PEOPLE OF THE MESA

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF BLACK MESA, ARIZONA

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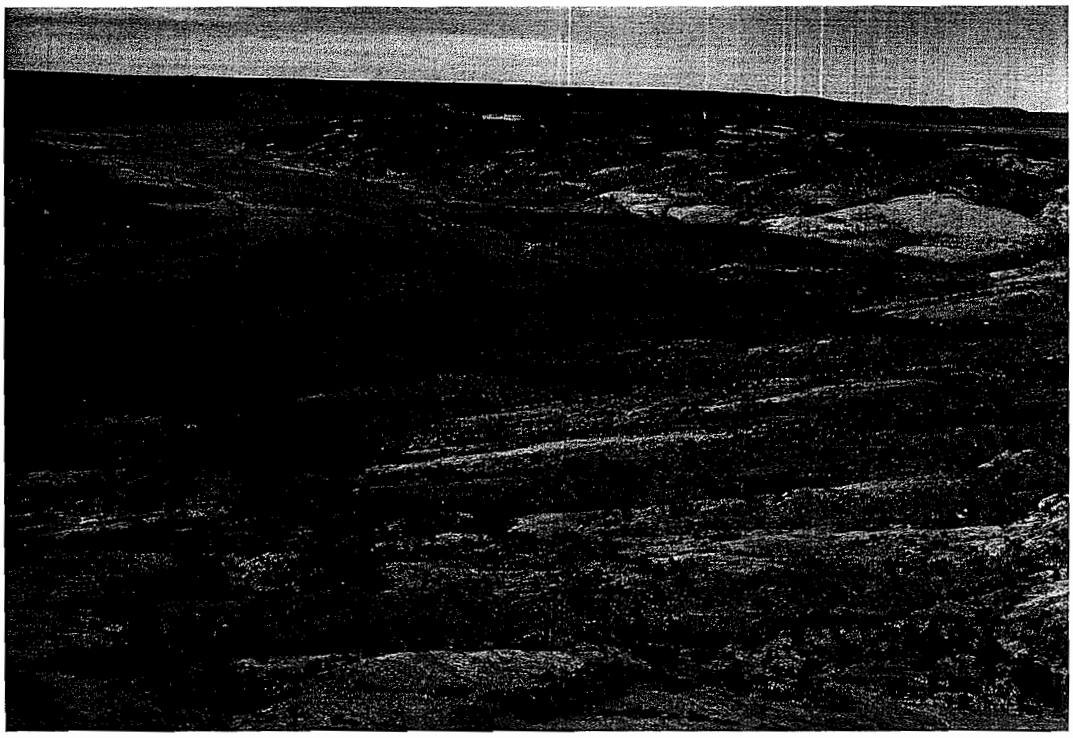

Figure 5-24. Long House Valley, just north of Black Mesa, is home to many Navajos, some of whom lived on Black Mesa in the past. Black Mesa forms the southern (left) boundary of the valley, and Skeleton Mesa bounds the valley on the north (right).

the stock fence. The three-generation family used site D:7:4089 as their winter home and herded both sheep and horses at the site. His recollections implied three major clusters of structures at site D:7:4089: the original windbreaks and one of the sweatlodges; the cribbed-log hogan and the stone wall; and the stone hogan, the stock fence, and the other sweatlodge.

That Saturday, the site supervisor and the woman crew member drove to a homestead in Long House Valley, just north of the mesa (Figure 5-24). They were to meet the woman's uncle there, and she had come along to show the way and to translate for her uncle, who spoke little English. When they drove up to his home, they had a surprise. The woman's uncle, who himself was almost sixty, had invited his eighty-year-old father to come along. Apparently his father, too, had lived at site D:7:4089, but even before the uncle had. Between them, the two men were able to identify many of the site D:7:4089 structures.

The woman's uncle claimed to have lived in the stone hogan around 1928 with his grandmother. The hogan was their winter home, and they herded sheep from the site. The sheep were kept in the box canyon, which was unfenced at the time; they did not build the stone fence. The only other structure he was able to identify was one of the windbreaks, which had been constructed by his father as a winter herding camp. That windbreak had been situated on the south-facing slope to catch the winter morning

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Figure 5-25 (above and far right). Because Black Mesa is higher and wetter than surrounding areas, pinyon and juniper forests grew there. People came from miles around to collect pinyon nuts and to gather wood for heating and building.

sun. The stock fence and most of the windbreaks were already present when he and his grandparents moved to site D:7:4089, and the wooden hogan and the sweatlodges must have been built after they moved away from the site.

The man's father recalled having built the stock fence around 1910, and his recollections about the stone hogan and the windbreak matched his son's; he remembered building the windbreak about 1920 during the winter. The other windbreaks were already there when the old man first moved to site D:7:4089; he thought they had been built by pinyon nut pickers, since the site was situated in a large, dense stand of pinyon trees.

