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"In Depth" written by John Kuehnert

Illustration by Richard Schlezht

Edited by Abby Mogollon

Designed by Carole Thickstun

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Cultural Crossroads: A Guide to Gran Quivira

Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument

LAS MISIONES DE LOS PUEBLOS DE SALINAS

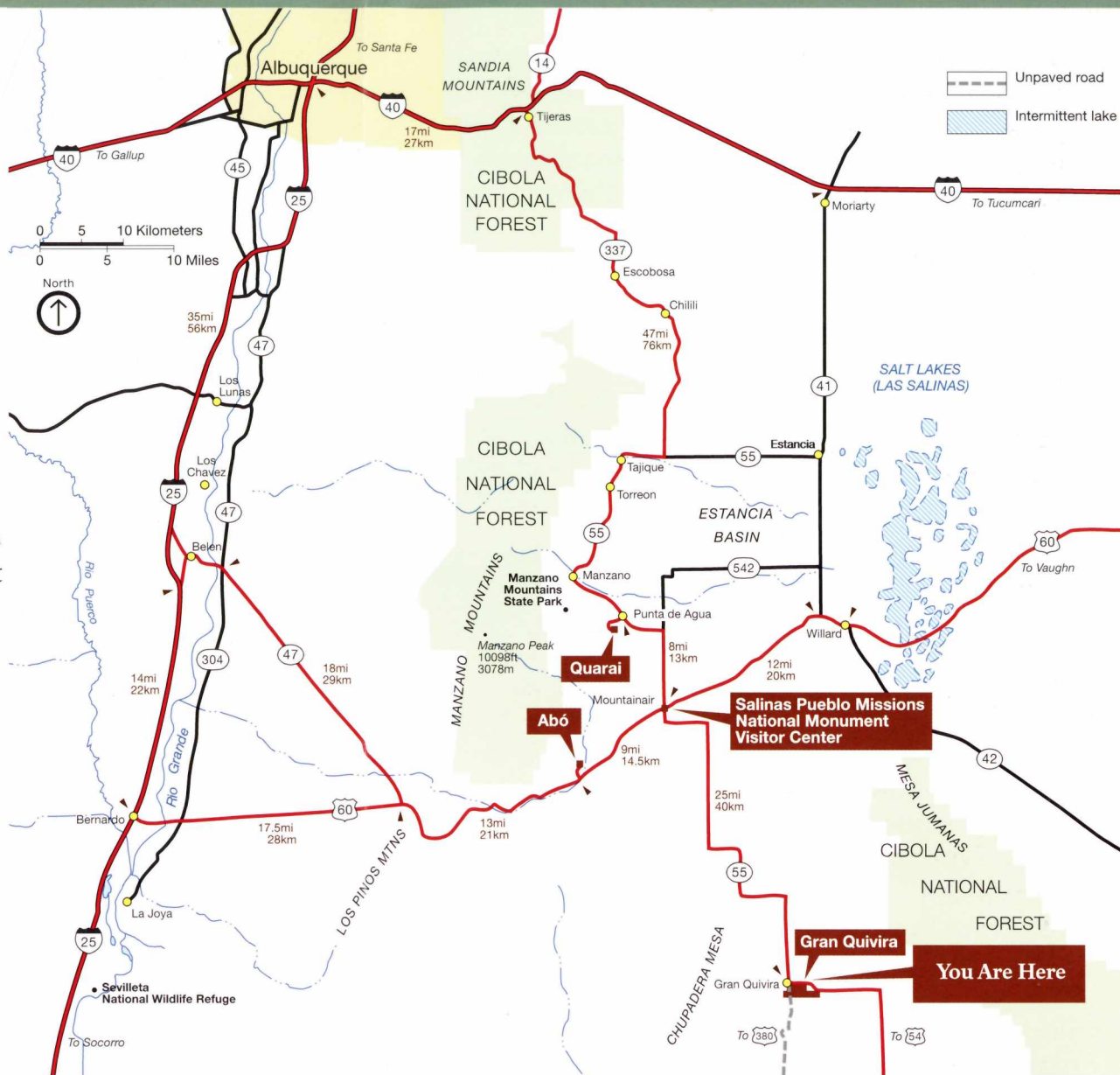
Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument preserves the remnants of three ancient Indian villages where Spanish friars started missions nearly 400 years ago. These pueblos were major trade centers for centuries prior to the arrival of Spanish explorers. Salt taken from nearby dry salt lakes was an important commodity traded between Pueblo and Plains Indians—so important that Spanish government officials called this entire region the “Salinas Jurisdiction.”

You can learn about life in early New Mexico at Abó, Gran Quivira, and Quarai as well as at the park headquarters visitor center in Mountainair.

In 1583, explorer Antonio Espejo reported that this area had “eleven pueblos with a great many people, over 40,000.”

(cover image)

This 1760 map by Bernardo Miera y Pacheco shows that the Salinas Jurisdiction stretched from the southern half of the Estancia Basin, along the eastern slopes of the Manzano Mountains, south to Chupadera Mesa and the Tularosa Basin.



Gran Quivira



Quarai



Abó

SITES AND FACILITIES

The Salinas missions are open every day except Thanksgiving, December 25th, and January 1st. Each site has picnic grounds. Camping is not allowed. Information about nearby campgrounds can be found at the visitor center in Mountainair. Telephone: 505-847-2585.

To visit Quarai, the most complete mission church, follow N.M. 55 north thirty-three miles.

To visit Abó, drive north twenty-five miles to Mountainair. Turn left on U.S. 60. Drive west nine miles. Turn right and follow N.M. 513 one half mile.



This is rattlesnake country—so please stay on the trails. Watch where you put your feet—snakes like the shady corners too. Always keep pets under your physical control.

Keep away from cactus. An encounter with walking-stick chollas (*Opuntia imbricate*) can be painful.

Pieces of old pottery are important clues to Gran Quivira's past. Like all park resources, they are protected by federal law. Leave any artifacts where you find them.



