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dineh MEANS "THE PEOPLE"

By

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Editor's note: Appreciation is expressed to the Author, and to the Executive Committee of the Four Corners Geological Society for permission to reprint this paper which originally appeared in the Guidebook of the Society's Second Field Conference, 1957.

Anthropologists generally agree that 6 to 10 centuries ago there were no Navajos, at least by that name. Navajo is a comparatively recent name although the exact origin is uncertain. It is generally accepted today, however, that "Navajo" was a place name used by Tewa-speaking Pueblo Indians. Translated it refers to a "large area of cultivated lands." This appears to fit the Navajo who have for centuries derived their livelihood largely from agriculture.

The Spanish word, "Navajo," has been accepted and replaces the anglicized "Navaho" of earlier anthropological usage. "Navajo" is not their own word for themselves, but "dineh" is. In their spoken word they are dineh, "The People."

PRE-HISTORY

Linguistic analysis, the foremost method of cataloging and tracing Indian groups, places the Navajo and Apache tongues with the Athabascan languages spoken by tribes in northwestern Canada.

Little or nothing is known of the southward migration of the Navajo segment of this lingual group. It is postulated their southward passage was along the eastern slopes of the Rockies, and that the earliest Navajo settlements were in the Gobernador—north Jicarilla Apache Reservation area. Earliest hogan site, dated by tree-ring chronology, proves Navajos lived in the area mentioned above as early as 1540. The dineh speak of this area as dinehtah, "old Navajo land."

One popular hypothesis relates that Navajo and Apache were one; eventually splitting into two groups. One group, the Apache, remained to hunt, subsequently scattering through the mountain fastnesses of the southwest. The second group, the Navajo, migrated westward to till the sub-marginal soils of relatively uninhabited western New Mexico and northeastern Arizona.

HISTORIC PERIOD

The first known reference to the Navajo is found in the report of a Franciscan missionary in 1626. Later, the Rabal documents, which were reports to the Spanish Viceroy of Mexico, contain the first detailed accounts of the Navajo during the period 1706 to 1743. The Navajo lived at this time in small compact communities located away from their fields, on adjacent mesa tops; very likely a protective measure copied from the Hopi. Agriculture was the basic economy, but sheep, goats, horses and cattle had already been obtained by trade, or by raid, from the Indian Pueblos and Spanish settlers.

The Navajo were warlike only in the aspect of reprisal and for the practical purpose of obtaining food, women, horses or other booty. They fought or raided in small groups of clans or bands, and by comparison were no match for the highly organized military cultures of the Plains Indians to whom war was the apex of living.

Horses greatly increased the mobility of the Navajo for trade and warfare. It is known that they traded and fought the Pawnee in western Nebraska. The horse, however, did not make the Navajo "nomads." "Nomadism" among the Navajo is a myth—at least during the historical period.

Prior to the Civil War, it is evident from historic incidents that a mutual hatred existed between the Mexicans and Navajo. For over 150 years, enmity between these two groups steadily mounted. Magnifying this hatred on the Navajo side was the infamous massacre in 1805 of some 100 or more Navajo—women, children and old men—by slave-raiding Mexicans. The wanton slaughter took place in a high cave located in one of the main canyon tributaries of Canyon De Chelly. This canyon tributary later became known as Canyon Del Muerto, or in English—"canyon of death."

