

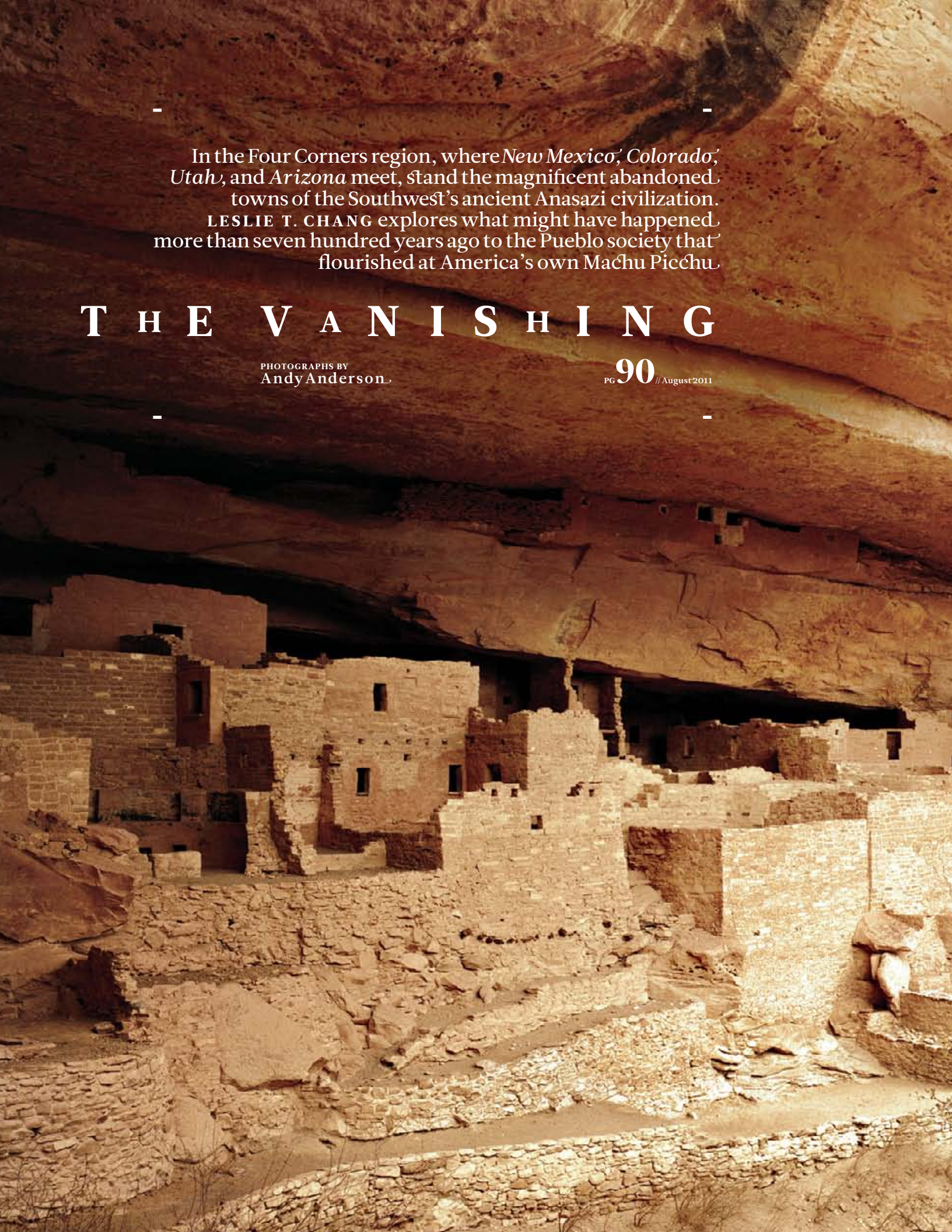
In the Four Corners region, where *New Mexico*, *Colorado*,
Utah, and *Arizona* meet, stand the magnificent abandoned
towns of the Southwest's ancient Anasazi civilization.

LESLIE T. CHANG explores what might have happened
more than seven hundred years ago to the Pueblo society that
flourished at America's own Machu Picchu.