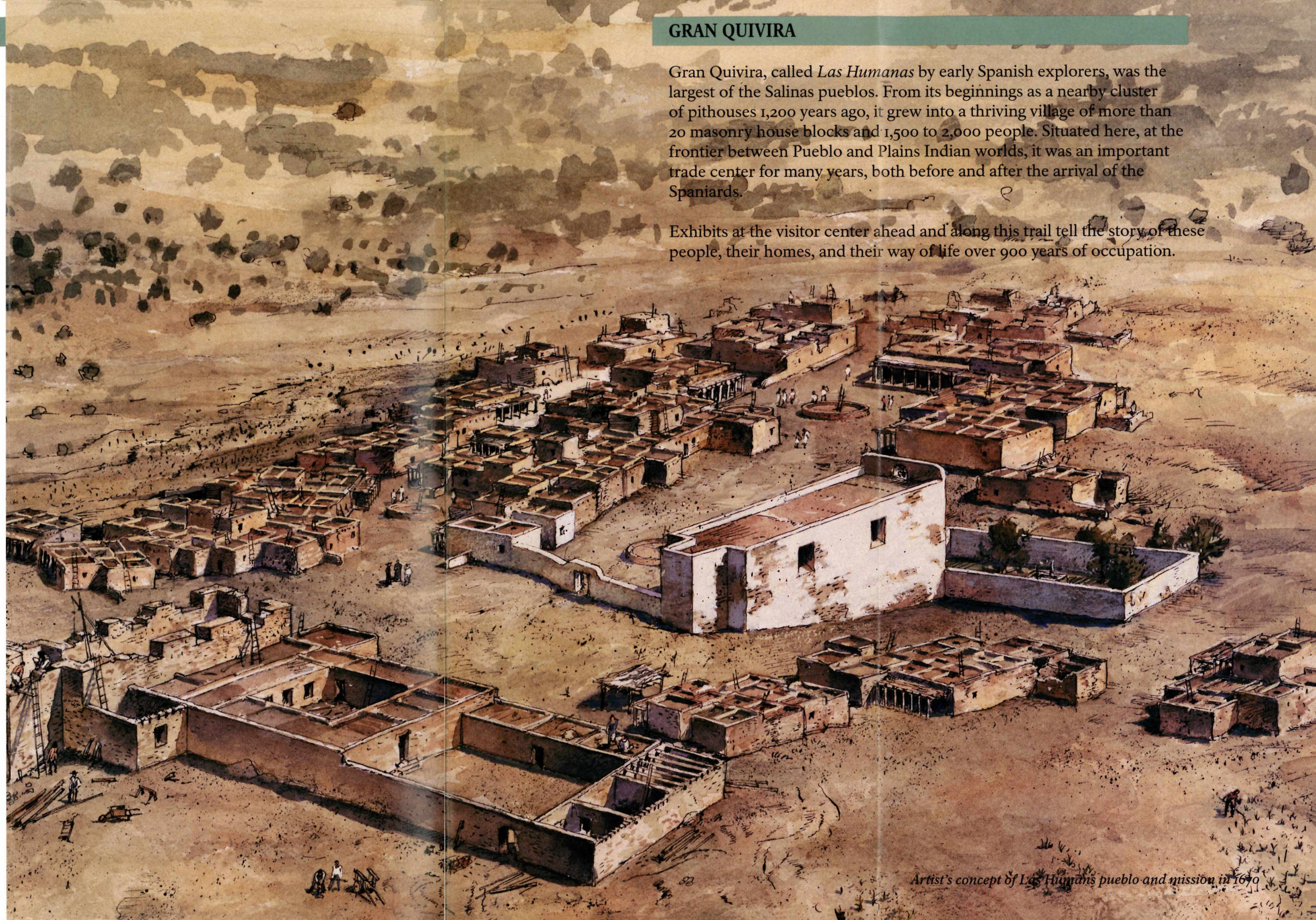
In Depth

Gran Quivira was established as a national monument in 1909, making it one of the oldest units of the National Park System. It was combined with the New Mexico state monuments of Abó and Quarai in 1980 to form Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument. Please help preserve these irreplaceable ruins for future generations by staying off the walls and on the trails. All resources within the park are protected by federal law.

GRAN QUIVIRA

Gran Quivira, called *Las Humanas* by early Spanish explorers, was the largest of the Salinas pueblos. From its beginnings as a nearby cluster of pithouses 1,200 years ago, it grew into a thriving village of more than 20 masonry house blocks and 1,500 to 2,000 people. Situated here, at the frontier between Pueblo and Plains Indian worlds, it was an important trade center for many years, both before and after the arrival of the Spaniards.

Exhibits at the visitor center ahead and along this trail tell the story of these people, their homes, and their way of life over 900 years of occupation.