When queried about why he and his son now lived off the mesa in Long House Valley, the old man recalled that they had never lived on Black Mesa year-round. During the early part of the century, his family would move with their livestock onto Black Mesa for the winter. The mesa top was relatively uninhabited then, and there had never been a problem in finding a place to live for the winter and to graze their animals. However, over the years more aud more people had moved onto the mesa, and there was no longer enough land for everyone. Finally, they decided to stay year-round in the valley, although they would camp on the mesa for a couple of weeks in the fall to collect pinyon nuts and cut wood for fuel (Figure 5-25).

The three informants' recollections did not contradict the archaeological

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findings in any substantial way, and the informants did help to clarify the relationship between the windbreaks, the stock fence, and the rest of the site. Apparently, the area around site D:7:4089 had first been used for a couple of weeks each year during the pinyon nut harvest—perhaps as early as the 1830s. The stock fence had been built before any of the hogans because they needed a safe place to pen their livestock before many sheep could graze there regularly. There was an apparent discrepancy about who had built the stone hogan; whereas the first informant claimed that his family had built and lived in the stone hogan in the 1930s, the second and third informants stated that it had been built by them in the late 1920s. The crew talked about this problem the following week over lunches while they finished work on site D:7:4089. They thought that maybe both stories were correct: that the old man had built the original stone hogan, and that the other had rebuilt it ten or more years later.

On the final day of work on site D:7:4089, the crew members had a picnic lunch celebration and invited the three informants and the lab workers who had analyzed their artifacts. Pot-luck site parties had become a tradition among the crews working on historic sites, and everyone brought a special food item to help celebrate the end of work. They all contributed some money to purchase a small lamb, and the lamb was placed in a pit barbecue near the site first thing that morning. The Hopi man brought piki

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Figure 5-26 (above). Picnic parties to celebrate the end of work at the site were a tradition. Each crew member contributed something to the menu, and all enjoyed the leisurely picnic lunch and conversations about what they had found.

Figure 5-27 (right). The coal, whose presence had brought so many changes to the people of Black Mesa, was being burned to provide electrical power to the large cities of the desert west. The photograph shows the Glen Canyon Dam, Lake Powell, Arizona.

bread, the Navajo woman made fry bread, lab workers brought potato salad in an ice-filled cooler, the student archaeologist brought a case of soft drinks, and the site supervisor made a chocolate cake (Figure 5-26).

They worked straight through until the early afternoon, when they stopped for a leisurely lunch. Just by coincidence, the project directors stopped by as the lamb was being taken out of the barbecue. They were invited to stay for a while, and the food looked so good that they accepted the invitation. They all filled their plates and sat in the shade of a large juniper tree to eat. The conversation centered on the work and what they had learned about site D:7:4089.

Much of the history of the Navajo occupation of northern Black Mesa was recorded in the remains left at site D:7:4089, and what the crew found most startling was how quickly things had changed. The number of people living in the area had grown dramatically, and this population increase was accompanied by many other changes. The earliest series of occupations of site D:7:4089, by pinyon nut pickers, had spanned seventy or eighty years, from the 1830s to the early 1900s. Soon after that, people had started using site D:7:4089 for winter herding camps. Then year-round occupation of the area began, and herds were grazed and crops grown in the floodplain of Yellow Water Canyon. Now the Navajos in the vicinity of site D:7:4089 depended on the large surface coal mines for a living. From where they were

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Figure 5-28. The improved accessibility of the northern part of the Navajo Reservation has drawn tourists to the area. Sales of art and craft items and tourist attendance at tribal and intertribal fairs are continuing sources of income. Painting of the Gallup Intertribal Fair by Beatien Yazz, reproduced courtesy of the School of American Research.

sitting, the crew could see the stark profiles of the Kayenta Mine N7-8 pit spoils. It seemed impossible that there had ever been a life without the coal mines and equally impossible that the mining would ever end; yet they all knew that the coal would not last forever.

The coal was being mined so that the people living in the large cities of the desert west could maintain the lifestyle to which they were accustomed, a lifestyle including air-conditioning in the summer, central heating in the winter, and electricity to power all their appliances (Figure 5-27). It was contradictory but true that in order to maintain their own lifestyle and culture, the people of Phoenix, Tucson, and other large western cities were the cause of all the recent changes on northern Black Mesa. Yet the Black Mesa coal would last only thirty or forty years; after that, new energy sources would have to be found or the lifestyle of the city dwellers would have to change (Figure 5-28). No one asked the question aloud, but it was in the air: what would people on Black Mesa be doing then?

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