I’ve roamed over Chacoan landscapes for forty years and I still haven’t figured ‘em out. The chapters in this volume go a long way toward that goal, with current and cutting-edge research. They point toward the future. My chapter looks to the past, a personal prehistory of Chacoan landscape studies. I mix useful (I hope) history with mythical (I fear) personal recollections. First-person accounts, eyewitness evidence: peace officers and trial lawyers will tell you that’s shaky stuff.

LANDSCAPES, CITYSCAPES: CHACO CANYON

When Lt. James H. Simpson rode through Chaco Canyon in 1849, he asked Native and Mexican guides for the name of each ruin; they provided names, in a variety of languages: Navajo, Pueblo, Spanish. Thus each ruin was marked as a separately named entity: Pueblo Bonito (which meant Pretty Town) was terminologically distinct from near-neighbor Chetro Ketl (which meant who-knows-what). And so has archaeology taken them: each a “site,” separate and entire.

The early history of archaeology in the canyon reflects that thinking, and also the outsized personalities of the early heroic archaeologists: Neil Judd and Edgar Hewett. Both were alpha males; they did not care
for each other and could not share the canyon. Hewett, of Santa Fe, wanted Chaco Canyon for the penurious Museum of New Mexico; Judd, however, had established a robust research program for the (then) prosperous National Geographic Society at Pueblo Bonito, Pueblo del Arroyo, Shabik’eschee, and several other sites. When Hewett finally got to dig his site, Chetro Ketl, his writings had little to say about Pueblo Bonito (save that it was smaller than Chetro Ketl). When Judd finally got to write up Pueblo Bonito (decades later), his writings had little to say about Chetro Ketl. And so on and so on, as the philosopher says.

These divisions were not (only) the result of egos; both Judd and Hewett genuinely considered their sites as distinct and separate villages—albeit surprisingly close neighbors. Proximity was not unprecedented: for example, First Mesa at Hopi consists of three contiguous villages, and only a local can tell where Hano ends and Sitsmovi starts. That situation at Hopi (and several other Pueblos) represented a defense against Conquistadors and unsettled times, now become habit and habitus. Prior to any colonial need for joining forces (i.e., in Pueblo III and Pueblo IV), large Pueblo villages were more often spaced at appropriate distance; or, in halcyon times (Pueblo II), broken into their constituent single-family homes, scattered like Kansas farmsteads across a peaceful landscape.

A half-dozen major “towns” and scores of smaller “villages”—in the terms of those times—jammed together in the unlikely setting of Chaco Canyon gives one pause. One who paused, productively, was Gordon Vivian. Gordon Vivian was a student of Edgar Hewett’s and the first NPS archaeologist at Chaco. He knew the canyon well and was impressed both by the density and variety of its many sites. Vivian and his colleague Tom Mathews (1965), along with dendrochronologist Bryant Bannister (1964), achieved the first real synthesis of Chaco Canyon prehistory; and it was . . . complicated.

Vivian defined three contemporary phases, all sharing the canyon: the Bonito and McElmo phases (two kinds of Great Houses, previously glossed as “towns”) and the lowly Hosta Butte phase (small sites, previously glossed as “villages”). These three, Vivian insisted, represented three different ethnicities sharing Chacoan space (expanding on Clyde Kluckhohn’s [1939] earlier interpretation). Again, there were Pueblo precedents: to return to First Mesa at Hopi, of the three coterminous villages, two are Hopi but one is a Tewa transplant, an in-migration. How Chaco’s complex situation arose, Vivian did not say; but in a too-often-overlooked comment on “cultural values” he predicted where Chaco was headed: not to the ethnographically documented Pueblos.
The developments in the Chaco [Canyon] in the 11th and the early part of the 12th century were not in the direct line of the Northern Pueblo continuum as it was exposed at the beginning of the historic period. The continuation of the directions taken by the Chaco group would have carried it even farther out of the stream of development that culminated in the Rio Grande [Pueblos] . . . The distinctive traits that we have so often emphasized . . . all imply a growing measure of specialization, social control, and interpueblo control. The elaboration of these institutions of ever-increasing control, specialization, and centralized authority was simply not compatible with the “slant” or “form” that directed the destiny of the Desert Culture–Basketmaker–Rio Grande [Pueblo] continuum . . . In this light then, the highest developments in the Chaco [Canyon] were cultural experiments or deviations that failed as they strayed from the main course of Northern Pueblo history. (Vivian and Mathews 1965:115)

A man ahead of his times, and a passage I never tire of quoting because no one else will. Now we need it more than ever (Lekson 2018 contra Ware 2014).

