

THE FOUR SACRED MOUNTAINS

While reading the Creation Myth, my thoughts traveled to the four sacred mountains bordering the Navaho World. It was then, I think, that it occurred to me to illustrate this beautiful story with photographs of these mountains from the air. To do this two flights were necessary, the first for ^{Sisnaajini} ~~Deis-na-jini~~, sacred mountain of the East, and a longer flight for the other three. ^{haps} ~~Perhaps~~ it is my love for landscape and geography that makes me want to fly. From the air one can see the great structures of the earth's surface, the different kinds of mountains, the sweep of contours, the age old erosions. In the air one becomes detached and the mind goes deep into the past, thinking of Time in Depth.

Chartering a small plane, my pilot lifted us from Santa Fe one morning with the picture of ~~Deis-na-jini~~ as our goal. As we circled to gain altitude, the form of the Sandia Mountain Fault, to the south of us, became more distinct in structure with its rising eastern slope, and the sheer, abrupt western face. In a cave high in this western wall. the earliest evidence of human life in this area has been found, remnants from migrants who lived here twenty thousand years ago, so old is the history of our Southwest. The present theory is that these ancient primitives came to North America from Mongolia via Behring Straight, moving slowly southward over a period of centuries.

We headed north following the Rio Grande, seeing clearly the canyons cut by the river through the volcanic slopes of the Pajarito Plateau. As we crossed into southern Colorado, the superb mountain mass of ^{Sisnaajini} ~~Deis-na-jini~~ (Mount Blanca) grew more impressive as we neared. Beneath us, the southern end of the San Luis Valley looked barren and uninhabited. Here once was an abundance of game- elk and antelope, deer and bison, and here the ancient Navaho came to hunt, seeing always

their sacred mountain before them. To the west, over the continental divide (from where we were flying,) the new Navaho Dam has now been completed at the confluence of the San Juan and Pine Rivers. Just above the dam site during the field seasons of 1959, 1960, and 1961, the salvage archaeology project of the Museum of New Mexico uncovered ^{more} ~~the first~~ comprehensive data of the early whereabouts of the Navaho and their Apache cousins. These recent unearthings have revealed simple, crude hogans (Navaho houses) dating from about the middle of the sixteenth century. This date, so much later than all other sources of Indian life in this region, seems to indicate that the Navaho may well have been the last migration to reach the Southwest. Whence they came has yet to be determined. The Spanish Conquistadores did not encounter the Navaho until 1626, nearly a century after Coronado's arrival. The ~~Benevides~~ ^{Apache} Chronicle of this date tells of the "Navaho de Apache" being farmers who lived in this old Navaholand area. It is assumed that they learned the rudiments of agriculture from the Pueblo People with whom they must have come in contact, for ^{many} the archaeologists found remnants of corn, squash, and bean seeds in these ^{err} ~~recent~~ excavations. ^{who have worked in this area have}

Thinking always of the Navaho, where they came from and how they traveled, one could see from the air that the distance from Old Navaholand to Dzis-na-jini is not great, and though there are mountains in between, there are passes through which travelers can find a way. Because of its severance by a wide low pass from the towering Sangre de Cristo Range to the north of it, Dzis-na-jini appears a mountain by itself and is a natural landmark-Dzis-na-jini, Navaho sacred mountain of the East.

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The first mention of the Navaho by the Spanish Conquistadores, was in a document by Fray Geronimo de Zarate Salmeron of 1626, who spoke of the "Apaches de Nabahu". This seems to be the name from which "Navaho" has been derived. However, the Spanish made other references to Apaches, and it is possible that at that time there were related groups speaking a similar language form which the present day Navaho and Apache tribes descended, for these are Athabascan speaking Indians, the only ones in this vicinity though there are others in Canada, the Northwest, California, and Oklahoma. It is assumed that these early Indian People in Old Navaholand learned the rudiments of agriculture from Pueblo People with whom they must have come in contact, for all the archaeologists who have worked in this area, found remnants of corn, squash and bean seeds in their excavations.

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