KNOWING PECOS

a small history of a big place

by
Courtney White

Original artwork by Jone Hallmark

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For Gen

A Brief Prologue

For four seasons, from 1992 to 1995, I had the honor of being employed at Pecos National Historical Park as an archaeologist, fulfilling a lifelong dream of working for the National Park Service. It was a wonderful experience and at the end of my tenure, I decided to write a book. I wrote a very long one. This history was the opening section, followed by excerpts from a journal that I had kept and then by a lengthy analysis of the evolving national park idea and my recommendations for revitalizing the National Park Service, a hot topic at the time.

It didn't come together. Unable to shape the various parts into a satisfactory whole, I put the book on a shelf, literally, and moved on to other endeavors.

In 2012, feeling curious, I pulled the book down and reread it. To my surprise, the history section held up, so I did some light editing and submitted it to a publisher, where it received a positive review – and a rejection. It was too brief to make money, they said. What to do? Fortunately, the world has changed a lot for writers, so I decided to publish the book myself and let fate take things from there.

I was privileged to work at Pecos and learn its story, as I am honored to live in northern New Mexico and share in its deep history. The past is never really past, a famous writer once said, and this is certainly true in the Land of Enchantment. It is especially true at Pecos. To this day, I have not discovered a park in the nation that captures as much of the story of human history in North America as Pecos does. It's my sincerest hope that I have been able to bring its rich history alive in some small way. I hope you enjoy it.

Thanks for reading.

Courtney

PECOS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

"The park is a site of exceptional historic and archaeological importance. Its strategic location between the Great Plains and the Rio Grande Valley has made it the focus of the region's 10,000 years of human history. The park preserves the ruins of the great Pecos pueblo, a major trade center, and the ruins of two Spanish colonial missions dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. It also contains sites relating to the Santa Fe Trail. The Glorieta Unit protects key sites associated with the 1862 Civil War Battle of Glorieta Pass – a watershed event that ended the Confederate attempt to carry the war into the west. Two miles of pristine riparian habitat on the Pecos River are also protected."

Authorized as Pecos National Monument June 28, 1965; redesignated June 28, 1990. Acreage: 6,576.

—*The National Parks Index (1995)*

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The Beautiful Place Theory

Once upon a time, Pecos was the center of the universe.

If you stroll to the top of the ruin today, it is easy to see why: the world emanates from a spot near your feet, rises slowly above your shoulders, and spreads out majestically to each horizon. As the highest point in a bowl-shaped valley along the upper Pecos River, fifteen crow-miles east of Santa Fe, New Mexico, the ruined village stands as a beacon in an ocean of time and place, demanding that attention be paid to its role in nearly seven hundred years of continuous human history. Its pride is well-deserved; no other native village in the region witnessed so many significant events or touched the course of history as Pecos. The view from the center of the universe is literally and figuratively breath-taking; marvelous if you are a historian or an archaeologist, but dangerous if you are a visitor out for a walk on a stormy New Mexican summer afternoon.

Over the course of my employment as an archaeologist with the National Park Service at Pecos, I often stood on the crest of the ruin and tried to reach back into the past. Often I strained for sounds, the lonely bark of a dog, the low murmur of adult voices, the clink of ceramic pots touching or the childish squeal of happy laughter. Occasionally, I expected to hear the shout of alarm, a Spanish curse and the noisy discharge of a flinty harquebus. In the distance, I tried to detect the steady creak of wooden wagons and the impatient whistles of American traders on the Santa Fe Trail among the hiss of semi-trucks traveling along the Interstate. I also yearned to hear the squeak of handmade wheelbarrows and the soft thuds of picks against soil as the great archaeological excavation of 1915 commenced in the ruined village.

Sometimes I detoured from my duties, bounded up the stone steps to the top of the pueblo – Spanish for 'village' – and simply looked. Despite the march of time and progress, the pueblo's original inhabitants would have recognized much of the horizon: the sturdy, table-flat mesa to the south, the quietly efficient pass through the mountains to the west which the pueblo guarded like a citadel, the serenely majestic high country of the Pecos River headwaters to the north and the gateway canyon to the east, with its enticing dogleg toward the Great Plains, hinting of adventure and new worlds beyond. There were remarkably few visible human-made scars: a long, thin slash of highway, the park's facilities, the modern village's maroon water tower and, unsettlingly, a crop of new houses scattered along the base of the mesa, citadels in their own way.

Revolving slowly on that spot, it was easy to imagine Pecos as the center of a great cyclical event, the opening and closing of a year, the center of a wheel or a galaxy. It was, frankly, a very beautiful place. This was not strictly my opinion either; visitors volunteered similar declarations to me without provocation. They hailed me as I sat before an adobe wall, in dutiful reverence or stopped me on the trail to say that Pecos was truly beautiful. I think they wanted to thank me, as a handy representative of the National Park Service, though I disavowed any credit.

Everywhere I went in the park, I ran into beauty and intrigue. From the friendly cottonwoods along the river, to the rolling meadows and rugged eastside, Pecos sheltered an abundance of natural charm. Better yet, nearly every enchantment concealed a secret: the foundations of an abandoned home in a pasture, the remains of an old mill in a grove of river trees, stubbornly mute petroglyphs tucked among cliffs, piles of historic trash blocking dry washes, dirt tanks for cattle in small drainages and bits of broken pottery everywhere. We often joked that the whole park was one big archaeological site, and we were not far wrong. Beauty and history are interwoven at Pecos and their inseparability made every day an adventure.

Inevitably, I began to contemplate the role of beauty in social organization at Pecos, which led to the development of a theory about the significance of ‘placeness’ in human life. I thought: Pecos was once the center of the universe for a reason – why not beauty? But this thought was unscientific, so I kept it to myself. It was also heretical. According to the scientific literature, the prehistoric process of picking a location for a new village was a logical response to the mundane realities of thirst, hunger, trade and the proximity of friendly (or cranky) neighbors. I wondered, however, if there were other reasons for living in a place, ones that could not be read in a piece of pottery or the edge of a blade? What if the prehistoric inhabitants of the valley at the center of the universe decided to move up onto the rocky promontory at Pecos simply to get a better view?

The same thought must have occurred to the people who came to the valley in subsequent centuries. I'm sure the Spanish missionaries who worked at Pecos took time out from their daily chores to gaze at the horizon and contemplate their good fortune to be at the center of all things. Perhaps this special feeling is what prompted the Spanish to build the largest church in the whole colony at Pecos. It must have been quite a sight. Sometimes as I worked in the mission, I tried to imagine what it would have been like to stand in the bell tower of such an edifice, probably taller than the adjacent "heathen" village, and simply stare out at the land. It must have been a very imperial experience. The European dream of conquest, with its peculiar emphasis on one-upmanship, must have beat strongly in the Spanish breast at Pecos.

Beauty must have played a role in the dreams of many who followed the Spanish, including French traders, Comanche raiders, Mexican homesteaders, American entrepreneurs and early modern visitors. To those who passed through the valley, either with fire in their eyes or profit on their minds, Pecos must have been irresistibly attractive. I like to think their busy lives were stilled for a moment as they stood in awe, hat or arrow in hand. To those who came to stay, either with dreams of a new life or thoughts about preserving old ones, the 'placeness' of Pecos must have been inspiring. It reinforced their feeling that a good place to live has timeless qualities: good water, abundant wood, wild food, economic opportunity, accessibility, defensibility and tons of beauty. They came to stay, and by doing so acknowledged the poet's observation that truth and beauty are inseparable.

The first human eyes to behold the valley's beauty belonged to indigenous peoples. They traversed the first trails, built the first homes, planted the first crops and buried the first dead. Archaeologists use the word *Puebloan* to describe the native people who occupy the Rio Grande Valley, whether past or present, as well as points beyond, including Pecos. The village stood fast in that place of beauty until the early decades of the nineteenth century, when its few remaining residents departed for a new home. Despite their absence, I'm certain the 'placeness' of Pecos still burns brightly in the hearts of the pueblo's descendents. I imagine that a dream of returning home some day to the center of the universe also burns brightly.

The role of beauty in the history of Pecos became abundantly clear to me every September, especially during the last two weeks when the chamisa bushes began to bloom gold and the air grew still and frosty. Everything in the park seemed to hold its breath. The leaves, contemplating their mortality, clung to their branches and the lowering sun lingered in the sky. Among the lengthening shadows, the park took on a palpable timeless quality, which made it hard to concentrate on my work. I would raise my head from a map or my notes and simply look. More often than not I found myself holding my breath as well. Unfortunately, there was no way to measure the effect of beauty on history at Pecos. My maps missed the mark entirely. Looking and listening had to suffice, as did holding one's breath. My dream each September was to stretch time out indefinitely.

At Pecos, this seemed entirely possible.

The center of the universe shifted to Pecos roughly seven hundred years ago when the elders of a small community of Puebloan people made a decision, I like to think, to place beauty and perhaps security above other values. They gathered their belongings together from a large, low-lying village nearby and climbed to the top of a small, flat, wind-swept mesa. There they paused to rest and take in the view before setting about to build a future. They moved to this small outcropping at first as individual families, but the trickle soon became a flood and within a hundred years the entire population of the former village had moved 'up top.' Their previous homes, built of long courses of sun-dried mud, stood silent and forlorn. Perhaps as a gesture of respect to their former home, the Pecos built their new homes out of rock.