Vivian had rightly recognized (some of) the different kinds of buildings in Chaco Canyon and had offered an explanation congruent with the University of New Mexico’s party line (see Vivian 1989). More than that, Vivian recognized that the various building types at Chaco were elements of a larger social and architectural entity he called “the Contemporaneous Community,” which he estimated at about 4,400 persons (Vivian and Mathews 1965:108). This was a new way of looking at Chaco: not as a valley with a scattering of independent farming villages but as a large ensemble. The beginnings of a canyon-scale landscape approach . . .

There things stood for a decade: the town–village terms continued in the work of Gordon’s son Gwinn Vivian (e.g., 1970) who further developed the multiethnic model, but resolutely as “an egalitarian enterprise” (Vivian 1989, 1990). The early 1970s, however, saw the rise of putative “managerial elites” elsewhere in the ancient Southwest, and those short-lived enthusiasms spilled over into Chaco: Paul Grebinger (1973) proposed that the two kinds of buildings (towns and villages) housed two different kinds of peoples: an elite class (my word, not his) in the Great House towns and nonelites in the smaller villages. Here again, the canyon was not simply congeries of farming settlements, but an integrated whole. Notions of elites and so forth frothed about for another decade or two (e.g., Schelberg 1984; Sebastian 1992) before disappearing beneath the awful weight of ritual and Pueblo ethnology (Lekson 2018), but that argument is not central to our theme, which is the recognition of the canyon as a whole as a land- or cityscape, rather than a random collection of sites.
Not random at all! The next insight came from an unlikely source, a chapter in a stridently scientific New Archaeology collection of papers: “Paleopsychology Today: Ideational Systems and Human Adaptations in Prehistory” by John M. Fritz (1978). Fritz, unfashionably for those times, favored the epiphenomenal fluff of ideology over good solid scientific adaptation. His case study was Chaco Canyon, which he proposed was laid out symmetrically around an ideological north–south axis running from Pueblo Alto on the north rim of the canyon to Tsin Kletsin on the south. This indeed was a new way of looking at Chaco, verging on fringe: ley lines and all that. Fritz was a decade ahead of Maya cosmogram cities (e.g., Ashmore 1991). And he was talking about Chaco, for heaven’s sake: Pueblo farming villages, not temples or palaces in a grand Mayan city.

Yet there was something undeniably attractive about Fritz’s reading of Chaco’s landscape, edging toward cityscape. It made sense. (And it has been greatly developed by Lekson 1999b and Van Dyke 2007.) I regret to say I did not cite Fritz in Great Pueblo Architecture, but I surely built on Gordon Vivian’s and John Fritz’s insight that Chaco Canyon was an entity, not a collection of sites (Lekson 1984a:272).

I added a few new wrinkles: modest monumentality (borrowing David Wilcox’s words); regional centrality; and—most important—a class-stratified society, marked by Great Houses and small houses: “Stratification in housing presumably reflected social distinctions in the population”—cautious and careful, but there it was: class-stratified society (Lekson 1984a:271). I did not yet dare utter the word “city,” but urbanism hovered overhead. In a shorter, more daring (i.e., less heavily censored) version: “It would not be unreasonable to see this complexity, when coupled with Chaco’s regional centrality and relatively high population density, as nearly urban. By the middle 1100s, Chaco was much closer to being a city than simply a canyon full of independent agricultural towns and villages” (Lekson 1984b:71). Thereafter, I escaped Downtown Chaco, its cares and its woes, for a decade or so. But when I was sucked back into Chaco’s black hole (e.g., Lekson et al. 2006:101–116), I called a spade a spade, and a city a city: Chaco Canyon was not a landscape; Chaco Canyon was a cityscape.

Through the 1990s the central canyon became the focus of the formidable archaeological talents of Messrs. John Stein, Richard Friedman, Taft Blackhorse, and Richard Loose (2007), who saw monuments where others saw mere mounds. Ringing in the new millennium, fresh theoretical insights were brought to Chaco by Ruth Van Dyke (2007), whose Chaco Experience presented a phenomenological analysis of Chaco.
The existence of Chaco-outside-Chaco was recognized in the early twentieth century at sites such as Lowry Ruin (190 km from Pueblo Bonito); Chimney Rock (140 km from Pueblo Bonito); Village of the Great Kivas (120 km from Pueblo Bonito); and Aztec Ruins (85 km from Pueblo Bonito). By the third quarter of the century, Chaco-outside-Chaco faded from general interest, but not from the specific enthusiasm of archaeologists such as Gwinn Vivian.

I got my start in Chacoan archaeology at Salmon Ruins (Reed 2006; 70 km from Pueblo Bonito), where Cynthia Irwin-Williams had been lured away from hunter-gatherers to tackle a major Chaco Great House in a field project that ran from 1970 to 1978. Cynthia’s project was a lively endeavor. I joined up in 1974 and survived until 1976, when—a husk of my former self, liver shot to Hell (but I never inhaled!)—I moved on to the sober, sedate NPS Chaco Center.