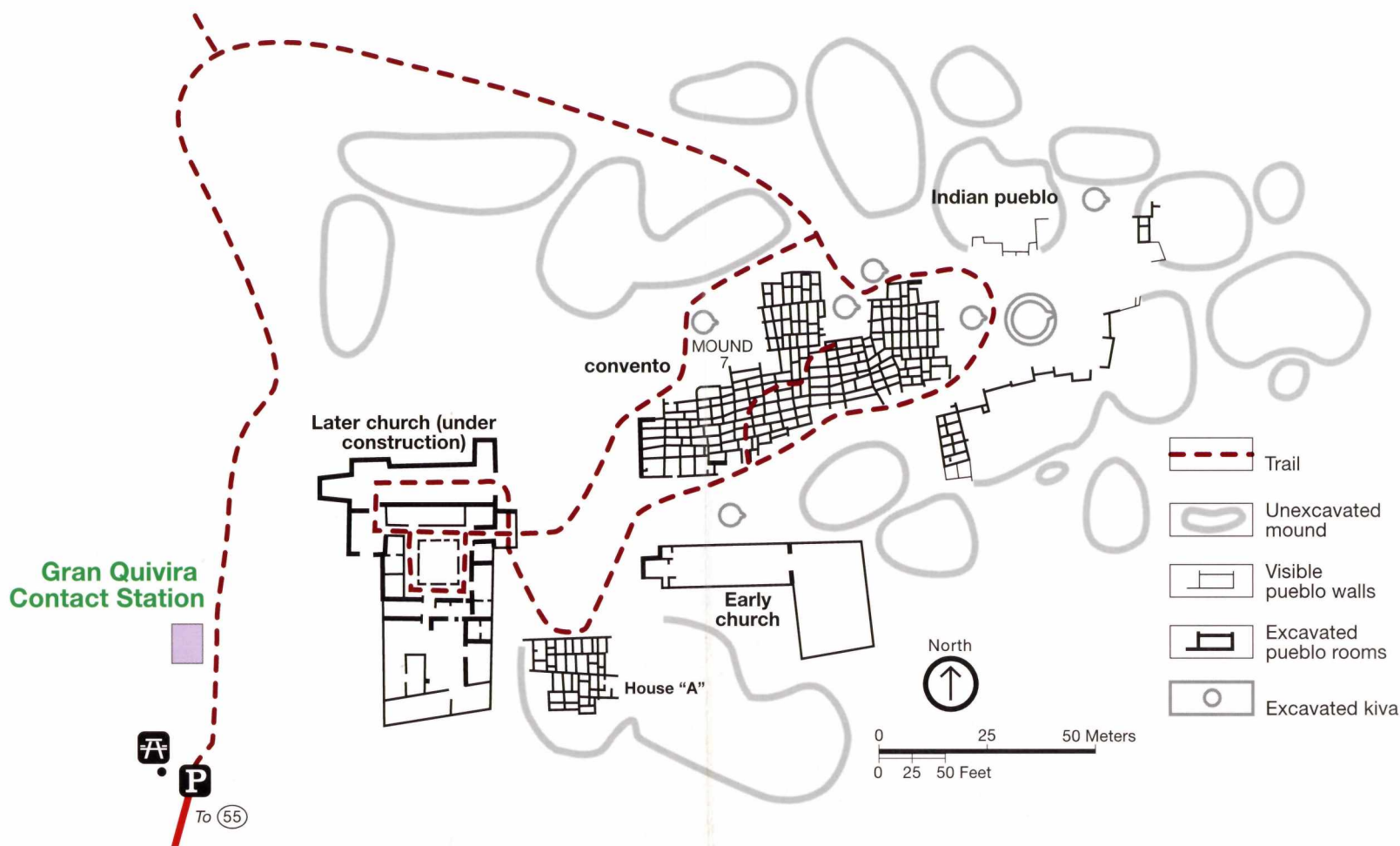


Artist's concept of Las Humanas pueblo and mission in 1670

EXPLORING LAS HUMANAS

The many names associated with the low ridge above—Cueloze, Las Humanas, San Buenaventura, and, most recently, Gran Quivira—hint that its 800-year history is layered and complex. The Tompiro Indians whose plazas and apartments you will see lived on the edge of survival, far from other pueblos and in a town with very little water.

This moderate $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile trail shown in red below, winds its way up to the ruins. The top is just 50 feet higher than you are now. However, the trail surface is uneven in places, and is steep for short sections. Portions of the trail are not suitable for wheelchairs.



In Depth

Over the years, this pueblo has been known by several names. The Pueblo people who lived here spoke a dialect called Tompiro. While we can't be sure what they called this place, it apparently sounded something like Cueloze to the Spanish. After Juan de Oñate's visit in 1598, and throughout the next century, the Spanish called it Pueblo de Las Humanas. Spanish explorers had previously encountered nomadic Indians with striped faces out on the southern plains and had called them Humanas. Unique in the Pueblo world, many of the people at this pueblo also had striped faces and so they and their village

were given the same name. The Tompiro people of Las Humanas and Abó were related to the Piro Indians who lived along the Río Grande in the area that is now Socorro, New Mexico.

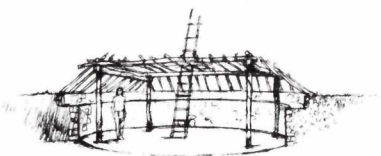
How the name Gran Quivira got attached to the pueblo is still a mystery. The first known use of the name occurred around 1835, more than 150 years after the place was deserted. Despite the reference to the mythical Cities of Gold for which Coronado searched in vain, there is no credible evidence that any treasure or riches ever existed at this Gran Quivira.

UNDERGROUND HOUSING

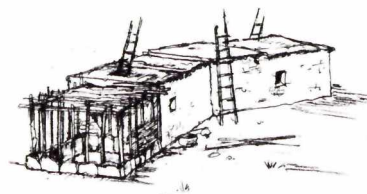
The first people known to live in this area built their homes partially underground with upper walls and wooden roofs covered by thick layers of earth. For many centuries, these pithouses were the most typical dwellings to be found in the Southwest. Jacals (pronounced *hah-CAHLs*), with woven wicker walls plastered with mud, replaced pithouses about 900 years ago. Above-ground stone pueblos, like Las Humanas behind you, began to appear only in the 1300s.



The first settlers built small communities on Chupadera Mesa, the high ground you see ahead in the distance, nearly 1,200 years ago. Distinctive pot sherds link these Jornada Mogollon people to Indians living in the deserts far to the south.



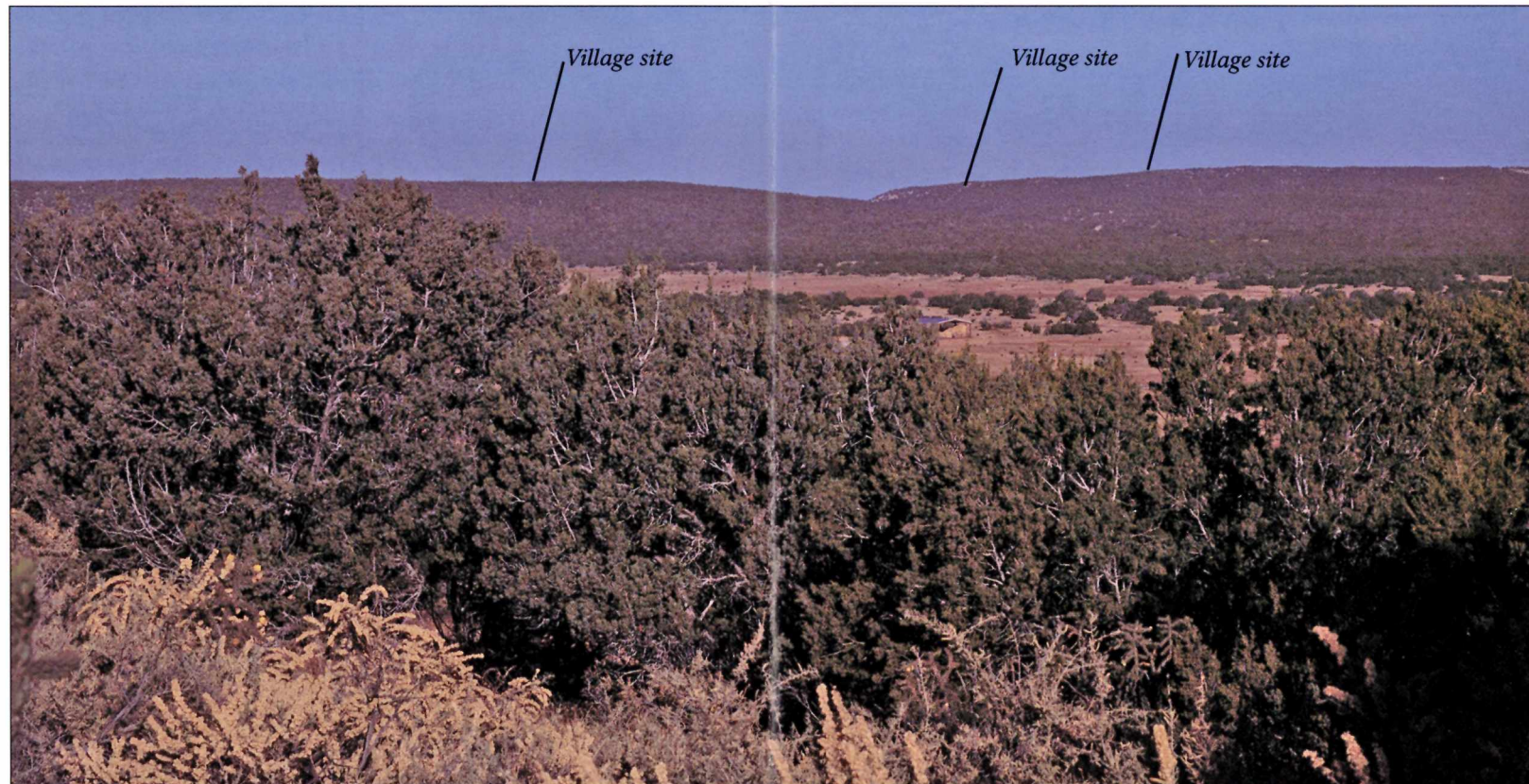
Pithouse



Jacal

In Depth

The Gran Quivira area was a cultural crossroads before European's arrived. Early pithouse-dwelling members of the Jornada branch of the Mogollon culture interacted with nomadic Plains Indians from the east and Pueblo Indians from the west. Eventually pithouses were transformed to above-ground jacal structures. The change from below- to above-ground living was gradual at first but seems to have been fueled by an influx of cultural ideas from migrating Pueblo people from the Rio Grande valley. By around 1300, the village had a predominantly Puebloan feel. Large, above-ground masonry house blocks arranged around central plazas and the modification of the pithouse from living quarters to religious structure (kiva) completed the architectural and cultural transformation.