The centuries prior to the arrival of the Spanish are a partially closed book to us. By digging and thinking, archaeologists have determined the outlines of "prehistoric" life (it was not pre-history to the Pecos after all) in that place of beauty – but only outlines. We know, for example, how tall the Pecos were, what their rooms were like, what they used for tools, what they ate and where they were buried. We know the size of their community, how it developed and how many stories high their buildings were. We know a few intimate details too: what diseases they carried, how they handled their dead, where the glaze of their pottery originated and so on. We know a little about their art, their religion and their social organization as well, but we do not know much more than that.

That's not quite true. We know they laughed, of course, and played games and gossiped and quarreled and fell in love. We just can't prove it. We will never know their names, their songs, their gods, what made them fight or cry; and we will never know the role beauty played in their lives. That is our tough luck. The emotional life of a long-gone people, much like their language, does not adhere to dirt. Confined to analyzing rocks, bones, ceramics and other "artifacts," archaeologists can only speculate about the interior monologues of the Pecos.

Although tremendous strides have been made on the technological front – we can, for example, accurately date the last time a hearth was used or trace a piece of obsidian rock back to its source – these facts hardly get us closer to the heart and soul of prehistoric lives.

We don't even know the true name of their village. "Pecos" is a word that the Spanish assigned the village. We don't know why. It appears to be Euro-corruption of the native Towa word "pe'kush" – Towa being the language spoken by the villagers. The village's first recorded name, however, was "Cicuye," an appellation used by the Keres-speaking people who live south of modern-day Santa Fe. As for the descendents of the remaining survivors of Pecos Pueblo, who today live with their Towa-speaking relatives in Jemez Pueblo, northwest of Albuquerque, they use another word altogether for their ancestral home: "K'ak'ora." Of course, we'll never know the real answer.

As it should be. Outlines are enough. They open the past, revealing shape and size, but not color, so that we may know more and act on that knowledge, but without breaking confidences. Outlines can satisfy our curiosity while providing a lesson or two about human behavior, which is all any scientist, or artist, can ask. Some scholars consider the past's intractable silence as the bane of archaeology, but I do not. Our inability to make the dead speak affords them a large shield of privacy. It allows the Pecos to keep their arms resolutely folded across their chests, and their mouths shut. That's alright. It is appropriate that archaeologists are confined to the material world – it is our just desserts for digging in other people's trash.

The outline of human history at Pecos reveals a record of remarkable achievement. After the move 'up top' circa 1300 AD, Pecos became one of the most influential centers for trade in the prehistoric Southwest. Although there were other pueblos of comparable size, by dint of its physical prominence astride the main corridor connecting the Great Plains to the Rio Grande Valley, Pecos became the chief arbiter of goods for the region. It prospered and grew fat. Its population and prestige expanded proportionally. Its estimated size at the time of Spanish entry into New Mexico in 1540 AD was 2000 souls – huge by prehistoric standards in the Southwest. It may have been the largest pueblo in the region during its heyday, though precise numbers are hard to figure. It may have been the most powerful as well, but those numbers are even harder to calculate.

For three hundred years, Pecos thrived as the center of the universe. Age-old patterns of hunting, farming, and population growth set a solid foundation for Pecos' rise. An expansion in trade with the tribes of the Great Plains in the 1400s brought new wealth to the village. It prospered enough, for example, to begin trading for fancy new glazed bowls and jars that were all the rage in the pueblos of the Galisteo Basin, just over the pass to the west. Pecos became a willing broker between the 'orient' and the 'occident' of pre-Spanish northern New Mexico. Bison hides and other foreign inducements from tribes in the exotic east were bartered for pottery, turquoise and obsidian from fellow Puebloans in the west in annual trade fairs that took place in the grassy field adjacent to the village. The Pecos must have relished their role as middle men in this busy and lucrative work.

Trade no doubt also brought some ease to a difficult existence in a high, cold mountain valley. At 7000 feet, Pecos endures long and often tempestuous winters that reluctantly segue into a windy spring season. After brief dry spell in May and June, the summer is characterized by squalls of driving rain and bouts of lightning. The growing season is short, which means the pueblo's inhabitants had to augment their regular diet of corn, beans and squash with mountain game and river fish. When these delectable sources of protein began to grow scarce, as they always did in the face of population expansion, there is little doubt that the Pecos turned to their burgeoning trade networks for relief. I like to think that dried bison meat became the currency of choice in the years prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. This way they had their profits and ate them too.

The village itself condensed into a sturdy rectangular shape, with only two narrow entrances leading out and a defiantly smooth exterior wall, similar to other pueblos of the era. Life at Pecos, in other words, focused inward. The interior plaza swarmed with activity; people ground corn, tanned hides, danced in ceremonies and played games. Subterranean *kivas* – a Hopi word for the round rooms which served as the social and religious nerve centers for the village – abounded at Pecos. Decisions made in these kivas regulated the year's schedule and life rolled on. It was a human town like any other, full of the usual joy, sorrow, contentment and strife. Warriors kept a lookout for enemies from the pueblo's rooftops while elderly men climbed up and down ladders into the kivas and women added a fresh coat of mud plaster to the walls of the buildings. Children frolicked while dogs yipped. Nothing changed, and nothing remained the same.

After a century or so on their little mesa, the pueblo inhabitants had settled down into the cyclical pattern of existence that characterizes so many agrarian peoples the world over: plant, pray and pick – and sometimes prosper.

The stability of routine settled over Pecos like a comforting shroud, marred only by the unpredictability of strangers and seasons. The population grew too, slowly but steadily. Room complexes were expanded, new kivas were dug and hopes for the future brightened. Satellite villages near Pecos were abandoned and the pueblo grew. Maybe the word got out that the center of the universe was a good place to live.

This population boom mirrored events throughout the northern Rio Grande region. After centuries of stop-and-go migration across the land, ancestral Puebloans, formerly called "Anasazi" – a Navajo word that Puebloan people reject today – found life good along the Rio Grande corridor and settled in. Related culturally but divided linguistically, the Rio Grande pueblos set down deep roots in fertile soil and thrived. Villages expanded, trade intensified and craft-work became more specialized. The usual schisms and social maneuverings went on as they do in every human community, but on the whole life was stable, at least for a while.

The origins of the people who came to call Pecos their home are obscured by time. We know the village's inhabitants spoke a dialect of Towa, which along with Tewa and Tiwa form the Tanoan language group. This relates Pecos linguistically to the modern-day pueblos of Jemez, Isleta and Sandia near Albuquerque, the pueblos north of Santa Fe, and the Kiowa tribe in Oklahoma. Today, there are twenty living pueblos in New Mexico and Arizona and their residents speak four separate languages: Tanoan, Hopi, Zuni, and Keres. Tanoan and Hopi are part of a broad language group in the West and Mexico called Uto-Aztecan. The Zuni are related linguistically to a tribe now located in California. Keres is apparently not related to any other language in the world. This is fascinating to archaeologists because it suggests that four distinct tribes came together over time and developed a common culture, as evidenced by their common use of the kiva, for instance.

In the mid-13th century, most ancestral Puebloans abruptly abandoned their homes in the Four Corners area – where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah touch – and moved south and east. Whether they were pushed out by drought, starvation or hostile neighbors, or pulled by social or religious forces is the subject of intense scholarly debate. The net result was the same, however: a mass exodus of people. Some moved south to the Hopi mesas, some joined cousins at Zuni, but many drifted east to the Rio Grande Valley and surrounding environs. Some probably came to the Pecos valley.

A century or so later, according to archaeological evidence, a new wave of indigenous peoples washed across the deserts of the Southwest. They were nomadic, Athapaskan-speaking tribes whose languages and cultures were wholly foreign to the Puebloans. Arriving from the far reaches of what is today northern Canada, they employed an economy based primarily on raiding, which chilled relations with their new neighbors almost immediately. These newcomers, of which the modern Navajo and Apache tribes are the most numerous members, dramatically and permanently changed the social landscape of the Pueblo world.

Change was occurring on the Great Plains as well during this period. Tribes such as the Sioux and the Comanche were being pushed west and south by warfare and other turbulence farther east. Some of these newcomers, such as the Plains Apaches, apparently became quite interested in trading which undoubtedly played a role in the rise of Pecos as a major trading center. However, while the Apaches were eager to trade for goods from the Rio Grande Valley, the Navajos apparently remained antagonistic toward their Puebloan neighbors. Evidence of armed conflict between the two groups can be found throughout the region.

Relations remained tense until a new wave of foreigners crashed upon their shore. In 1540, a Spanish nobleman named Francisco de Coronado led a large and intrepid band of explorers north out of Mexico in search of the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola, purported to be brimming with gold. Riding strange beasts and wearing bizarre armor that glinted brightly in the sun, these foreigners looked like apparitions from a dream. Indigenous peoples didn't know how to respond. Some opened their arms, some threw rocks, some cowered submissively, some fought defiantly. It didn't matter much. The Spanish, with their superior technology and unshakeable sense of purpose, would not be denied. The fortified walls of the villages in the region could not deter Spanish aggression for very long. Pueblo after pueblo fell under Spanish dominion as the foreign search for material wealth and spiritual submission rolled on.

Pecos, because of its size, economic prominence and strategic location, was one of the first to be swamped by this particular tide of history. Whether the Spanish recognized the pueblo as the center of the universe or not isn't clear.

The whole region underwent a historic holocaust. Ancient traditions and patterns of life were demolished in decades. Local economies, politics, social customs and religious beliefs were radically transformed, often at the point of a sword. Populations plummeted, primarily as a result of infectious foreign diseases. Some pueblos survived, but many did not. Of the fifty or so pueblos in existence at the dawn of the Spanish conquest, only twenty-one made it to the 20th century.