Salmon Ruins was a major Great House, as big as the major Chaco Canyon sites but surprisingly unknown to science. Were there more of those Big Boys out there, waiting to be discovered? (No, as it turns out, but we’ll get back to that.) At the Chaco Center, as soon as it was decently possible (spring 1976, as I recall), I approached the director Jim Judge with a proposal to go find more Chaco sites. He informed me that only a week before, Bob Powers had made the very same suggestion. That was propitious: I thought we would find more Salmon Ruins, but Bob was a student of Gwinn Vivian and he knew that our targets would be smaller, more modest: Chimney Rocks and Lowrys. So Bob, William Gillespie, and I mounted a short survey (a month or so) in fall 1976, to document fully three such “outliers” (Bis sa’ani, Peach Springs, and Pierre’s); to briefly visit more; and to document as many candidates as the literature revealed (Powers et al. 1983). The timing, again, was propitious: on the heels of the NPS survey, another survey of “Anasazi Communities of the San Juan Basin” was under way (1977–1979), led by Michael Marshall and John Stein. That survey was the brainchild of Richard Loose, then an archaeologist for the Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM). The company thought it might burn coal from deposits in the San Juan Basin, and Loose persuaded PNM and the Historic Preservation Bureau in Santa Fe to jointly sponsor a proactive survey of the major sites in the coal area and beyond (Marshall, Stein, Loose and Novotny 1979). There was considerable and convivial interaction between the two surveys, and we visited the PNM crew at several of their sites and vice versa. Michael Marshall went on to work with the Solstice Project (among many other ventures). John Stein, too, continued to collect “outliers”

I’ve contributed (a bit) to the “outlier” files in this brave new millennium, but I’d like to revisit the thrilling days of yesteryear and the initial challenges of convincing archaeologists that “outliers” were (1) real and (2) in their backyards. The initial (1977–1979) “outlier hunts” were focused on the San Juan Basin of northwestern New Mexico, but soon spread into Colorado, Utah, and Arizona, and south in New Mexico well beyond the San Juan Basin, to (at least) the Mogollon Highlands—an area to which I will briefly return.

There was pushback, as they say. Much of that resistance was simply turf: Chaco in the 1970s and 1980s was in the news, and archaeologists outside the media circus (and outside northwest New Mexico) wanted none of it. A University of Colorado crew at the huge Mesa Verde site of Yellow Jacket produced a bumper sticker saying “Chaco is a Dairy Queen Outlier.” David Breternitz, also of the University of Colorado, stood in front of Far View House and declared that he knew of no Chaco “outliers” on Mesa Verde. (There’s a sizable Great House at Yellow Jacket, and Far View IS a Great House.) The Colorado reactions were typical of the times: no Chaco at Mesa Verde, no Chaco in Utah, no Chaco in Arizona. Indignant locals demanded data: what were the criteria, what were lists of traits, what gave Chaco the right to intrude on their space? In their backyards? This was difficult, because we “outlier” hunters had more or less abandoned lists of criteria. Outlier Great Houses were, as John Stein said, an “a-ha” experience: if you found yourself climbing up (and up, and up) a Pueblo II ruin, that was a pretty good clue. “Outliers” stick up. I eventually codified this as “big bump surrounded by small bumps” (Lekson 1991)—not my most precise work, I admit. Once verticality had been established, more often than not most of the desired criteria appeared: wide walls, big rooms, multiple stories, elevated “kivas,” Great Kivas, road segments, earthworks, and so forth. It was a real struggle to get local archaeologists to think globally or even beyond their green valleys. More than once I was tempted to organize a tour, throwing the harshest critics into (not under) a bus and visiting “outlier” Great Houses from Bluff, Utah, to Grants, New Mexico, and from Polaca Wash, Arizona, to Guadalupe, New Mexico. Let them see for themselves; let them “a-ha.”

In the end, objections fell before the weight of data: more and more so-called outliers piled up, and more and more people recognized that their little fiefdom was part of a larger world. Outliers were real and really were in (almost) everyone’s backyards. Not in the Rio Grande, nor west past Hopi.
And not in the far south. There was not a lot of work going on in west-central New Mexico at that time, so no one could object to outliers around Quemado and Magdalena. And there were very convincing outliers near those peculiar towns, with all the necessary attributes. And further south? That’s Mimbres country, and Mimbres archaeologists are famously anti-Anasazi. Which is a shame, because out on the edges, like Mimbres, Chaco archaeology could perhaps address one of its recurrent problems: export versus emulation.

