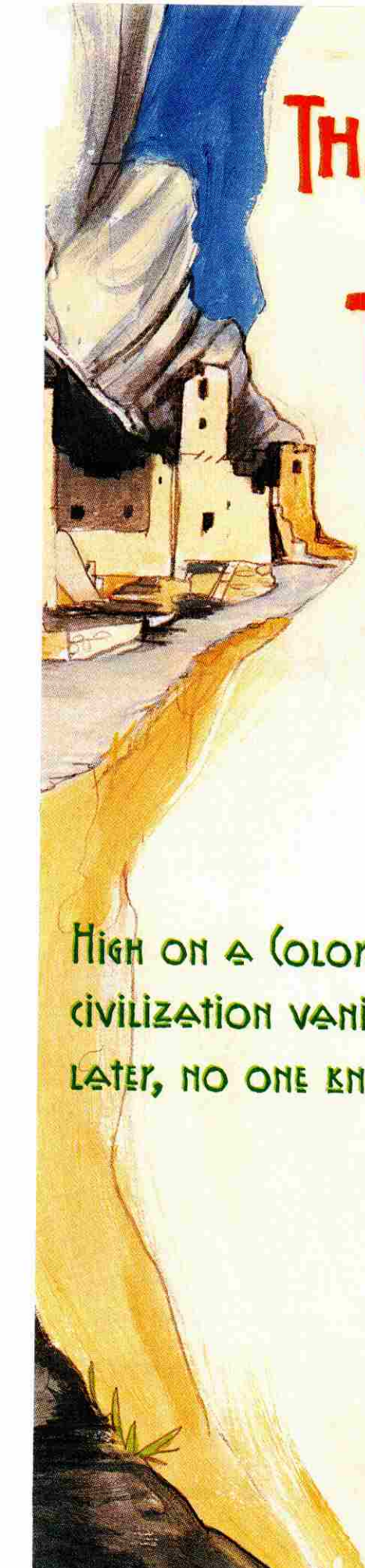


**By Karen Gibson
Illustrations by
Lynn Pauley**





THE MYSTERY OF THE ANASAZI

Nothing could have prepared Richard Wetherill for that wintry day in 1888 when he and his brother-in-law left home in search of some lost cattle. Clambering to the top of a large flat rock, he hoped to see the missing cows.

Instead, an amazing sight greeted him at the top of the mesa: Ancient buildings built into sandstone cliffs. Each held hundreds of windows and doorways, like primitive apartments.

High on a Colorado mesa, an entire civilization vanished. Even 700 years later, no one knows why.

Wetherill watched, expecting to see people—maybe the nearby Utes, or even the Hopi who normally lived farther south. But the only sounds came from him. His breathing sounded like the roar of a tornado. He felt as if his heartbeat echoed throughout the canyon.

Prehistoric Ghost Town

Without a ladder or even a pathway, Wetherill managed to scramble down to the deserted dwellings. Bowls and other black-on-white pottery were strewn about. Tightly woven baskets lay on their sides, spilling out dried food and beads. Tools such as stone axes looked ready for use. ►

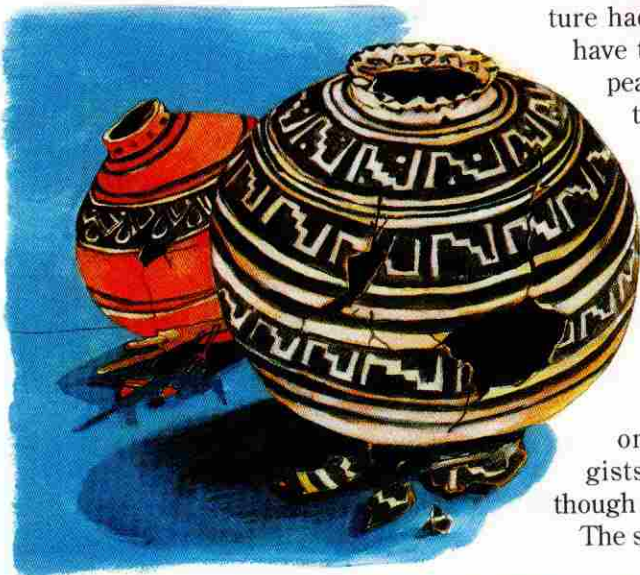
It was as if whoever had lived here—in Cliff Palace—had suddenly vanished.

Barely a Few Clues

They had.

From about the year 550 to 1300, Native Americans called Anasazi lived throughout the Four Corners area of the United States (where Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Colorado intersect). Cliff Palace in southwestern Colorado, once housed more than 200 Anasazi. It was built around 1200.