T H E V A N I S H I N G

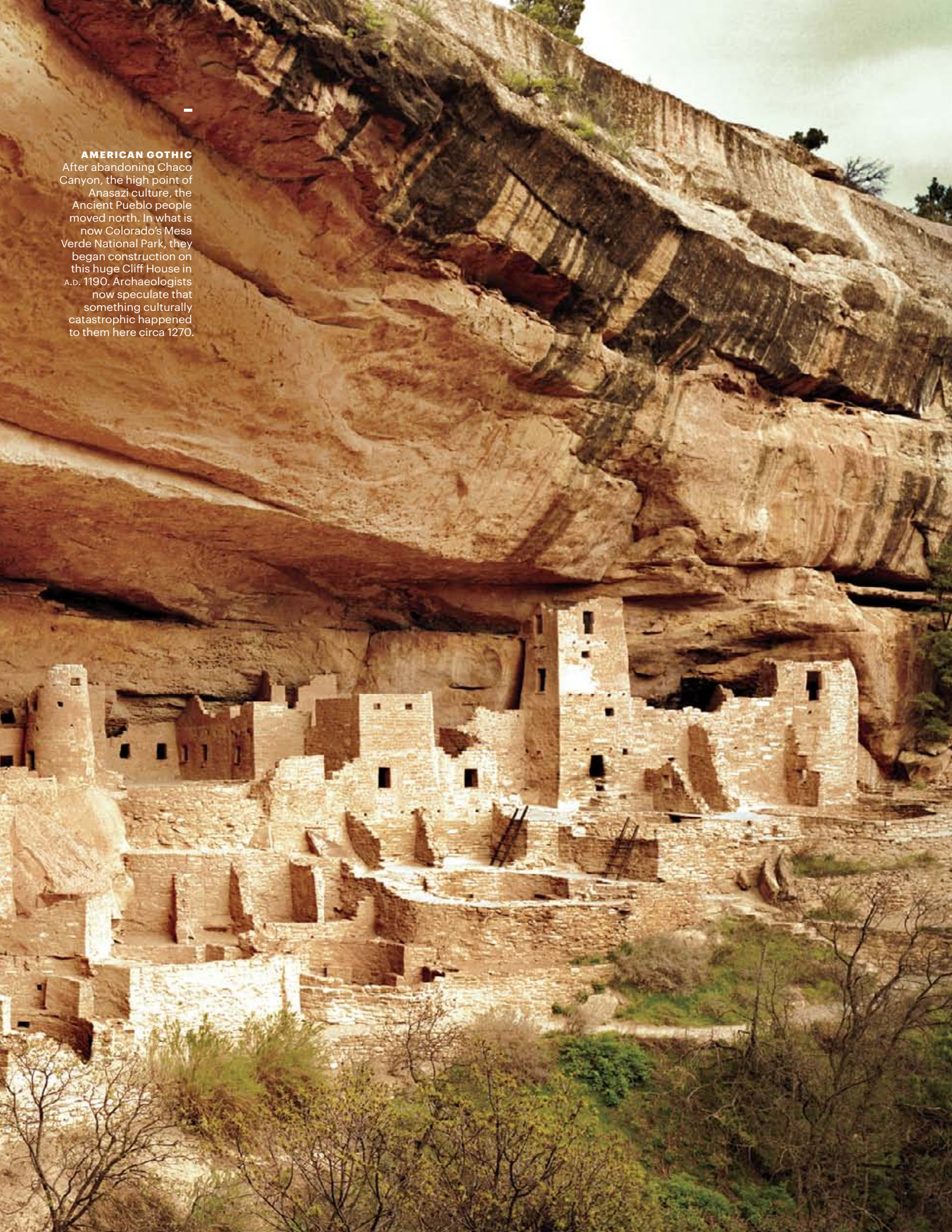
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Andy Anderson.


PG 90 // August 2011



AMERICAN GOTHIC

After abandoning Chaco Canyon, the high point of Anasazi culture, the Ancient Pueblo people moved north. In what is now Colorado's Mesa Verde National Park, they began construction on this huge Cliff House in A.D. 1190. Archaeologists now speculate that something culturally catastrophic happened to them here circa 1270.



The image shows the interior of a multi-story stone building, likely a Great House in Chaco Canyon. The walls are constructed from stacked, irregular sandstone blocks. A large, rectangular window is positioned high on the wall, looking out onto a bright, overexposed area. Below the window, there is a horizontal row of small, circular openings, possibly for ventilation or drainage. At the bottom center, there is a doorway leading to another room. The floor is made of dirt and small stones. The lighting is warm and directional, highlighting the texture of the stone.

Everything about Chaco civilization seems monumental. Roads thirty feet wide extended north and south, their ramps and stairways cut into sandstone cliffs. Construction obeyed the order of the cosmos

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE Scholars now think that the Great Houses of Chaco Canyon were designed to impress (here, the curving back wall of five-story Pueblo Bonito), and were inhabited by an elite that controlled access to the storage rooms within.



TANKERS AND EIGHTEEN-WHEELERS RUMBLE DAY and night through the streets of Bloomfield, New Mexico, bound for the country's second-largest natural-gas fields. Signs on Highway 550 offer a mix of service and salvation: "We Buy All Scrap Metal." "Jesus Christ Brings Freedom!" "Apache Nugget Casino, 51 Miles Straight Ahead." At the Best Western Hotel, paintings as earnest as Russian icons fill the lobby: workers in hard hats drilling on a platform, men unloading gas pipe off a truck. Everything feels at once new and dusty, a boomtown sprung up overnight that might be abandoned just as fast.

This newest part of America is also its oldest. In the eleventh century, a people known as the Anasazi dominated this high desert country, centered on a place called Chaco Canyon. They built in stone—monumental structures with hundreds of rooms, round subterranean chambers called kivas as beautiful and mysterious as crop circles seen from the sky. Their empire collapsed, but the Great Houses endured. Preserved by the arid climate, they have outlasted their creators by seven centuries.

Layer upon layer, the desert retains a record of all who have passed through: Anasazi, Spanish, Hopi, Navajo, us. To travel here is to explore the present and excavate the past, puzzling over how each layer relates to the last as an archaeologist might.

On a raw February morning, I drive into Chaco Canyon. The sky is the color of dull pewter, promising snow. A few miles before the park, a Native American man appears by the side of the road and waves at me. He is tall and bulky, with sloping shoulders and a handsome pockmarked face. Suddenly my car feels small.