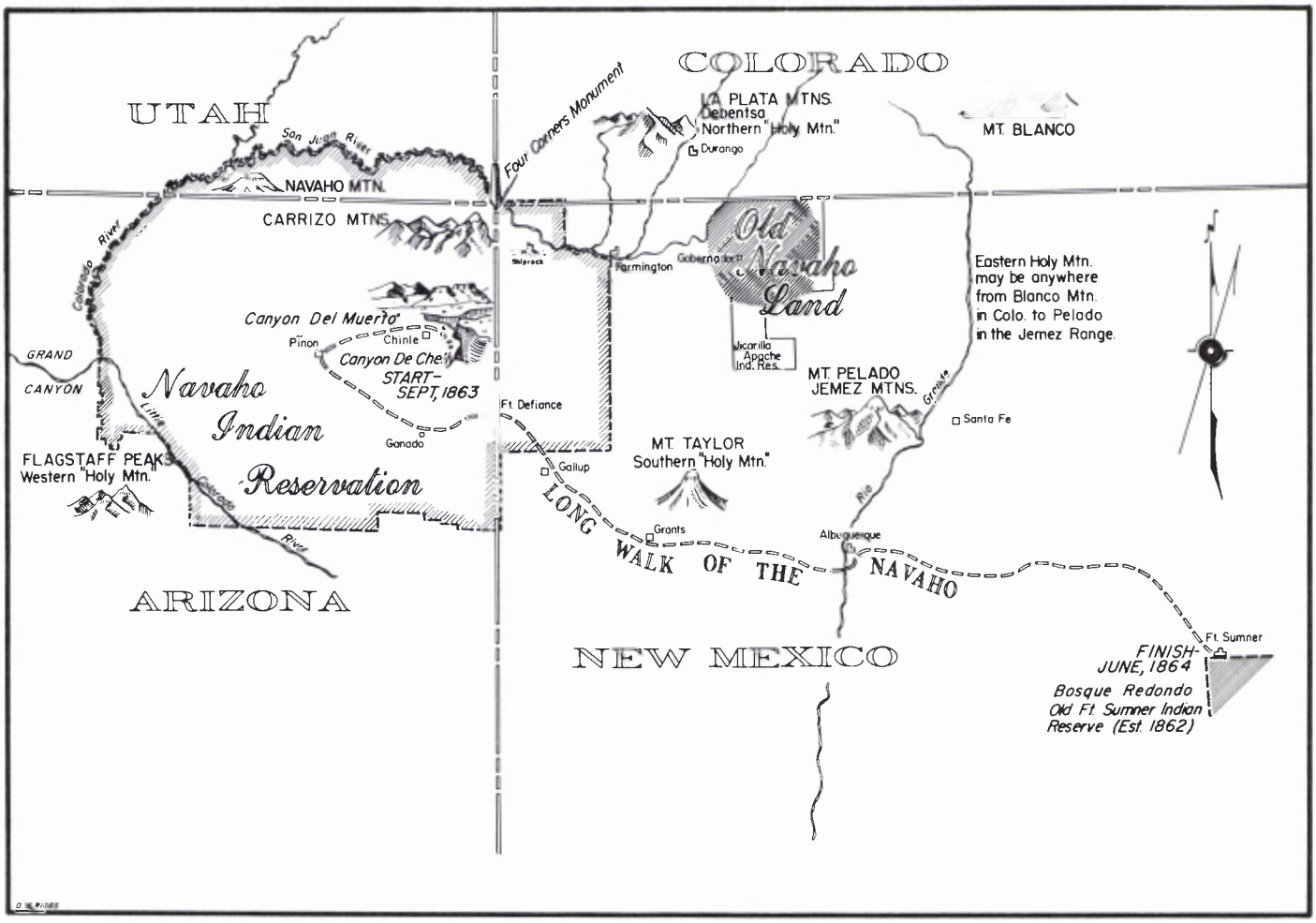
Local Navajo leaders or "headmen" led raids on Mexican farms, or organized fighting bands to ward off Mexican raiders. One such leader, Manuelito, was instrumental in organizing such a defense force that surprised and killed many Mexicans of a slave-raiding group in the Chuska Mountains, north of Tohatchi, in 1860.

During the early part of the Civil War, withdrawal of the "bluecoats" into the more active fronts of the east was imperative. Navajo raiders were virtually unrestricted to increase their depradations and atrocities on farms, ranches and settlements. Defeat of the Confederates by Union forces at Apache Canyon and Pigeon's Ranch, 20 miles southeast of Santa Fe, however, turned the tide of the War in the west and released reinforcements to once again curtail Navajo raids which had indeed gotten out of hand. The Navajo were probably more organized as a "military group" in the early days of the Civil War than at any other time in their existence.

Older Navajo headmen, in the few months that followed the War, had made treaty after treaty with the "bluecoats" only to have their authority displaced by restive young braves who were eager for blood. Raids continued despite all promises and treaties.

The "Long Walk"

Apparently the breaking point was reached in the fall of



Editor's Note: The spelling "Navaho" appears on this figure as it did in the original publication.

1863 when General James Carleton initiated what he called the reduction of the Navajo. Some 800 New Mexico volunteers under the command of Kit Carson invaded Navajo country and began a scorched-earth campaign, driving the captured Navajos to temporary internment at Ft. Defiance.

The "Long Walk" to Ft. Sumner, New Mexico—known to the Navajos as that journey to *hwelte*—began March 6, 1884, by a contingent of about 2400 captives. More were to follow later. 500 miles and 10 months later they reached Ft. Sumner and were placed in Bosque Redondo, the Ft. Sumner Indian Reserve established by President Abraham Lincoln in 1864. The present town of Ft. Sumner is several miles north of old Ft. Sumner. Disease, hunger, privation and the dejection of a once-proud people, greatly reduced the ranks of the confined Navajos. Four years later, on June 18, 1868, they were freed and began the long trek back to their beloved land.

