were wasted.

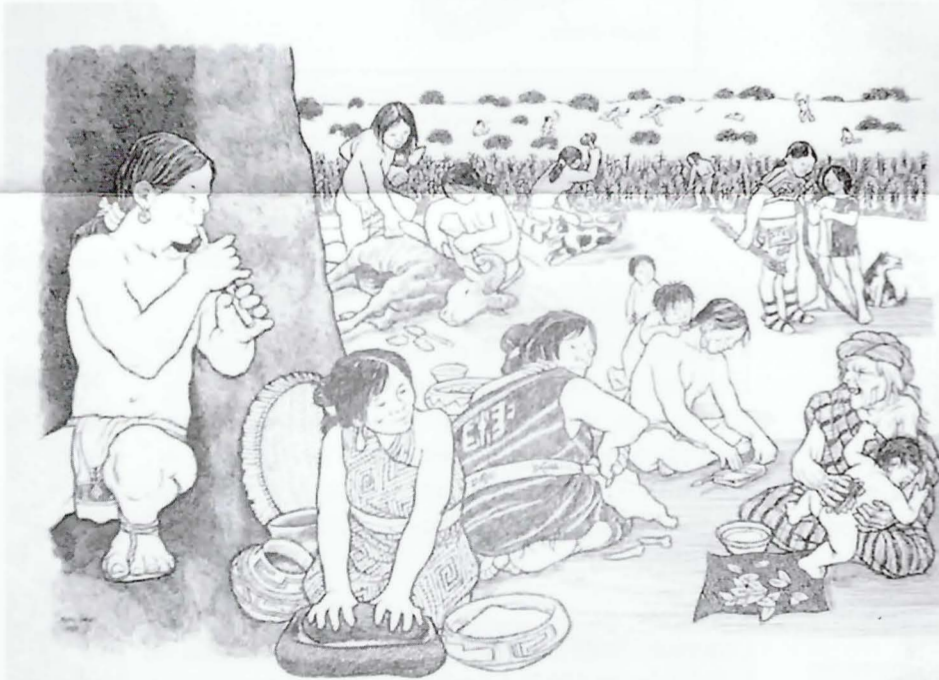
Fathers and uncles taught boys how to hunt, trap, and make tools. Pueblo women and girls gathered wild plants for food and medicine, hauled water, prepared meals, and probably tended to the domestic turkeys that were kept in pens on the plazas. The Rio Grande provided life-essential water for drinking, cooking, bathing, farming, and fishing. Catfish, chub, and buffalo fish swam there. Corn, beans, squash, and cotton were planted, weeded, harvested, and dried for preservation. Whether Kuauan farmers ditch-irrigated their fields with water from the river, (as did other Rio Grande pueblos), has not been determined.

### Ceremony

Continuation of the pueblo also depended upon the villagers’ success in pleasing their spiritual benefactors. Kachina dancers, representing spirit messengers to supernatural beings, performed ritual ceremonies in a regular, seasonal sequence, thereby ensuring sufficient rain, successful hunting, and fertility of crops. Sacred and social activities took place in kivas (underground rooms that symbolized the people’s place of origin in the underworld). The fact that rectilinear kivas, in addition to the round-shaped kivas traditionally constructed by the ancestral pueblo culture, were built in Kuaua’s plazas, may indicate that Pueblo people of the Mogollon culture from the southern part of New Mexico or eastern Arizona introduced new ideas to the Rio Grande valley. Kivas were central to ceremonies and communal processional dances in the plazas.