"You need to help me jump-start my car," he says, directing me down a rutted turnoff whose surface is cloudy with ice. Alarming instructions follow. "We'll pick up my wife and dog on the way. Try to stay out of the ruts." A quarter of a mile down the road, his wife climbs in back with a miniature Doberman in her arms. The dog claws wildly at the upholstery.

The man's name is Victor Furr; his wife is Evangeline Wilson. She is matronly and shy, with a ruddy round face and thin gold-rimmed glasses. He does all the talking.

"Are you a rancher?" I ask him.

"A rancher?" He laughs. "You could say that. I think of myself more as an artist. I've built my house entirely of tires. I'll show you." Victor and his wife raise a few goats and sheep. Their car died three days ago, and they are running out of supplies.

They live in a two-room shack built of thin plywood sheets. Most of its surface is covered in old tires, like giant mutant barnacles out of a horror movie. Parked beside the house is a trail-

er that is also encrusted in tire. The house is dim and warm inside, with a wood-burning stove and a stained-glass crucifix that swings against the front door. "I've torn down and rebuilt this house four times because I couldn't get it right," Victor says.

I ask him how many tires he has.

"I've got a thousand here, and I want to have three thousand more," he says. "I went to a guy who runs a tire store in town. He has to pay eight dollars for every tire he leaves at the town dump. So I told him, you can give me a dollar for each tire as long as you find a way to get them out here."

"So you're making money off this," I say.

He smiles. "If you don't use your brain, you're not going to survive out here."

Parked in the mud in front of his house are a derelict Volvo, Oldsmobile, and Toyota—a triptych of futility. Victor hooks up jumper cables from my car to the Toyota. I pump the gas. The Toyota is silent.

"I have an idea," Victor says at last. "Why don't you push my car with yours? You just have to hit it lightly with your bumper. Once it gets moving, we can get it started."

I picture myself doing that. Then I imagine the look on my husband's face.

"I can't do that," I say. "I'm sorry. I'm a woman traveling on my own. I hope you can understand."

Victor says, a little glumly, that he does. He

NEOLITHIC KNOW-HOW The Great Kiva at Chetro Ketl, one of the Great Houses in Chaco Canyon. It was built between 1020 and 1050 by people who lacked metal tools, wheeled vehicles, and knowledge of writing.

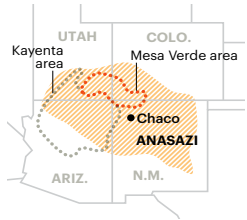


High Desert Drama

Ten centuries of civilization in the Four Corners region

No. 1

THE ANASAZI PERIOD
BEFORE A.D. 1400



900-1130

- Flourishing of Chaco civilization, whose communities covered an area the size of Ireland

1150

- Collapse at Chaco; people move to the uplands in all directions, where it's cooler and wetter

1275

- Collapse at Mesa Verde

1300

- Kayenta depopulated

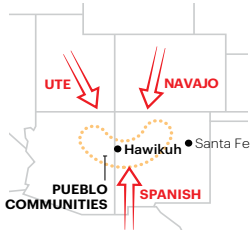
1275-1300

- Ancestral Pueblo people disperse to the south



No. 2

NEWCOMERS MOVE IN 1400 to 1700



1400s

- Ancestral Dine people, dubbed *Navajo* by the Spanish, come from the north; ancestral Ute come from the west

1540

- Spanish arrive at Hawikuh, a Zuni pueblo. At least 100 pueblos are known in the Southwest

1680

- Pueblo Uprising expels Spanish from New Mexico

1695

- Spanish retake Santa Fe and again establish Spanish rule



and his wife and their dog climb back into my car so I can give them a lift out to the road. I am wondering what he thinks about the Anasazi when he tells me that New Age visitors converged here on the eve of the millennium. “They said, ‘Tell me something spiritual, man!’ I said, ‘You want something spiritual? How about you open your Bible and read about Jesus Christ.’ They didn’t like that at all.”

I stop the car. Victor and Evangeline will walk out to the highway and get a ride into town. It’s a cold morning, and soon it will start to snow.

“Are you Navajo?” is the last thing I ask Victor.

“My wife is Navajo. My grandfather was the last chief of the Pawnee tribe,” he says, sitting taller in his seat. “He raised me from a baby.” He reaches over to shake my hand.

HERE’S HOW TO BUILD A WALL TO last a thousand years: Gather uniform boulders of dark-brown sandstone. Smash each one against a harder rock, then scrape or peck its surface until the face is flat and smooth. Place the sandstone blocks in even layers, sandwiching thousands of rock shards or bits of pottery between the rows to hold the stones in place. Mix a mortar of clay and water to seal the wall. When you are finished, paint the wall on both sides with a thick plaster to hide its beauty and symmetry for all time.

Everything about Chaco Canyon civilization seems monumental, and a little mysterious. Roads thirty feet wide extended north and south, their ramps and stairways cut into sandstone cliffs. Construction obeyed the order of the cosmos: The central wall of one building was aligned to cast no midday shadow, the doorway of another oriented to frame a rising moon. As many as 200,000 ponderosa pines were cut and carried

WRITING ON THE WALL

Petroglyphs in Mesa Verde National Park (beware the crowds of visitors here). Changing climate and escalating warfare may have led to the culture’s social breakdown.



from forests seventy miles away to be fashioned into roofs. Corn and cooking pots came as tribute from all over the Chaco world, a web of communities that covered an area the size of Ireland. All this elaborately wrought machinery came apart in the mid 1100s, when a prolonged drought undermined the authority of Chaco’s leaders and destroyed the faith that had built these citadels. Canyon residents’ methods of dry farming, which relied on channeling rainfall to the cornfields, proved devastating when precipitation failed. The Great Houses emptied out.