A TRAP FOR RUNOFF

Any town in dry country must hunt hard for enough water. But the people who lived on this ridge 400 years ago had no stream nearby to tap for drinking, cooking, and building. Look for a hollowed-out shape on the ground ahead. The basin you see here is just one of more than thirty such shallow pits built on this slope to catch runoff from sporadic rains. Water held here for a few weeks supplemented the wells and roof-fed cisterns of *Las Humanas*.



Chupadera Black-on-white storage jar



Salinas redware olla



Kotyiti Glaze-red jar

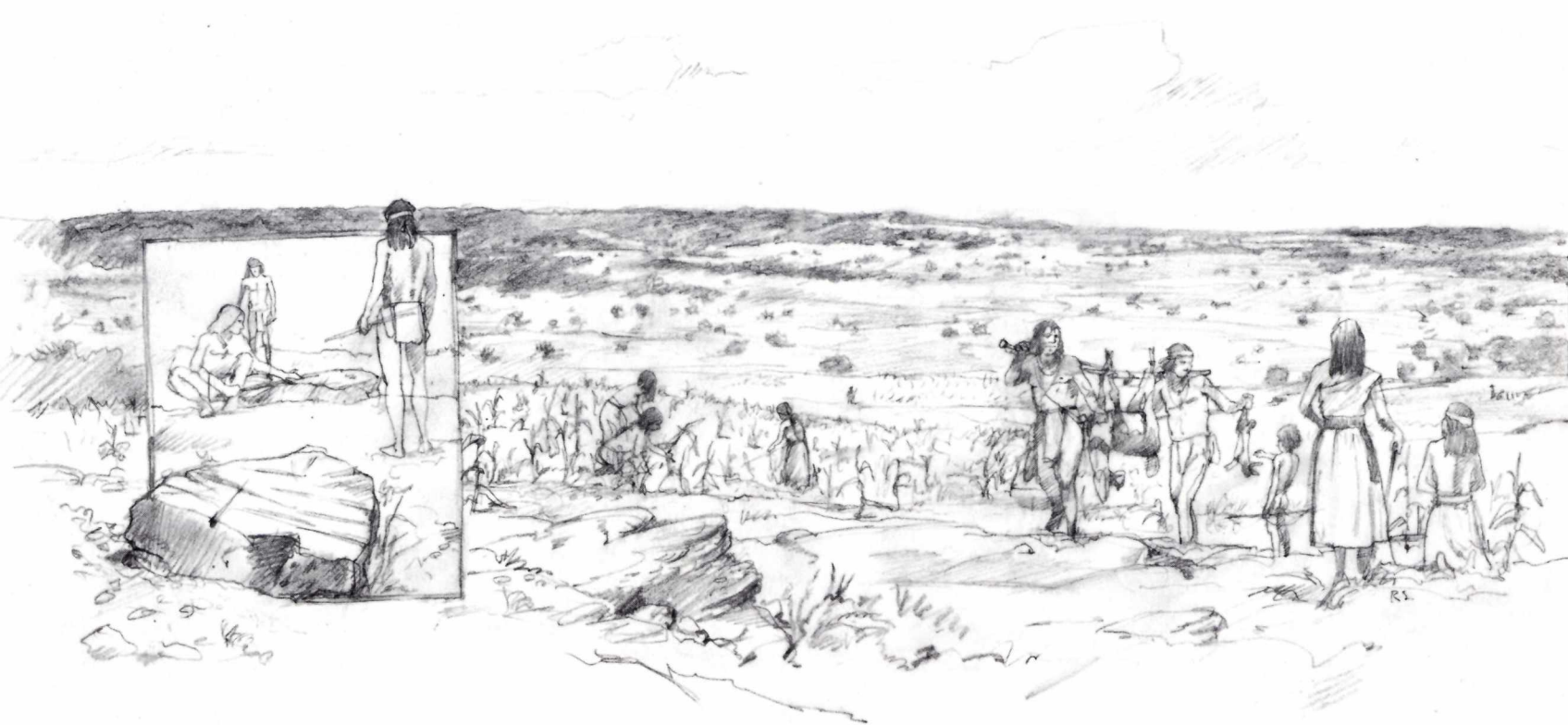
In Depth

Unlike the pueblos of Abó and Quarai, there was no permanent water source nearby. Yet we know there was water or the pueblo could not have survived. Some archeologists feel that basins like this one were not catchments or “reservoirs” at all, since in recent times only a few inches of standing water has been observed in them and then only for short periods after heavy rain. The basins do, however, retain moisture and may have served as a good place for growing dryland crops.

If this is so, then, where did the water come from? The main water supply was probably a series of 32 wells, ranging from 20 to 50 feet in depth, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to the west. Archeologists have also found a series of clay-lined pits dug into the bedrock within the pueblo and at other sites nearby. It's possible they were cisterns to store runoff. Whatever the source of water, it was limited. Historical documents indicate that drought was one of the leading factors in the abandonment of the pueblo in 1672.



Tabira Black-on-white canteen



DRYLAND CROPS AND GAME

Drought-resistant corn, planted eight inches deep on this north slope, was the staff of life for this pueblo. Archeology here reveals tiny fragments of beans, squash, piñon nuts, yucca, and prickly pears, along with the bones of tens of thousands of jackrabbits, cottontails, deer, pronghorns, and even bison. After Spanish priests and settlers came to New Mexico, European wheat, cattle, sheep, and goats joined these earlier Indian foods.

Hunters straightened and smoothed their arrow shafts on special grooved stones, arming them with points made of jasper, chert, chalcedony, or obsidian. Salt from nearby lakes preserved the game meat.



In Depth

In a semi-arid land that's at best marginal for subsistence farming, survival often depended upon a flexible diet. At favorable locations along the north and south slopes of the pueblo, drought resistant varieties of corn, beans, and squash were cultivated using dryland farming techniques.

The gathering of seasonal wild foods supplemented the harvest. The people of Las Humanas also hunted and trapped pronghorn antelope, deer, cottontail, jackrabbit, and smaller mammals.