### Trade

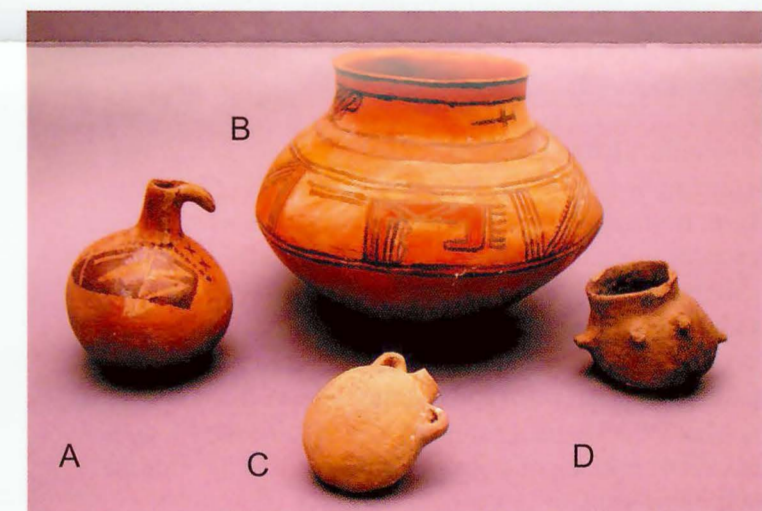
Kuaua was one of about a dozen Tiwa-speaking villages within the province of Tiguex (pronounced “Tee-wesh”), a 30-mile-long corridor flanking the Rio Grande. Long before contact with the first Spanish explorers, Kuaua held a strategic position at the crossroads of two major pre-European trade routes. Access to natural resources, proximity to and social ties with other pueblos, and location in a river valley bordered by mountains placed Kuaua in an enviable zone for commerce. Trade routes brought seashells from the Pacific coast and the Gulf of California, macaw feathers from Mexico, and pottery from Hopi. Trails extending as far east as Kansas and Oklahoma on the Great Plains funneled freshwater shells, flint, and bison products through Pecos Pueblo. Pueblos along the Rio Grande, using lead mined in the Cerillos Hills to make glazes for pottery, traded vessels with each other, as well as with distant partners.



Kuaua village scene.  
Drawing by Betsy James.



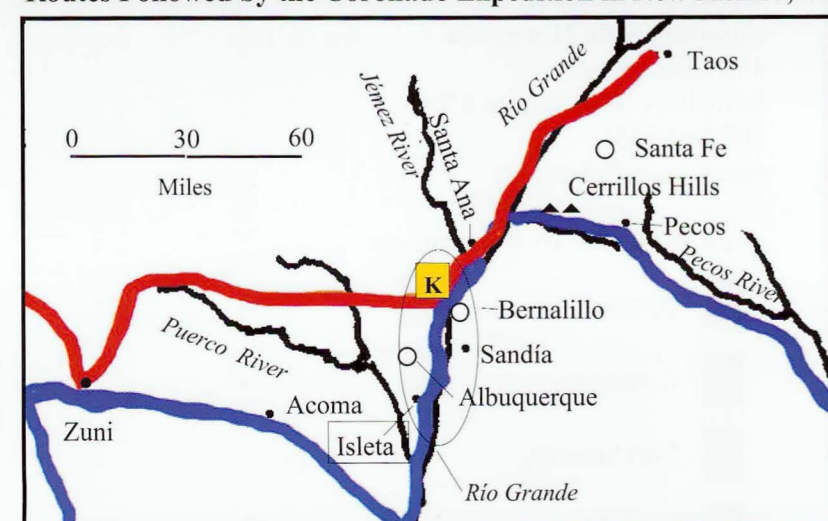
Universal Deity, from Layer H-31, Kiva #3, Kuaua.  
Photograph courtesy University of New Mexico Press: Sun Father's Way. The Kiva Murals of Kuaua, 1963 (frontispiece).



Ceramic vessels from Kuaua: A. 11517/11, Pitcher; B. 11273/11, Jar; C. 44242/11, Canteen; D. 21665/11, Jar (shoe or bird shape).  
Courtesy Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology.  
Photograph by David McNeese.

## Chapter 2: A.D. 1540—1940

### Routes Followed by the Coronado Expedition in New Mexico, 1540-41



- Legend**
- Coronado's Main Army
  - Reconnaissance Units
  - Kuaua
  - Indian Pueblo
  - ▲ Cerrillos Hills
  - Municipality, 2002
  - Tiguex Province

Map after Carrill L. Riley, Rio del Norte. People of the Upper Rio Grande From Earliest Times to the Pueblo Revolt. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press. 1995.



