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THE JICARILLA APACHE INDIANS OF NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

SIDNEY R. ASH

This year's field trip of the New Mexico Geological Society will pass through a part of the Jicarilla Apache Indian Reservation. About 1,200 Jicarillas live on this reservation, which is nearly as large as the State of Rhode Island. The tribe has a relatively cosmopolitan culture because through the years they have adopted many "foreign" traits, not only from other Indians but from the Spanish and Anglos as well.

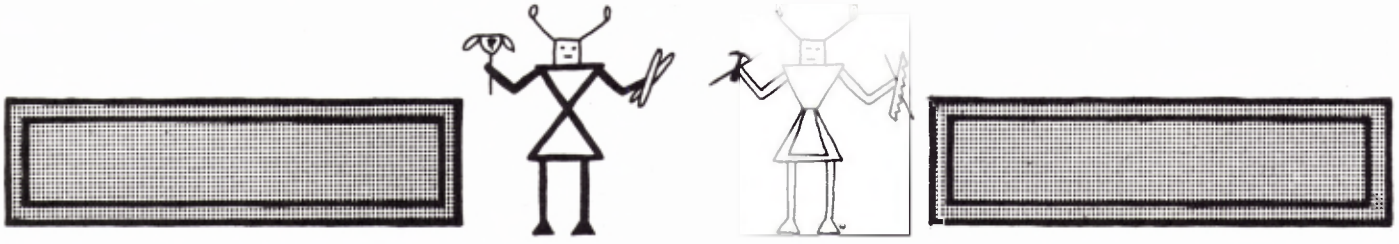
The Jicarilla Apache Indians belong to the southern group of the Athapascan linguistic stock as do the Navajos and the other Apache groups of the Southwest. Many Indians in northwestern North America belong to the northern group of this linguistic stock, which suggests to some authorities that all the Athapascan speaking people had a common homeland in northwestern Canada. When the Spanish first entered the Southwest they apparently recognized this "kinship" because they called all the Athapascan speaking Indians in the area Apache, distinguishing the individual tribes by adding descriptive suffixes to that name, such as **Apache de Jicarilla**—the Apache who wove shallow-bowl-shaped baskets; **Apache de Navajo**—the Apache who cultivated fields; **Apache de Mescalero**—the Apache who ate mescal cactus, etc. This practice, which was adopted by the Anglos, continued until about the beginning of the nineteenth century when one group came to be known as the Navajo while all the others continued to be called Apache. Interestingly enough, today all of the Athapascans in the Southwest call themselves Dineh, or "The People."

The early history of the Jicarillas is rather obscure, but it is apparent that they entered the Southwest, probably by way of the Great Plains, some time between 1000 and 1500 A. D. At the time of the Spanish entrada the Jicarilla Apache were living in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. One division, the Llanero, or "plains people," lived on the headwaters of the Canadian River and in the mountains between that stream and the Rio Grande, while the other division, the Ollero, or "mountain people," lived west of the Rio Grande, particularly along the Chama River. However, the only difference was in the geographical location of the bands, and the members intermarried freely.

All the Jicarillas were more or less semi-agricultural people with an annual subsistence cycle divided into sedentary horticultural and nomadic hunting phases. They had learned the art of clearing fields and cultivating corn from the nearby Pueblos. In addition they had adopted Plains Indian warpath, raiding, and buffalo hunting traits, and such material items as skin- or cloth-covered tepees, moccasins with legging tops, and buckskin clothing. Having acquired these Plains Indian traits and being somewhat nomadic by nature, they and the other Apache groups in the Southwest readily took to the horse upon its introduction by the Spanish. This enabled them to increase the scope of their raids against their enemies, especially the Comanche and Kiowa Indians of the Great Plains. For a time the Jicarilla even joined with the Spanish against the French and their allies, the Pawnee Indians.

It is thought by some that new combination of corn, buffalo, and horse furnished a subsistence basis for an enlarged Apache population which resulted in their expansion toward the east. The expansion was finally halted and in 1716 the Comanche drove the Jicarillas into the mountains between Taos and Picuris. There they lived for a few years and seemingly accepted Spanish rule and the Christian faith. Eventually, however, they joined the Mescalero Apaches of central New Mexico and harried the Spanish settlements and some of the Pueblos and remained hostile to most people until their defeat by the United States Cavalry in 1855. For over 30 years thereafter the Jicarillas were moved from one part of New Mexico to another as treaties were made, ignored, and broken, and as Acts of Congress pertaining to them were passed and repealed. Finally in 1887 a reservation was set aside for them in the Tierra Amarilla region of New Mexico, where they still hold land in severalty.

The ceremonial and religious life of the Jicarilla, like their material culture, is a modification of the basic southern Athapascan pattern by certain Plains and Pueblo Indian traits. Their religion is "curative" and seeks to put man in harmony with nature. They hold a puberty ceremony for the young women that is similar to that of the Navajo, except that it is held by the girl's family or clan and is not tribal. Occasionally they observe a healing ceremony called the Holiness Rite, or Bear Dance, which involves elements of Navajo, Ute, and Pueblo rites. On September 14 and 15 the Jicarillas hold an annual two-day celebration near Horse Lake which closely resembles the fiesta held by the Taos Indians. This celebration includes an imitation of the ceremonial foot race that is run at Taos during the Pueblo's fiesta, a round dance, and the creation of a sand painting. The Jicarilla and Taos Indians are such good friends that many attend each others fiesta with the Taos people participating in the Jicarilla foot race



Design used in the Holiness Rite sand painting

and dance and the Apaches taking some part in the ceremony at Taos.

Although they are still under the supervision of the U. S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, with the Agency at Dulce, the Jicarillas are full-fledged citizens of the United States and have the right to vote in local and national elections. They are not restricted on travel, activities, or purchases.

The principal source of tribal income is from the sales and royalties from oil and gas leases, which recently amounted to about one-quarter million dollars in one year. Additional income is derived from timbering, cattle raising, and a tribal store at Dulce. Most of this money is used to maintain an educational fund and for other tribal projects, although a small percentage of the tribe's income is given to each member annually for his personal use.

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