At one point, near century’s end, there was much discussion of export versus emulation of “outlier” Great Houses. Export = came from Chaco; emulation = copied from Chaco. I was never enthusiastic about this question; it seemed like a last refuge of the NIMBY, as if “emulating” a Chacoan Great House somehow made matters more comfortably local. But how would we tell a Great House built by local labor with local materials at the hand-waving direction of someone from Chaco? And there were indications that form mattered more than fabric, even in Chaco Canyon. The range of wall types found in Pueblo Bonito was nearly as great, or broad, or varied as the range of wall types seen in “outliers.” In my mind none of that mattered much: either way—export or emulation—the area in question had come into Chaco’s sphere. But for many people, export versus emulation was an issue. I suggested ways of thinking about the problem that turned the question on its head, or rather inside-out. For a particular “outlier” Great House, the identification had already been made that the darn thing was, in one way or another, Chacoan. Fussing about it would quickly degenerate into an empty game of I-am or I-am-not-convinced. Why not jump way outside Chaco’s region, and work back in until we hit things not identified as outliers but that indeed went bump in the night (as it were): big bumps that might perhaps . . . and so forth?

Looking in from the north, through Fremont, for example: many of the big Fremont communities along the west slopes of the Wasatch Range had conspicuously big bumps among a cluster of smaller bumps (Lekson 2013). They were built of adobe, but when you started looking at them: wider walls, bigger rooms, more stuff, and so on. Now those Fremont big bumps might be a good place to start thinking about emulations! So too looking in from the south, through Mimbres: big bumps (with wide walls, big rooms, more stuff, “roads,” etc.) among the small bumps of Mimbres sites on the Upper Gila (and maybe even on the mighty Mimbres itself) might represent some sort of local version of Great House (Lekson 1999b). The pundits laughed: I have a photo, somewhere, of a gang of Mimbres archaeologists posed atop a candidate Upper Gila big bump: all thumbs point down. But I still think that Mimbres, and Fremont, and other societies around the perimeter of Chaco’s world would be
a good place to start thinking about emulation—if, for some reason, you want to think about emulation.

Chaco’s region is pretty well fixed now, four decades after the great Outlier Hunts. North, west, and east boundaries seem solid; only the south is soft. And, strangely, the south is where the least work has been done, or is being done. As summarized in Duff and Lekson (2006), Keith Kintigh’s and Andrew Duff’s work south of Zuni and Ruth Van Dyke’s and John Kantner’s work around Grants has been admirable but far less cumulative research than we’ve poured into northern “outliers” from Chimney Rock to Bluff with, for example, Crow Canyon’s current Northern Chaco Outliers project being only the most recent of many northern Chaco projects. Compared to the north, Chaco’s south is markedly underresearched. And, of importance, Chaco “outliers” extend far south beyond Zuni and Grants. How far? A matter for debate. . . . shall we go down that road?

REGION: ROADS

Special agent Stephen H. Holsinger, investigating Richard Wetherill’s Chaco Canyon excavations at the instigation of Edgar Hewett, may have written the first Chaco report of “roads” (Holsinger 1901). Hewett, through Holsinger, shut down Wetherill’s (and George Pepper’s) work at Pueblo Bonito. Two decades later, before Hewett could establish a research presence in the canyon, Neil Judd arrived with his National Geographic Society and Smithsonian Institution expedition, and worked in the canyon from 1920 to 1927. Among his other researches, Judd was intrigued by “roads.” He interviewed several Navajo elders who knew them well—though they told Judd the “roads” had become less visible over the years (see Frazier 2005:110–112). (Chaco’s archaeology has diminished markedly in the last 100 years, from grazing and casual vandalism: walls fell, roads faded, sherds vanished; what must Chaco have looked like, at 1500? At 1800?)

Knowledge of the “roads” never entirely vanished—Judd eventually published his reports—but outside interest waned (Frazier 2005:105–127). “Roads” intrigued Park archaeologist Gordon Vivian, who passed his interests on to his son, Gwinn Vivian; Gwinn Vivian, in the early 1970s heyday of Karl Wittfogel’s “hydraulic civilizations,” challenged the identification of “roads” and suggested instead that they were canals (Vivian 1970). He quickly realized he was wrong, and by the mid-1970s he and his associates fostered a renaissance in “road” studies (Vivian 1997a, 1997b). “Roads” engaged first the National Park Service (NPS) Division of Remote Sensing; and then
the “outlier hunts” of the early 1980s (discussed above); and last, but most important, Cultural Resource Management Projects sponsored by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the mid- to late 1980s. Thereafter, for two-plus decades, “roads” were only sporadically investigated—typically as short segments seen at “outliers.” Because of the limited scale of most projects at that time, there was an alarming tendency to localize “roads”—“roads” went nowhere, it was said, but existed only in the parts we could easily see, usually near outliers.

The most important “road” studies were the BLM projects of the 1980s, pro-actively researching roads ahead of proposed energy development (Kincaid 1983; Nials et al. 1987). These projects were prescient: knowing that a major but poorly understood cultural resource would be or could be threatened by energy development, the BLM decided to investigate known or possible “roads” in the to-be-impacted areas and to develop techniques and tricks to identifying and recording “roads.” This was done well in advance of actual planning and permitting; would that we were so wise today. Significant resources were expended; excellent archaeologists were hired; innovative field techniques were developed.

