The Greater Chaco Landscape

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Published by University Press of Colorado

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The Greater Chaco Landscape: Ancestors, Scholarship, and Advocacy.

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https://doi.org/10.5876/9781646421701.c010.v001
https://doi.org/10.5876/9781646421701.c010.v002
https://doi.org/10.5876/9781646421701.c010.v003

The three members of the Zuni Cultural Resources Advisory Team gathered early in the morning at a rock art panel located just behind Wijiji. Here, they explained that Pueblo ancestors stopped in Chaco before traveling on to Zuni in their quest for the Middle Place. The ancestors left behind these petroglyphs and pictographs—which include the migration route symbol—as a record of their journey. Ancestors of all the Pueblos—not just Zuni—were here in Chaco before continuing on their migrations. There is a special energy or presence in Chaco that attracted them. Today, Zuni see the traces left by the ancestors as their library, their encyclopedia of knowledge. It is good to come to such a place, to reconnect with their history, to learn. The Zuni are very concerned about mineral development near Chaco Canyon, because this is a violent disturbance of Mother Earth. They are asking the public for help to protect and care for Chaco. The only way forward for all of us is mutual respect for the land and for each other.

In the evening we gathered on the north rim of Chaco Canyon, overlooking Pueblo Bonito. On the trail we encountered stone circles and pecked basins. The Zuni pointed out that these little things have big
significance for them and are used in ceremonies today. Looking beyond the great houses, they pointed out that in Chaco, these small features, the wind, the views, the sunrises, and the roads, are just as significant for the Zuni. The Zuni selected this spot for filming because of the vantage point it gives for reflecting on the rock fall that crushed the eastern portion of Pueblo Bonito. Zuni ancestors were master builders. In Chaco Canyon, they raised families, held ceremonies, and kept the earth in balance. They built places like Pueblo Bonito to speak to future generations. The rock fall is a reminder that it is our responsibility to care for these places. This is what can happen if we do not honor our responsibility to protect Chaco. Our individual voices may not be heard, but our unified voices will be strong.

Members of the Zuni Cultural Resources Advisory Team gathered on the second morning in Chaco at the great kiva Casa Rinconada. Here, walking in the footsteps of their ancestors, the Zuni felt a very strong connection to their Chacoan forbears. Today, a kiva is a gathering place, a place for ceremonies, the driving force of the Zuni community. All important events start and finish in kivas such as this one. They explained that the small round houses such as those within Pueblo Bonito are not kivas—they are medicine curing houses. A great kiva such as Casa Rinconada is a sacred place. The elders are here, and it is appropriate to make offerings. The Zuni reminded us that they pray for all of us, asking for help in protecting this place from the damage caused by resource extraction of all kinds, now, and into the future.