### Coronado and Contact

In February 1540, an event occurred that would permanently change the way of life known by people of Kuaua, their neighbors on the Rio Grande, and beyond. About 1,400 miles to the south, an army led by Francisco Vásquez de Coronado departed the frontier town of Compostela, Mexico, in search of the legendary Seven Cities of Cibola. Spurred on by hopes of finding treasures similar to those found by Hernán Cortés among the Aztecs, a caravan of almost 300 Spanish soldiers, six Franciscan friars, 1,000 Indian allies and slaves, and 1,500 head of livestock ventured north into uncharted territory, following ancient roads which had facilitated trade among Indian groups for centuries. In September 1540, while the bulk of Coronado’s army was engaged in defeating the Zuni and Acoma pueblos of western New Mexico, an advanced

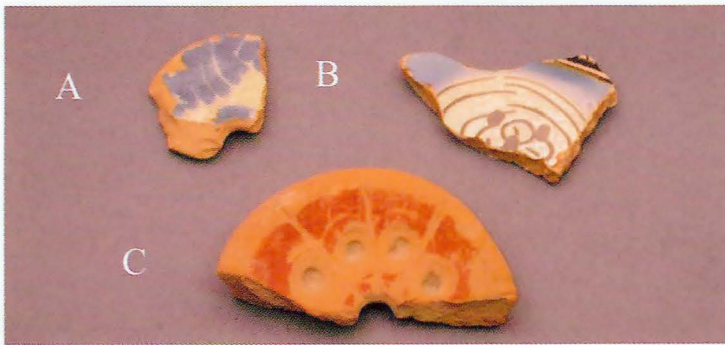
guard of Spaniards arrived in the Tiwa-speaking region located along the Rio Grande, which they named Tiguex. Inhabitants of one of the villages, displaced by soldiers who moved into their homes, were forced to seek refuge in neighboring communities. After acts of brutality by the European intruders and resultant retaliation by the Tiwa people, all-out warfare ensued. The Spaniards’ unfruitful expedition to the plains of Kansas in search of the fabled wealth of Quivira, followed by continued unrest and intermittent fighting with the Pueblo Indians, precipitated Coronado’s orders for his expedition to depart Tiguex in the spring of 1542.

*To date no evidence has been found indicative that Kuaua was the Tiwa village that Coronado’s army commandeered.*

## Chapter 2 continued: A.D. 1540- 1940

### The 17th Century

The Tiwa and other Pueblo people had a forty-year reprieve from Spanish intrusion until the 1580s, when exploration resumed. The 1598 expedition of colonists led by Don Juan de Oñate up the *Camino Real* (Royal Road) from northern Mexico passed near Kuaua en route to their first capital, San Gabriel, near present-day San Juan Pueblo. For the next eighty years Spanish missionaries labored to convert the indigenous population of New Mexico to Christianity. No one knows exactly how long Kuauan occupants remained after Spanish settlement on *haciendas* began around them. Pottery fragments manufactured in the late 16th century in Puebla, Mexico, as well as a bar of copper, have been excavated at Kuaua, indicating that its residents traded with Spanish settlers until about 1625. Perhaps the Franciscans ordered the evacuation of Kuaua under the policy of *reducción* (consolidating native people into centralized towns in order to facilitate conversion). By 1613, there were Roman Catholic missions at nearby Sandía and Isleta pueblos—both of which continue to speak Tiwa today.



Ceramic sherds, Kuaua. A. (ICC 43149-11) and B. (#101757, spec.R.6, T.T.1): Majolica, (lead-tin-glazed pottery, made in Mexico, pre-1680. C. (ICC49921-11): Fragment of a spindle whorl (for spinning fiber). Probably locally made, pre-1680. Courtesy Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology. Photograph by David

### The Pueblo Revolt

Any records which might explain what became of Kuaua were likely destroyed during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Considered to be the most successful Indian uprising against Europeans within the current boundaries of the United States, the revolt culminated from 100 years of strained relations between the Pueblo Indians and Spanish interlopers. Policies of forced labor, tribute, and education of Indian children in missions, the banning of ceremonial rituals, feuding between Spanish governors and clergy, disease, and a major drought contributed to a build-up of resentment toward the colonists. In August 1680, most Indian pueblos in New Mexico joined together, attacking missions, ranches, and government offices, killing priests and settlers, and burning or destroying property. Spanish citizens, joined by people of Isleta and other villages nearby, fled south to El Paso del Norte (present Ciudad Juárez) and remained for twelve years before returning to northern New Mexico.