The maps produced by these projects and their spin-offs represent a network of considerable range and ramifying complexity. Much of the mapped “road” network was projected: a bit of road here, a bit of road there, and an alignment of sites gave us dotted lines on a map (e.g., Lekson et al. 1988)—reasonably, I think, and probably correctly but the cause of much subsequent eye rolling and teeth gnashing. First, John Roney (1992) pared “roads” back to only those segments visible on the ground; much later, James Snead (2017) would rightly complain that various “road” maps differed significantly—which should we believe? All and none, perhaps: the road network is without question far more extensive than Roney’s minimal map (an assertion to which John would surely agree), but Snead’s grievance is sound. We truly do not know the actual extent of Chaco’s “roads.” But absence of knowledge is not knowledge of absence: “roads” are surely there, but there have been no projects or programs on the scale of the BLM’s 1980s “road” studies to map them out.

The problem for today is this: because there is a long history of “road” studies, nonarchaeologists engaged with the data (e.g., land managers) seem to think that the preservation of “roads” is perfect and our knowledge of them is complete. Neither is remotely true. “Roads” are archaeological sites, and it is in the nature of archaeological sites to hide—even, sometimes, disappear. Recall Judd’s Navajo complaining that “roads” had been far more visible in earlier times; time waits for no one, as the poet said. As discussed below, the region
in which “roads” surely run is threatened again with extensive energy development, but today we are not as proactive as the BLM was in the 1980s. No one is spending money to find roads ahead of development. It seems that “roads” will have to take their chances.

**VIEWSHEDS**

In the early 1980s, when I was crawling all over Chaco’s Great Houses measuring things, I noticed that the siting of several buildings—perhaps all the buildings?—clearly addressed lines-of-sight. One Great House could see another; but if either was moved 100 m or so, those lines-of-sight vanished. I thought I’d discovered something wonderful. Not so: my elders knew all about it and had observations of their own. It went beyond Great Houses, too: Alden Hayes and Tom Windes (1975) had published their lines-of-sight observations from “shrines” at Chaco. And views of natural features: I was at Pueblo Alto with Peter Pino of Zia Pueblo, just the two of us; Mr. Pino looked hard to the southeast, and pointed out a bit of the Sandia Mountains, just visible on the horizon, over Mount Taylor’s shoulder. Tom Windes continued to accumulate information on lines-of-sight, mostly through his infamous “flare-ups”: nighttime exercises in which volunteers stood at potential viewpoints (Great Houses, shrines, etc.) and lit truck flares at specified times. Participants at other stations who saw a point of red light vaguely to the south (e.g.) at precisely 9:00 PM knew that they were seeing Kin Ya’ a (e.g.). Tom’s experiments were ingenious but messy when rain turned the roads to mud. The Solstice Project built on this work, compiling more and more line-of-sight data.

Through the years, I kept my eyes open. I was particularly interested in what I (or someone) called “notch phenomenon”: a line-of-sight through one or more restricted breaks in terrain; that is, through a notch or two in ridgelines. Working at Chimney Rock in 2009, we saw a “notch” discovered some years earlier by Katie Freeman, then a high school student working on her Science Fair project: a just-barely visible Huerfano Mesa, seen down the narrow Piedra River Valley. Huerfano Mesa had been our landmark on the northern horizon when we excavated Pueblo Alto at Chaco Canyon in the late 1970s. You can’t see Alto from Chimney Rock, or vice versa. What Ms. Freeman had discovered was that Huerfano was a “repeater” station, relaying fire/smoke line-of-sight signals to and from Pueblo Alto and Chimney Rock. This was something of a revelation because there was no Great House, no Chacoan community at Huerfano. There were “shrines” and fireboxes, but no residential sites. It seemed likely that Huerfano was staffed; that is, it was someone’s duty
to sit atop Huerfano all the time or at specified intervals and relay the messages back and forth. That suggested that Chacoan line-of-sight communications were indeed a “system,” an integrated network; and probably the “roads” and “outliers” were a system too.

In recent years Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has made it possible to research lines-of-sight and viewsheds on a regional scale. Ruth Van Dyke and her colleagues (2016) are doing exciting work with these truly intriguing data; I think line-of-sight communications (alongside “roads”) could give us something like a network map or diagram of the Chacoan Regional System. As noted above, the “roads” have deteriorated and are, today, difficult or expensive to document. Lines-of-sight should remain mostly intact and readily knowable from GIS. “Ground-truthing” viewsheds will require far less investment in time and money than a full-dress road study.

