Uncorrected pages

Navaho homes, or hogans, are scattered far and wide over the reservation. Pasturage for sheep is the primary reason for this. Each family has grazing rights, and though there is no individual ownership of land as we know it, the individual's rights are strictly respected. No one encroaches on another's pasture; boundaries are indicated only by a small pile of stones, and boundary lines follow the contour of the land, for there are no stock fences. The same rights prevail for summer pasture in mountain areas where sheep are moved to higher elevations for fresh grass.

The hogan is the most practical building for life in the desert country. It heats with a minimum amount of fuel, it is cool in summer, and having no windows, it is a retreat from the strong winds of early spring. There is a quiet peace within the hogan, for the only light is from above, through the smoke hole in the roof. The form of the hogan stems from the Creation Story, for it was the Holy People who built the first one and set the pattern and the customs. Round, or nearly round in shape, and with a dome-like roof, the hogan always faces East, to the rising sun and the new day. When a new hogan is built, it is blessed by a medicine man if one is near, or by the head of the family. Corn pollen, symbol of fertility, is sprinkled on the logs or stone while the chant invokes peace and a happy life.

On entering a hogan, one must move from left to right, clockwise, circling the fire in the center of the room. On formal occasions the women sit on the north side of the hogan,

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Near the winter hogan there is always a summer shelter, for the Navaho live chiefly out-of-doors during the summer months. Built of upright poles, the shelter has a roof of fresh green boughs from cottonwood trees, or cedar or juniper. In areas where sheep are taken to the mountains for summer pasture, the winter hogan will be closed. As the Navaho lives with a minimum of possessions, there is little to move for life during the summer months. Cooking utensils, some extra clothing, wool for weaving, a few basic food supplies -- salt, sugar, coffee, flour, etc. The women set up their looms under a shelter, the children watch the flocks, the men haul water and wood and tend the small farms.

Water in most areas must be brought from wells or from the few rare springs which may be miles away. Barrels filled with water are hauled in wagons, sometimes for a distance of twenty miles. Today, the wagons are rapidly being replaced by pickup trucks, and where, long ago, the horse changed Navaho life, now the automobile is bringing another great change. Water is still scarce, though the Tribal Government, as well as the Indian Service, are developing new wells, bringing some relief from the long hauls that have been necessary for so long. Water is still conserved to the utmost. Once, when we were visiting under a summer shelter, our friend Paulina was making ready to wash a few dishes. I asked her if I might make a picture showing how the Navaho can wash dishes in a tea cup full of water. She took me quite literally and measuring out a cupful, proceeded to wash the few dishes. And they were

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areas, that a man must never speak to his mother-in-law. We spent several hours visiting this family. They were interested in us and in the things we observed. They looked at every picture in the book with the greatest of interest, pointing out differences in costume, ornaments, or possessions. We watched the making of kneel-down bread, green corn cut from the cob, put through a meat grinder, salted, packed into the green husks, and baked in an outdoor oven. It was very good. We have found when visiting families such as this, that a time comes when their courtesy to us has been fulfilled, their curiosity is satisfied, and normal work or occupation must be resumed. It is well to be sensitive to this approaching moment and to take one's leave before wearing out a welcome.

At Navaho Mountain we found a distinct difference in costume from other parts of the reservation. A broader collar on the women's blouses, different stitching, different use of silver buttons. Before the days of American Occupation, the old apparel consisted (for the women) of two hand-woven mantas secured at each shoulder and tied about the waist with a woven belt. When the women saw the pioneer white women's long cotton dresses of the 1870-1880 period, they copied them, though they quickly made adaptations to suit their own needs, eliminating the tight bodices and supplementing loose, comfortable blouses. At present there is a change from the cotton skirt, worn for so long a time, to one of rayon and the like, and shorter in length.

