Apache places are named after symbolically important events, so individuals in the tribe are continually moving in a webwork of places whose names embody the stories of their people. Living inside a mesh of significance constantly tells them who they are, where they reside in tribal history, and how to act if they wish their fellows well. It is a society attempting to be absolutely located, and thus secure.

—William Kittredge

The Dirty Devil flows wide and imperial like an abandoned Nile wandering through sand dunes and statues of pharaohs and sphinxs. The river winds lazily back and forth in an undulating rhythm, alternating between concave salmon-colored cliffs that bend in and receive the river and long protruding tongues of rock or sand. Sometimes these tongues form gently sloping benches where prickly pear, blackbrush, ricegrass, and flowers grow. Other times they are sand dunes or reclaimed riverbanks consisting of a riparian community of willow, tamarisk, and reeds. Farther back we encounter rabbitbrush.

Massive Navajo sandstone rises above us as we plod down the river to a small canyon tucked between two longer ones. Despite fences at the mouth of each canyon, cows have gotten in and turned the shallow, willow-lined creeks into quagmires. For one reason or another, the cows have avoided the middle canyon, and we make our camp in a sandy wash. This canyon has no name on the map. Since I often camp here, I feel justified in calling it Jumlung Canyon after the Tibetan term for middle path, which refers to the way to enlightenment advocated by Buddha—persuing neither extreme asceticism nor indulgence.

While the others busy themselves with setting up camp, I wander up the canyon for a few moments of peace. Rather than pitching camp and hanging out, I simply drop my pack and continue on, walking off the physical strain of the backpack and the psychological strain of the day. I’ll find a nice, quite nook somewhere, take off my boots, enjoy the silence, and feel of

The formation rolls softly across the horizon. Colors fade into pink and white. Sculpted into domes, breasts, and hips, the Navajo is quintessentially female. One senses the Great Mother incarnate.
this new place, allowing all thoughts, responsibilities, and frustrations to flow away. That way I return to camp reinvigorated.

Up the canyon, the sand dunes blaze with sunflowers—rough mule-ears. Yuccas send up long white candlesticks of drooping flowers. An \textit{Astragalus} simultaneously sports violet flowers and crescent seedpods, mottled green and purple. In the heat of the day, the Fremont barberry advertises its sticky scent to hundreds of bees that converge on the yellow flowers. I dig some wild onions out of the sand to flavor our dinner.

After a few bends, the Navajo sandstone demonstrates its magnificence, unfolding a giant alcove streaked with a single line of black varnish. Moving from the direct sun into the alcove is like walking into a refrigerator. Water seeping along the cliff cools the rock and the decades of rockfall piled at the outer edge trap the cold air in and keep out the day’s heat. Along the weeping wall, maidenhair fern, a spindly ash, and a buckthorn grow right out of the rock. A pair of ash-throated flycatchers chase each other through the oaks along the edge of shade and sunlight. These sky-coyotes always put on a show, swooping, diving, snatching up insects one moment and chasing down a prospective mate the next, while keeping an eye on me as if this were a theatrical display for my benefit. Who knows? Maybe it is. One alights on a branch, cocks his head, gives a “pechwee,” and looks at me for a response. None forthcoming, it tries again and finally abandons attempts to communicate with such an obtuse creature.

Around the next bend, the canyon comes to an abrupt end in an amphitheater. An incised slot brings water from the canyon above, depositing it into an ephemeral pool. I duck under a fallen, but still living, cottonwood. The trunk lies horizontal and the leaves grow skyward, out of the trunk and even out of the exposed root. An orange-headed spiny lizard tumbles along the cottonwood’s deeply furrowed bark, licking up ants as they march blithely past. It eyes me suspiciously as I take refuge in the shade and slip off my boots.

I return to camp just in time for dinner. Huckleberry, Yucca, and Bobofet have formed their own food group. After being continuously hungry on Muddy Creek, they’ve agreed on substantial dinners. Substantial is hardly an adequate description. In town they bought a huge six-quart cooking pot that Yucca carries strapped to the back of his pack. Each night they fill it to the brim with a thick mass of carbohydrates. Tonight it’s burritos, and their pot is filled with a thick paste of refried beans and sticky rice.

“You want cheese in it?” Yucca asks.

“Yeah,” says Bobofet.

Yucca lops off chunks of cheese from a two-pound block.

“More?” he asks.
“More,” Huckleberry replies.