LANDSCAPES: RITUAL AND SECULAR

The idea of landscape—if not the term itself—was applied to Chaco long before, but my public engagement with that term at that place dated to the 1990 Society for American Archaeology meetings at Las Vegas, Nevada, where John R. Stein and I presented a paper titled “Anasazi Ritual Landscapes.” What happens in Vegas supposedly stays in Vegas, but the idea of “ritual landscape” had legs, coming as it did just on the cusp of British landscape studies such as Christopher Tilley’s 1994 *Phenomenology of Landscape* and Richard Bradley’s 1993 *Altering the Earth* and 1998 *Significance of Monuments*. (I may have had the first copies of these British landscape books between Philadelphia and Berkeley; I didn’t much care for Tilley’s “phenomenology,” but I liked Bradley’s book.) And “Anasazi Ritual Landscapes” (I think coincidently) appeared just before the remarkable rise of ritual to interpretive dominance in southwestern archaeology (Charles Adams’s 1991 *Katsina Cult* and Patricia Crown’s 1994 *Salado* volume opened the floodgates). “Anasazi Ritual Landscapes” was published in 1992 in a Chaco volume edited by David E. Doyel (1992), who had organized the Society for American Archaeology session, the first of a steady series of Chacoan stock-takings, of which the book you hold is—for a short while, at least—the most recent.

“Ritual landscape” was Stein’s, mostly, but I contributed my bit. We bounced ideas around long before the Vegas gig. I had a brief flirtation with cognitive archaeology (Lekson 1981), but that was rather more clinical than ideological. In 1983 and part of 1984, I rented a room at chez Stein. Stein had decided to become an architect, and he was in his first year of architectural
school at the University of New Mexico. I was in the midst of graduate classes at UNM, taking every class I could with Binford but staying out of his way. Most evenings for many weeks, Stein and I would convene at his pot-bellied stove (the principal heat source) and grouse about architecture school (him) and Binford (me). Sometimes simultaneously, each of us wailed to the walls about the day’s provocations. Between ventings, we discussed architecture and landscape. My primary inspirations were not New Archaeologists or Brits (I had not yet met them), but architectural historians and historical geographers (Karl Sauer, George Kubler, J. B. Jackson, Vincent Scully, among others); John’s were architects—I don’t recall which. I do recall warning Stein away from alignments, arguing that the universal revulsion toward ley lines and New Agery made them problematic. When Chaco Meridian came out in 1999, it must have struck Stein as derivative. I’m sure it was; my thinking owed much to Stein.

My principal contribution to “Anasazi Ritual Landscapes” was the intracanyon argument outlined above in “Landscapes, Cityscapes.” And the demonstration that earthen architecture was real at Chaco Canyon—the two platforms mounds at Pueblo Bonito being prime examples—thereby legitimized the less emphatic earthen architecture Stein was seeing at “outliers.” Stein and his field colleagues (Mike Marshall, Andrew Fowler, Taft Blackhorse, Richard Friedman, and others) developed a rich, even baroque taxonomy for Chacoan earthworks, using Navajo words or anatomical terms for various forms of berms. Most berms related to “roads,” particularly where “roads” arrived, circled, and departed from “outlier” Great Houses.

These, today, are part of the standard archaeological field-kit; but back then, berms were controversial. The existence of earthen architecture inside the canyon gave credence to the same at “outliers,” and we both held the Bonito platform mounds (e.g., Lekson 1984a:74–77) to be such rock-ribbed, unassailable, lead-pipe certainties that no one could possibly doubt. So contrarian archaeologists doubt them (I saw one, in a conference presentation, make them disappear with a wave of the hand). But that’s not our problem here.

Add to the ritual landscape a secular landscape of the Chacoan community—a term I have avoided until now. The term community came from the “outlier hunts.” Recall the work of Marshall, Stein, Loose and Novotny (1979): “Anasazi Communities of the San Juan Basin.” Community in this usage was a field taxon, not a social unit. It referred to the clustering of small sites (Unit Pueblos, “small bumps”) around a Great House (“outlier,” “big bump”) with its attendant feature (“ritual landscape”)—an ensemble, a taxon seen scores and scores of times in the outlier hunts and thereafter. While it seemed safe to
assume that the residents of such a unit were part of a daily face-to-face “community” (i.e., a social unit), Nancy Mahoney (2000) pointed out that Chacoan “communities” were all too small to constitute a reproductive unit; that is, “communities” were part of a larger community for which the problematic “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) might actually be appropriate (Lekson 2018). That is, the 150-or-so Chacoan communities scattered over an area the size of Indiana were all part of an ideological “imagined community,” even though they could not possibly have all known each other—rather, embodying the original, modern nation-state definition of the term (Anderson 2006).

At least a few community-level secular landscapes were planned: for example, Skunk Springs and Yellow Jacket had parallel rows or streets of Unit Pueblos, ranged side-by-side like row houses. Those were two of the largest communities; smaller communities surely had plans too, but their arrangements seem, today, more random. Perhaps we don’t yet understand their landscape principles.