### The 18th Century

Archaeological material dating to about 1725 that was found at Kuaua suggests that someone came back to the previously vacated town and lived there during the 1700s. Drifting sand blanketed Kuaua for the next two centuries. During the late 1800s grandparents of modern Santa Ana Pueblo Indians sheared sheep in the vicinity of Kuaua's crumbling walls.

### Archaeological Excavations

In the 1930s archaeologists from three New Mexico state institutions retraced the footsteps of Adolph Bandelier and Charles Lummis, who had surveyed and excavated sites near Bernalillo in the late 1800s. With financial assistance from Federal New Deal relief programs and project direction by Dr. Edgar Lee Hewett, teams from the University of New Mexico, the Museum of New Mexico, and the School of American Research excavated both Kuaua and a contemporaneous site two miles south. The scientists hoped to prove that one of the adobe complexes was the spot where Coronado's army stayed. When kiva murals were discovered at Kuaua, the focus of excavation shifted to it. Dr. Hewett, a long-time promoter of tourism in the Southwest, envisioned Kuaua as a historic public attraction. Rather than subjecting the original, six-inch-to-a-foot-high adobe walls to erosion by leaving them exposed, workers built walls of molded, cement-reinforced adobe bricks on top of the structural remnants. The intent was to show visitors an outline of the town, using walls that looked uneven and old.

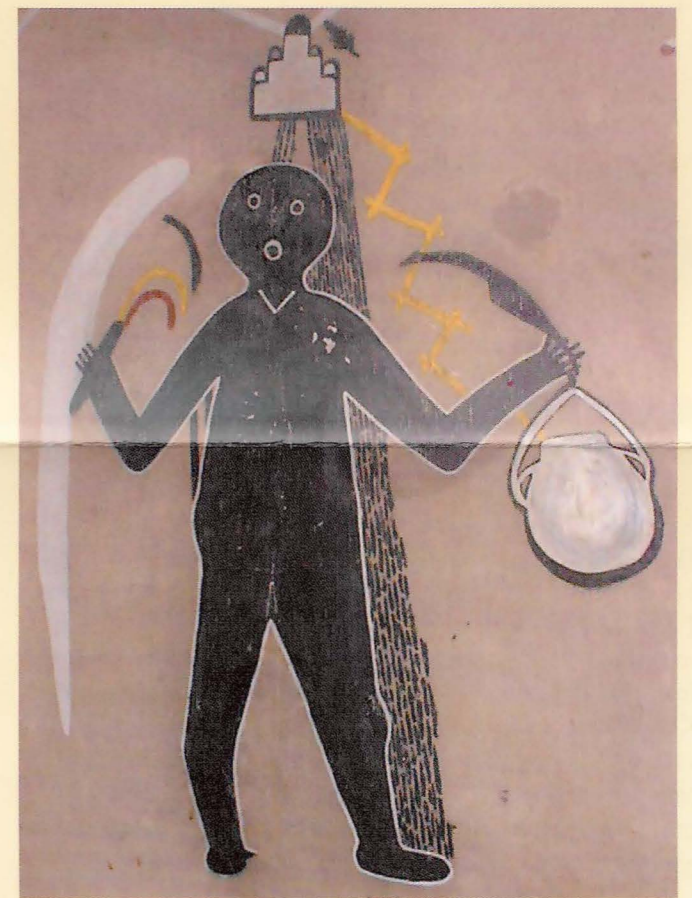


Works Progress Administration workers excavate a room at Kuaua, 1935. Courtesy Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, ARMS site files:LA187, folder 43, J. Charles Kelley notes and photographs.