Alas, Pecos was not one of them. Hardened by centuries of strong cultural crosswinds, Pecos endured a veritable hurricane of change for nearly three hundred years after initial European contact. It finally succumbed, however, in 1838 when its last citizens, numbering only two dozen or so, packed their things and moved in with their linguistic relatives, the Jemez, eighty miles to the west.

For the first time in five hundred years the center of the universe was empty.

It must have been hard to leave. Sometimes as I stood on the top of the ruin I tried to imagine what the surviving Pecos felt as they walked away from their home. Were their heads bowed in sorrow? Were their eyes filled with anger? Were their bodies weak from hunger and disease? Were their spirits dog-tired from two centuries of nearly continuous conflict with the outside world? Or were they simply numb with resignation? Perhaps they sang a song as they trudged down the well-beaten path to the west. Perhaps they laughed and smiled, knowing that their ordeal was concluded and that friends and family awaited them at the other end of the trail. Perhaps they felt relieved to shed the burden of so much beauty.

We will never know.

Pecos did not die, of course. It simply changed its clothes, assumed a new role and embraced a new, romantic century. Within a year of the villagers' exodus a rumor began to circulate through the region that a mysterious fire continued to burn in the old ruin. The newly arrived Hispanic and Anglo colonists of the upper Pecos valley called it "Montezuma's Eternal Flame," erroneously conflating the Puebloans of the Rio Grande with the ancient

Aztecs of central Mexico. They believed that Montezuma, the Aztec king swept aside in the 1520s by Hernan Cortes and his dreams of plunder, was born at Pecos. The eternal flame, went the rumor, symbolized the desire of Montezuma to return someday to his home. The people of Pecos grew tired of waiting for their departed kinsman, went the story, and so decided to move away, leaving the flame behind as a beacon.

Another rumor spread of a giant snake that lived in the pueblo during the last years of its occupation. According to this story, the serpent demanded and received a regular human sacrifice, usually a child. One year, however, the Pecos became neglectful of their lord's needs and forgot to honor the ancient ritual. Wrathful, the snake slithered out of the village, never to return. Grief-stricken and abundantly aware of the portentousness of their crime, the village commenced a precipitous decline in population, resulting in its eventual abandonment. In another version of this story, the great snake's appetite was so insatiable that the village's population became decimated beyond the point of no return. Either way, blame for the village's demise, according to these westerners, lay conveniently at the feet of the Pecos themselves.

Their imaginations fired by these tall tales, travelers on the nearby Santa Fe Trail flocked to the charismatic ruin and added fuel to the romantic fire. One soldier wrote home that the village was built by fifty-foot giants and occupied by red-headed dwarves, before being conquered by the Aztecs. A journalist recounted a story he heard from an old shepherd, who lived in the ruined church, about doomed Indian lovers, the last of the Pecos, raising a burning brand to the heavens and expiring in each others arms as they watched the flame ascend into the morning sky. Naturally, the young journalist pocketed a handful of cinders from the ruin before continuing on his travels.

Josiah Gregg, a famous American trader on the Santa Fe Trail, himself "beheld this consecrated fire, silently smoldering under a covering of ashes, in the basin of a small altar." His book, *Commerce on the Prairies* (1844), verified rumor into fact. The Pecos, he wrote, had waited in vain for salvation in the form of the mystical Montezuma. He described a pathetic scene:

> *Even so late as ten years ago, when [the village] contained a population of fifty to a hundred souls, the traveler would oftentimes perceive but a solitary Indian, a woman, or a child, standing here or there like so many statues upon the roofs of their houses, with their eyes fixed on the eastern horizon, or leaning against a wall or a fence, listlessly gazing at a passing stranger; while at other times not a soul was to be seen in any direction, and the sepulchral silence of the place was only disturbed by the occasional barking of a dog, or the cackling of hens.*

Despite its abandonment, Pecos continued to grow in the era's imagination. In 1846, an American soldier with General Kearny's conquering Army of the West, sketched the ruin for the first time, thus initiating it into the pantheon of romantic 'must-see' destinations in the region. A German artist visited the ruin in 1858 and produced a painting of the church notable for its gothic *sturm-und-drang*, complete with what appears to be a flock of vultures squatting on the parapets. In 1875, another painter depicted three 'Indians' on a village roof staring forlornly off toward the horizon. He titled the painting "The

Watch for Montezuma." Thus it went. The quickly deteriorating ruins drew artists, dreamers, scavengers, tourists and other curiosity-seekers like moths to an eternal flame.

Instead of actually dying, Pecos became the region's first tourist destination.

One day during my second summer at Pecos, a young man stepped into our office and asked to speak with an Interpretive Ranger. Walking the Santa Fe Trail from east to west, he had been sending regular correspondence to the local newspaper about his adventure, so we knew he was coming. What, we wondered, would he want to know about Pecos? Would he write something about the ten thousand year-old history of human life in the valley? Or the seven hundred year-old story of the ruin? Perhaps he desired a peek at the nearly three hundred year-old Spanish church and mission? Or the pivotal Civil War battlefield nearby? Not at all. Stepping into the office, he inquired about Montezuma's Eternal Flame. Where had it burned, he wanted to know?

As a polite Ranger led the young adventurer out of the room, I suppressed an urge to jump up and shout "Follow me!" If I had, I would have led him onto the foot trail, past the church, and up the stone steps to the top of the ruin, where I would have told him that the rumors of an eternal flame were true. The flame burns in the shape of a park, illuminating the land. Its light shines brightly to the west, reassuring the descendents of the original inhabitants that their ancestral home is in the hands of a good steward. It shines across the nation as well, reassuring all its inhabitants that the flame would remain lit as long as someone was willing to tell the story of Pecos, and as long as someone was willing to listen.

All our national parks, I would have said, are eternal flames. They cast light on nature, history, and our desire to preserve both in perpetuity. They illuminate sacred places in time and landscape, and by doing so shine a light on our soul as a nation. Pecos, I would have said, is a perfect example. No other national park unit in the nation can tell the story of human history in North America as Pecos can; and no other park can do so with the aid of such an attractive landscape. The light of Pecos shines brightly on our history, on our relationship to nature, on the changing role of the National Park Service and on the winds of change. Knowing Pecos, I would have told him, means knowing an important part of ourselves.

On the other hand, if the lad and I had been able to walk out to the top of the ruin perhaps no words at all would have been necessary. The beauty of the place itself would have been enough; my theory about the role of place in human action would have been laid bare in the silence. He would have recognized instantly the center of the universe, and understood. He would become his own flame, burning brightly. I would have left him there, standing at the hub of so much history and loveliness, lost in his own thoughts. I would have gone back to my seat in front of an adobe wall, picked up my pencil and map, and quietly returned to my work knowing that some theories are simply unproveable – and rightly so.

Harmony

The arrival of Christopher Columbus, we are constantly reminded, ruined harmony forever in the New World. Europeans crushed Paradise under their boots and speared it with their lances. Do not believe it. As any archaeologist can tell you, the New World was no Eden. It was a culturally fractious, socially stressed and at times environmentally abused landscape, full of desperation and struggle. In other words, it was no different from any other place on Earth. The jungle empires of modern Mexico and Guatemala, for example, were ruled by leaders so despotic that entire civilizations collapsed in great social revolutions likely triggered by environmental stress. Slavery existed in many prehistoric – and historic western – societies. Starvation was routine in Paradise, as was warfare. Some animal species may have been hunted to extinction, causing more stress and suffering for all involved. Harmony, if that is what we want to call it, was rough business.

Any examination of ancestral Puebloan life in the arid Southwest reveals a history of struggle, especially with nature. The famous collapse of the communities in Chaco

Canyon, in northwestern New Mexico, during the 11th century is a good example. Most archaeological evidence now suggests that overexploitation of the environment in combination with a deep drought triggered the precipitous abandonment of Chaco. Rapid population growth in the canyon during the preceding century placed great stress on the already meager countryside. Wild game became scarce, as did timber for new construction and fuelwood for the evening meal. Arable land for farming deteriorated in quantity and quality. Springs dried up. Subsistence became a matter of grave concern for the Chacoans. When the drought refused to break, they saw that the gig was up. They hit the trail, dispersing in various directions in the never-ending quest for adequate rainfall.

Many have called the demise of Chaco a “collapse” or something similar, lumping it together with the collapse of great civilizations, including the Maya in Mexico and Guatemala. But this isn’t correct, I think. That’s because what happened at Chaco was typical across the Southwest as a combination of periodic drought, expanding populations, resource depletion and social fissioning repeatedly goosed the inhabitants of villages into doing what humans have always done in hard times: pack up and move to someplace new.

The ruined pueblo of Arroyo Hondo, just outside the city limits of Santa Fe, is a good example. In the early 14th century, Puebloan settlers staked out a flat spot of land near good water, planted crops, and built a community. The site’s population grew dramatically, surging to over one thousand souls in just a few generations, which placed enormous pressure on the surrounding environment. Then, as food and wood grew scarce, rains dried up and the population crashed. The village became a shell of its former self. Increased rainfall in the 1370s corresponded with a resurgence of population growth, and the walls of Arroyo Hondo again echoed with life – but not for long. Drought arrived a decade later and the villagers abandoned their homes for good, possibly moving to the more prosperous Pecos River valley nearby.

