

THE INDIANS OF WEST-CENTRAL NEW MEXICO

By Sidney R. Ash

The 1959 field trip of the New Mexico Geological Society will pass near the Navajo Indian Reservation and the Indian pueblos of Zuni, Acoma, and Laguna.

All of the Indians are citizens of the United States who can vote and make any purchases they desire. Although still under the supervision of the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the U. S. Department of the Interior, each pueblo and tribe is governed by a tribal council usually made up of respected elders. Each pueblo council chooses a governor who serves for one year. The Navajo Tribe elects a chairman, vice chairman, seven judges, and seventy-four council members for four year terms of office.

The Acoma and Laguna Indians speak the same language. However, this language is not the same as that spoken by the Zuni Indians, and the language of the Navajo Indians is dissimilar to that of either pueblo group. Most of these Indians speak some Spanish and English. In general the religions practiced by the Pueblo Indians are combinations of Christianity and their ancient faiths which are based largely on dieties of fertility, growth, strength, etc. The Navajos, on the other hand, still adhere mainly to their ancient curative religion which seeks to put man in harmony with nature. Some of the Indian religious dances may be witnessed by visitors, but pictures may not be taken without first obtaining permission from the Indians.

NAVAJO INDIANS

The Navajo Tribe with a population of more than 80,000 is the largest Indian tribe in the United States today. Most Navajos live on their 16,000,000-acre reservation which lies in parts of New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. A few live at Ramah, Canyoncito, and Puertecito, New Mexico, while others occupy and use land just outside the boundaries of their reservation. Commonly the Navajos are taller than the Pueblo Indians, and the majority are slender. Both the men and women tend to have long faces. Some of the men have mustaches, though lack of facial and body hair is an Indian characteristic trait.

The Navajos were formerly a warlike people. Like their close relatives the Apaches, they continually raided the Indian pueblos and Mexican communities of the Southwest until they were captured in 1864 by United States troops under Kit Carson and marched 300 miles from their home in the Four Corners area to Bosque Redondo near Fort Sumner, New Mexico. Hundreds died while on the march (the "Long Walk" as they now call it) and while confined at Bosque Redondo during the following four years. When their native clothing wore out it was replaced by the white man's type of clothing which was then in style. Women were given long full skirts and blouses with full length sleeves; the men were clothed in ordinary male attire. They have continued to wear the "captivity" style of clothing adding colorful sashes, shoulder blankets, silver concha belts and other jewelry.

After being released in 1868 the Navajos returned to their former homeland and never again gave resistance. They now support themselves in a number of ways: stock raising (mostly sheep, goats, and horses); agriculture; lumbering; arts and crafts (such as weaving and jewelry making); and off-reservation employment of various types. An increasingly important segment of their income is derived from the oil, gas, helium, uranium, and other natural resources found on their lands. Probably the Navajos are

most famous for their rugs which are woven by the women, and the silver necklaces, rings, concha belts, and other articles of jewelry that are made by the men. Navajo jewelry tends to be massive with simple but bold design and is usually set with turquoise. Several Navajo men have become famous for their water-color paintings.

The houses used by the Navajo are called hogans and are generally built of logs covered with adobe plaster. Families frequently have several hogans, moving from one to another with their animals. Near the houses are the simple upright looms on which rugs are woven.