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everything, and through the years has taught many Navaho necessary construction and mechanical techniques. Built of stone, adobe bricks, occasionally of logs, the old trading posts consisted of one or more buildings, with sheep and horse corrals nearby. In addition to the store, there was usually a barn, a storehouse, sometimes a visitors' hogan for the use of Indians who lived far away. Around three walls of the post were shelves reaching to the ceiling, stocked with goods of all descriptions. In front of the shelves, and separated from them by a passageway, were high, wide counters, built so for protection as well as use. Beneath the counters were shelves for an assortment of articles, tools, and, in early days, a weapon or two in case of need. In the center of the room, or to one side, a large old-fashioned iron stove gave warmth in winter, and along the remaining wall were benches to accommodate the customers. Hanging from the ceiling were coils of rope, lanterns, buckets, bridles, harness, and other items of trade. For sixty years many trading posts were in isolated spots, far removed from wordly contact. There were few roads, usually bad ones, often impossible to travel at certain times of year. Horse or mule drawn wagons were the only means of carrying supplies or delivering goods for sale.

There are many legendary personalities among those early traders on the reservation: Keam, the Hubbells, the Wetherills, the Hyde brothers (who were the first to send hides to the eastern market), C. N. Cotton, who saw a potential market for rugs in the east, Sam Day, McSparron, Staples, the Newcombs,

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Probably the most famous trading post is the Hubbell Post at Ganado, Arizona. This is one of the exceptions where the land was homesteaded by Don Lorenzo Hubbell, for at that time, 1876, this land was not a part of the reservation. Don Lorenzo, the son of a Connecticut Yankee and a Spanish mother, purchased a store built six years previously at this site, in all probability the oldest post following the first at Fort Defiance. When Don Lorenzo bought this post, he also homesteaded a one hundred and sixty acre tract of land. He erected a number of fine substantial buildings during the course of his life. His post became a Mecca for anthropologists, archaeologists, writers, and a host of noted visitors, who were all received with the gracious hospitality of a Spanish Don. His family still maintains the post.

Here in Don Lorenzo's treasure room, is his son Roman Hubbell, discussing the merits of a rug just brought in to be sold. On the walls are many relics of the past, Kit Carson's gun scabbard, a fine old gun collection, water containers of many different types, a superb collection of Indian baskets from many tribes, archaeological specimens from nearby early Pueblo ruins. Piled high along another wall of the room are stacks of Navaho rugs all of top quality, for which the Hubbell Post was famous. "Cozy" McSparron, Hubbell, and later the Lippincotts at Wide Ruins, did much to restore the use of natural dyes in rug making. This is one of many instances where the traders' influence has counted most, and today certain areas of the reservation are noted for rugs of widely different types.

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Although the Indian of the Southwest has practiced irrigation since the twelfth century or before, wherever it was possible, all the techniques of modern productive farming are bringing about a cultural change in Navaho life. The change from subsistence to commercial productivity is great, but here, once more, the adaptability of the Navaho will serve him in good stead.

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NAVAHO LANDSCAPE

Navaholand abounds in interest and scenic beauty. Adjacent to the reservation are three National Parks and seven National Monuments. The Grand Canyon, Petrified Forest, and Mesa Verde National Parks are all in close proximity, as are the National Monuments of Walnut Canyon, Sunset Crater, and Wupatki to the west; El Morro (Inscription Rock) to the south; and Hovenweep and Aztec Ruins to the north. Within the reservation are four more, Rainbow Bridge, Canyon de Chelly, Chaco Canyon, and Navaho National Monuments, with the recent addition of the Navaho Tribal Park at Monument Valley, developed and operated by the tribe with uniformed personnel, graduates of the National Park Service Ranger Training School. Plans are under way for several more additions to the Tribal Park system.