This stop-and-go pattern repeated itself across the Puebloan heartland for hundreds of years. Very few villages existed for lengthy periods of time, Pecos being a notable exception. Some major sites, such as Betatakin in northeastern Arizona or the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde, were occupied for only sixty years. Some lasted a century. Although social variables, including warfare, undoubtedly played a role in causing these migrations, the chief reason for the brief life of Puebloan villages was environmental stress, including drought and overexploitation of natural resources or some combination of the two. This is a main reason why there are more than three hundred thousand ancestral Puebloan sites across the Southwest.

The abundance of prehistoric villages also accounts for the famous myth of the "disappearance of the Anasazi" that still dominates popular imagination in the region. According to this misconception, which was aggressively kindled by early boosters of the tourist industry in Santa Fe, the ancient Anasazi collectively "vanished" from the face of the earth before the arrival of the Spanish in 1540. Even early archaeologists were taken in by this myth, especially because some ruins looked as if they had been abandoned only yesterday, with whole pots sitting quietly in rooms, corn cobs resting neatly in stone bins, ladders leaning against walls, waiting to be climbed. All these ruins lacked were smoldering embers in hearths!

Unfortunately, quick-witted entrepreneurs at the turn-of-the-century took the "mystery of the Anasazi" by the hand and held it up for every potential tourist to see. Academic explanations were trampled underfoot in the ensuing stampede. Even the term "Anasazi" stuck despite academic – and Puebloan – objections. Boosters didn't care because they knew they had a good thing going. Posters, brochures, and other shenanigans trumpeted the disappearance of the "mysterious Anasazi" across the nation. "Come to the Southwest," they shouted, "and witness the puzzle first hand. Partake in the intrigue! Explore forbidding cliff dwellings!"

And don't forget your money.

I witnessed the power and durability of this myth first hand. "Where *did* the Anasazi go?" was the second most frequently asked question I received during my time at Pecos (the first being "What are you doing?"). Despite its disturbing regularity, I did not begrudge the visitors their concern; clearly, our culture has a soft spot for certain romantic misconceptions and will not let go. Sadly, the "vanishing Anasazi" myth was perpetuated not only by bad novels and poor journalism, but also by an occasional national park volunteer. Like a virus, it is a tenacious lie that defies scholarly attempts to vanquish it.

The "Anasazi" did not disappear. There is unequivocal evidence in the ethnological and archaeological records that the "Anasazi" are alive and well living as the modern Puebloan people. Not only is there strong artifactual and architectural continuity with the past, such as the use of kivas, the Puebloans *themselves* claim direct descent from the "Anasazi." Their oral tradition is replete with references to the physical and spiritual landscape of their past. Some modern pueblos even claim specific ruins as their ancestral homes. Pecos is a perfect illustration. It was continuously occupied from the "Anasazi" period up to 1838, when its inhabitants packed up and left for Jemez

Pueblo. There is simply no mystery – there never was. To the inquiry "Where did the Anasazi go?" I usually jerked a thumb in the direction of the Rio Grande Valley. "Over there," I replied politely.

The arrival of the Spanish, with their foreign ideas about private property and economy, broke the age-old cycle of stop-and-go movement of Puebloan people. The Spanish came to stay (or so they thought) and demanded that everyone stay in their place as well. To enforce this new world order, the Spanish established religious missions in most of the Rio Grande pueblos, thus driving a stake into the ground, in essence, and tethering them to a particular patch of territory. It was a short leash. The Spanish forced Puebloans to accept a new god, a new economy, new technologies, new boundaries, and new fears. The great unhurried migration of Puebloan people across the Southwest had come to an end.

Harmony at Pecos ended as it often did elsewhere – with a bang. As broker to a complex trading network, Pecos dodged the environmental bullet that felled so many other communities. It stepped out of the leisurely migration of Puebloan peoples and built a home to last. Over time, this home grew in height and was carefully constructed to withstand the slings and arrows of misfortune. By providing access to food, wood and other raw materials, the trade business protected the pueblo from the unwanted challenges of drought, deforestation and decreasing wildlife. The village's mud-plastered rock walls shielded it from the predatory whims of unsatisfied trading partners and other enemies. The village itself apparently avoided the type of internal feuding that fissioned many other ancestral communities as well.

Pecos was determined to endure.

Unfortunately, the Spanish had other ideas. In 1540, while chasing his wild golden goose into the Great Plains, Francisco de Coronado paused in the mountain pass to behold Pecos, a pueblo "feared throughout the land," according to the expedition's chronicler, Pedro de Castañeda. He observed that the pueblo was built in a

> *square, founded on a rock. In the center is a great patio or plaza with its kivas. The houses are all alike, of four stories…they have no doors at ground level. To climb to the corridors inside the pueblo they use ladders which can be drawn up; in this way they have access to the rooms…The pueblo is surrounded by a low stone wall. Inside there is a spring from which they can draw water.*

He went on to write "The people of the pueblo pride themselves that no one has been able to subdue them." Perhaps the Spanish took this last achievement as a challenge. On the return journey from the Plains, bitter and disillusioned by their failure to locate any fabled gold, some of Coronado's men picked a quarrel with the Pecos. It was hardly a fair fight. When two of the village's ablest warriors were shot dead by Spanish harquebuses, which were more bazooka than rifle, the Pecos retired into the shelter of their stone home. The Spanish, claiming victory, made a quick inspection of the pueblo and moved on. Little did they know that the Pecos would nurse this defeat like a wound that would not heal.

Upon Coronado's empty-handed return to Mexico and subsequent prosecution for mistreating the Puebloan people, a lone Franciscan friar decided to remain behind in this new territory to spread the Word of his god. Of the fifty pueblos in the region at his disposal, he chose Pecos.

Thus the sturdy village became the first of all the pueblos to receive a European missionary's attention. Although the padre was never seen alive again, this simple fact foreshadowed tremendous change and conflict in the region.

Half a century later, the Spanish returned to the region still pursuing their impossible dream of a Golden City. The results were the same. In the dead of winter, 1590, Castaño de Sosa and his small army reached Pecos and were rebuffed by the villagers, probably out of vengeance for their earlier mistreatment. Angered, de Sosa attacked the village and quickly subdued it. Starving, he found more food than he imagined possible. He wrote:

> *[It was] provided with such an abundant supply of corn that everyone marveled…the total amounted to more than thirty thousand fanegas, since every house had two or three rooms of it, all of excellent quality. Moreover, there was a good supply of beans. Both corn and bean were of many colors…the natives also store quantities of herbs, chili, and calabashes [squash], and many implements for working their cornfields.*

Possibly impressed by what he saw, de Sosa took what he needed and departed Pecos without further hostility. Still, the damage had been done.

Eight years later, the Spanish returned again to the region in force, this time determined to colonize the land. By 1610, Spanish colonists had founded a small village with the portentous title of *Santa Fe* – Holy Faith – just over the pass from Pecos. Soon, Franciscan missionaries fanned out to each of the major pueblos, determined to share their faith whether the Puebloan people wanted it or not. Pecos was an early target. The village's initial reception of the Spanish friar was cool. The sound of gunfire still reverberating in their ears, the Pecos chose disdainful tolerance over open confrontation. They made the friar build his small church on a spit of land some distance away from the village. Perhaps they thought he would dry up and blow away, as the previous padre had.

He didn't.

Instead, something changed within the village because by the mid-1620s a great church, as well as a home for the priest called a convento, was being constructed at the southern edge of the pueblo itself. In allowing the Spanish to move up onto their little mesa, apparently the Pecos had relented, or been divided. Either way, the Spanish moved closer to the center of the universe and dug in deep. Constructed of an estimated three hundred thousand sun-dried mud bricks, called *adobe*, this second church was the finest of its kind in the land. The head of the Catholic Church in New Mexico at the time, Father Benavides, observed that it was a "most splendid temple of singular construction and excellence on which a friar expended very great labor and diligence." Massive and whitewashed when completed, the edifice was visible for miles, an unmistakable symbol of Spanish authority and piety.

The church and convento were constructed under the supervision of Friar Andrès Suarez, who remained at the mission for nearly thirteen years – a very long tour of duty for the era. Although not much is known about the man, I like to think he was a compassionate soul, kindhearted and patient. To live that long in one pueblo, in a time when friars switched missions like musical chairs, required considerable skills. Or else he was colossally stubborn. Probably he was well-liked by the villagers. Undoubtedly, he was a talented diplomat thrust into

Nuevo México's volatile and dangerous mix of church-state-pueblo relations. Maybe he fell in love with Pecos and thought he had found a home in the mission he had raised to maturity. Maybe he was happy to be in the center of all things.

The Spanish mission at Pecos prospered through the 1600s. A second story was added to the convento by 1663, new rooms were built and corrals expanded. A secular hacienda complex grew up alongside the convento walls, as did a large corral-like structure across the creek, likely the result of an expansion of the mission's ranching operation. A large, diamond-shaped field appeared below the western gate to the pueblo. Rows of wheat, barley and vegetables – European food – fed by water that ran off the village and collected in a shallow reservoir at one tip of the diamond, grew tall and taunted the Pecos. The center of the universe had a new master, marked by defiantly waving wheat.

As the mission grew, the pueblo commenced its slow, fateful decline. It began ominously when the village split into two parts. A large contingent of villagers packed up their things and moved to the 'South House,' near the great church, taking their valuable roof beams with them. Most likely, they were Christianized souls either thrown out of the main village for their sacrilegious beliefs or voluntary exiles. In either case, a deep schism appeared in Pecos – one that repeated itself all across the Puebloan world in this troubled time.