A U.S. military expedition passing through the deserted canyon in 1849 was puzzled by evidence of a civilization more advanced than any they had seen on the continent. They decided that the Great Houses had been palaces of the Aztecs; there was no other way to reconcile these buildings with the modest adobe houses of the area’s Pueblo Indians. “Our view of history is progressive: Once you become a state, you don’t stop being one; once you start farming, you don’t revert to hunting and gathering,” says Scott Ortman, an archaeologist and fellow at the Santa Fe Institute. “There is something peculiar in the ideology of Anglo-America that makes it hard to understand the history of the Southwest.”

Scholars have projected their own views onto the Anasazi from the start. The nineteenth-century anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan envisioned an egalitarian commune whose residents built the Great Houses on terms of absolute equality. Later scholars idealized the Pueblo Indians—and their Anasazi ancestors—as inhabitants of a primitive utopia. Yet the evidence shows that ancient Chaco was deeply stratified. Teams of laborers taking orders from above were surely required to haul timber, quarry sandstone, and construct the houses and roads that define Chaco. Great House residents were two inches taller than their farming neighbors, studies have shown, with lower rates of illness and infant mortality. In the oldest wing of Pueblo Bonito, archaeologists found the skeletons of two extended families buried with abundant jewelry and thousands of turquoise beads.

Recent scholarship has unearthed other surprises. Scant evidence of human habitation—few fire pits, a dearth of graves—suggests that the Great Houses had only a small number of elite residents, who controlled access to the many storage rooms within. Nor was the canyon a true trade center; while all manner of goods flowed in, almost nothing flowed back out. Chaco’s primary purpose was probably not utility but ritual, designed to awe the crowds of pilgrims who came from afar into offering tribute or labor. Their cer-

REMAINS OF A DAY

1. Chaco’s Pueblo Bonito (inhabited from A.D. 1000 to 1150) had nearly 700 rooms. “It’s relevant,” says an archaeologist, “for how we imagine the history of our species.” 2. Unlike the Great Houses of Chaco Canyon, the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde—here, Spruce Tree House—seem tucked in, defensive.



- 1.
- 2.



No. 3

U.S. RESERVATIONS 1700 to PRESENT



1846

- U.S. government takes Santa Fe

1861-1897

- Navajo, Ute, Zuni, and Hopi reservations established

1907

- President Theodore Roosevelt declares Chaco a national monument

1912

- Arizona and New Mexico become states



emonies likely centered on the Great Kivas—circular chambers sixty feet in diameter that were used for rituals and social gatherings. For all its material permanence, Chaco is an abstraction, an expression of a system of beliefs now lost to us.

Perhaps most remarkably, this civilization was built and sustained over generations by a Neolithic people who lacked metal tools, wheeled vehicles, and knowledge of writing. “The archaeological record of the Four Corners is the best known and most knowable record of a civilization that did not have a writing system,” says Ortman. “We can better understand early agricultural societies here than anywhere else. It’s relevant for how we imagine the history of our species.”

I SPEND THREE DAYS IN CHACO CANYON, trying to read a civilization through its stones. The curving back wall of Pueblo Bonito, which up close feels as immense as the Roman Colosseum, was built over three hundred years, judging from subtle shifts in the banding and the changing size of the chinking stones. The Anasazi were constant renovators, incorporating older buildings into newer constructions from one generation to the next. At a Great House called Chetro Ketl, excavators dug four and a half feet below the Great Kiva and found a floor and stonework walls—evidence of an even earlier kiva that had been built over. I feel a chill as I imagine chambers beneath my feet, underground hallways where the dead still wait.

Up at ground level, the walls tell of environmental decline. Brooding Pueblo Bonito, the color of wet tobacco, stands out against the paler cliff behind it; the Anasazi built on such a ruthless scale that they depleted the dark-brown sandstone in the canyon. The stonework is more jumbled in later walls, and many did not hold together well as water became too precious to use for mortar.

Shifts in ideology can be read in the rock. Chetro Ketl boasts an architectural feature unique in the Anasazi world: a colonnade with columns and windows in elegantly banded layers of sandstone. The walkway was built in the early twelfth century when Chaco was declining; soon afterward, its windows were filled in

I see slender imprints in the mortar—fingerprints, left by a person who worked here a thousand years ago. In the fading light, he feels as real as me

with bulky rocks. Archaeologists read this as a desperate attempt to reverse Chaco’s fortunes, a plea to the gods frozen in stone.

My enduring memory of Chaco Canyon is of emptiness. Alone, I wander the Great House labyrinths for hours, each room opening onto an identical one as in a nightmare of being lost. In an

PLACES & PRICES

Magical Mystery Tour

The Four Corners area of the Southwest is rich in not-to-be-missed ancient Pueblo sites. This itinerary traces the historical migration of the Anasazi people, from the height of their civilization at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, north into the Mesa Verde region of Colorado, where their culture flourished and collapsed, and southwest to Kayenta, Arizona, where a branch of the Anasazi lived in the late 13th century. The journey ends on the mesas of the Hopi, a contemporary Pueblo people descended from the region’s ancient inhabitants.