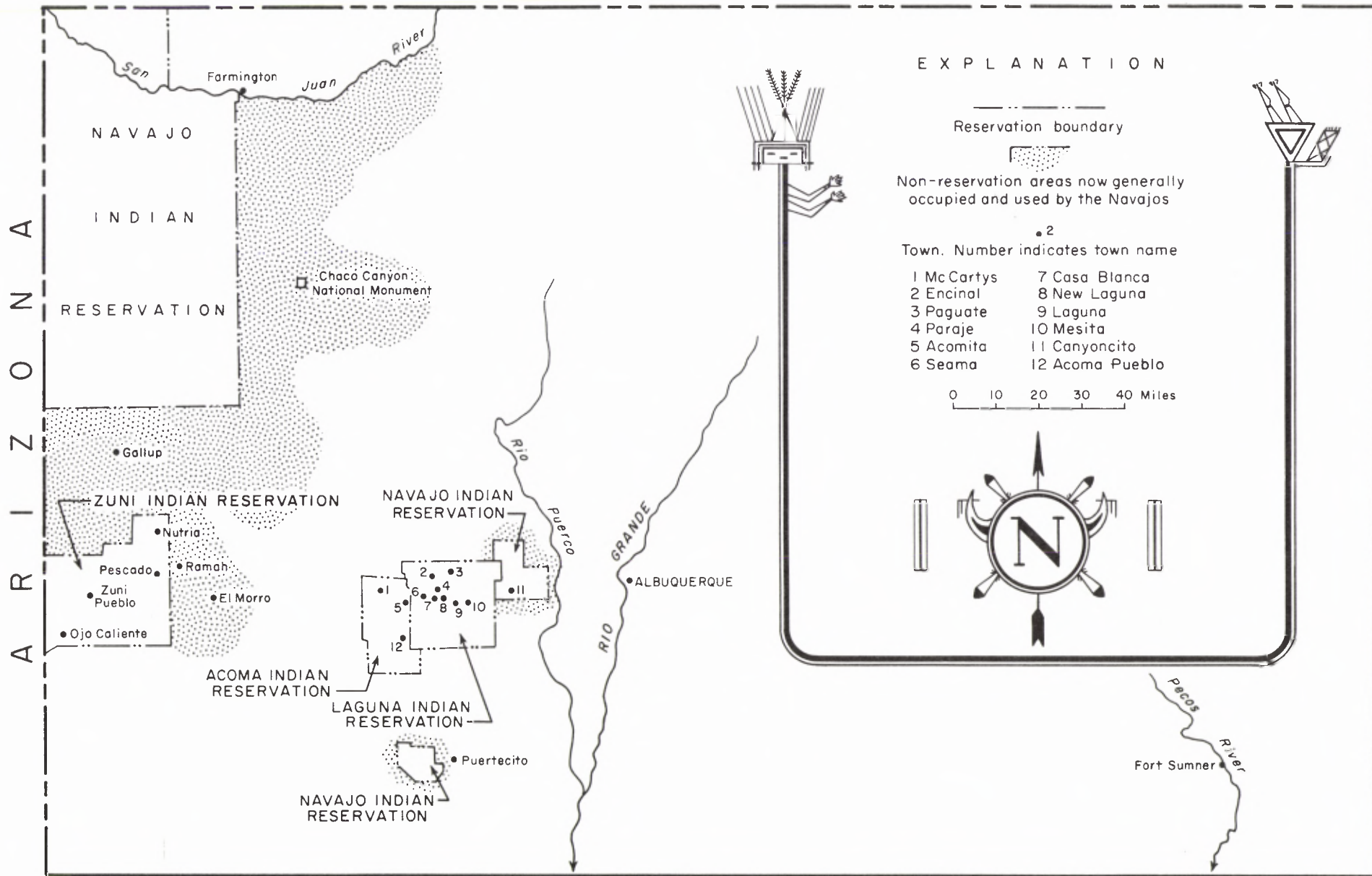
In general the Navajo ceremonies are not seen by the White man although visitors are allowed to attend the dances which are an important part of the Navajo rites. The Mountain Chant, the Yeibichei or Night Chant, and the Enemy Way are the best known of the ceremonials. Squaw Dances, a feature of the Enemy Way which is an ancient war dance, are popular and are frequently given. In connection with some of these rites the famous sand paintings are made. These paintings which are drawn with colored sands on a bed of tightly-packed sand are destroyed after their purpose has been served.

ZUNI PUEBLO

Although of interest from several points of view, the pueblo of Zuni is of particular historical interest because it is the only survivor of the Seven Cities of Cibola — the legend of which inspired the Spanish to explore what is now New Mexico and Arizona. The legend of the Seven Cities did have a slight basis in fact, although the facts were exaggerated and distorted. When the rumor of the Cities of Cibola was connected with the Old World legend of Seven Cities of the mythical Island of Antilla it appeared to credulous Europeans of the early Sixteenth Century that an extremely wealthy civilization was to be found north of Mexico in what was referred to as the "north country". Actually all of the inhabitants of the north country had a simple and rather poor culture in comparison to that of the Aztecs and the Incas. The Indians who lived in the six westernmost pueblos of New Mexico called themselves Cibola and have been identified as the ancestors of the modern Zuni Indians. They were farmers who cultivated corn, squash, beans, and gourds, and lived in houses made of mud and stone which were several stories high. They dressed in skins and cotton cloth. The only thing they possessed which was of value by European standards of the time was the turquoise that they used for ornaments and as decoration.