Chaco Canyon and Navaho National Monuments contain great pre-historic ruins indicating the extensive population that existed here between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, and there are other sites ante-dating these. Chaco Canyon, with its great Pueblo Bonito and Chetro Ketl ruins, the earliest of the terraced structures, are the finest examples of the work of these prehistoric builders. Navaho National Monument contains the cliff dwelling called Beta-ta-kin, perhaps the most beautiful in the Southwest, as well as other ruins. Canyon de Chelly and its tributary, Canyon del Muerto, is the most spectacular Monument for scenic beauty. Here also is an area of

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of Pueblo dwellings in close proximity to those of Navaho origin, indicating an association of the two Indian cultures. As the Navaho moved westward in the early 1700s, they encountered the Hopi in Canyon de Chelly and at the villages farther west. Possibly the Navaho learned the art of weaving from some of the Pueblo groups with whom they came in contact, or perhaps they brought this knowledge with them when they came to the Southwest.

In his book Navaho Weaving, the noted authority Charles Avery Amsden gives a clear picture of this association between Pueblo and Navaho, and the development relating to weaving that followed. The Navaho, so quick to adapt a craft or technique from others, soon developed a style and character of their own in the creation of their products. One interesting difference between the two groups is that among the Pueblo Indians, it was, and still is, the men who weave, while among the Navaho it has always been the women, with a few rare exceptions. Navaho weavers commenced their weaving with wool, and they soon excelled in the craft, producing blankets of uniquely beautiful design and color. Navaho weavers have never changed in their use of their upright loom, nor have they made any change in its construction. The Spanish settlers in the Rio Grande Valley brought with them from Europe the knowledge of the treadle loom which they built of native wood, but the Navaho have steadfastly continued to use the upright aboriginal invention.

While the earliest examples of Navaho weaving have long since disappeared, there are early references to this craft

contained in letters from a number of Spanish writers. These remarks, together with their chronological dates, are interesting indeed. One early letter of 1780 says, "The Navahos, who although of Apache kinship, have a fixed home, sow, raise herds, and weave their blankets and clothes of wool ---." * The same Spaniard, Teodoro de Croix, fifteen years later refers to the Navaho, "The Navaho Nation has seven hundred families, more or less, with four or five persons to each one, in its five divisions of San Mateo, Zeolleta, Chuska, Chilli with one thousand men at arms; five hundred tame horses, six hundred mares with their corresponding stallions and young; seven hundred black ewes, forty cows with bulls and calves, all looked after with the greatest care and diligence for their increase..." Another writer of the same year, 1795, "...they work their wool with more delicacy and taste than the Spaniards. Men as well as women go decently clothed, and their captains are rarely without silver jewelry."** In 1799 an officer of the Spanish Royal Engineers wrote, "The Navahos have manufacture of serge blankets and other coarse cloths which more than suffice for the consumption of their own people, and they go to the Province of New Mexico with their surplus and there exchange their goods for such others as they have not, or for implements they need." In 1812 Pedro Pino, who went as a delegate to the Spanish Parliament, wrote of the Navaho, "Their woolen fabrics are the most valuable in our province and in Sonora and Chihuahua as well."***

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The picture evoked by these quotations shows that within the thirty-two years between 1780 and 1812, Navaho weavers, through their imagination, versatility and increasing skill, gained weaving supremacy in the Southwest.

A later picture is given by Charles Bent in 1846. "Navaho war and hunting parties might be found anywhere from the Coconini Plateau in Arizona to the buffalo plains of West Texas. They rarely ventured as far north as the Arkansas (river) and so were little seen at Bent's Fort. They did, however, go often to Taos to trade, many of their woven blankets finding their way into the Bent, St. Vrain and Company store, and ending up finally at the Fort as trade goods valued by the Plains Indians."

add reference

THE WEAVERS

The raising of sheep, the spinning of wool, the weaving of textiles, are age-old activities in most parts of the world where fabrics of great variety and use have been produced during many centuries. When the Spanish Conquistadores first came to the American Southwest in 1540, they brought with them the first sheep ever seen by the Indian inhabitants. To the surprise of the invaders they found cotton garments woven by Pueblo Indians, made on well-perfected looms of Indian origin. In later years archaeologists were to find scraps of woven cotton fabrics buried in prehistoric ruins whose dates go back to the fifth century A. D.