Meanwhile, the stage was set for high drama on the rim of the Spanish empire. Corrupt territorial governors, high-minded clerics, hard-working homesteaders, rebellious Puebloans, raiding bands of Navajos and Comanches, long winters, poor soils and incredible isolation for the Europeans – it was a four-month journey by wagon to

Santa Fe from Mexico City – characterized 17th century life in colonial New Mexico. The mission at Pecos often found itself at the center of the melodrama that surrounded church-state relations of the age. In 1663, for example, the Governor stormed into its convento, arrested the chief Franciscan of the territory and jailed him in Santa Fe on trumped-up charges. Relations between the civil and religious authorities in the territory, always tense, quickly deteriorated to the point of open conflict.

This fractious state of things, combined with an intense drought through the 1660s and an increasing intolerance of native religion on the part of the Franciscans caused physical and emotional distress throughout the Puebloan world. Additionally, the Spanish economic system, called *encomienda*, forced Puebloan people into something very close to slavery. Failing to discover gold and silver in satisfactory quantities, the colonists turned to something nearly as valuable: the sweat and toil of native peoples. Entire families were placed into debt servitude to Spanish masters, often reducing Puebloan people to abject poverty. All of it took a terrible toll. At Pecos, the population of the village dropped by eight hundred in the first twenty-five years of Spanish colonization, mostly due to disease. Inevitably, Puebloan patience began to run thin. Talk of rebellion had been in the air for some time, but cultural and historic antagonisms among pueblos kept defusing any attempt at coordinated action. What they needed was a leader, and a plan. When that leader, Popè, stood up finally, Pecos pledged its support.

The Spanish world in New Mexico came crashing down, literally, on August 10th, 1680, when the Puebloan people rose in revolt. Warriors sacked many of the churches and attacked colonists in their homes, before besieging the Governor in his Santa Fe palace. Failing to secure a truce, the Governor muscled his way out of the city with the remainder of the colonists and fled south to El Paso, where he nursed his bruises and sore feelings. As a result of this uprising, the entire state of present-day New Mexico emptied itself of European colonists. This is why the Great Pueblo Revolt is sometimes referred to as the most successful Native American uprising in North American history. The Puebloan people probably suspected that the Spanish would return someday, but in the meantime they reveled in the restoration of harmony as they knew it.

The celebration at Pecos was spectacular. After letting Father Velasco slip away unharmed (to be killed later at Galisteo Pueblo), the villagers turned their wrath on the magnificent church, obliterating it from the face of the earth. They fired its roof and tore down its adobe walls until no trace remained. Its existence faded from memory. It was the only Spanish church to be completely erased during the Great Revolt, evidence that strong feelings were at work in the village. Perhaps the church's massive size, or prominent location provoked such hostility. Or perhaps the Pecos felt it was no longer appropriate to have a heathen temple in the center of the universe.

The restoration of harmony did not last very long. In 1692, Don Diego de Vargas swept into Santa Fe at the head of a reconquering army and reclaimed the territory for his King. The pueblos were quickly subdued in turn, many without a fight. During the twelve years of Spanish absence the pueblos had fallen into old habits: they quarreled among themselves, fought and even murdered Popè, the leader of the Great Revolt, who apparently harbored dreams of tyranny. The Don's divide-and-conquer strategy was half complete before he rode out of El Paso. Although the pueblos attempted another Revolt in 1696, it came to naught. The Spanish, who had learned their lesson the hard way, were here to stay.

Grudgingly, Pecos accepted the inevitable. In late September of 1692, de Vargas marched on the village, the first pueblo he attempted to reconquer after taking Santa Fe. He found it abandoned. Unable to lure the Pecos down from the hills, de Vargas wisely retreated to Santa Fe without molesting their home. Three weeks later he returned to find a more hospitable welcome. He rode into the plaza at Pecos and accepted their apology. Shortly thereafter, Father Zeinos constructed a temporary chapel in the vanished shadow of the great church and repaired the damaged convento. The Pecos picked their secular leaders, went to Mass, harvested crops and tried to reestablish a rhythm to their lives.

With the christening of a new, smaller church in 1717, it seemed for a moment as if Pecos had emerged from a thicket of uncertainty and would now find its legs. The pueblo quickly took its place again at the center of a far-flung trading network, one that occasionally reached beyond the Mississippi River. A sprinkling of French merchants joined Apaches and other Native American entrepreneurs at annual trading fairs held in the grassy plain just east of the pueblo. These great fairs, rivaled only by ones hosted by Taos Pueblo to the north, were a time of great celebration and camaraderie. For a moment, Pecos could bask once more as the center of attention.

The mission's vitality, however, never returned. Its days of economic and spiritual prosperity were gone for good. The pueblo itself, weakened by disease, privation and constant raiding by hostile Plains peoples, also lurched toward extinction. Its population dropped steadily throughout the 18th century, from roughly one thousand souls in 1700 to one hundred by 1800. Comanche raiders nearly overran the pueblo twice. Although this period was generally one of peace and stability in the pueblo villages in the Rio Grande Valley, it was a time of consternation and discouragement along the eastern frontier. Pecos, sitting exposed on the edge of a foreign empire that could do little to defend itself, began to realize that its days were numbered.

History, however, was not quite finished with the village. In 1786, the Territorial Governor, the brilliant general Juan Bautista de Anza, convened a peace conference with the Comanche in the shadow of Pecos' walls. Seven years earlier, Anza scored a devastating victory over the Comanche and their leader Green Horn on the Great Plains and had been pursuing peace ever since. At last the Comanche agreed. On February 28th, 1786, a pact was drafted at Pecos, signaling the end of a century of hard fighting. Peace and security would reign on the frontier for the duration of the Spanish period. Pecos could carve another notch in its passing parade of events.

It was nearly the last.

By 1790, the Spanish reduced the mission's status to a *visita* and vacated the convento. The priest removed himself to serve a rapidly growing settlement of Hispanic colonists downriver of the dying pueblo. Soon squatters violated the historic Pecos grant boundary itself, openly defying the sovereignty of the original villagers. Meanwhile, the pueblo's population continued to fall. In 1795, there were only five baptisms at Pecos; thirty years later, there was only one. During the same period the Hispanic population in the valley had jumped from near zero to over seven hundred people. The handwriting on the wall was clearly legible. Still, the Pecos clung stubbornly to their life and home. Hope continued to beat in the center of the universe, even as foreigners began plowing their best land.

The decision to leave their home in 1838, however, apparently was not entirely a bitter one. Before departing, the Pecos arranged for the residents of the nearby Hispanic village of the same name to celebrate the pueblo's Feast Day. They removed a painting of the Virgin from the now empty church and gave it to the residents of the new village as an offering to be used in an annual celebration. The Hispanic villagers accepted the painting and the Feast Day is honored today. On the first Sunday of every August, the villagers gather in the old church in the park to celebrate Mass and remember a relationship between two peoples of wildly different cultures that, though often hostile, was old and profound and deeply rooted in that place of beauty.

The abandonment of Pecos Pueblo after five hundred years of continuous occupation is often couched in terms of failure and sorrow. I received this impression not only from visitors to the park, who tended to sigh whenever the subject came up, but from modern books and articles on the park as well. These travelers and authors, nearly all of whom were of European descent, expressed a similar emotion: a sense of shame. Could it be our fault that Pecos, once two-thousand people strong, was reduced in only two hundred years to a small flame and then extinguished? A visitor once asked me "Did we kill them all?" My reassurance to the contrary that the descendants of Pecos were alive and well at Jemez Pueblo did little to mollify him.

Not surprisingly, the descendents of Pecos do not consider the site "abandoned" at all. They think it merely "unoccupied" and intend to return someday to reclaim it

– and have said so publicly. They view the National Park Service as a steward of their property, managing the grounds until the time comes to reoccupy the ruin. Why not? In the game of patience we Euro-Americans are rank amateurs. Native Americans have occupied the Pecos River valley for more than ten thousand years. They have only been gone for one hundred and sixty years or so – a drop in the bucket. Who are we to say they will not be back?

Perhaps the Puebloans do not consider their great migratory cycle broken at all. Maybe they are simply biding their time until the crazy Anglos disappear in a final frenzy of self-destructive behavior (which appears to be entirely possible). Then, after the dust settles, the Puebloan people will pick up their things and begin their slow journey again.

Of course, I hardly know what Native Americans think. Not many Anglos do and should admit it. One day, a group of Pecos elders from Jemez Pueblo suddenly appeared in the park. They had been inspecting shrines in the neighborhood and decided to stop by the ruins for a visit, quite unannounced. The Park Service as a whole, and the Southwest Region in particular, had made sensitivity to Native American concerns a top priority, and rightly so. Thus, when the call came up from the visitor center that Ambrosio, the eldest elder, and others were walking the trail both my boss and the chief of Interpretation rushed outside.

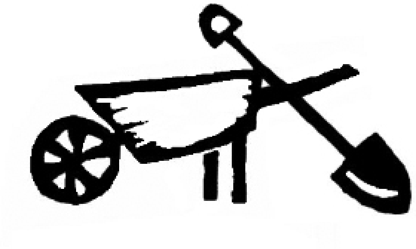
Twenty minutes later, a radio call came into the office. My boss needed to pick up his child at daycare, would I take his place? Of course I would. I walked rapidly out to North Pueblo where a half-dozen Jemez men and the park's Chief of Interpretation stood at an overlook in the main ruin. As I approached, I noticed one of the elders move off to his right. I assumed he was going to inspect a wall that we had recently repaired and covered with a blue plastic tarp. Halfway there, however, he stopped, spread his legs and urinated. I caught the Interpretation Chief's eye; she shrugged ever so slightly and smiled. It was still their pueblo after all.