A full pound of cheese goes into the pot. Then Huckleberry begins dumping dried jalapenos into the mixture.

I watch in amazement as the three of them scoop the amalgam into giant tortillas and down one after another. Running out of tortillas, they stand in a tight circle chortling as they spoon the remains out of the pot. So focused on eating, they haven’t even bothered to sit down. Despite the amount, they are finished long before anyone else. Each night the same ritual is repeated. No matter what the delicacy, a pound of cheese and a quantity of jalapenos goes in.

“You know, that’s borderline disgusting,” I tease.

“Yeah, but we’re finally getting enough to eat,” Bobofet replies.

Meanwhile, Seaweed flits around like a hostess at a cocktail party, offering samples of her dinner.

While everyone is cleaning up, Seeker comes running excitedly into camp.

“You guys have to come see this!” he implores.

He leads us a short distance from camp to a small dune covered in evening primroses.

“Check it out; just watch,” Seeker says bending down to one of the flowers. “You have to get close,” he adds, lifting his head.

In groups of two and three we cluster around the flowers. Pregnant torpedoes dangle from the thin red stalks. As we watch, the torpedoes begin to swell, bursting through their casing into four sections and exposing brilliant white insides.

Amidst a chorus of gasps, the casings suddenly give way with audible pops. They peel back becoming the sepals of the emerging flower. The tightly coiled blossoms begin to unfurl before our eyes. Within minutes the petals have spread wide, and the brilliant white reflects the moonlight to attract moth pollinators. The star-shaped pistil rises into the air awaiting fertilization. The four stamens droop under the weight of their anthers sticky with strands of pollen that dangle like yellow spider silk. A sweet fragrance permeates the air. Sage bends close and takes a long olfactory draught. She raises her head, and her nose is powdered yellow.

We watch transfixed as one flower after another opens. Tomorrow morning the flowers will have wilted pink. Based upon anecdotal evidence, it seems that evening primroses time their blooming to coincide with the full moon, when the white inflorescence is most conspicuous. Since they only have one night in which to become fertilized before their flowers wilt, they need to make the most of it.

The plaintive wails of Woodhouse toads surround us as the full moon crests the canyon walls. I walk up a small gully to throw my sleeping bag
down and am overwhelmed by the delicate scent of sand verbena, another night-blooming flower. By day, the sand verbena resembles a tightly clustered snowball, but each night it explodes in white fireworks.

I lie awake listening to the night. The chomping of caterpillars on the cottonwood leaves sounds like a jet engine. Their droppings ricochet off the dry leaves onto the ground. A loud crunching by my head sounds like a bear eating a boulder. I turn on my headlamp and reveal a beetle rustling in the leaves. Bats dart about with great clicking commotion.

I awake with a start at dawn as a great horned owl wings silently a few feet above my head. She perches on the cliff and stares at me with big yellow eyes. She hoots twice and continues up the canyon. I stare up at the V-shaped wedge of sky above my sleeping bag. A wedge of sky inhabited by violet-green swallows, flashing iridescent green and violet as they soar, dart, and pirouette in three dimensions. A swallow perches on a dead juniper branch and spreads a wing to preen. The morning sunlight glimmers through the bird’s nearly translucent wing. A moment later it’s airborne again. A pair of swallows plays tag, each one rising higher and circling the other as if on a vertical column of air. Higher and higher they fly until almost out of sight. They join in conjugal bliss and plummet earthward locked in a deathly embrace. A few feet above the ground they part in two and resume their sky antics. They nest in cracks and hollows in the cliff, but they live in this slice of sky, this emptiness. Benevolent protectors, angels on our shoulder, consuming thousands of gnats and mosquitoes each day. How can something fly so fast, so effortlessly?

I then notice a strange vibration in my right ear. Rolling over I see a hawk moth the size of a hummingbird gorging himself on the pungent lavender flowers of the desert mint that line the gully. “Today is going to be a good day,” I think.

As I walk into camp, I meet a porcupine waddling through our kitchen. I guess nothing looks too appetizing, for he continues up the streambed to where Huckleberry is sleeping. I call to wake him, but he doesn’t respond. However, the porcupine turns around and trudges off faster than I thought possible. I laugh at his little legs treading back and forth in an attempted scurry. A few dozen meters are all he can manage. He passes within a few feet of Banjo, both animals purposely ignore each other. He climbs up into a Gambel’s oak and falls asleep.