Spring, fall, and winter are good times to avoid the crowds. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is useful for navigating the unpaved road into Chaco Canyon, especially in winter. The drive from Chaco Canyon to Mesa Verde takes about four hours; and Kayenta to the Hopi Reservation, two and a half hours.

Prices quoted are for August 2011; tour prices are per person.

NEW MEXICO

Led by a professional archaeologist, the all-day tour of Chaco Canyon run by the **Salmon Ruins Mu-**

seum, in Bloomfield, reveals the history behind the breathtaking Great Houses. Custom tours are also available (505-632-2013; \$295). The impressive buildings of nearby **Aztec Ruins National Monument**, in Aztec, date to the early 12th century, when the civilization in Chaco Canyon was declining (505-334-6174).

A real find in a land of budget motels, the **Casa Blanca Inn** in Farmington has beautiful rooms around a garden courtyard (800-550-6503; doubles, \$135-\$175). Steaks, award-winning beers, and heavenly pecan pie are on the menu at the **Three Rivers Brewery**, in a 1912 building that was New Mexico’s oldest drugstore (101 E. Main St.; 505-324-2187; entrées, \$8-\$26).

Waterflow’s **Hogback Trading Company** sells coiled-willow baskets, cradleboards, and other items of cultural importance to the mostly Navajo clientele (3221 Hwy. 64; 505-598-5154).

For a scenic route, follow the La Plata Highway north out of Farmington into Mesa Verde country.

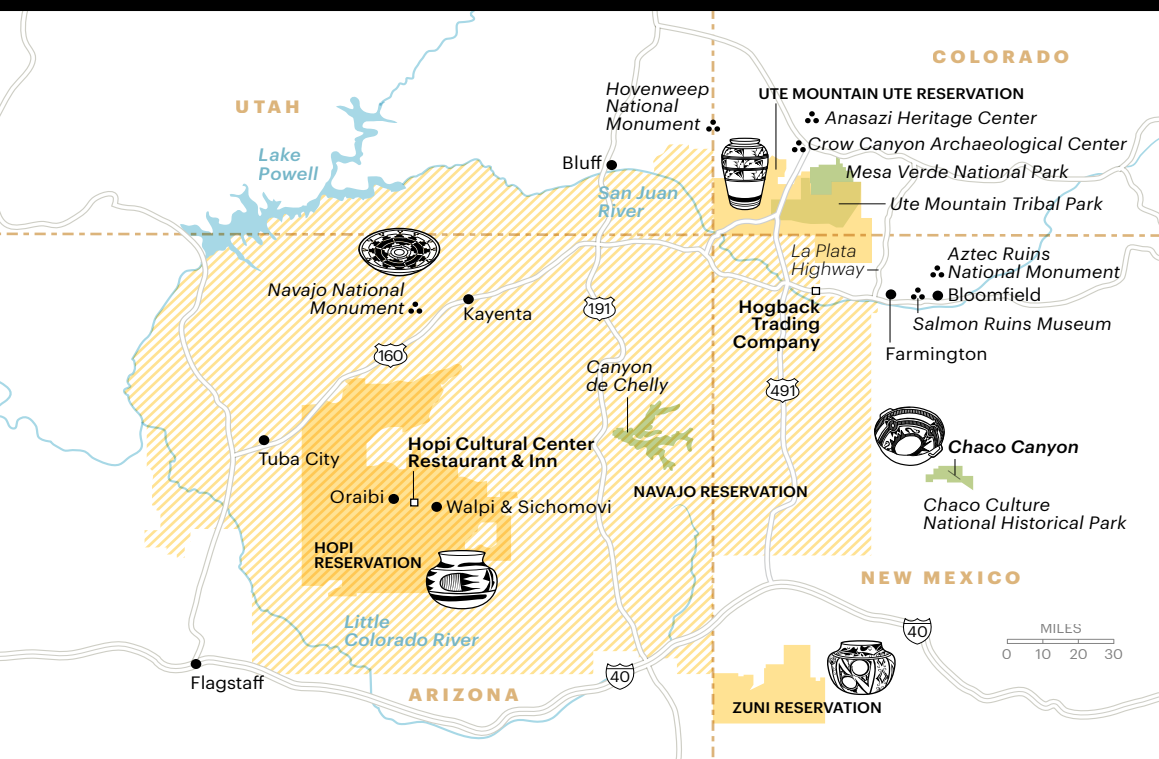
COLORADO

Take the full-day tour of **Ute Mountain Tribal Park**

inner room in Pueblo Bonito, I look up at the ceiling and see slender parallel imprints in the mortar—fingerprints, left by a person who worked here a thousand years ago. In the fading light of a winter afternoon, he feels as real as me.

FROM CHACO CANYON, I DRIVE NORTH on the La Plata Highway, climbing into a country of cattle ranches and Baptist churches, ponderosa forests and deep snows.

After Chaco’s collapse in the twelfth century, inhabitants moved to the cooler, wetter uplands. The focus of the Anasazi world shifted north. In the southwestern corner of Colorado emerged communities with distinctive Chacoan traits—sandstone masonry, circular kivas, black-on-white pottery. But the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde are nothing like the Great Houses: Their walls are tucked into massive sandstone over-



to see pristine ancient cliff dwellings in the company of a Ute guide. Private tours to more remote areas are also available. The visitors center is at the junction of highways 160 and 491 (800-847-5485; \$48).