But by the 1300's, the entire cul-



EXPLORING CLIFF DWELLINGS

Modern Pueblo tribes are descended from the Anasazi. Their cliff dwellings are sacred to the Pueblo and should be treated with respect. Do not remove anything from the ruins or leave anything behind.

Visitors should not climb on walls. Some of the walls are weak and could cause injury.

Stay on designated trails. Much of the cliff dwellings are still uncharted territory and could be dangerous.

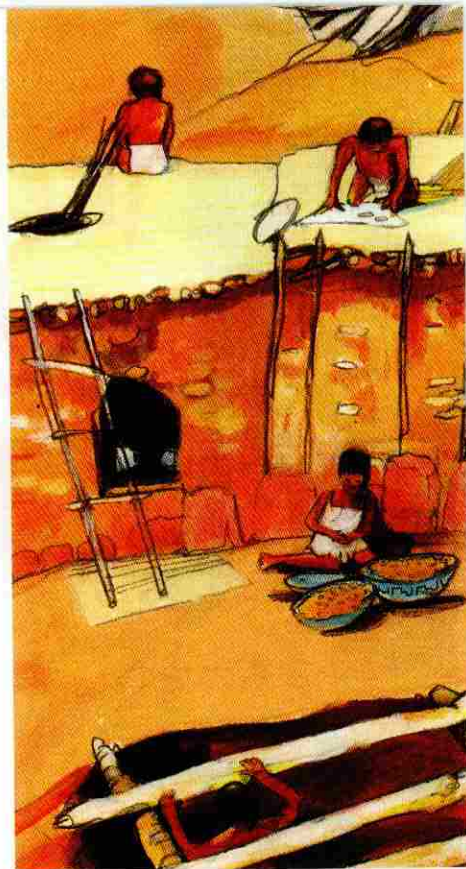
ture had vanished. Many theories have tried to explain their disappearance, from sickness to war to starvation.

A few petroglyphs, or cave writings, exist. (See "Stories in Stone" box.) But they don't explain much. There is no written account of the life of the Anasazi.

Excavations Begin

To uncover some history on the Anasazi, anthropologists and archeologists dug through the ancient Indians' trash.

The scientists learned the Anasazi



diet consisted of beans, squash, corn and nearby game. Broken pieces of pottery and tree rings from logs used as roofs help date the area. Skeletons of animals suggested dogs and turkeys were probably Anasazi pets.

Some objects excavated were not

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Cliff dwellings are protected by federal law. Many of the dwellings are national parks or monuments.

1 MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK is the best known of the Anasazi ruins.

WHERE: The park entrance is 36 miles west of Durango in southwestern Colorado.

WHEN: Open year round from 8 a.m. to sunset. Services (food, gasoline, lodging, campgrounds) are available from early spring through late fall. Roads are open in winter as weather permits.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Mesa Verde National Park, P.O. Box 8, Mesa Verde National Park, CO 81330; On the Internet: www.nps.gov/meve

2 CHACO CULTURE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK was once the center of the Anasazi culture. People lived in Great Houses on the mesas and in the canyon instead of cliff dwellings.

WHERE: Twenty-six miles south of Nageezi in northwestern New Mexico. Some of this is unpaved roads that may be impassable during bad weather. No services (gasoline, food, lodging) are available past Nageezi.

WHEN: Park is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. during summer and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the rest of the year, weather permitting.

WEATHER: Unpredictable weather is the key, even from one end of the

park to another. Rain, snow, and high winds are possible and may make some roads impassable. Temperatures can fluctuate over 60 degrees in a 24-hour period.

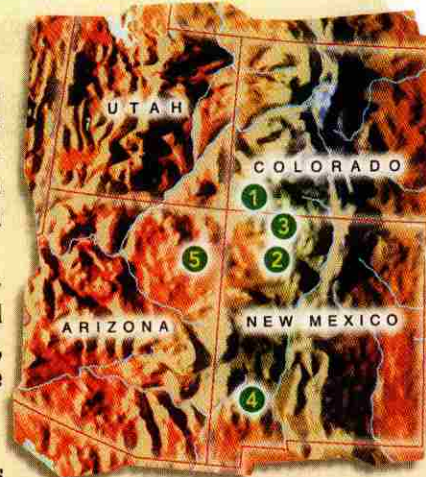
FOR MORE INFORMATION: Chaco Culture National Historical Park, P.O. Box 220, Nageezi, NM 87037; On the Internet: www.nps.gov/chcu