Later, I escorted the group through the pueblo and into the ruined church, where a disaster nearly occurred. The Jemez were accompanied by a garrulous Anglo archaeologist who smoked cigarette after cigarette. He worked for the Jemez tribe, which as I understood it was the only Rio Grande Pueblo at the time to have a professional archaeologist on staff. As he and I entered the church ahead of the group we noticed a young woman slip into the North Sacristy. She had an Indian blanket pulled tightly around her body. Another young woman rose from the Sanctuary steps where she had been rearranging a battery of photographic equipment, and disappeared into the Sacristy as well. "That's odd," I thought to myself, but didn't pursue it.

Fortunately, the Anglo archaeologist did. As the Jemez elders approached the Sanctuary he turned toward me suddenly and hissed "She's naked!" Visions of a collective Park Service heart attack filled my head as I turned quickly and cut off our visitors. I launched into an improvised speech about the church. I talked energetically about adobe stabilization, reconstruction, preservation and anything else that popped into my head. The Chief of Interpretation frowned at me. She was wondering, no doubt, why I blocked progress into the Sanctuary with this unnecessary monologue. It did not matter; the future outraged reaction of the park's Superintendent already reverberated in my head: "She was *WHAT!?*"

Eventually, the Anglo archaeologist and I herded the elders out a side door without seeing a sign of the naked woman. We exchanged glances of relief. “What would have happened if they had seen her?” I asked the archaeologist later. He shrugged. “They probably would have liked it,” he said with a laugh.

Which proves, I suppose, that harmony exists in the eye of the beholder.



Kidder At Pecos

The dividing line between making history and memorializing it is thin and fascinating. For example, when the United States Census declared the frontier closed in 1890, the nation's attitude toward wilderness switched almost instantly from malice to bereavement. Once considered a ferocious barrier to Progress, as well as a living symbol of all that was treacherous in the American landscape, wild land suddenly became a fragile, precious and endangered commodity in the American mind. Within a year, national parks and forest reserves sprung into existence to conserve what had hitherto been hostile territory. Shortly, a conservation movement gathered itself together to protect wild country for the very civilization that had, up to 1890, been consuming it so efficiently.

The frontier entered the realm of myth with head-turning speed as well. The guns of the OK Corral had hardly cooled when such books as Eugene Cunningham's *Triggernometry* and Billy Beckinridge's *Helldorado* memorialized the fight into myth. A few years later, Owen Wister penned *The Virginian* and the floodgate of popular (mis)imagination opened wide. Dime westerns flooded the nation, followed quickly by Hollywood movies. Perpetuating the myth of the Wild, Wild West became a profitable industry. The reality of a hard, grubby, dirty and often desperate existence on the western frontier became transfigured into the heady stuff of romantic legend. It was a myth especially attractive to city-dwellers comfortably ensconced in their upholstered homes. The frontier would never be the same again.

The line between life and myth at Pecos was also thin. Montezuma's Eternal Flame, giant snakes, doomed lovers and red-headed dwarves were taken seriously by many. Within a few years of its abandonment, Pecos became an early victim of the 19th century affliction that would eventually grab the frontier by the throat. It seemed as if the era could not wait for the pueblo to complete the messy and tiresome process of dying so it could get on with the business of memorializing it. One can almost hear an audible sigh of relief as the last inhabitants of the pueblo packed up and moved out. "Whew! That was depressing! Now let us tell you the real story of Pecos. Once upon a time there was a great Aztec king called Montezuma…"

The thin line wavered, however. Despite the earnest attempts of romantic wayfarers to fashion Pecos into a shrine of doomed history, Pecos also became the object of calculating eyes. In the 1850s, a Polish immigrant named Theodore Kozlowski decided to build a trading post on the Santa Fe Trail near the ruin. Rather than go to the trouble of constructing his own modest structure from scratch, he opted to rip the roof off the old church instead. He pulled down entire walls too, scavenging adobe bricks. He might have done more damage, so the story goes, if a vengeful God had not killed Kozlowski's son with a lightning bolt. Regardless, the blasphemy was done; the church, suddenly bowdlerized, seemed destined to become a huge pile of red dirt and live on only in tall tales and fading memories.

The pueblo too was similarly defiled by unromantic need. Over the years, it became a barn for horses, mules and sheep; its deteriorating walls became a convenient source of raw materials for the homesteaders that had begun to fill the Pecos valley. Treasure-seekers punched holes into its floors looking for "buried gold" rumored to be there. The ruined pueblo quickly collapsed into a shapeless mound of dirt and stone. Soon, romantic infatuation faded. As the buildings fell into a heap, and the site began to look like every other formless ruin in the region, warm rumor gave way to sober indifference. No longer making history, Pecos suddenly seemed in danger of being forgotten as well.

Rescue arrived in 1880 when Adolf Bandelier, a disenchanted banker from the Midwest who had turned to anthropology for a second career, arrived in the Southwest on the newly completed railroad line. This peripatetic scholar, who over the ensuing decades would make a distinguished name for himself (to be posthumously honored by a National Monument), chose Pecos as his first subject of scientific inquiry. Why he did so is anyone's guess. Perhaps he had read about the romantic ruin in one of his books and was on the look-out as the train passed by. Maybe its close proximity to his flea-ridden hotel in Santa Fe was an inducement. Or maybe he thought it was a beautiful place to start a career. In his diary he says simply: "Concluded to go to Pecos tomorrow."

Bandelier spent a week enthusiastically mapping the ruins at Pecos. He identified and measured over a dozen separate structures, including North and South Pueblos, Lost Church, and Square Ruin. His detailed report contains an energetically large number of measurements – rooms, doorways, adobe bricks, cross-sections of buildings, the height of wooden posts, the distance between buildings, individual walls, ad infinitum. Reading it, one gets a strong feeling of scholarly exuberance. Bandelier not only relished his new career, he embraced it whole-heartedly. Sometimes his exuberance extended beyond scientific detachment. The dilapidated condition of the church, for instance, drew an angry response: "The vandalism committed on this venerable relic of antiquity defies all description. It is only equaled by the foolishness of such people as, having no other means to secure immortality, have cut out the ornaments from the sculptured beams in order to obtain a surface suitable to carve their euphonious names."

Bandelier concluded his scientific inquiry with the first detailed analysis of history at Pecos, including an intriguing tale about his trip to observe the broken, pre-Revolt mission bell half-submerged in a sandy wash high on Rowe Mesa. With this fine report, Bandelier blessed Pecos with a benedictory analysis. By working diligently and accurately, using the dispassionate methods of science, Bandelier led Pecos back over the thin line from myth to fact. His attentions anointed the ruin as a site for serious scholarly study, as he did for many other prehistoric and historic sites throughout the Southwest. Although he never returned to Pecos again as a scholar, Bandelier set an important precedent for future investigators. It was a precedent that would wait thirty-five years for fulfillment.

Unfortunately, Bandelier did not stir the ruin from its fitful slumber. The old Spanish church, the last standing structure on the whole site and already gravely wounded, began to give way, brick by brick. Historic photographs, taken by a small but steady stream of admirers, chronicled its deterioration in unhappy detail. The attraction of Pecos as an object of curiosity seemed destined to outlive its physical integrity. The site had no steward and thus no human guardian. It appeared condemned to the dustbin of memory. Pecos as an idea, either as a scientific artifact or romantic mystery, seemed determined to outshine Pecos as a living place.

This condition changed dramatically in 1915 when Pecos became the focus of a revolutionary archaeological expedition and returned briefly to the center of the universe. The architect of this revolution was Alfred Vincent Kidder, considered by most professional archaeologists as the “father” of their discipline. He directed an excavation of the prehistoric ruins at Pecos that lasted from 1915 to 1929, with a year or two off for war and writing. The sheer size of the project, as well as its duration, would alone qualify it as one of the epic digs in the annals of North American archaeology. However, it was Kidder’s influence on the intellectual foundations of the discipline that gave the expedition its revolutionary impact. Over the course of the excavation, he made significant advances in archaeological method and theory, advances that are not only in use today, but are considered basic tools. Kidder literally wrote the book on modern archaeology, and he did it at Pecos.

Prior to Kidder’s arrival at the pueblo, archaeology in North America was primarily descriptive. It focused on the rudimentary classification of prehistoric cultures by architectural style, often with a value judgment thrown in for good measure (mud-and-stick constructions signified a ‘less advanced’ culture than one which lived in ‘cliff palaces’). Intellectual investigation meant inventorying archaeological sites and speculating on their origins without the benefit of sophisticated theories or field methods.

The results were often less than satisfactory. If answers to questions of origin did not come easily, for instance, some simply fell back on the venerable Lost Tribe of Israel or the Aztecs.

Kidder changed all that. Unlike his predecessors, Kidder was primarily interested in chronology. He wanted to understand how a site developed over time, how its architecture, and the pottery styles utilized by its inhabitants, changed over the centuries. His main investigative tool was the scientific application of *stratigraphy* – the layering of cultural deposits in a site, with the oldest on the bottom and the newest on the top – a concept being developed by geologists at the time. By studying the layers of soil in a site, Kidder thought he would be able to piece together the chronological development of the ruin and thus gain a clearer understanding of prehistoric life there. Although he was not the first to use the stratigraphic method in the Southwest, Kidder was the first to use it on a large scale – and he revolutionized American archaeology as a result.