### The Kiva Murals

When an uplifted hand and portions of a mask that were painted on a layer of plaster in Kiva #3 became visible during excavation work on February 14, 1935, archaeologist Gordon Vivian and his crew knew they had found something extraordinary. The figure was one of hundreds painted on walls of an 18-square-foot kiva during the 1500s. Covering 17 of 85 different layers of adobe plaster were arrays of masked and costumed dancers, animals, birds, snakes, fish, corn plants, clouds, lightning, and droplets of moisture. A consultant from Zuni Pueblo suggested that the figures referred to ceremonies of rain-making, hunting, war, fertility, and curing. In his book *A Cowboy Writer in New Mexico*, Monument curator John Sinclair recorded a remark made by a member of Santo Domingo Pueblo, who visited the reconstructed kiva during Sinclair's 1944-62 tenure: "These pictures around here—they are everything that we believe. They show us how to live. To us, these paintings are everything to live for".

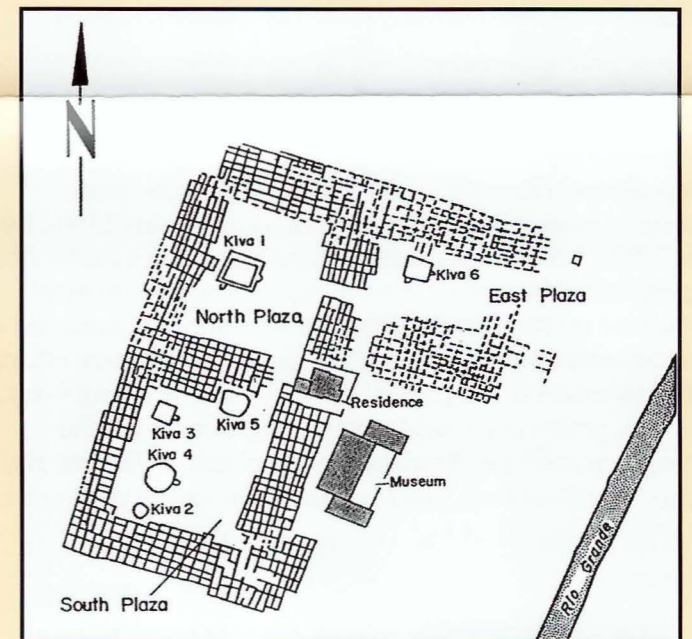
Preservation of the murals presented a major challenge. How could the team retrieve the images, averaging 1/30 of an inch in thickness, that were affixed to fragile layers of adobe wash? The archaeologists devised a way to move the murals in three-foot-wide sections to a humidity-controlled laboratory at the University of New Mexico by jacketing them in plaster. For the next two years each of the murals was meticulously preserved on pieces of commercial pressboard. Some of the original kiva mural sections were placed on exhibit at the Coronado State Monument Visitor Center, where they are still located today. The remainder are housed at the Museum of New Mexico, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, in Santa Fe.



Priest/clown mural figure, reconstruction of Kiva #3. Photograph by Penny Gómez.



The plaster-jacketed mural walls were removed from Kiva #3 for transport to a University of New Mexico laboratory in 1935. Photograph courtesy Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, Archives.



Museum of New Mexico—Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, ARMS, site files, LA187 Schematic drawing of Kuaua from "Test Excavations at Kuaua Pueblo (LA 187)" by Bradley J. Vierra

## Chapter 3: A.D. 1940— Present

### Coronado Visitor Center

Beginning in the 1920s, the prominent architect John Gaw Meem was actively involved in the preservation of historic structures in Santa Fe. He eventually designed numerous institutional buildings and residences in the Spanish Pueblo Revival style. Meem took on the architectural design for the Coronado State Monument Visitor Center in 1939. The building was completed and exhibits were installed in time for the May 29, 1940, dedication of Coronado State Monument—the official opening of a year-long celebration marking the 400th anniversary of Coronado's journey.



Coronado State Monument (reconstruction of Kuaua), about 1940. Photograph courtesy New Mexico Department of Tourism.