Extending far beyond the secular landscape of the community were agricultural landscapes. These could be remarkably extensive and elaborate, for example, the irrigated field complexes at Skunk Springs (Friedman et al. 2003) and the irrigated field systems of Chaco Canyon (Gwinn Vivian and others 2006). In Chaco Canyon small fields (for what crops? County-fair-prize-winner corn? Marigolds?) interspersed between clusters of buildings; while it is beyond the scope of this chapter, that pattern has been identified as a low-density, agrarian-based urbanism by archaeologist Roland Fletcher (2009).

And landscapes operated on even higher levels: Chacoan communities fit into natural landscapes and social landscapes. The Great House and its ritual landscape were typically on a natural rise or elevation above the community of small bumps; the Great House looked down, the small bumps looked up: viewsheds. And, as noted above, the locations of Great Houses were often fixed by line-of-sight considerations, seeing other Great Houses or natural features (Van Dyke 2009). Thus the form of a Chacoan community, as an archaeological unit, answered questions posed by multiple scales of landscapes, from the local terrain to regional intervisibilities. And probably a heavy dose of cosmology—like Fritz’s north-south axis at Chaco—overarching all.

University of Arizona professor Dennis Doxtater (2002, 2003) attempted to decode the regional landscape through the intersections of alignments from major, far-distant mountain peaks. Thus, Chaco sits at the intersection of lines linking Chimney Rock to Baldy Peak, and Cabezon Peak to Brian Head, and Mount Taylor to Abajo Peak. While this is very interesting, I worry about practical implementation and, again, the pitfalls of Ley Line methodologies.
Whatever Chaco was, it was big. It was regional. Chaco itself may or may not have been unique, or extraordinary, or phenomenal, but its regional archaeological record is truly remarkable. Eventually the area was depopulated by the Chacoans. Today it is home to the sparse and scattered Navajo. Subsequent Native and modern impacts have been minimal, other than overgrazing. Consequently, landscape features are well preserved. We have, in Chaco’s region, the trace fossils of a social system, in buildings, landscapes, “roads” and viewsheds. Chaco’s unparalleled regional record is threatened today by energy development, which appears to be proceeding without the forward-looking, proactive strategies of the “outlier hunts” of the 1970s and the BLM “road” studies of the 1980s. Is it too late?

CHACO LANDSCAPES: GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

The reality of Chacoan landscapes is now firmly established and accepted. There are, of course, varying interpretations of these features and, more notably, major gaps in our knowledge of their distribution and variation. For example, there are certainly many more “roads” out there, but, as noted above, we don’t have that map.

Concern for these remarkable, yet fragile cultural resources prompted Thomas Lincoln (then of the National Park Service) to approach me about Chaco landscapes, sometime in 2005. As the head archaeologist of the NPS’s Intermontane Region (assistant director for cultural resources), Tom’s purview included the Four Corners states and, with them, Chaco and its region. He had access to “year-end” funds to invest in the project—entirely his initiative, not mine—but, alas, before the year ended, the money was scooped up by someone else, somewhere else, for something else. New toilets at Yellowstone? A parking lot at Carlsbad Caverns? I don’t know, but their need was greater than ours. At the time, I was relieved that I had not acquired another project: Chaco landscapes were certainly interesting, but not a front-burner issue.

Or were they? Tom Lincoln foresaw energy development in the San Juan Basin and was trying to get ahead of that threat, to have data and ideas and management concepts ready and waiting in the locker. But for the nonce, the Chaco landscape project was sidelined.

Time goes by. In 2013 Tom contacted me again about Chaco landscapes, and shortly thereafter the University of Colorado agreed to arrange and administer a “planning meeting for a seminar to identify, define, and characterize the Chaco Landscape and World Heritage values.” This was a small grant, a planning grant prior to a larger, longer effort, which the NPS generously funded in 2014.
Even in the halcyon bubble of the Peoples’ Republic of Boulder, I had become aware of the impending leases of federal, state, and tribal allotted lands around Chaco for drilling and fracking. Other organizations were already marshaling data and arguments against this development—of which, more below.

I could see that the need was real, but just that year I had started a “phased retirement” from my position at the Museum of Natural History at the University of Colorado. Retirement means different things to different people, but one common factor is you are old. More active, energetic scholars were needed. I asked for the help of two of our best Chacoan specialists: Dr. Ruth Van Dyke of Binghamton University, and Dr. Carrie Heitman of the University of Nebraska. Van Dyke had written a number of highly regarded studies of Chaco landscapes; Heitman had written excellently about Chaco and also controlled the online Chaco Research Archive (http://www.chacoarchive.org/cra/; originally the creation of Dr. Stephen Plog, Heitman, and other colleagues at the University of Virginia). Van Dyke and Heitman took the wheel and steered our course. The University of Colorado, Boulder, facilitated and administered the project, but the intellectual and operational leadership came from Binghamton and Lincoln.

