

By 1350, the Puerco pueblo had been abandoned, a fate to be shared by most other Anasazi settlements in the Southwest by 1500. Where these people went and why they abandoned an area they had occupied for over 1,500 years has never been completely answered. It is widely accepted that the present day Hopi, Zuni and other Pueblo Indians are descendants of the Anasazi who were driven from their homes by drought. Others believe that introduced disease, Navajo and Apache invasion, and climatic fluctuations resulting in a shortened growing season were also instrumental in causing the exodus.

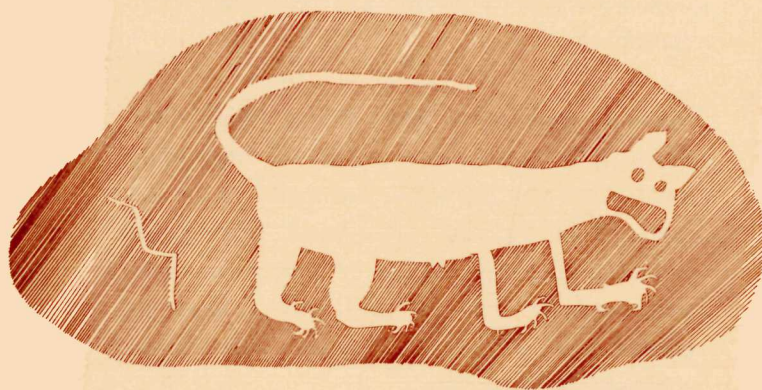
Modern ecology tells us that nature sets certain constantly changing physical parameters to which all forms of life must adjust. If a species can operate within these conditions and adapt to change, it survives; if it cannot, it dies. Man is no exception.

Modern Pueblo Indian philosophy regarding man's place in the universe appears to reflect Anasazi awareness of this basic law of survival. They viewed man as part of an ordered and balanced world in which all life forms are interdependent. Anasazi survival hinged upon the ability to use every resource provided by their immediate

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surroundings without upsetting this delicate equilibrium. If they failed to maintain this balance, through disruptive farming or hunting practices, they perished. The Anasazi lived in harmony with their environment for fifteen centuries. Their decline was due mainly to external forces beyond their control.

Our brief three-century environmental record is not as impressive. Because our highly developed technology insulates us from intimacy with nature, we arrive at the misconception that we are somehow immune to those ecological laws which affected our Indian predecessors. Only recently have we reluctantly come to the realization that our existence is threatened by environmental problems of our own creation.



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PUERCO INDIAN RUINS



PUERCO INDIAN RUINS (ANASAZI) PETRIFIED FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Sometimes, before we can understand where we are going, it is necessary to look into the past — to see where we have been. One of the greatest legacies of past civilizations is their record of successes and failures, for this provides us with a yardstick to measure our own progress.

These ruins allow us the opportunity to look back over 700 years. While European knights were embarking upon the Crusades, Anasazi Indian farmers built this pueblo (village) and farmed the river floodplain below.

Prior to the 13th century these Indians lived in small summer settlements scattered throughout the area. Long periods of drought during the 1200's forced these groups to concentrate near the only dependable water supply in this region, the Puerco River.

At that time, the Puerco was a tree-lined permanent stream, slowly meandering along a marshy floodplain. The floodplain not only supplied the Anasazi with suitable farmland, but was also rich in waterfowl, pronghorn and other game.

This pueblo was a planned unit, the result of a community effort. Rectangular in shape, it consisted of approximately 125 rooms in two to three tiers surrounding a central plaza. Since there were no doors, removable ladders provided rooftop entrance to both the pueblo and the individual rooms inside.

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Building material came from the immediate vicinity. Sandstone slabs from surrounding cliffs were squared and set in adobe to form walls averaging 5½ feet high. Roofs were constructed of timber, reeds, grass and adobe from the river banks.

Rooms were primarily designed for storage of food and water, cooking and shelter during severe weather. The Anasazi were an outdoor people. They spent most of the day tending the fields, hunting or preparing food and making pottery and tools in the plaza.

When compared to our own complex civilization, life for the Anasazi was quite simple. Due to a distinct division of labor according to clan, sex and age, each individual knew his place in the community and the duties he was expected to perform. Men farmed, hunted and provided protection; women bore children and the burden of domestic services.

Material possessions were almost totally functional. Leisure time, so necessary for the development of art and literature, was scarce to the Anasazi. Their rigorous agricultural, hunting and gathering economy offered little opportunity for purely esthetic creativity. Shell jewelry, decorated pottery and petroglyphs represent their highest achievement in the arts.

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However meager their material possessions, the Anasazi did develop a rich ceremonial life — as evidenced by the kiva (subterranean ceremonial room) in the northwestern corner of the pueblo. The kiva is believed to have served both a religious and social function involving the men of the community.

The Anasazi diet, like their life-style, was simple. Corn, beans and squash were the main crops. These were supplemented by game, wild seeds and roots. The small stature of these people (5 to 5½ feet), similar to that of Europeans of the same period, reflects this diet.

Although the Puerco Anasazi spent their lives in a limited geographical area, their territory was crossed by well-established Indian trade routes interconnecting the Southwest and Mexico. Some elements of their culture, like the rectangular kiva, appear to have been borrowed from their Mogollon neighbors to the south. Other cultural features suggest strong Mexican origins. Their crops, methods of agriculture, pottery and weaving techniques, and even the idea of building with stone may have been derived from older Indian civilizations far to the south. Shells from the Pacific Coast and Gulf of California, parrot feathers, cotton and copper bells all point to the continuity of vigorous trade with Mesoamerican peoples.

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