After class we explore one of the neighboring canyons. Along the way students stop off to work on their journals, essays, or projects. Soon only Seeker, Huckleberry, and Patience accompany me up the canyon. We halt below an intriguing looking alcove scooped out of the Navajo sandstone.
“Think there’s anything up there?” Seeker asks as I scan the alcove with binoculars.

“I doubt it; just a pile of rubble. Still, only one way to find out.”

Despite the heat we zigzag up the slickrock, and before long we are standing before an alcove much bigger than it looked from below. The pile of rubble at the entrance is undoubtedly a wall constructed to provide protection from the wind and cold.

The four of us stroll through the alcove in silence. Our footfalls raise the soft sand like moondust. Others have been here before us and left their boot prints, which remain undisturbed and protected from the elements.

A series of stacked sandstone blocks denotes rectangular sleeping quarters. A beehive-shaped structure squats at the back of the alcove. A block of sandstone leans against the beehive. It would fit perfectly into the opening as a door to guard the precious contents. I run my hand over the mud-plastered walls and let my fingers slide into the indentations left by a man unaware that the Normans were invading England. My fingers are too big, and they spill out of the mud furrows. Smaller rocks are impressed into the mortar in a line like decorative jewels. I peer inside. The floor is littered with corn cobs.

Originating in Mexico about four thousand years ago, corn cultivation spread north, becoming established along Muddy Creek by the dawn of Christianity. At first these nomadic hunters and gathers supplemented their diet with corn, squash, and beans, but then became increasingly more reliant on agriculture. In time they developed their own variety of corn, capable of resisting the extremes of cold and drought, called “Fremont dent” after the indented kernels and the name we’ve bestowed upon this group of Native Americans.

Anthropologists have belatedly recognized the cliff dwellers of the Four Corners region as the ancestors of today’s Pueblo Indians and now refer to the Anasazi as Ancestral Puebloans. However, we continue to use the term “Fremont” (after the river where they were first described in 1937) to distinguish this particular group. Incidentally, the river was named after a rather pompous explorer, John C. Fremont.

Determined to find a transcontinental railroad route across Utah, John Fremont attempted to push through the San Rafael Reef. Encountering a narrow, boulder-strewn canyon, his party soon gave up. Unwilling to follow in Gunnison’s footsteps, which lead north along the Old Spanish Trial, Fremont led his men south. They explored all along the reef but found no passage through. Instead of waiting for spring, Fremont pushed on to the ten thousand foot Aquarius Plateau in the middle of the winter of 1853. Fremont and his men nearly died of starvation and cold. Fremont went on
to become California’s first territorial governor and the 1856 Republican nominee for president. He was subsequently fired by Lincoln as a Civil War general for issuing his own emancipation proclamation months ahead of the president’s.

A mano and metate lie nearby. I heft the mano in my hand; this grapefruit-sized river rock plucked from the benches below would easily serve to crush corn kernels. I place it back on the smooth surface of the metate, a slab of sandstone worn smooth by generations of Indians using it for grinding. The mano and metate predate corn by several centuries and were originally used to grind seeds of Indian rice grass and acorns. I can’t help but wonder how much sand ended up in the flour.

I then spy a large piece of pottery sticking out of the sand, a solid black shard marked with indentations forming short vertical lines all around the rim. Agriculture required an increasingly settled lifestyle, which in turn facilitated the development of pottery. Because of their distinctive pottery style, anthropologists are uncertain whether the Fremont acquired pottery independently from Mexico or adopted it from their Anasazi neighbors. Anthropologist David Madsen writes, “[A]n internally consistent and widely accepted definition of the Fremont has never been developed. Given the lack of elaborate ceremonial kivas, polychrome pottery, detailed basketry designs, and other hallmarks of ‘higher’ social organizations, the Fremont have always been considered to be some sort of poor, out-back Anasazi.”

Anthropologists distinguish the Fremont from the Anasazi based upon pottery and basketry styles, clay figurines, rock art, and footwear. Unlike the yucca sandals typical of the Anasazi, the Fremont wore a unique type of moccasin. These were fashioned from three pieces of hide from a deer’s foreleg with the dewclaws intact. Likely this provided a distinctive footprint so tribal members could readily identify each other. Through minor modifications of the sole, one might even be able to distinguish family groups or clans. I wonder if future anthropologists will categorize us as cowboy boot culture, high heel culture, or Birkenstock culture.