The project advanced through a series of stages. First, a planning/listening meeting took place at San Juan College in Farmington, New Mexico, in August 2014. This meeting brought together several dozen federal agency archaeologists and managers, local cultural resource management archaeologists, and Tribal representatives from the Navajo Nation (many leases were on Navajo tribal or allotment lands). We presented ourselves not as official representatives of the National Park Service (those too were in attendance), but rather as contractors tasked by NPS to assemble histories of research, site, and landscape data and of management themes and options for Chaco landscapes. The second step was a meeting at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln in July 2015, to compile and reconcile several independent GIS datasets of Chaco “outliers” and features, with the final product to be supported on the online Chaco Research Archive.

In April and August 2015, and again in April 2016, we presented progress reports to the Chaco Native American Advisory Board and benefited from their comments and advice. We learned that there were turf issues: The cultural resources were of great interest to the various Pueblos, but Navajo families and clans also had deep ties to the land. Much of the land involved were Navajo allotments, not quite reservation and not quite private. Energy companies—we were told—had already obtained permission to develop on many allotments, dealing directly with allottees. It would be hard to deny
that income to Navajo families. But at the same time there was resistance from some Navajo residents who were concerned about the effects of fracking on water and health. At several meetings we learned about federal involvement: the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was the agency most directly implicated, but BIA delegated authority for subsurface management to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which had more experience in that sort of thing. And, alongside the BIA and BLM, the Navajo Nation clearly wanted a say in how development would proceed. Some of the land belonged to the state of New Mexico, whose land office was mandated to generate revenue for schools. Again, it would be hard to deny those resources for education. It was . . . complicated.

The information from the Farmington, Lincoln, Advisory Board and other meetings informed a “white paper” on Chaco landscapes completed in February 2016 and authored by Van Dyke, Lekson, and Heitman (with a contribution by Julian Thomas, who had toured Chaco with Van Dyke in September 2015). The paper, titled “Chaco Landscapes: Data, Theory and Management,” summarized the history of Chaco landscape studies; identified, defined, and characterized the elements of such landscapes; and offered management considerations for their Section 106 and National Register of Historic Places management. With the NPS permission, the “white paper” was distributed to agencies, tribes, and several other organizations concerned with energy development and the Chaco landscape. (It appears here as appendix A.)

The “capstone” meeting for the project was a seminar of invited archaeologists, tribal representatives, and agency archaeologists and managers held at Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, Cortez, Colorado, in August 2017. Unlike the earlier planning/listening meeting in Farmington, the Crow Canyon meeting had an agenda developed by Van Dyke, Heitman, and Lekson and ultimately resulted in the present volume and video products. We shot additional video in Chaco Canyon in October 2017 with tribal members who had been at the Crow Canyon conference.

Initially, our instructions from NPS were to not advocate against (or for) energy development, but rather to provide management considerations for NPS to use when commenting on BLM management plans, but those instructions changed as the extent of the proposed leasing and development became clearer. We were united in our concern for the Chaco landscape, and for what appeared to be an emerging BLM strategy of treating each lease as a separate undertaking rather than developing an umbrella master leasing plan that would operate on the landscape level. The complex land and political situations were difficult to engage from Boulder, Colorado; Binghamton,
New York; or Lincoln, Nebraska. All politics is local, as Tip O'Neill said, and we were not local. Several regional environmental and archaeological NGOs banded together to save the “Greater Chaco Landscape.” The archaeological lead was Archaeology Southwest, with Paul Reed as their principal (and outstanding) spokesman. We supported the work of Archaeology Southwest and other organizations insofar as possible, but beyond writing letters and comments and so forth, our participation in on-the-ground politicking was limited mainly to our meetings, which included Tribes and agencies.

Things looked grim for Chaco landscapes, and they still look grim. Swiftly changing news of court cases apparently won, then lost; and last-second postponements by the Secretary of the Interior of BLM leasing are too complex and dynamic to recount here. If—as seems all too likely—we lose the remarkable record of Chaco “roads” and landscapes in northwest New Mexico, perhaps someone will write a history of how that happened. Or perhaps, at the eleventh hour, a management plan will emerge that encourages small-footprint directional drilling, avoids probable “road” alignments, and saves part of the Chaco landscape—a lot? a little?

The election of 2016 sent a message to archaeology and historic preservation. In January 2017, Tom Lincoln retired—along with several other senior NPS staff—before the deluge. The book you are holding and the videos you are viewing are the product of Tom Lincoln’s archaeological vision, commitment to historic preservation, and professional expertise. Tom wanted tools and products for the NPS to use in its comments on the drilling that will soon begin around Chaco. We hope that our “White Paper” will prove tactically useful in the trenches, and we hope that this volume will be strategically helpful in presenting the broader issues to larger audiences. Chaco and its landscape are World Heritage Sites: whoever you are, this is your heritage under threat.

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