Watch the video of this chapter, recorded at Crow Canyon Archaeological Center on August 14, 2017.
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Interpretive ranger G. B. Cornucopia first came to Chaco Culture National Historical Park (NHP) as a campground host in 1988. Across three decades of interaction with the public, he has encouraged visitors to use their experiences in Chaco to connect with the natural and archaeological world. Chaco Culture NHP has exceptionally dark night skies, and these skies are one of the park’s most important archaeological and natural resources. We know Chacoans looked at the night skies; in fact, for most of human history, night skies were an important dimension of the human experience. Chaco Culture NHP is an exceptional place to study and learn about the stars. It is the only national park with a working astronomical observatory available to visitors, donated by an astronomer in 1998. Over two decades ago Chaco initiated a Night Skies program for visitors. The program has been immensely successful and has fostered the development of similar programs in other parks. In 2013, Chaco was named an International Dark Sky Park. Today, however, ambient light pollution, particularly from mineral extraction activities on the borders of the park, threatens Chaco’s night skies.
Figure 12.1. Night sky view from Chaco Canyon. Photo by G. B. Cornucopia.