

**An Introduction to the Navajo Oral History of Anasazi
Sites in the San Juan Basin Area**

**Dennis Fransted
Navajo Aging Services
Fort Defiance, Arizona**

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted under a purchase order from the National Park Service, Chaco Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico (PX 486-8-0224). The personnel of the Chaco Center were extremely helpful throughout, especially W. James Judge, Chief, Division of Chaco Research. In the field the Superintendent and staff of Chaco Canyon National Monument provided invaluable support. My participation in the project was very much at the suggestion of David Brugge, then Acting Director, Division of Interpretive and Visitor Services, National Park Service, Southwest Region, Santa Fe, New Mexico. My thanks to him are especially profound. My work would not have been possible without the previous site survey work of John Stein and Mike Marshall, in fact, the idea for this research came from them. They provided me with an orientation in the field and numerous aids. Family and friends, in Tucson, Albuquerque, Chaco Canyon and elsewhere, should also be thanked for all the tokens of support that often go unnoticed but without which a field anthropologist cannot function.

During the course of the field work numerous institutions provided aid. Thanks go to: the staff of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Boarding School, Crownpoint, New Mexico; the Real Property Office, BIA Eastern Agency, also in Crownpoint; the staffs of the Senior Centers (congregate meal sites) in Two Grey Hills and Tohatchi, New Mexico; and the following chapters: Becenti, White Horse Lake, Casamero Lake, Smith Lake, Iyanbito, Counselor, Church Rock, Two Grey Hills, Tohatchi, Nanehnazad and Huerfano. I owe special thanks, of course, to all those who took the time to talk to me about ruins, who are much too numerous to mention individually. Finally, this work would have been much more difficult without the valuable assistance of my translator, Joe Begay, who was very much a collaborator in the research, never confining his activities to translating.

Table of Contents:

Acknowledgements.....i
Introduction.....1
The Research.....2
The Results.....3
Problems Encountered.....10
Recommendations and Conclusions.....11
Site Information.....13
Site Records.....20
Footnotes.....61
Bibliography.....63

I. Introduction.

This report presents the results of a study conducted during the late fall of 1978. The aim was to obtain Navajo knowledge about a number of Anasazi sites in the general area of the San Juan Basin. All the sites are located in northwestern New Mexico with one exception, the Allantown Site, in Arizona a few miles from the state line¹. Only a few of these sites, the most southerly located of the group, are in drainage systems that do not empty into the San Juan River. All of the sites, however, are of either Chacoan or Mesa Verdean construction. Finally, all are located outside Chaco Canyon proper, and hence have generally been classified "outliers," though this term may not have the correct connotations in any other than a geographical sense².

The present report contains information about 44 sites, most of them fairly large ruins or ruin complexes well known to local Navajo residents (shorter comments will be made concerning some eight other sites). In some cases the sites have been previously documented by archaeologists. A few have been fully or partially excavated, indeed, some are already part of Chaco Canyon National Monument. Many of the sites, however, were unknown or little known to investigators prior to the site survey work that immediately preceded this project. In addition, seven new sites, largely undocumented, were located in the course of my work and are included below. In very few cases, however, had any systematic attempt been made to understand and document the Navajo view of these ruins. The present work is the first step (only) in filling that gap. The information reported below is considered to represent the basic data necessary for the development of a Navajo oral history concerning Anasazi sites. Furthermore, the information about most of the sites is sufficient

to permit the development and implementation of a plan of protection and preservation for them, an aim, by the way, which is supported by many Navajo people living near ruins.

In what follows I will discuss the course of the research, methodology used and results obtained in general, highlighting matters of special significance. The problems of doing this kind of research will also be discussed. As part of my conclusion I will add recommendations for subsequent research which could build on that reported here. Finally, each site will be discussed separately, presenting all information obtained from Navajo people living nearby.

II. The Research.

No complicated designs or methodologies were required for this research to be successful. It was necessary, however, to travel to each site (almost 8000 miles) with a translator and locate people willing to be interviewed about the Anasazi ruins in their neighborhood (the interviews were never confined to a discussion of only the ruin already known). It proved most advantageous to construct data sheets for each site prior to the interviews. These sheets contained space for entering responses in every category of information sought and thus provided an ongoing progress check during the course of the research.

It was considered desirable to interview more than one person regarding each site and, in fact, this usually proved both possible and wise. It should be noted, however, that there were no serious disagreements among informants; more commonly, people knew different minor details, not conflicting ones. Generally, it should be said that I experienced a high degree of cooperation in the course of this work. Those few people who seemed reluctant

to talk to me were typically younger and seemed to know less traditional knowledge in any case.

Interviews were conducted entirely in the Navajo language, though informants would occasionally volunteer information in English. The reader will notice below that the majority of the information sought did not require complicated or detailed answers during interviews. These were simply translated and written on the appropriate data sheet. I always had a tape recorder with me, however, in the event that longer texts were given in response. Indeed, part of each interview was designed to elicit such longer responses, i.e., folkloric/oral history texts. Unfortunately, it never became necessary to use the tape recorder. This does not mean that longer texts could not be forthcoming in future research, however, as I will discuss below.

III. The Results.

The story is told that long ago there were many anaasazi³ living in pueblos throughout what is now Navajo country, traditionally defined by the four sacred mountains of the cardinal directions⁴. Something happened which caused the anaasazi to begin fighting each other. Nobody is sure what caused the struggle, but soon a general civil war ensued. Finally, the anaasazi completely destroyed each other and many of their pueblos. That is why only ruins are left, though one can occasionally find a room in one that looks as if the people simply went to their fields and never returned. Someday, the story goes on to predict, the same thing will happen again and years afterward people living on the land will again be asked about ruins by strangers (field notes; the story was told by a gentleman living near Two Grey Hills, New Mexico).

One might ask, after reading this story, why the anaasazi

population (this last point is not an interpretation, it was expressed quite plainly to me in the field).

(20) Kin Nahzin

*Site #4201
11/8/80*

Provisional name: Kin Nahzin is already on maps.

Location: Kin Nahzin Quadrangle, T18N, R9W, Section 22, NE/4 as shown on maps.

Navajo name: kin naaziin ('extending up house').

Land status: This and the surrounding four sections are privately owned by Mable Whitchorse and/or her brother's children.

Traditional land use: This was an area of dry farming, though very little is done now.

Associated ruins and/or geographical features: There are a number of other ruins in this area, especially on the mesa top between Kin Nahzin and Hosphah. Many of these are already identified, indeed, one is marked on maps (Section 33), but the area probably deserves further work. For instance, there is an unlocated ruin close to the road between Kin Nahzin and the same mesa (i.e., Section 23 or 26) which I was told about but could not find. Mesa Pueblo is not far away (about 6½ miles) but is on land not well known to local Navajo people. Finally, I suspect other ruins are located in the area east of Whitehorse Lake Trading Post, especially in T18N, R8W, Sections 8 or 9.

Legends/history: Two Navajo clans claim this ruin as their ancestral home: the tl'ooqí and ma'iideeshqiizhni (the first name is difficult to translate, the second means 'coyote canyon or gap clan'). These people lived at Kin Nahzin before joining the Laguna and Jemez Pueblos, respectively. They later became clans among the Navajo. Ma'iideeshqiizh ('coyote canyon or gap') is a place near Jemez Pueblo (and other places as well). It is the starting point for the legend of Excess Way (Kluckhohn,

Could also refer to Kin Nahzin near Whitehorse Lake