The Spanish began exploring the north country in 1540 and, even though they were disappointed and disillusioned they eventually colonized it and subjected Zuni and the other pueblos of Cibola to Spanish rule. However, while outwardly accepting Christianity and the rule of the Spaniards, the Zunis were able to cling to much of their own way of life. In 1680, at the beginning of the Pueblo Revolt, the Zuni Indians from all six pueblos took refuge on the high, sacred mesa of Taaiylone which lies southeast of the modern pueblo of Zuni. There they stayed until the Reconquest in 1692 when they moved to one of the old pueblos, Halona, at the foot of Taaiylone. After killing some Spanish soldiers in 1703 they again fled to Taaiylone where they stayed for two years. At present the Zuni people live in Zuni proper and in three smaller communities

C O L O R A D O



Index map of areas occupied by Indians of west-central New Mexico.

— Ojo Caliente, Nutria, and Pescado. The total population in 1958 was 3,708 comprised of 741 families.

As in the early days, agriculture is the chief occupation. Formerly the Zuni wove blankets, made baskets and fine pottery, and worked silver. However, all of these arts, except for silver work, have practically died out. The Zuni silver work is characterized generally by a large number of extremely small turquoise settings. In their channel work many small settings are fit flush with the top of the silver. A new art, that of sewing glass beads, has developed at Zuni. Although Indians did not use glass beads before the coming of the White men, the White people think Indians should do beadwork and the Zuni people oblige.

The Zuni Indians have not been very receptive to Christianity. Their dances retain much of the ancient character. The Shalako, the most famous of the Zuni ceremonies, is held in November or December each year.

ACOMA PUEBLO

Acoma, sometimes called the "Sky City", is one of the most famous pueblos in New Mexico because it is situated on a sandstone mesa about 350 feet above the surrounding valley. When the Spanish entered New Mexico in 1540 the Acoma Indians were living on the same mesa they occupy today. They were friendly to the Spanish until 1598 when they killed one of Onate's officers. This resulted in war during which the pueblo was captured and burned. The mesa was repopulated but the Acomas held great hatred for the Spanish.

A Franciscan priest went to Acoma in 1629, and for years the Indians labored for him building the great mission that still stands in the village. The building materials, of course, had to be carried up from the valley below. Tradition has it that the roof beams were carried all the way from the Zuni Mountains and were never allowed to touch the ground at any time during the journey. Acoma took an active part in the Pueblo Rebellion in 1680 and the missionaries stationed there were killed. In 1693 the Acomas submitted to De Vargas but then changed their minds and repulsed him in 1696. The actual submission of Acoma was not achieved until 1699 when Governor Cubero made a tour of western New Mexico. Since then, the Acomas have lived in harmony with their neighbors.

Today most of the Acoma people have established homes in the outlying farming communities of Acomita and McCartys. The latest Indian census (1958) shows 402 family groups with a total population of 2,013. Agriculture is still the chief occupation of the Acoma Indians as it was in the past. The pottery of Acoma is well made and fired so that it will hold water.

Three miles northeast of Acoma is Mesa Encantada (Enchanted Mesa) which stands 400 feet above the surrounding area. The Indian name for the mesa is Katsimo which means "haunted". This name is applied to the mesa because of the legendary tragedy connected with it. According to Acoma tradition, at one time there was a village on the summit of Katsimo in which the ancestors of the present Acoma people lived. The only way of access to the mesa and the village was destroyed in a storm or by an earthquake while most of the inhabitants were working in the fields below and those on top died of hunger. Those

in the fields established the Acoma of today on the nearby mesa. Although difficult to climb, the top of Katsimo has been reached by many people. A few Indian artifacts are present; however, there are no traces of house walls or of a village.

LAGUNA PUEBLO

To the geologist Laguna is probably the most interesting pueblo in this region because of the rich uranium deposits found on its tribal lands. The principal mine is Anaconda's Jack Pile Mine. Laguna is the youngest and possibly the most cosmopolitan pueblo in New Mexico. It was built on its present site in 1697 by people from several pueblos who came there to escape the Spanish armies in the Rio Grande valley to the east. In 1699 the inhabitants declared their allegiance to Spain, and the name of San Jose de la Laguna was given the village. The Spanish word, Laguna refers to a large ephemeral lake west of the pueblo.

This pueblo is one of the largest of the New Mexico pueblos and has a population of 3,654 comprised of 730 family groups. At present they live in Old Laguna and the small farming communities including New Laguna, Paguete, Encinal, Paraje, Seama, and Casa Blanca.

Most of the Laguna people support themselves by farming or herding, although a few men work in the nearby uranium mines, in Albuquerque, and in other cities in the area. Some of the women make good pottery which is similar to that made in Acoma. A small amount of weaving and basket making is still carried on by some of the Laguna people.

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