Kidder came to the Southwest for the first time in 1907 as a college undergraduate. He was immediately smitten with the region's pottery (a sure sign of an archaeologist at heart). Curiosity about variations in prehistoric pottery styles led him to roam the landscape over subsequent summers. He visited Pecos in 1911 and collected a sample of its ceramics. No doubt he stood on the crest of the ruin and marveled at the beauty as well. Upon graduation from Harvard, with only the sixth PhD in archaeology in the nation, Kidder was selected by Phillips Academy of Andover, Massachusetts, to direct a multi-year excavation at a ruin of his choice. He chose Pecos. With its long history of occupation and deep deposits of trash, Pecos appeared ideally suited to his intellectual goals. But I wonder if the view from the top of the ruin had a hand in it too.

Work commenced in the summer of 1915 and continued, with breaks, until 1926 when Kidder shifted his focus to Forked Lightning Ruin, just across Glorieta Creek from Pecos Pueblo. During the first season, Kidder concentrated on the midden – archaeology-speak for trash deposits – east of the main pueblo. His crews dug deep trenches into the midden, eventually exposing vertical profiles of soil over forty feet in height. It was a stratigrapher's dream-come-true. Eight different pottery styles were evident in the profile, enabling Kidder to accurately reconstruct which styles were oldest and which were most recent. The immense depth of the midden confounded expectations and was the first of a long series of 'surprises' at Pecos. "Each one," wrote Kidder years later, "has proved the site to be vastly larger and more complex than had appeared from surface indication." Unwittingly, Kidder had awakened Pecos from its slumber.

Another surprise awaited Kidder at the north end of the pueblo, where he discovered during the second season of excavation a forty-room complex he dubbed 'Black-and-White House' in honor of its distinctive pottery. Later styles at Pecos were polychromatic – i.e., painted in many colors. Black-and-White House proved to be the oldest structure on the mesilla, with its pottery dating to 1300 AD or so. This surprised and somewhat disappointed Kidder, since he expected Pecos to be a much older site overall. Nevertheless, the outline of a chronology of prehistoric life in the valley began to take shape – and only after two seasons of excavation! There is little doubt that Kidder turned this chronology over in his mind the following year while serving a patriotic tour-of-duty in

France during the Great War. It must have been a terrible distraction.

Kidder returned to Pecos for five more seasons of work, sandwiched around time off to write an introductory book on Southwestern archaeology. His crews cut trenches all over the pueblo, eventually exposing about twenty-five percent of the entire site. Most of the work concentrated in the rectangular-shaped North Pueblo, where numerous kivas and rooms were uncovered. In a few rooms, Kidder discovered Spanish-era, form-molded adobes in walls and parts of floors. One kiva, in fact, had been completely repaved with adobes apparently scavenged from the tiny first Spanish church, indicating…what? A Christian kiva? Simple opportunism? Kidder could only speculate. Pecos continued to toss curve balls at him, some of which he simply had to duck.

Over the course of the excavations, Kidder collected a staggering wealth of data, including tens of thousands of ceramic and stone artifacts. His crews dug dozens of trenches and cleared hundreds of rooms. They also unearthed hundreds of skeletons. He documented all of this work in innumerable pages of field notes, photographs and maps – a new standard for recordation that was as revolutionary in its day as was his use of the stratigraphic model. Kidder summarized his findings in numerous publications, including the first general introduction to Southwestern archaeology, a classic that remains in print to this day.

After digging at Forked Lightning Ruin, Kidder closed out his work at Pecos for good, thus terminating one of the most extensive and intensive archaeological investigations in North American history. He spent the next two decades of his life as the chief administrator of an ambitious, multi-year, multi-disciplinary excavation in the

Mayan jungles of highland Guatemala before eventually retiring from the field to a post at Harvard. He published over a hundred books and articles during his lifetime and became by dint of his energy and erudition, as well as his magnanimous and self-effacing personality, the beloved dean of American archaeology. He was honored accordingly. In 1952, the American Anthropological Association created the A.V. Kidder Award for exceptional achievement in American archaeology – an award given only once every three years.

His heart, however, never left Pecos. Nearly forty years after leaving the mesa, Kidder returned to Pecos – in the comfort of his Boston study – and wrote a final summary of its architecture. It was a bittersweet experience. His friends, many now deceased, were still "alive in memory and in grateful affection as they were when most of us were young and each of us was working toward the common end of learning what we could of the forces that shape human destinies."

He continues:

> *That was thirty to forty years ago. To return to thinking and writing of Pecos after so long a time, has been a keenly nostalgic experience. But very interesting. I find that today I am concerned less with the old site's pottery than with its human problem…*

His wheels never stopped turning, even in old age. It is an unmistakable sign of a great scholar, as is his humility.

> *In 1924, I thought I knew a good deal about the Southwest in general, and Pecos in particular. The pages, especially the last few, of the present belated*

> *contribution show how very wrong I was. But I flatter myself, I was not nearly as wrong as was he who advised me, just 50 years ago, to take up work in another field because, he said: "The Southwest is a sucked orange."*

Indeed, Kidder knew that Pecos, despite the tons of shoveled dirt and the boxes of catalogued artifacts, would never be a "sucked orange" either. He ends his life-long relationship with that place of history and beauty this way:

> *I only wish I could return again to that wonderful country and wet my aged lips once again in the rich juice of a fruit which a half-century of research has little more than begun to tap.*

He received his wish posthumously in 1981 when he and his wife Madeleine were reinterred in the park, near Forked Lightning Ruin. The only evidence of their final resting place is a small brass plaque, which lies flush with the surface of the ground, as unpretentious as the man himself. It is a lovely, quiet, contemplative spot with a sweeping view of his beloved North Pueblo.

A. V. Kidder had come home to Pecos for good.

Kidder's spirit endures in another way – in the annual Pecos Conference. During the summer of 1927, during his excavation in Forked Lightning Ruin, Kidder wrote to colleagues proposing a convening of Southwestern archaeologists for the purpose of "arriving at an understanding of underlying problems, the methods of accumulating and presenting data, and…a standardized nomenclature for artifacts, decorative motifs, and periods of culture." He hoped that a three-day collective brainstorming session by the brightest minds in the field would resolve conflicts in methods and theories that had been plaguing the discipline for a number of years. He also intended to provoke camaraderie among dispersed (and sometimes contrary) fellow researchers – and have some fun in the process.

He succeeded on every level. The Who's Who roster of conference attendees mixed deans of the discipline, such as Byron Cummings, Andrew Douglass, and Alfred Kroeber, with then-current leaders, such as Sylvanus Morley, Neil Judd, and Earl Morris, and future leaders, such as Emil Haury and Clara Lee Frapp. Together, they cheerfully tackled the chief pressing problem of the era: the classification of Southwestern culture periods. Up until 1927, the prehistory of the region had been loosely categorized by different researchers into a confusing hodgepodge of periods. Kidder wanted a consensus on a set of periods and what dates to assign them – and got it. The conference produced the *Pecos Classification*: Basketmaker I (later deleted), II, III and Pueblo I, II, III, IV, and V. It quickly became the professional standard that Kidder was aiming at. Based on the evolution of pottery types over time, these periods are still in general use by archaeologists to this day.

Other professional concerns were tackled over the course of the conference, including defining particular architectural terms, such as 'kiva.' The researchers also made brief presentations on their current fieldwork, and listened to a long report by Douglass on the emerging discipline of tree-ring dating, called dendrochronology. Years later, however, what many participants recalled most fondly was the satisfying experience of simply *being there*. Typical was the reaction of Hulda Haury, Emil's wife:

> *Arriving at Dr. Kidder's Pecos camp…we found the Conference already in informal discussion. Most were seated on the ground, some on chairs, in the shade of a cluster of juniper and pinon trees, an impressive group! Almost immediately, I was aware of the relaxed, informal atmosphere, yet permeated by an intense and high-level curiosity about the intent of the Conference, together with active participation in contributing and sharing of field experiences and knowledge; in fact, a coming together of minds, working toward some common concepts and ideas.*

The conference was such a success that Kidder convened another in 1929, during his last summer at Pecos. A larger and more varied crowd attended this meeting, which was held over four days in late August, including a few researchers who dropped in uninvited. The diversity of the participants reflected how quickly research in the Southwest had expanded in only two years. The purpose of the conference was also less academic than its predecessor, probably for the same reason. Informal reports of ongoing fieldwork dominated the gathering. One attendee, William Holden, described it this way:

> *The meeting was at Kidder's camp, and in the open with no accommodations whatever except the shade of a few cedar trees… The only place to sit was on a bedroll or the ground. Kidder, then in his mid 40s, presided in a most casual and offhand manner. No papers were read. The various groups just told what they had done and found. No record was made of the proceedings. All was most informal.*

The Pecos Conference continued intermittently through the 1930s and 1940s, adding Santa Fe and Chaco Canyon as host sites. In 1948, the eleventh Pecos Conference became the first to be held outside New Mexico, at Haury's excavation at Point of Pines, Arizona. Soon, the Conference became an annual event and grew dramatically in popularity and importance. A bit of formality crept into the meetings, as delivered papers replaced informal reports, chairs and tents replaced bedrolls and shadeless skies. Institutions, such as the National Park Service, began hosting the event. However, the essential spirit of the Pecos Conference never wavered. It remained casual, hospitable and an outdoor delight for participants. Of course, the addition of the Saturday night beer and dance party didn't hurt.