These first sheep brought by Coronado were used chiefly as food for his marching army, so that eventually they were consumed. Later, when Don Juan de Oñate came up the Rio Grande Valley to colonize New Mexico, he also brought sheep for domestic use. These animals were the common Spanish breed known as the churro. The Pueblo Indians soon learned the use of wool, and as production of sheep spread, the western Pueblo Indians of the Zuni and Hopi villages soon were weaving woolen garments.

At the time of the great rebellion of 1680 when all the Pueblo People united to drive the Spanish from their land, some groups, fearing the return of the Spanish soldiers, took refuge in Old Navaholand. In this region archaeologists, those intrepid investigators of ancient human habitation, found remains

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THE PROCESS

The wool

The sheep that have been produced by the Navaho People ever since 1869, are small, are resistant to the desert heat and sudden changes in weather, can survive cold winters, and can exist on a minimum of food and water. Consequently the fleeces from these sheep are light, but they are also comparatively free from grease. The staple of the wool is long and wavy, and particularly suited to Navaho methods of hand spinning.

Under the adverse conditions of raising sheep on most of the reservation, where the flocks range over great distances in order to find enough to eat, heavier breeds, like the Rambouillet have difficulty in surviving. The character of the wool from the old type Navaho sheep compared with that from these heavier breeds, has been one of the major factors in the controversy over introducing the newer strains. The crimpy wool from such breeds as the Rambouillet is very difficult to spin by hand, and where it has been used is apt to produce lumpy strands. The traders and the sheep and wool buyers wanted heavier meat-producing animals and heavier fleeces, but the Navaho women, who largely control the sheep. preferred their old stock which produces the best wool for hand spinning.

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time it has been transformed into fine rugs, brings a greater return than the wool that is sold. There are some areas on the reservation where the heavier breeds are being raised today, but little of this wool is used for weaving.

Many goats are also raised by the Navaho. They like the meat to eat just as well as mutton, and goat hair (mohair) is also used in weaving. More difficult to spin, it nevertheless produces fine yarn, and rugs made of mohair bring a premium.

In Santa Fe, in 1860, there were a number of German merchants who imported from Germany the fine vegetal-dyed Saxony yarn with intent to sell it to the weavers of the Rio Grande Valley. It is believed by some authorities that some of this wool reached Navaho weavers possibly while they were in exile at Fort Sumner. Having little or no wool of their own production, they may well have commenced using this soft three-ply yarn if it became available to them at that time.

There are in existence, mostly in museums, a number of extremely handsome and rare blankets woven by Navaho women between the years 1860-1880, all made of this fine Saxony yarn. Following this period, American-made Germantown yarn made its appearance at some of the trading posts on the reservation. Heavier than the Saxony yarn, four-ply instead of three, it was used to some extent during the decade that followed, and with this yarn, cotton warp was first used. The cost of the Germantown yarn was a deterrent to

time it has been transformed into fine rugs, brings a greater return than the wool that is sold. There are some areas on the reservation where the heavier breeds are being raised today, but little of this wool is used for weaving.

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the weavers, who in general, preferred to continue spinning their own wool, and in addition, the traders objected to the use of the cotton warp.

Shearing

In early times, sheep were shorn with the use of any piece of thin metal that could be honed to as sharp an edge as possible on a stone. But when metal shears were first brought to the trading posts, the Navaho were quick to use them. The shorn wool is sorted carefully, separating the longest hairs to use as warp, removing the shortest to be sold as wool, and saving the remainder for spinning weft threads. Burrs and other matter sticking to the wool are carefully removed.

Washing

Usually only greasy wool is washed. Using the pounded roots of the yucca plant for soap (still preferred by most weavers), and making a rich lather with it in a pan or a tub, the mixture is poured over the wool as it lies on a

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