

# CARING FOR YOUR NAVAJO TEXTILE

## Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site *Ganado, Arizona*

Given the proper care, a Navajo textile will last indefinitely. Here are some suggestions for caring for Navajo textiles:

### Cleaning

Never wash, steam clean or iron a Navajo rug. Some rugs will have fold marks when purchased but these will come out naturally over a period of time after they are mounted or allowed to lie flat.

Never shake a rug to clean it as the whip action can break the fibers.

Rugs should be lightly vacuumed on a regular basis with suction only. Do not use a beater brush attachment. When vacuuming a textile, the recommended method is to place a piece of gauze or screen (nylon or fiberglass) over the weaving to reduce the suction and prevent possible structural damage to the weave.

Rugs should only be dry-cleaned in an emergency; for example, if they become stained. Be sure to find a dry cleaner that has had experience cleaning Navajo textiles.

### Light

Sunlight is a major factor in the deterioration of Navajo rugs. Direct light will quickly fade the color of the rug and structurally damage the rug fibers. It is best to keep textiles away from direct sunlight, spotlights, and other sources of bright illumination. Even if displayed in indirect sunlight, the colors will fade to some degree. To ensure that the fading is uniform, rotate and flip the rug over on a regular basis. (Some curators would argue that rotating a rug to ensure that it fades evenly deteriorates both sides, rather than one side. The decision is yours.)

Regularly rotating your rug, and vacuuming, also provides the opportunity for a careful inspection of possible insect infestation.

### Moths

Moths, crickets and carpet beetles can quickly render a major investment worthless.

The treatment of Navajo rugs to prevent moth damage is a matter of some debate even among experts. Regularly, every month or so, inspecting and vacuuming your rug is perhaps the best preventative measure and should largely eliminate moths and their eggs.

Mothballs or crystals (paradichlorobenzene, or PDB) are sometimes suggested as a treatment to prevent infestation. However, this can result in lessening the lanolin content in the textile and there is a danger of over saturating the rug with PDB vapor that can re-crystallize on the textile.

One recommended procedure, in the event that you have an infestation in your rug, is freezing. Wrap the rug carefully in plastic to prevent damage from condensation and place it in a chest-type freezer that is capable of going down to -18°C (- 64°F) and leave it for at least 24 hours. This procedure will kill any moths present, but it may not kill their eggs. The normal hatching period for moth eggs is about 18-20 days. Because of this, the procedure should be repeated about 25 days after the initial treatment.

Dry cleaning will kill a moth infestation but the freeze-thaw treatment outlined here (non-chemical intervention) is far safer.

Any chemical treatment of rugs can potentially result in a deterioration of the fibers over a period of time.

## Display

If you intend to use your textile as a rug and place it on the floor, some type of padding should be placed beneath the rug. Museum curators recommend hair felt rather than a petroleum-based carpet padding. Be sure to rotate the rug regularly so that it wears evenly.

Most textiles purchased today are hung rather than placed on the floor. This minimizes the potential of staining and wear that can occur even if carpet padding is used. It also eliminates the possibility of damage from house pets.

Never use nails or thumbtacks to hang a rug as they offer no support and can damage the rug fibers.

The recommended hanging procedure is to use a hook and loop tape (Velcro). The hook and loop tape is available in two-inch widths that offer more support than the thinner widths.

Remember that some hook and loop tapes have an adhesive backing. If the adhesive backing is stuck directly onto a painted wall, the paint will peel when the tape is removed. Do not stick the tape to your rug.

Nail a thin board to the wall and attach the adhesive backing to the board. The rug will adhere to the "hooked" side of the hook and loop tape and can be easily removed and remounted when you vacuum and rotate the rug. (Many museum curators question the practice of using the textile as the female component in this system, especially for museum quality rugs. The hooking action of the hook and loop strip is very strong and the removal of a textile from the strip can result in fiber damage. They recommend taking another step and sewing the female section of the hook and loop strip to a cotton strip and then sewing this cotton/hook and loop strip to the textile. While this is probably the safest method of mounting, it has the disadvantage of having to re-sew the cotton/hook and loop strip onto the opposite side of the rug when you rotate the textile.

## Storage

If you own a number of rugs and some require storage, be sure that they are rolled rather than folded. Rugs should be rolled in the direction of the warp threads. Acid free tissue paper, or washed, unbleached muslin, should be used to interleave the textile during the rolling process. Place the rolled textiles in a chest with mothballs that have been wrapped in cotton cloth or a sock. Mothballs can be hazardous to people and should be used with caution. PDB vapors can dissolve some plastics and soften varnishes. PDB should never be left in an open container and should always be used in a well-ventilated area. PDB vapors are heavier than air and should be placed above the object. Never let the crystals touch the rug.

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## **Ganado, Arizona**

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### **SOUTHWEST PARKS AND MONUMENTS ASSOCIATION**

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