Located on the western edge of the Llano Estacado, or staked plains, trade with nomadic tribes, especially for bison, was also crucial to securing a steady supply of meat and hides for the pueblo.



PLAZA - HEART OF THE PUEBLO

This central plaza was a busy place in the 1500s. Here the Puebloans of this village—called “Cueloze”—cooked, made pottery, fashioned tools, performed ceremonies, and traded their wares. Located at a gateway between Río Grande Pueblo and Plains Indian worlds, and near valuable salt lakes, *Cueloze* was a regional trade center. During trade fairs and religious ceremonies, hundreds of Pueblo and Plains Indians would gather in this plaza.

This plaza had several kivas. The smaller one ahead was probably used by an individual clan. The larger one beyond was likely used for events involving the entire pueblo.

In 1598 Don Juan de Oñate elicited this pueblo’s obedience to the Spanish crown. He called it “*Pueblo de Las Humanas*” for the striped-faced Indians he encountered here.

In Depth

When Don Juan de Oñate visited Las Humanas, he persuaded the pueblo leaders to sign the Acts of Obedience to the King of Spain. But it was Frey Alonso de Benavides who first introduced Christianity to the people of the pueblo. When Benavides arrived in 1627, the pueblo already had a highly evolved and complex religious system. It should come as no surprise that the shaman, a prominent and highly respected religious leader of the pueblo, viewed Fray Benavides and his new religion suspiciously. Fray Benavides most certainly viewed the shaman and the events of the day through the lens of his own culture as well. Thus the stage was set for the cultural and religious conflicts soon to come.

In Depth

Trade and barter played a crucial role in the economy and existence of Pueblo de Las Humanas. Jumano and later Apache bands from beyond the Gallinas Mountains to the east often journeyed here to trade. They brought bison products and other raw materials to exchange for the goods that only a sedentary culture could produce such as corn, blankets, and pottery. Large clumps of salt from nearby salt lakes, called *salinas* by the Spanish, were common in pueblo excavations, indicating its value as a trade item. Flint nodules from the Alibates quarries in northern Texas were traded to the pueblo for locally produced pottery such as Tabira and Chupadero Black-on-white.

It also appears that the people of Las Humanas may have served as middlemen, facilitating the transfer of products such as cotton and pottery from the pueblos along the Río Grande to the nomadic tribes of the Plains. So close became this relationship that it appears a part of the pueblo’s year-round population may have been from the Plains.

YOU MUST BE CRAZY!

...when I began preaching at Las Humanas an Indian sorcerer became infuriated (when) he saw they were satisfied with my explanations and that the whole town had decided to be Christian. He shouted: ‘You Spaniards and Christians must be crazy! And you live like fools, and you want to teach us so that we might be crazy too!’ ... he must have seen some procession in a Christian town during Holy Week, for he said: ‘You Christians are so crazy that you go together through the streets whipping each other like madmen, spilling blood and that’s the way you want it, so that these people would also be fools.’ And with that, he left town shouting vey angrily, saying he didn’t want to be a fool. The things is, everyone was left laughing, and I even more so, ...being persuaded to myself that he was the Devil, who had been put to flight, humiliated by the power of the Divine Word.

Friar Alonso de Benavides preached his first sermon to this pueblo on April 4, 1627, probably in this plaza. A Christian woman and a Pueblo war captain translated for him.



UNDERGROUND WORSHIP

Franciscan missionaries tolerated the kachina dances of the Tompiro religion at first. For a while, a new church coexisted next to the kiva you see just down the hillside behind you. But by the 1660s, changes in church policy forced traditional believers to hide non-Christian ceremonies in underground rooms within the pueblo complex you see here. Many hidden kivas have been found among these walls.

There is a sweat room (kiva) painted all over with large and small idols in the same manner that they paint devils here. In the middle are sculpted idols of stone or wood to which they offer maize, small birds of various colors, reeds, lizards, and other reptiles, and when they make a sacrifice, they all join in a great circle to dance...