### Educational Programs

Throughout the 60 plus years of the Monument's existence, thousands of visitors from all parts of the world have learned about the first people who lived at Kuaua. Groups of school children continue to delight in descending the ladder of the reconstructed kiva and holding artifacts from the hands-on teaching collection. Dancers, choral groups, volunteer docents, and others from local communities participate in scheduled public events at Coronado State Monument. Among the most special guests are possible descendants of Kuaua's villagers. Members of both Sandía Pueblo (whose original language is Tiwa) and Santa Ana Pueblo (speakers of the Keres language) claim ties to Kuaua. Traditionally, members of contemporary pueblos have inter-married and moved to other pueblos. One might wonder—how many Pueblo Indians today have ancestors who lived at Kuaua?



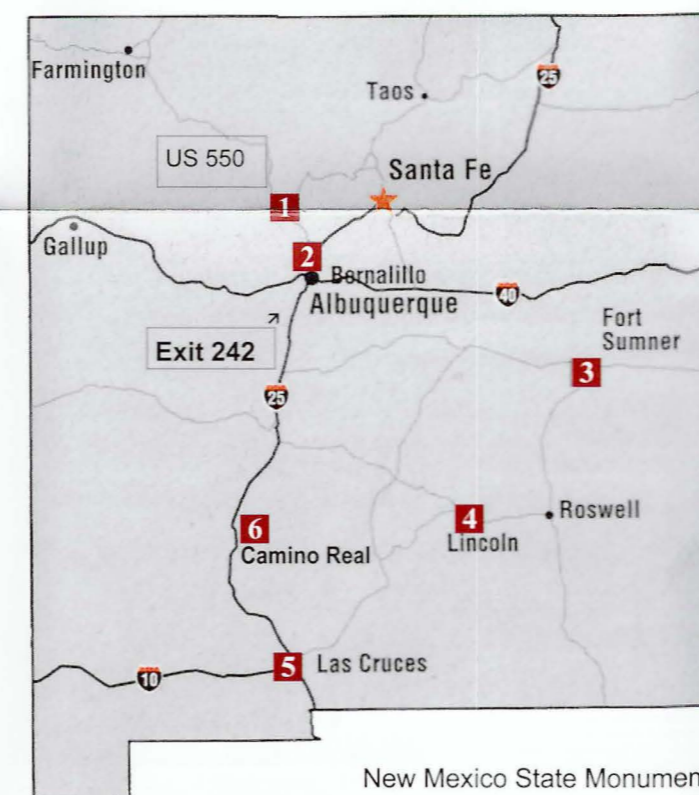
A third-grader "tries on" history at Coronado State Monument. Photograph by Penny Gómez.



Ranger Elmer Leon, Santa Ana Pueblo member, shows a young visitor a Pueblo pot from the hands-on collection. Photograph courtesy State Monuments.

### About Your Visit

Visitors enjoy beautiful vistas, an interpretive trail winding through the architectural remnants of a once-thriving Pueblo Indian village, nature paths leading to covered picnic tables that overlook the Rio Grande, reconstructions of a kiva and a habitation unit, and a gallery of centuries-old wall paintings housed in a room designed by renowned architect John Gaw Meem. For self-guided tours, printed site maps are available in the Visitor Center. Groups may make prior arrangements for docent-guided tours.



New Mexico State Monuments

Camping facilities with shelters, tent sites, and RV hook-ups are located adjacent to the Monument. Restaurants, shopping, and other recreational activities are conveniently located nearby. The Visitor Center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday through Monday. Closed on Tuesday. For tours or additional information, call 505-867-5351.

### Location

Coronado State Monument, located in Bernalillo on U.S. Highway 550 is 17 miles north of Albuquerque, one mile west of I-25, Exit 242. Established March 7, 1935, Coronado State Monument is one of six state heritage sites administered by New Mexico State Monuments, a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Coronado State Monument  
485 Kuaua Road  
Bernalillo, New Mexico 87004  
505-867-5351  
email: kuaua@lobo.net

### New Mexico State Monuments

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|---------------|---------------|
| 1 Jémez       | 5 Fort Selden |
| 2 Coronado    | 6 Camino Real |
| 3 Fort Sumner |               |
| 4 Lincoln     |               |