In Cortez, the **Crow Canyon Archaeological Center** supports research and has lectures, seven-hour tours, and day- and weekend courses in

Southwestern prehistory for the general public (800-422-8975; \$55).

The exhibits at the **Anasazi Heritage Center**, in Dolores, are a good primer of the archaeological history of the region (970-882-4811).

UTAH

Just across the border into Utah, the massive stone towers at **Hovenweep National Monument** were among the

last Anasazi structures erected in the Four Corners area (970-562-4282).

The riverside town of Bluff makes a pleasant stopover as you leave Mesa Verde. Stay at the **Decker House Inn**, built by an early Mormon settler (435-672-2304; doubles, \$88-\$140), and don't miss the pioneer cemetery on a hill overlooking Bluff. The **Twin Rocks Trading Post** sells

unique jewelry, rugs, and unusual items like a \$4,000 rawhide leather saddle with intricate beadwork (913 E. Navajo Twins Dr.; 435-672-2341).

ARIZONA

Four-hour ranger-led hikes are the only way to view the stunning cliff dwellings of **Navajo National Monument**, near Kayenta. They were occupied by a branch of the Anasazi in the mid 13th

century (928-672-2700; hikes are free).

The **Hopi Cultural Center Restaurant & Inn**, on Second Mesa, is the most convenient lodging on the reservation. Inquire about social dances and ceremonies that are open to the public (928-734-2401; doubles, \$95-\$105; entrées, \$6-\$20). Bertram Tsavadawa of **Ancient Pathways** leads three-hour tours of Oraibi village and local sites (928-797-8145; \$75). Walking tours are also available in the villages of **Sichomovi** (928-737-2670; \$13) and **Walpi** (928-737-2262; \$13).

READING

David E. Stuart's *Anasazi America* (University of New Mexico Press, \$20) is a compelling account of the rise and fall of Chaco civilization that draws lessons for modern societies. For a collection of essays summing up current scholarship about Chaco Canyon, read *The Archaeology of Chaco Canyon*, edited by Stephen H. Lekson (School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, \$35). David Grant Noble's *Ancient Ruins of the Southwest* is an indispensable guide (Northland Publishing, \$16).

-L.T.C.

hangs, villages disappearing into the shadows of caves. These were the homes of people who had reason to be afraid.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, inhabitants had congregated in these cliff dwellings or in defensive walled villages north and west of Mesa Verde. Their architecture speaks of social stress. Tunnels and walls were built to close off certain areas, perhaps reflecting the desire to control access to springs. Many of the last villages in this area feature D-shaped buildings with twin kivas at their heart—miniatures of Pueblo Bonito, perhaps a last attempt to revive the glories of Chaco. In the 1270s, Mesa Verde society fell apart in traumatic fashion. Scholars believe that a combination of drought, changing climate patterns, and escalating warfare led to social breakdown. Many residents of nearby Sand Canyon and Castle Rock pueblos died in massacres; human remains

there show evidence of scalping and cannibalism. Survivors fled an area that had been continuously inhabited for seven hundred years. They left few traces of where they had gone.

"A LOT OF UTES WON'T COME INTO THIS canyon," says Zane Jacket, a guide to the cliff dwellings of Ute Mountain Tribal Park. "People believe that if you walk around a place where many people have been murdered, their souls will rise up and follow you."

"What about you?" I ask.

He shrugs and exhales a puff of Native-brand cigarette. "I've seen things, I've heard things, I've felt things. But I have a job to do."

In 1972, the Ute tribe set aside 125,000 acres of its reservation for a public park. Just south of Mesa Verde National Park, the Ute preserve sees fewer than one percent (*Continued on page 124*)

Anasazi

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 97

of the visitors that the national park has each year. While Mesa Verde can resemble a theme park, with tourists herded through restored ruins on a set schedule, in the Ute park a visitor can hire a native guide and spend the day exploring half a dozen pristine cliff houses, climbing over walls, peering into windows, smelling storage rooms, and fingering potsherds and eight-hundred-year-old corncobs. This is the anti-Disney experience, down to my twenty-four-year-old guide pressing a water bottle to his forehead to soothe a hangover.

“When I first started doing tours here, they didn’t give me any instructions,” says Zane, who has a broad face, sleek black hair tied in a long braid, and sleepy eyes with long lashes. “They told me, ‘Just go out and experience.’”

“How was it?” I ask.

“Pretty bad. I had to tell some lies. But I could tell from the looks on people’s faces that they didn’t believe me.”

We wind our way up from the canyon floor on a single-lane dirt road, an occasional stray cow galloping away from Zane’s truck in panic. The tops of the mesas are surprisingly green, with thickets of pinyon and juniper. We descend on foot into Lion Canyon. The trail spirals downward and wraps tightly against the sandstone cliff face, which is salmon pink

in the morning sun, turning to white, tan, and a rich honey color as the day goes on. We descend three wooden ladders and squeeze through a crevice between two rock faces. (“The other guide is so fat we have to push him through,” says Zane.) Across the canyon and through a screen of Douglas firs, we see a sight that has thrilled travelers for centuries: the ghostly outline of crenellated walls and towers, delicate as chess pieces, tucked into a cavelike opening eight hundred feet above the canyon floor.