Some Escaped the "Long Walk"

Despite the careful roundup by Kit Carson and his volunteers, many thousands of Navajos evaded capture by the volunteers to remain well hidden in the difficult terrain of the Colorado Plateau. Western Navajos descended into the deep recesses of Grand Canyon. Others fled further west to the Havasupai or dropped out of sight in the wild ravines along the Little Colorado River. Southern Navajos joined the Gila Apaches. Eastern Navajos fled to join the Jemez and other Pueblo tribes. Northern clans found hiding places in the deep red-walled canyons of the Navajo and Carrizo Mountain areas. The Alamocito Navajos who presently occupy an area in the wilds about 35 miles northwest of Magdalena, New Mexico, are the descendants of one of these groups that evaded the roundup.

Black Horse

One of the most colorful Navajos who evaded capture by Carson's volunteers was Black Horse, or so he was called by white men. *Bili iizhin*, or Black Horse, never liked white men. He placed them with the Mexicans who had killed his old grandfather and made slaves of his kinswomen. As a young brave he helped keep gold-hunters out of the Carrizo Mountains. Old-time Navajos believed that digging holes in any of the sacred mountains would

bring bad luck to the tribe. Many mountains in the land of the Navajo are considered sacred, but what are referred to by the Navajo as the four "Holy" mountains are found at the four points of the compass (refer to the accompanying map). When Black Horse and a number of other braves, together with their women and livestock, successfully eluded Carson, they quietly moved that winter into the Red Rock country that separates the Lukachukai and Carrizo mountains. In the summer they moved up into the deep forests of the Lukachukais.

Black Horse apparently was never subdued. Free to plunder while so many of his tribe were in confinement, he sometimes led his band across the San Juan River to steal horses from the Mormons or the Pahute Indians. When the "bluecoats" came down from Ft. Lewis, his trail faded into the deep canyons of the Red Rocks.

The high point in Black Horse's career occurred about 1894 when government agent Dana Shipley, called *Tlizi chon*, or Smelly Billy Goat by the Navajo, apparently cruelly forced Navajo children to attend school at Ft. Defiance. He was said to have whipped them, among other things, a form of punishment never meted out to Navajo children by the Navajo themselves. Black Horse was infuriated beyond control and called for a war council at the Cave in the Red Rocks. Navajo swarmed in from as far away as southerly Ganado. Smoke signals rose in spirals from nearby mountains as headmen gathered in the summer hogan of Black Horse and talked of war.

Arriving at Ft. Defiance, the sizable war party met with Smelly Goat, interpreter Chee Dodge, a missionary named Alfred Hardy and several Navajo policemen. An argument ensued—neither side giving ground. Smelly Goat declared he would not release the children, whereupon Black Horse screamed of his hatred of whites and how he would kill any of them that would venture into his Red Rock retreat. Everyone grew madder and talked so fast that even Chee Dodge could not interpret. The Navajos were by now drawing threateningly closer and suddenly grabbed Smelly Goat and pulled him outdoors yelling, "Kill Smelly Goat —kill all the white men! Don't leave one to tell the story!" A barrage of stones and sticks fell upon the agent as the blood-thirsty Navajos tried to beat him to death. In the thick of the melee, a heroic Navajo policeman pulled the badly beaten agent indoors, taking several severe head wounds in the rescue.

Finding their victim suddenly snatched from them, the war party held council and decided to set the roof on fire, which would drive the besieged out where they could readily dispose of them. Fortunately (as in the movies) a line of mounted "bluecoats" arrived on the scene, at which point Black Horse boldly told the captain of the plight of the children under Smelly Goat's care. Mediation of the dispute soon followed at a council meeting of Navajo headmen and army officers from Ft. Wingate. Smelly Goat was fired for abuse of Navajo children and was replaced temporarily by an army officer who proved capable and soon found favor with the Navajos.

Thus, Black Horse, in his hatred of white men, unwittingly had brought about great good for his people. His attack on Smelly Goat had ended a vicious practice. From that time began the slow development towards humane and intelligent education for Navajo children. Black Horse continued to live high in the red sandstone country until but a few years ago when he passed on—defiant to the end.