Because the Fremont defy categorization, archaeologists continue to debate just who they were and how they were related to each other. Further complicating matters was the discovery of small villages scattered along Bull Creek, south of Hanksville on the flank of the Henry Mountains. This site shows continuous occupation from 6000 B.C. The Fremont occupied this complex of rock-lined pit houses, camps, and storage areas between eight hundred to twelve hundred years ago. Archaeologists have uncovered a potpourri of Fremont as well as Anasazi artifacts, including both classic Fremont and Anasazi pottery.
Some archeological evidence suggests that the Fremont and Anasazi shared geographical regions but occupied different niches, so to speak. The Anasazi confined themselves to lower elevations conducive to agriculture while the Fremont practiced hunting and gathering at higher elevations, living in groups of five to twelve extended families. Certainly the two groups were in frequent contact and may have shared both language and religion, surely a stronger cultural glue than footwear.

Furthermore, Fremont is a rather porous category encompassing both Great Basin hunter-gatherers and these Puebloan farmers. Fremont designates the people who from A.D. 650 to 1300 lived in the area from Grand Junction to Ely, Nevada, north to Pocatello, Idaho and south to Cedar City, Utah. Likely those living in the Great Basin had more in common with other hunter-gatherers than they did with those here on the plateau who adopted a lifestyle similar to the Anasazi. These people doubtfully categorized themselves as a single group and may have even spoken different languages. Madsen speculates that what we call the Fremont were really three separate groups of different origins that shared a few minor traits acquired through trade and the spread of a religious cult. “Today we call these scattered groups of hunters and farmers the Fremont, but that name may be more reflective of our own need to categorize things than it is a reflection of how closely related these people were,” writes Madsen.

Seeker waves me over to a corner of the alcove. By unspoken agreement, none of us have uttered a sound since entering. Seeker places a large spearpoint in my hand when I reach him. I stare at him in amazement. He points to the soft sand just past his feet. I hold the spearpoint in my hand, running my finger along the razor sharp edge. Made from green chert, the spearpoint is notched slightly at one end where it was laced onto a spear with sinew. I sit at the edge of the alcove staring out to the canyon beyond, holding the spearpoint and puzzling over it.

The corn, pottery, and ruins all suggest that the Fremont lived here about a thousand years ago. The years A.D. 700 to 1300 marked the most widespread and dense indigenous population on the Colorado Plateau. Perhaps the climate was especially conducive to agriculture at that time. The Anasazi and Fremont cultures flourished, but agriculture demanded that people remain in one place, at least seasonally. Thus the game in an area was soon eliminated. The bow and arrow appropriate for small game replaced the atlatl and spear. Yet here was this spearpoint. The juxtaposition of seemingly different lifestyles is indicative of the Fremont who adopted strategies appropriate to the location. In some places and times they practiced agriculture, and in others they depended upon hunting and gathering. Some
groups shifted seasonally between the two. In the fall, these shifting groups would harvest crops then quickly head to the highlands to gather pine nuts and hunt deer and sheep. In the winter they retreated to the rock shelters and subsisted off stored food supplemented by hunting. Spring brought planting and gathering. In summer they continued to gather wild plant crops, such as acorns and rice grass, as they came into season.

Other groups would be settled agriculturalists for a few years then take up hunting-gathering again, perhaps moving to another locale to settle. This harsh environment required a diversity of lifestyle strategies in order to survive. Perhaps some individuals simply preferred hunting to farming. Often we get trapped in our thinking, assuming a society \textit{progresses} from hunting-gathering to agriculture.

About the time the Crusades ended, a watershed was reached among people in the Colorado Plateau. The Ancestral Puebloans had abandoned their villages in Utah and Colorado and consolidated into the Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, and Pueblo peoples along the Rio Grande, focusing nearly exclusively on agriculture. These villages are now the oldest continuously inhabited settlements in the U.S., dating back to A.D. 1250.

The Fremont took the other route, abandoning agriculture. What actually became of them is speculative. A large proportion of Fremont sites show concurrent use by Shoshone and Paiute with a total replacement of Fremont-style artifacts. This combined with the fact that the most recent artifacts (dating back five hundred years) are found the farthest away from the Shoshone-Paiute expansion, led Madsen to believe that the Fremont were pushed out of the region. Some argue that the Fremont moved south, integrating with the Pueblo Indians and losing their separate identity. Others hold that the Fremont, having originally come from the plains, simply moved back. Or that they were absorbed into the Shoshone-Paiute culture; I once met a Paiute man who claimed Fremont ancestry.