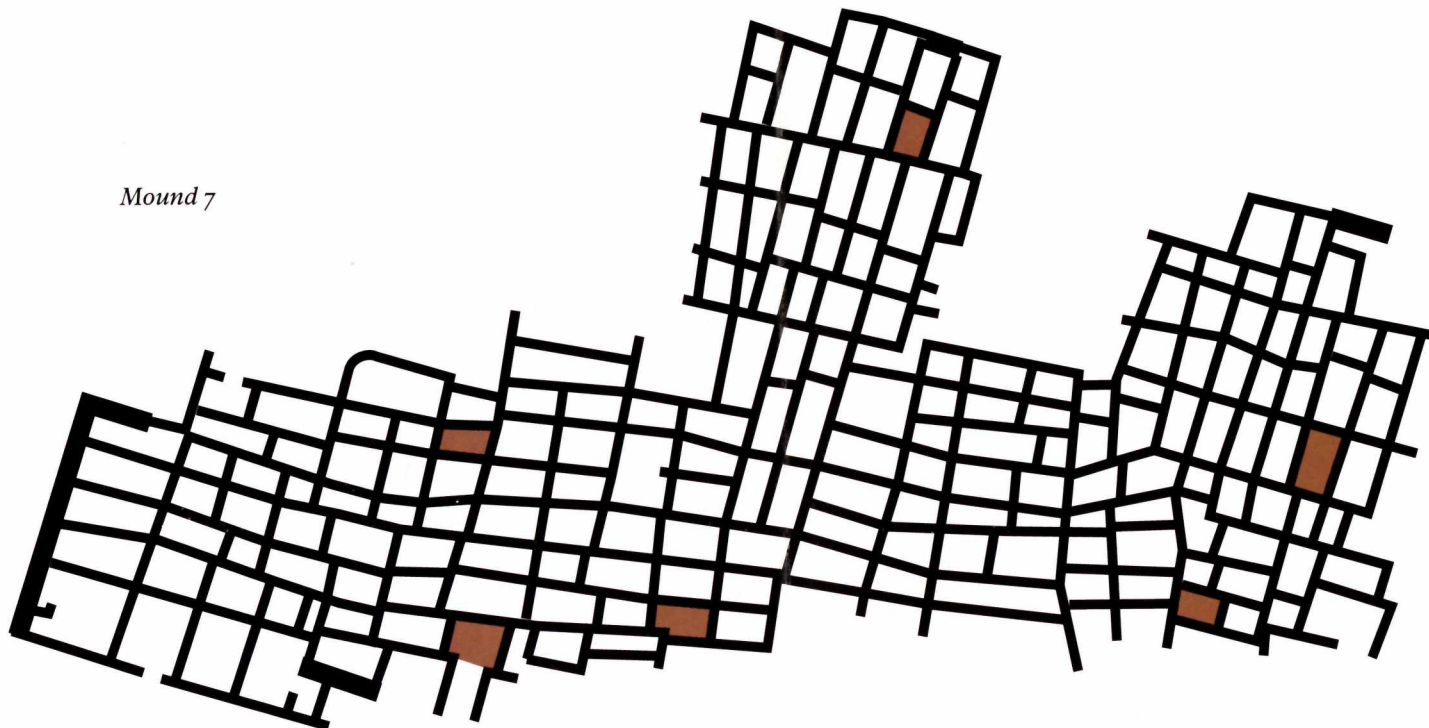
Marcelo de Espinosa, 1601

In Depth

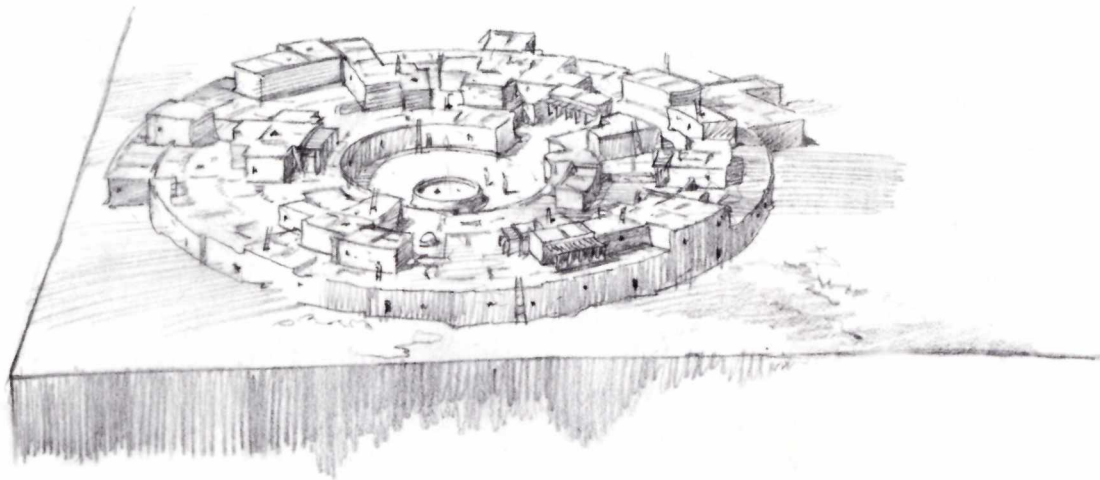
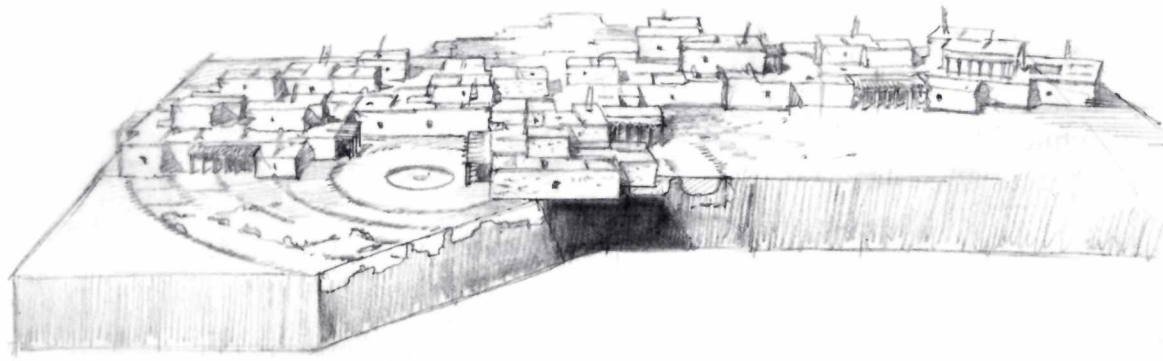
Due to changes in church policy, the friars of the 1660s began to vigorously suppress Native religious practices, particularly the katsina dances, which most viewed as idolatry. At the same time, resentment spread between the Franciscans and the Spanish civil authorities. Governmental officials tried to undermine Franciscan religious authority by encouraging or even coercing the Puebloans to openly practice their Native religion. This placed the Puebloans in an awkward position—torn between the church, civil officials, and their own clan allegiances.

As the situation worsened, the Puebloans simply moved their religious activities underground, far from the prying eyes of the Franciscans. In several of the inner rooms of Mound 7, archeologists have found walls plastered with spiritual murals. A small stone fetish and two small mountain lion effigies were also found, along with possible storage areas for sacred objects.

Mound 7



hidden kivas



FLOOR PLAN CHANGE

Archeologists explored this mound in 1967, and discovered clues that this pueblo once looked completely different from the layout you now see all around you. Look down this shaft. The wedge-shaped wall you see below is part of an earlier pueblo where the rooms were organized in concentric circles around a grand kiva.

1550–1670

Working from the east and west sides, masons used an ashy-colored mortar to build a 225 square-room pueblo atop earlier construction.

1300–1400

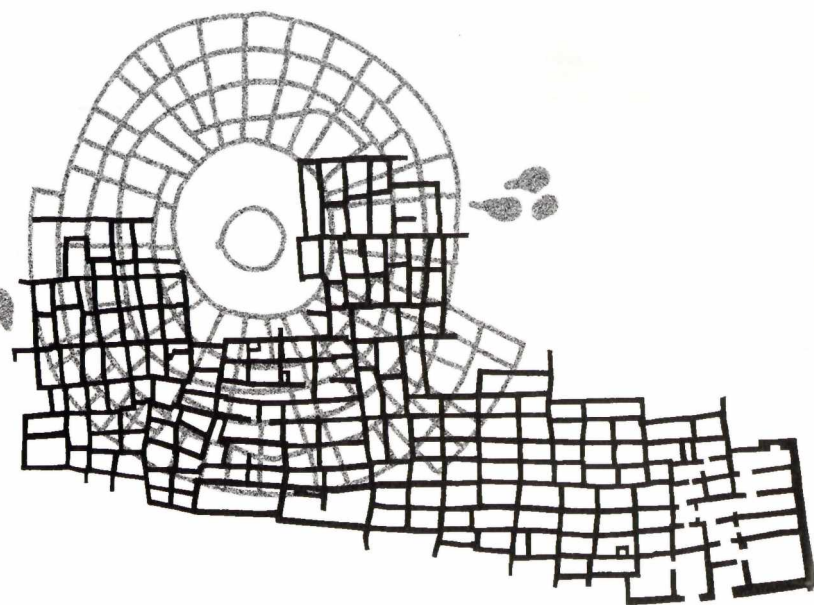
Seven centuries ago, Tompiro masons used yellow caliche mortar to build more than 200 wedge-shaped rooms in five to six concentric circles.

In Depth

The height of Mound 7 prior to excavation seemed to indicate that a multi-storied pueblo was buried here. However, excavation revealed rooms built in the 1300s lay beneath rooms built in the 1500s and 1600s. Also surprising, the plan of the upper pueblo is roughly rectangular, while the lower rooms were laid out in a circular pattern.

