New Mexico and Arizona – late June 2012 – notes by Elly

My friend Marja (from Groningen) had a conference in Albuquerque and we decided it would be fun to meet and see a bit of New Mexico together. It was a very good trip: great company and interesting landscapes!

I started Sunday from Apache Junction and took US 60 all the way East to connect with the I-25 at Socorro in New Mexico. I had not been on that road, through Quemado, Omega, Pie Town, Datil, and Magdalena: very remote and interesting, e.g. with the Very Large Array Radiotelescope sitting in the high desert. On my way back, I spent one night in Magdalena because it looked a very dusty old town and it was.

Marja’s flights were perfectly on time, so we left Albuquerque early on Monday morning to go to Chaco Canyon. The road there was much better than anticipated! In Chaco Canyon, there are remains of a culture that flourished between 800 and 1200 CE: great houses, kivas, and astronomical marks. Pueblo Bonito, for instance, had buildings of four stories, 40 kivas, and over 600 rooms. The canyon and its culture are important to many current Indian tribes, e.g. the Navajos. How the people disappeared and whereto and who they were remains a mystery though they are claimed as ancestors by many. Chaco Canyon was linked to many other early settlement either by road or by a signaling method. Richard Wetherill explored Chaco and many other sites; he remains a controversial figure in archeology but is buried in a wonderful place overlooking Bonito.

After Chaco, we tried to find a motel overlooking the San Juan river, but Bloomfield and environs are very industrial. Gas and oil exploration and extraction has caused a boom in
industry and construction. However, it all looks ugly, is bad for the environment (e.g. the San Juan river), and benefits the local population only nominally (lots of labor comes from outside and the companies are too). But this is my opinion; some other critical opinions can be found here. We ended up in Farmington, another sprawling boom town with lots of new hotels and a river walk!

We were planning to go to Cortez after Farmington and then East to Durango and Pagosa Springs, but the fires in Colorado (thanks to Laura for the link) looked very serious on Tuesday morning so we went to the Navajo Reservation instead. Marja had really wanted to see Shiprock (elev 7178 ft) and it was beautiful as always. I love that landscape too: beautiful colors of sand and stone and bushes, and many changes in the landscape. It was monsoon season so clouds gathered in the early afternoon and we could often see heavy rain in the distance. We had a late breakfast in Mexican Water. Marja had blueberry pancakes and I had my best (though only) mutton stew on the trip and great frybread.

Before Mexican Water, we had stopped at the Teec Nos Pos Trading Post. I ended up with a beautiful rug, basically a Ganado/Klagetoh rug with a dazzler middle. It is so similar to a rug Harry and I bought a long time ago. See below (and I have to check the weaver’s names)!

We then went to Canyon de Chelly’s North Rim: it was peaceful with very few tourists and vendors. Canyon de Chelly has been occupied by many peoples since 2500 BCE and
the Navajo are the most recent ones but some structures go back to Puebloan times and to what is called ‘archaic’.

The Navajo name for Teec Nos Pos is T’iiz Názbás which means ‘cottonwoods in a circle’ and the name for Canyon de Chelly is Tséyi’ and it means ‘within the rock’ (see the 1995 *Navajo Place Names* book by Alan Wilson and Gene Dennison). Both Anglo names are Spanish renderings of the Navajo. There are just so many layers of culture, as in any place! The Northern Rim road leads to Tsaile, home to [Diné College](https://www.dine.edu/) and then we found the road to Crystal (sometimes hard to find) and went into the Chuska Mountains and descended into New Mexico. Gallup, where I thought one could always find a motel, had a rodeo so the closest place that had a few rooms left was Grants, NM.

The next day we went to El Malpais ‘the badlands’ with lots of lava and to the Acoma ‘Sky City’. There are about 5000 Acoma (2010 census) and 13 families that live in Sky City (about 45 people; according to the guide). The others come up for ceremonies and festivities. There is no electricity up in the city and the wind blows a lot of sand. Lots of sad history: the Spanish were very cruel (killing and cutting off feet and hands) and the Acoma didn’t get US voting rights till very late. However, there was the [Pueblo Revolt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pueblo_Revolt_of_1680) of 1680 that was successful which gives the Acoma and other Puebloan people a lot of pride. Our guide in Acoma was a quite rigid young man so we didn’t get to ask many questions, unfortunately. For instance, one couldn’t ask about the impact of the Casino (where Marja and I had lunch....) and one person on the tour was a county recorder (in another state) who was burning to ask questions. The Acoma have dual citizenship but how does this work in terms of elections etc? She didn’t dare ask questions either!

We didn’t have time to go the world’s largest open-pit uranium mine which is to the West of Mount Taylor (a sacred mountain for the Acoma and the Navajo – *Tsoodzil* - and Laguna and Zuni and perhaps others). Most uranium mining is said to have stopped but it would have been interesting to see. An older article appears here.[1](#)

The total trip was 1700 miles (for me) and a little less for Marja. I enjoyed it very much: gossiping about (former) colleagues, talking about politics and social and cultural changes, and just ‘hanging out’! Much left to explore and that’s good!