NAVAJO CULTURE

Intermontane and Plains culture were admixed with the Navajo culture during the latter's migration southward in pre-historic times. During historic times, major alterations in the Navajo way of life occurred between 1626 and 1846, when intensified contacts with the Pueblo Indians were made. After the Pueblo rebellion of 1680, Indians from Jemez and other pueblos took refuge for some years among the Navajo. Drought and famine drove many Hopis to live with the Navajo, especially in Canyon De Chelly. These Pueblo Indians taught the Navajo much, especially the arts of weaving and the making of painted pottery.

The Navajo as a whole are artists, not technicians. By contrast to many other Indian groups, the Navajo are singularly uninventive. While the Navajo surpassed the Pueblo as weavers, this superiority was gained not by technical advances but by the aesthetic imagination of the Navajo mind.

Navajo lineage is matrilineal; that is, where descent is traced through the mother. Matrilocal residence generally prevails even today; the pattern of residence with the wife's people. Women own most of the property, thereby placing them in a strategic position in family affairs.

The birth rate is high, 2.0 percent per year as compared to 0.9 percent for the entire United States. The Navajo's varied origins, so heterogeneous from both biological and cultural sources, have resulted in an outstanding manifestation of that phenomenon known to anthropologists as "hybrid vigor." They want to live. They want children, as many as they can possibly have.

Religion

Religion plays a tremendous part in the lives of the Navajo. Typical of most primitive tribes are the medicine men, superstitions, curing chants, taboos, ceremonial dances and the many other things connected with the unknown. Most familiar to the whites are the ceremonial dances, the Squaw Dance, Yeibichai and the Fire Dance. It is interesting to note that the falsetto singing by Navajo men at these ceremonies is rather rare in American Indian music.

Many other Navajo rites are unknown to outsiders. One of the rarest is the *Wolachii*, or Red Ant Chant, which even most Navajos have not witnessed. During the course of the ceremony the patient gulps down a hot basketful of squirming red ants. Amazingly, this rite has effective curing powers for erysipelas and like ailments. In checking, it was found that the bodies of ants contain formic acid, a substance originally introduced into medicine as a nerve and muscle tonic.

Death and everything connected with it are horrible to the Navajo. It is considered perilous to even look upon a

dead animal except the necessity of those killed for food. It has been said that when a group of Navajo horsemen are running down a coyote for the kill, they will try to fire simultaneously so that no one will know just who fired the fatal bullet. The human dead are buried as soon as possible and the greatest service a White can do for a Navajo is to bury his dead. The author knows of one case where a geologist was requested by a Navajo family to rebury a Navajo—not long dead—whose knees were seen sticking above the ground. He complied.

A ghost is the malignant part of the dead which returns to avenge some neglect or offense. They appear in the form of other humans, coyotes, owls, mice, whirlwinds, spots of fire or indefinite dark objects. Since ghosts appear only at night, adult Navajos dislike going about in the dark alone. The Navajo seem to have no belief in immortality. Their afterworld is a place like this earth, located below the surface and to the north.

Since the subject of Navajo culture is extremely complex, and even yet not fully understood by the most astute ethnologists, only a very few of the more interesting aspects have been presented herein.

THE NAVAJO—PRESENT AND FUTURE

Social and economic advancement of the Navajo was extremely slow before World War II. Since that time, however, tremendous changes have taken place which point to rapid development of the Navajo tribe as a functional unit, oblivious in large part to the "old" ways of Navajo life. True, poverty and disease are still with them for the large part. Adoption of the modern ways of living will not be an overnight affair. The question is, why haven't the Navajo adapted themselves to our way of life quicker than they have? The answer probably lies somewhere between the apathy of the American people as a whole and the possibilty that the Navajo themselves are not a "progressive" people. Some will take issue with this statement, but even the experts cannot agree on what makes a people progressive, and just what constitutes "progress."

At present, the effect of the oil and uranium industries upon the Navajo nation is one of decided improvement for many of its peoples. Under the able leadership of the present and past Chairmen, an improved Council is hard at work attempting to instigate a long range program of progress. Among the more important features of this program are:

Increased education
Inducement for self-employment
Soil conservation
Improved herds
Irrigation
Health and hospital facilities
Telephone and radio communication
Revolving loan fund
Improved roads

With only a small fraction of the 18,000,000 acres of tribal and allotted lands leased for oil and uranium exploration to date, the jolting influence of bonus and royalty millions has already awakened the Navajo to a future bright with hope and expectation.

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Photo Mosaic of Cottonwood Canyon area.