You're standing on the top of one of the later rooms looking "through" the floor into a lower room that is about 300 years older. The older rooms were filled with debris prior to construction of the upper rooms, perhaps indicating a period of disuse. There was also a lesser quality transitional or "Middle Phase" of construction when the room pattern started to change from circular to rectangular.

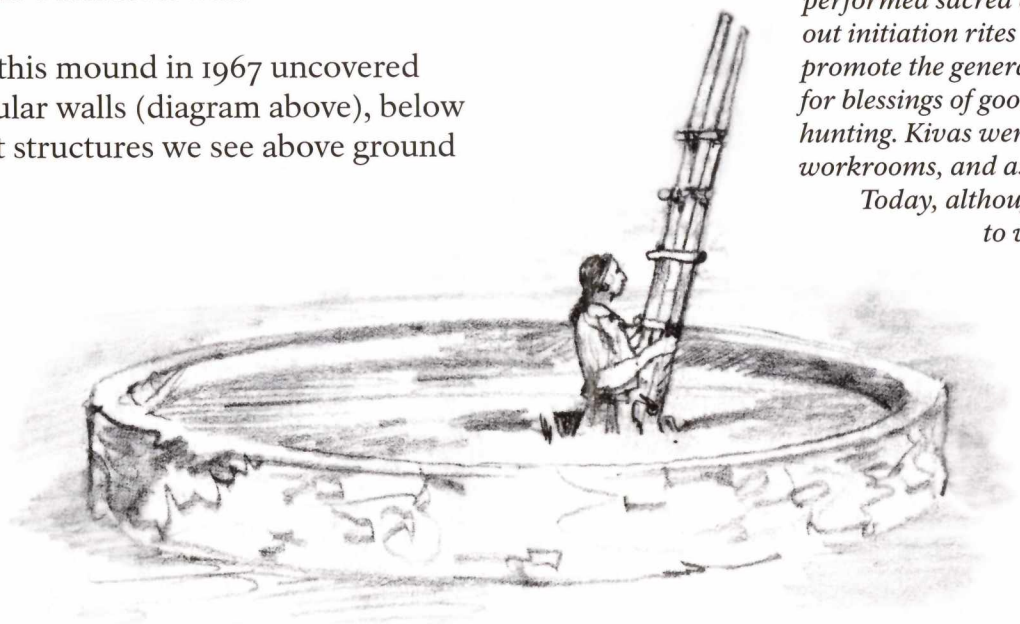
This change in building style in the mid-1550s coincides with two other significant changes at the pueblo. The appearance of a new pottery type, called Tabira Black-on-white, and the introduction of cremation to the earlier flexed-position burial practices, indicates significant cultural change. Although we can't be sure, it's possible that these new ideas came with newcomers from the north and west. By the time they arrived at Las Humanas, these newcomers may even have already had contact with the Spanish of Coronado's expedition of 1540–1542.



ROUND TOWN

This circular pit was a kiva—an underground room for meetings and ceremonies. Indians built a community of more than 200 wedge-shaped rooms in rings around this kiva 700 years ago. Clay-lined pits, probably cisterns to collect rainfall, surround the outermost wall.

Excavations of this mound in 1967 uncovered concentric circular walls (diagram above), below the more recent structures we see above ground today.



In Depth

Centrally located, this kiva was still in use 300 years after its construction. Four support posts set in the floor and walls held up a flat, timbered roof, covered with dirt. A square roof opening provided access by ladder. It also served as a smoke hole for a fire pit in the floor near the east wall. What looks like a chimney in the east wall was actually a ventilator shaft. Fresh air was drawn in as smoke and heat rose and escaped through the roof opening. Placing a large flat stone like that in the middle of the room in front of the shaft opening regulated the flow of air. In the 1560s, a retaining wall was built around the kiva to keep debris from the surrounding house blocks off and to stabilize the rooms directly above it.

The Pueblo people practiced their own religion for centuries before the arrival of Europeans. Clans and various societies each had their own kivas. Members, mostly men, performed sacred ceremonies and rituals, carried out initiation rites and instructed the young. To promote the general welfare, prayers were offered for blessings of good rainfall, health, crops, and hunting. Kivas were also used as clubhouses, workrooms, and as lodging for pueblo guests.

Today, although influenced by Christianity to varying degrees, many Pueblo cultures continue these traditions.



MISSION CHURCH 1630-1670

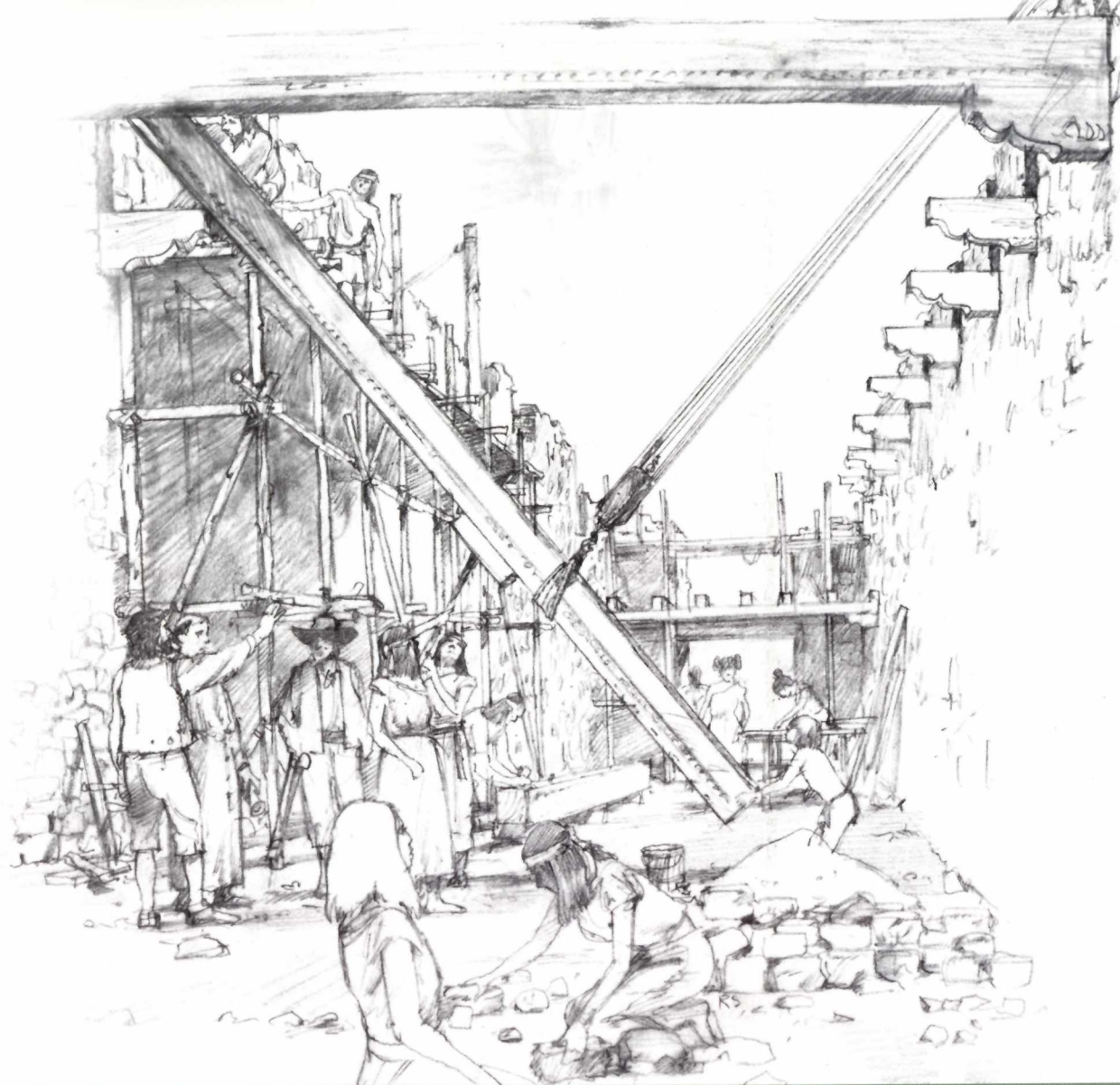
For almost 30 years, no priest lived at the mission established for this pueblo. The first Franciscan assigned here, Francisco Letrado, started the church walls you see to your right in 1630. After only two years' work, Friar Letrado left Las Humanas to go west to the Zuñis. Five more years passed before workers led by Francisco de Acevedo, the priest at Mission Abó, could finish this church. This church—called *San Buenaventura de Las Humanas* in its later years—was the only church ever used for worship in this pueblo.