Up close, Tree House is as ingenious as a jigsaw puzzle, with every piece cunningly fashioned to fit in its allotted space. A square three-story tower out of a medieval fairy tale guards the entrance. Granaries are tucked into ledges high above; a smooth table of rock shows hollowed-out indentations called metates, where Anasazi women ground their corn. Visitors have carved their signatures here: Al and Richard Wetherill, discoverers of many of the area’s cliff dwellings, and Baron Gustaf Nordenskiöld, who oversaw the first scientific excavations. I think about the fingerprints in the inner room of Chaco Canyon—we would all like to be remembered.

The Utes are the area’s most recent guardians. In the late nineteenth century, some Ute parents brought their children out to the ruins and hid them so that they wouldn’t be taken away to government-run boarding schools. The decision to open the park to visitors was fiercely opposed by many members of the tribe. Pro-

By Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Word Trips

ON THE SIDE

Each row in the grid contains a word from which one letter has been removed. (As clues, definitions of all 12 words are given below in random order.) When you know which letter has been deleted from somewhere within the word, write that letter in the adjacent blank. Read top to bottom, those letters spell an appropriate phrase—the final answer to the puzzle.

C	A	N	O	N	
T	A	M	E	S	
B	R	I	N	G	
C	A	T	E	R	
P	R	A	T	E	
B	R	I	D	E	
A	P	A	C	E	
C	A	S	E	S	
T	R	I	E	S	
P	I	N	T	A	
F	R	I	E	D	
B	O	O	E	D	

CLUES

1. Italian’s amico
2. Jura, Lucerne, or Bern
3. Strait named for a Dane
4. Hoister of the Jolly Roger
5. Golden Gate or Tappan Zee
6. Toy-filled crock in Mexico
7. River to the North Sea
8. All set, as travel reservations
9. Social classes of India
10. Geronimo’s people
11. Mountain lake of Oregon
12. Ancient Israelite twelvesome

MAY’S PUZZLE ANSWER: Go to page 122.

Enter online for a chance to win a spa weekend for two!

Enter your answer online at cntraveler.com/wordtrips/august. No purchase necessary. Full rules and entry form available online at this address. All correct answers will be included in a drawing for the annual prize: a spa resort weekend for two (approximate retail value, \$2,500). Entries must be received by 11:59 P.M. E.T. on August 31, 2011, when the contest ends. Contest open to legal residents of the United States and Canada (excluding Quebec) age 18 and older. Odds of winning depend on the number of correct entries received. Answer will be published in the November issue. Sponsored by Condé Nast Traveler, 4 Times Square, New York, New York 10036.

testers scratched out pictographs so they wouldn't be seen by outside eyes; they chiseled an Anasazi mural off a rock face and smashed it to pieces. "They didn't want this place to become another Mesa Verde," says Zane.

As we hike back to his truck he picks up the pace, like a horse that knows his feed is waiting back at the barn.

"So what's your favorite kind of alcohol?" he asks.

"Scotch."

"Rum's my drink—rum and Cokes. I drink Sailor Jerry's. You heard of it?"

"No."

"I used to drink Captain Morgan, but now that I work two jobs, I need something stronger.

"What about wine?" Zane persists. "What's the difference between red and white wine?"

"I guess white wine is sweeter."

"Yeah, I've never had wine. But I hear it gives you a different kind of buzz."

We discuss Metallica, the History Channel, the nuclear aspirations of North Korea, and why gay characters on television are frequently named Zane. He is astonished that I don't have a tattoo. His include a brand of his grandparents' ranch and an Indian coat of arms copied from a book cover. He rolls up his sleeve to show me a Chinese character inscribed on his forearm: 罪, *zui*.

"Do you know what it means?" I ask him.

"It means sin. Because I am a sinner."

At the visitors center, we shake hands and I pay him for the day's tour. I take a picture of Zane standing in front of his truck and showing off his Chinese tattoo. *Because I am a sinner.*

FOR A LONG TIME, the romantic appeal of Mesa Verde was inseparable from the mysterious vanishing of its residents. The ranching Wetherill brothers who discovered the site described clay pots and stone axes resting against walls as if their owners had just stepped out on an errand. Willa Cather, an early visitor, imagined that discovery in her novel *The Professor's House*: "I saw a little city of stone, asleep. It was as still as sculpture . . . looking down into the canyon with the calmness of eternity. . . . I knew at once that I had come upon the city of some extinct civilization, hidden away in this inaccessible mesa for centuries."

An entire cultural tradition was extinguished when Mesa Verde emptied out. Such innovations as canyon-rim villages, D-shaped buildings, south-facing kivas, pecked stone masonry, and multi-storied towers seemingly vanished from the earth. Archaeologists now speculate that the linked occupations of Chaco Canyon

Anasazi

and Mesa Verde ended so catastrophically that they shattered the cultural identity of those who once lived there. Many Pueblo mythologies speak of a place called White House, where the people spoke a common language and lived among the rain spirits. But their leaders became arrogant and believed that they could bring rain themselves. The spirits made war against the people and expelled them from that place.

But the Anasazi did not disappear. They fell back on a tradition of migration and agricultural adaptation that had always governed life in the Southwest, where the margin between survival and hunger can be a few inches of rain. People had initially migrated to Chaco Canyon in the early tenth century, drawn by the predictable summer rains. Later they moved to uplands like Mesa Verde to hunt game and plant corn. And when Mesa Verde imploded, they headed south again, scattering to towns across New Mexico and Arizona.