Nonetheless, this spearhead pointed backward, not forward. Could it be an artifact of the Archaic Indians who preceded the Fremont and also used this alcove? Could it be that humans have been visiting this particular alcove off and on for the past several thousand years? A similar alcove just east of here called Cowboy Cave contains thirteen thousand years worth of sediments that can be radiocarbon dated. The oldest layer contains dung from mammoth, ground sloth, horse, and camel. The earliest human artifacts date back to 7000 B.C. These people left little evidence besides fires, kill sites, and stone tools. At some point (precise dating is difficult), they began painting and carving figures on rock surfaces. Then they began making things for us to discover: arrowheads, animal figurines from willows, humanoid figurines from clay, baskets,
awlts, and other bone tools. This Desert Culture traveled about in small bands of twenty-five to fifty individuals, engaging in a sustainable economy for thousands of years until agriculture arrived and the population exploded. Artifacts flourished as well: pottery, burial sites, jewelry, moccasins, and of course buildings, ranging from tiny granaries tucked into a cliff to entire villages.

I hold the spearpoint before me admiring the handiwork and skill it took to fashion it. Suddenly I'm filled with a desire to possess this artifact. I could easily slip it into my pocket and no one would be the wiser. I test out several rationalizations: if I don't take it, someone else will; the museums already have more spearpoints than they know what to do with; it's of no value, really. But they all ring false. This spearpoint has been here for several centuries, and in another thousand years it will still be here where it belongs. Who am I to disturb it? Antiquity bears its own authenticity. I will always have the satisfaction of knowing that it lies here unmolested. That in itself is worth far more than mere possession.

As I turn back to the alcove to replace the spearpoint, I remind myself that removing artifacts not only destroys any archeological value the artifact may hold but also robs the public of what is rightfully public property. It is akin to going into an art museum, cutting up the paintings, and taking all the pieces. I notice for the first time that the alcove is pockmarked with shallow pits where pot hunters have been active. An unbroken pot will fetch more than forty thousand dollars on the black market, and every accessible site on the Colorado Plateau has been raided.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice a brown circle on a pink rock. Stepping closer, my eye perceives a tight coil of concentric circles radiating outward, and it takes a moment before my mind recognizes it as the bottom of a basket. I kneel down. Rock and pottery are so durable they should last a thousand years, but to find something as delicate as a basket comes as a surprise. Aridity, however, is a wonderful preservative and early archaeologists and settlers have found numerous baskets, moccasins, rope, sleeping mats, headdresses, and even buffalo hide robes and shields.

This basket is one of the distinctive features of the Fremont. The Fremont had a unique style of basketry called rod and bundle where stripped willow rods were bound with yucca cordage. This method of construction allowed the yucca fibers to swell, and, combined with a bit of mud, rendered the basket virtually waterproof. Baskets and pottery were not only used for hauling water but also for cooking. A hot rock was dropped into the basket and quickly heated the water inside. Unlike their Anasazi neighbors, the Fremont never abandoned basketry in favor of pottery. Baskets were quicker and easier to make and could be readily constructed on site, important for a people clinging to their nomadic roots.
Made valuable by time alone, this treasure was uncovered and exposed by men intent upon quick profit. Reduced to a fragment, it was tossed aside as worthless. I lean over the basket fragment, and my strong scent permeates the dry air. I become hyperconscious of my own presence.

I step through a breach in the wall of the ruin. I notice the indentations in the sand left by dozens of feet. Nike, Adidas, and Teva have all left their trademarks. I pick up a piece of shaggy juniper bark and begin to sweep the prints clean. I sweep the floor of the ruin, working toward the exit so that all that remain are the striations of juniper bark. I want to obliterate all signs of profanity in this space. I wish to wipe clean my culture’s impact. I want to erase the past; sweep away Wounded Knee, Sand Creek; obliterate poverty, reservations, alcoholism, diabetes, and depression. I want to place the stones back in the wall and seal this one ruin up from the poking and prodding of the curious. I want to sweep the whole alcove clean. I want to glue the pieces of broken pottery back together. I stand outside the ruin with my juniper bark broom and look at the hundreds of footprints in the alcove and sigh at the enormity of the task. I get down on my hands and knees and slowly begin sweeping.