New believers helped Friar Letrado convert the corner rooms of the apartment block to your left into his living quarters and a small chapel.

In Depth

The naming of the churches at Las Humanas is a subject mired in ambiguity. Apparently, since there was no church in 1627, Fray Benavides dedicated only the conversion effort at Las Humanas to San Isidro. In 1629, Fray Letrado arrived and continued the conversion by establishing a temporary chapel in a room of Mound 7. Since it did not have a permanent altar, this chapel may not have been dedicated. After Letrado left, Fray Acevedo of Abó completed the first permanent church in 1636. He dedicated the church to San Buenaventura. A second church was begun, but never completed. Thus, this church, San Buenaventura, was probably the only church ever named at Las Humanas.

The ceiling of the church was perhaps 20 feet above the dirt floor. Wooden posts placed upon flat stones inside the entrance supported a small choir loft. The white plaster walls were decorated with red and black dados. The round masonry pedestal just inside the doorway was the base of the sacrarium or baptismal font. Christian Indians received religious burial within the walled campo santo in front of the church. The stone structure you see in the cemetery probably held a cross. During stabilization of the cemetery walls, a mass burial was found, possibly a result of famine in the late 1660s.



A LARGER CHURCH 1659-1670

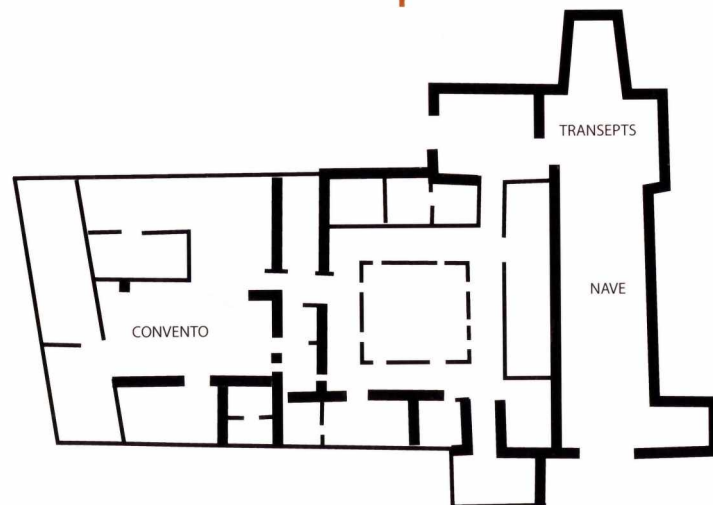
Work on the massive walls of this complex started after a new priest, Diego de Santander, was assigned to live here in 1659. Men of this pueblo carved and placed the wooden beams. Women and children mixed mud mortar, laid stones, and plastered walls. The convento rooms to your left were finished by 1670, when all work came to an abrupt halt.

The ambitious cross-shaped sanctuary you see here was never fully completed. People left Las Humanas before this church was consecrated for worship.

In Depth

With the arrival of Fray Santander, Las Humanas was restored to mission status. Fray Santander probably completed enough of the convento to live in. But as work on the church progressed, he was seriously injured in an accident from which he never fully recovered. Santander left Las Humanas in 1662, and an unknown friar took his place. Work continued sporadically on the church but construction was never finished. Recent evidence, including the amount of debris found within the church, suggests that the walls of the church probably did not extend much above what they do today.

The cross-shaped (cruciform) floor plan of this church is typical of large Spanish churches of the period. The outside length of the church is 140 feet, with walls five to six feet thick. The room to your right as you enter was to be the baptistery. Overhead, a choir loft was being built; the large holes in the walls once held corbels and a viga to support the front of the choir loft. Plans called for the main altar to be located in the apse at the far end of the church, with side altars at each end of the transept.



STARVED FOR RAIN

When the rains stopped falling in the 1660s, this water-poor pueblo was in mortal danger. Famine quickly followed the drought; some 480 people started to death here in a single winter. The Franciscans transferred tons of grain, beans, and livestock from mission to mission in armed convoys, but bad roads, Apache raiders, and sheer distance made it impossible to feed the Salinas missions. Crops failed, year after year.

In 1670, the people of Las Humanas fled to Abó. Theirs was the first pueblo forced to move. Within seven years, all the missions of the Salinas jurisdiction were abandoned for the relative safety—and still flowing waters—of the Río Grande, south and west of the mountains you see in the distance.



In Depth

In an already marginal environment, severe drought is devastating. In a letter dated April 11, 1669, Fray Juan Bernal explains:

For three years no crop has been harvested. In the past year, 1668, a great many Indians perished of hunger, lying dead along the roads, in the ravines and in their huts. There were pueblos (as instance, Las Humanas) where more than four hundred and fifty died of hunger. The same calamity still prevails, for, because of lack of money, there is not a fanéga of corn or wheat in the whole kingdom.

Smallpox and other European diseases exacted a heavy toll on an already weakened population, as did Spanish demands for labor and tribute and a deepening church-state conflict. After migrating to other pueblos on the Río Grande, the Tompiro speakers were further dispersed by the effects of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Many went south with the Spanish and settled near what is today El Paso, Texas. Others dispersed and remained allied with the northern pueblos. By the late 1800s, anthropologists no longer considered Tompiro speakers to be a distinct linguistic group.