For decades, scholars did not study these migrations. The passage of a 1990 law required museums and agencies to work with the tribes to document and return human remains and artifacts. Scholars discovered that almost every Pueblo Indian tribe had

a migration story, many linked to iconic sites like Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde. Recent analyses of historical populations, burial remains, and linguistic patterns all support a southward migration. But in their new homes, the tribes organized along communal lines, to ensure that their leaders would never again enjoy the power of their Chacoan ancestors.

“Chaco Canyon proposed something in the year 900, and over the next four hundred years there was a conversation about it in the Southwest,” says the Santa Fe Institute’s Ortman. “Then in 1300 they decided, and the answer was no.”

Today the Pueblo Indians inhabit a string of settlements from the Rio Grande Valley near Santa Fe, westward through the pueblos of Laguna, Acoma, and Zuni to the Hopi mesas in Arizona. If you look at a map, these towns trace an arc that curves across the land—and their center lies in Chaco Canyon. But now I grasped the meaning of its emptiness. All over the Pueblo world, people have not forgotten that historical moment. But they are determined that it never happen again. That is why virtually no one lives in Chaco Canyon today.

THE LANDSCAPE IS SLOWLY leached of color as I head southwest from Mesa Verde. Rolling green hills turn the color of straw, and hay farms give way to cattle range. East of Tuba City, the land opens into a great windy emptiness. It feels like the end of the world, and this is where the Hopi made their home.

The Hopi are among the closest descendants of the people who once lived at Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde, although they reject the term *Anasazi*. In Navajo, *Anasazi* means “enemies from long ago”; the Hopi use *Hisatsinom*, which means “ancestral Hopi.” Many Hopi clans reconsecrated their religious ceremonies at Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde, and the ritual objects that they use today match those discovered at excavation sites. A survey of burial remains found that the Hopi and another tribe, the Zuni, have the strongest genetic links to the bejeweled family buried inside Pueblo Bonito.

I arrive on the reservation late in the afternoon. The villages are set on top of three narrow, fingerlike mesas—each a scattering of cinder block homes, trailers, and shacks facing every which way. Broken-



HOMELAND SECURITY The only access to Mesa Verde’s Square Tower House—occupied for seventy-five years in the thirteenth century—is via hand- and toe-holds notched in the rock.

down trucks squat in muddy yards; children play with feral-looking dogs. I feel my heart sink: So this is the outcome of a thousand years of civilization.

Over three days, I see how Hopi traditions are under attack and how the people are fighting back. I visit an ancient site of sandstone boulders covered in petroglyphs that the tribe is protecting against vandalism. I listen to a Hopi-language radio station, which teaches how to grow crops using traditional methods. In the nine-hundred-year-old village of Oraibi, I see stone houses with wooden ceiling beams arranged in the pattern of those found in Chaco’s Great Houses; the villagers have not installed electricity or plumbing so as not to disturb the kivas and shrines underground. I attend Hopi-language classes at the reservation high school and watch high-spirited seventh-graders play Hopi Jeopardy. “The students are aware of the covenant with our creator, of the necessity of carrying on the language,” says Anita Poleahla, the state’s first certified teacher of Hopi.

Most astonishingly, I learn that almost all Hopi adults, in addition to their regular jobs, still plant corn. They use traditional tools and rely on rainwater, as their ancestors did. Lee Lomayestewa, who drove me out to see the petroglyphs, tends six acres and another six at his mother’s place. Debra Onsa, who runs a Hopi-language summer camp in Flagstaff, grows ten acres of beans, melons, and corn. Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, the overscheduled director of the tribe’s Cultural Preservation Office, checks on his four acres of blue and white corn morning and evening. “We still plant by hand—we don’t irrigate,” he says. “That’s what has helped us maintain our spiritual strength.”

“What does that mean?” I ask.

“Because we depend on nature, we relate to the clouds, we relate to the rain.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDY ANDERSON

That's what the Hopi still have. It teaches us a lot. It shapes us."

My entire trip, I have been looking at the buildings that the Anasazi left behind. On the Hopi mesas, I suddenly see that buildings are beside the point. It's the beliefs of the people living inside that foster a culture and sustain it through almost overwhelming assault from the outside world. In material terms, the Hopi are not thriving: Sixty-one percent

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of households fall below the poverty line. But almost half of the tribe's members still live in the villages—tending the land, performing the ceremonies, honoring a spiritual covenant that remains real, even to schoolchildren.

On the drive home, my car breaks down along a stretch of highway on the Navajo reservation. I knock on the door of a trailer home to use the phone and end up sitting with a Navajo family for hours, waiting for help to arrive. The patriarch, a medicine man named Emerson, lost his job working security at a hospital because of eye trouble. His wife works at a nearby school. A grown daughter cares for a newborn baby, while three sons do odd jobs. Jasmine, a beautiful girl of about four, dances around, excited that I have appeared out of nowhere to pay attention to her.

For hours we sit in the stuffy room and watch a Tyler Perry comedy on television. As I get to know this family—big, handsome, proud, and idle—I think about the Hopi. There is a strength that comes from living in a place where your history is still alive. People move into the towns to make a living, but they lose something along the way. All that long afternoon, I sit in the living room of the Navajo family and think of the Hopi up on their mesas, harvesting their corn. □

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