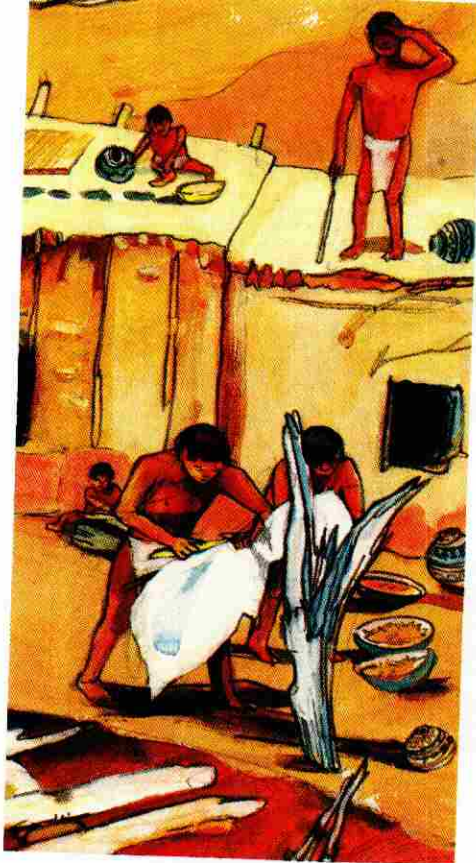
OTHER SITES Ruins are scattered throughout the Four Corners area where New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona and Utah meet, including:

3 Aztec Ruins National Monument, north of Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico.

4 Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, an example of the Mogollon Culture believed to be related to the Anasazi. Park is located 44 miles north of Silver City in southwestern New Mexico.

5 Canyon de Chelly National Monument, northeast Arizona on the Navajo Reservation.





YOU CAN DO IT:

Stories In Stone

Prehistoric people like the Anasazi left their stories in stone. These pictures carved onto rocks and cave walls are petroglyphs.

Many of the images are familiar to us, but others are mysterious, like a language we can't read or understand. Some may relate to hunting, others to sky watching, still others to spirits and magic.

Petroglyphs have been found in many states, especially throughout the Southwest. Some are thousands of years old. The people who made them used stone tools to peck the designs into rock varnish, a thin, dark film that builds up slowly on rocks in dry regions. Pecking off the dark varnish exposed the lighter colored rock beneath.

Make your own petroglyph with clay and a little imagination.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- two colors of low-fire ceramic clay: red and white or gray (available at most art-supply shops)
- rolling pin
- paintbrush
- toothpick
- an idea for your picture

WHAT YOU'LL DO:

STEP 1: Use the rolling pin to roll out a slab of the white (or gray) clay, $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick and 3 to 5 inches across.

STEP 2: Mix the red clay with water until it's the consistency of melted ice cream.

STEP 3: Use a paintbrush to coat one side of each white clay slab with the red clay. This coating simulates the layer of rock varnish found on desert rocks.

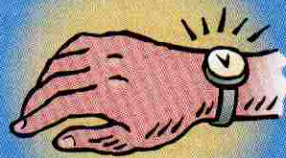
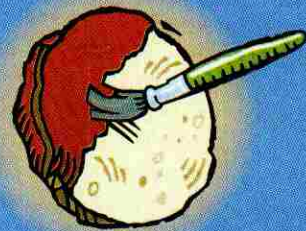
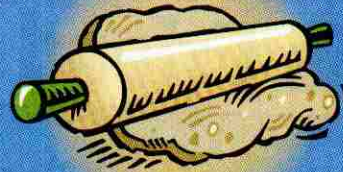
STEP 4: Let the clay slab dry for at least one hour.

STEP 5: When the slab is dry, use the toothpick to scrape a design into the surface, removing the red clay to expose the white clay underneath.

Press only hard enough to expose the white clay underneath. Tap the slab gently on the table now and then to remove the dust.

OPTIONAL: Fire the petroglyph in a kiln to make it harder and shinier.

—Bill Florence



native to the area. Turquoise came from faraway mines. Parrots or macaws of brilliant colors came from Mexico and Central America, as did copper bells. Seashells have even been uncovered, even though the nearest ocean is hundreds of miles away.

War or Peace

Still, the questions remain: Who were the Anasazi and where did they go? And, maybe most perplexing, why did they build homes into the side of a remote cliff?

To get to the cliff dwelling known as Balcony House, the Anasazi had to crawl on their stomachs through a 12-foot tunnel. Other cliff dwellings could only be reached by hand-and-toe trails in the cliffs.

All evidence points to the Anasazi as a peaceful people. No weapons have been found. But if an enemy didn't threaten the Anasazi, why did they make their homes so difficult to reach?

So, the ruins remain a place of mystery. Today, 700 years after the disappearance of the Anasazi, we have clues—just not many answers. Archeologists say we will never know the entire story.

They're not even sure if Richard Wetherill ever found his lost cows. ✦

Illustrations by Amy Bryant; photograph by John R. Huber