In 1977, the Conference returned to Pecos in time to celebrate its Golden Anniversary. The meeting was held in late August under a large tent in a wide field directly south of the Monument's headquarters. Six hundred and fifty people attended and ten-minute field papers were presented almost non-stop. T-shirts were printed, book dealers arrived en masse, green chile burritos, beer and informal chats abounded. The spirit was the same, but archaeology itself had changed in ways that Kidder, who died in 1963, could never have imagined. The percentage of women in the discipline, for example, had risen substantially. Many archaeologists now worked for private companies on contract to a state or federal agency, frequently on 'compliance' projects, such as mitigating the archaeological impacts of highway and dam construction. It was a period of vigorous expansion of archaeological inquiry. The two remaining founders of the Pecos Conference in attendance – Emil Haury and Clara Lee Tanner (nee Frapp) – must have marveled at the changes.

No doubt Kidder was smiling too.

Today, the Conference returns to Pecos every five years and during my first season at the park the pleasure of hosting the event fell on the shoulders of my boss, Todd Metzger, and myself. The previous year's Conference, held in Casas Grandes, Mexico, had been underattended, so we expected a big crowd – and got one. Todd handled the official duties, while I picked up many of the nuts-and-bolts chores, such as organizing the finances and registration. The weeks preceding the event were wild. We had T-shirts to pick up, chairs to move, tents to erect, food to order, a beer truck to secure (very important), a band contract to negotiate, a campground to organize, a speaker schedule to fill out, checks to deposit, phone messages to return (in those pre-email days) and a thousand other little details.

Everything went smoothly until the day before the Conference was set to start, when the park's Superintendent snapped. She had convinced herself that five hundred anarchistic archaeologists were going to descend on her park, get drunk, fall over the chairs and generally make mayhem for three days. Our reassurances to the contrary went unheeded. She lost it one afternoon as the chairs were being arranged in the main tent. In contradiction to her wishes, Todd had refused to order a wooden floor (because it makes noise when people walk on it or scoot their chairs), so she chewed him out on the spot, in front of a small crowd that included his wife and young daughter. I wasn't present, but I ran into Todd a short time later. He was livid. Later, the Superintendent apologized, but the damage had been done – Todd was tense all weekend.

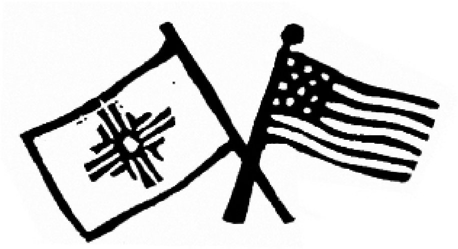
The Conference went swimmingly, almost literally. A violent rainstorm on Saturday swamped the grounds and caused the main tent to sag so dangerously it had to be evacuated. Fortunately, these things don't phase archaeologists, so the rest of the presentations were given outside in the bright sunshine that always seems to follow a New Mexican thunderstorm. The speakers were organized by region and given ten minutes to recount their summer adventures. The two surviving original founders, Emil Haury and Clara Lee Tanner, attended once more. Alas, it would be Haury's last Pecos Conference. He died a few months later, snapping one more root to the past.

The only other hitch we encountered was a shortage of food provided by the caterer, though I learned later that this was another Pecos Conference tradition. Otherwise, everyone seemed to have a good time. I know I did. I wandered around the grounds like a proud parent, mingling with friends as they chatted earnestly in small knots, peering at books I could not afford, joshing with the park staff as they efficiently guided cars in and out of the cramped parking lot, and shooting photos for posterity. I knew this event would also be history soon enough.

I hold one enduring image in my mind's eye. Late Saturday night, after the dancing had ended and the drinking subsided (without any obvious signs of debauchery), I noticed someone working energetically among the shadows outside the main tent. Curious about who could be active so late at night, I meandered obliquely to the edge of a pool of light and stepped carefully into the darkness. When my eyes had adjusted, I saw a uniformed woman stooping repeatedly toward the ground, shoving trash into a large plastic bag. It was the Superintendent, working diligently and alone. I stood there for a moment, impressed and wondering if I should offer her a hand. But she seemed content, so I wandered away in the direction of the ruined Spanish church, beer in hand.

I eventually perched myself on a low wall and raised my beer in a silent toast. The comic Woody Allen once quipped that he wanted to achieve immortality not through his work, but by never dying. Kidder had achieved immortality, by his work – and by never dying. So had Pecos.

Both deserved a toast.



A Park Is Born

I like to believe beauty played a prominent role in the arrival of the National Park Service to Pecos in 1965. There was history, of course, and archaeology but they do not fully explain why Pecos was destined to become a National Monument. The ruined Spanish missions of the nearby Galisteo Basin, for example, were not deemed worthy of Park Service protection. Neither were the state-managed historic missions at Abo and Quarai in central New Mexico, at least not till 1980 when they joined Gran Quivira ruin as Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument. Important archaeological ruins lay scattered throughout northern New Mexico, why were they not considered to have the 'right stuff'? How did the acquisition of Pecos alone make a significant contribution to the national treasury of parks and monuments while these sites did not? Beauty had to be one reason.

Pecos endured a long odyssey from romantic ruin to federal park. For the majority of the nineteenth century the old pueblo lay at the center – literally – of an ugly legal brawl. By law, the Spanish had granted the indigenous Pecos an 18,000-acre block of land centered on their home (one league in each cardinal direction). Things operated smoothly until shortly before the pueblo was abandoned in 1838 when a steady stream of non-native homesteaders entered the land grant and began to stake illegal claims. Accusations, counter-claims, lawsuits and general ill-will followed. Adding to the chaos, descendents of the Pecos, now residing at Jemez Pueblo, sold the title to their grant to homesteaders not once, but *three* separate times. Later, the Pecos sued the U.S. Government for failing to protect their home from illegal trespass. They won a pyrrhic victory; they earned monetary compensation but lost the title to their land officially. Nothing was resolved, really. By the end of the 19th century, the upper Pecos River Valley was a tangled web of legal and realty intrigue, a condition not dissimilar to other valleys in northern New Mexico at the time.

After the turn of the century, some order was restored, at least from the ruined pueblo's perspective, when the Gross-Kelly Company of Las Vegas, New Mexico, began buying large chunks of land south of the modern village of Pecos. Soon the company sued individuals for quit-claim deeds as well. By 1914, Gross-Kelly had secured title to over ten thousand acres of land, including nearly all of the significant archaeological ruins in the area. This was convenient for Kidder, since all he had to do now was write a letter to the company president (who he knew) and ask permission to dig in the former pueblo. Apparently, he never considered writing a letter to the Pecos descendents at Jemez to ask *their* permission. The company was more than happy to oblige the young Harvard scholar. In fact, when Gross-Kelly decided to sell their ten thousand acres a few years later, the company chose to retain title to the land underneath and immediately surrounding the old pueblo in order to facilitate Kidder's excavation as well as protect the ruin.

Pecos, everyone seemed to agree, was a special place.

In 1915, Kidder initiated the first significant attempt at preservation at Pecos when he employed his good friend Jesse Nusbaum to stabilize the rapidly eroding remnant of the old Spanish church. Nusbaum's crew energetically poured cement foundations, braced doorways and windows with new wooden beams and repaired creeping cracks with adobes recycled from collapsed walls. They also partially rebuilt the back wall of the church and excavated below the floor, where they found numerous Spanish graves. When they were done, Nusbaum had his crew sweep the new floor and whitewash portions of the cement walls. Then he took a photograph. In it, the church looks like it's ready to throw a party. The effect was more important than the look, however – the church had been saved from immediate oblivion.

The long-term protection of Pecos took a big step forward in 1920 when Gross-Kelly donated the ruin and sixty-five acres surrounding it to the Catholic Church. A year later, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe transferred the tract to the state-run Museum of New Mexico on the condition that "the said premises shall be held for the preservation and maintenance thereof and the ruins thereon as a historic monument, and for no other use or purpose." It was an important moment in the state's history. A public institution had obligated itself to the long-term care of a culturally significant resource. It did not matter that the state's maintenance would be nominal; its commitment in principle was enough for the moment. After nearly a century of alternating rounds of abuse and neglect, protection for Pecos had officially arrived.

On February 20, 1935, this new era expanded significantly when the sixty-five acre site was proclaimed a State Monument and reassigned to the newly created New Mexico State Parks Department. By doing so, however, the state revealed an ulterior motive: to develop Pecos for the upcoming Cuarto Centennial celebration of Francisco de Coronado's historic entrada into the region, planned for 1940. They had a lot of work to do. By 1938, the state was busy excavating and stabilizing the church and ruins using Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) labor. Pecos was given a haircut, told to stand up straight, suck in its gut and hold its breath until the party was over.

The site nearly turned blue and passed out as a result.

With its designation as a State Monument, two strong social currents of the age converged on Pecos. The state needed attractive, accessible sites for a slowly rising tide of tourists and Uncle Sam needed make-work projects for its CCC crews. The increasing affordability and durability of the automobile added fuel to the quickly growing fire of tourism in the Southwest. Santa Fe became an early destination spot, attracting many visitors. Enterprising entrepreneurs, such as those who ran the Fred Harvey Company, promoted the region's prehistoric charms far and wide. Pecos became an early "Indian Detour" for the Company. Meanwhile, at the other end of the economic spectrum, hands idled by the Great Depression needed to be kept busy. Pecos fit both bills perfectly.

Preparations for the Cuarto Centennial focused first on the pueblo's ancient defensive wall, which was quickly, and inaccurately, reconstructed. Then the CCC crews shifted their attention to South Pueblo, commencing a series of vigorous and destructive excavations. It was not a good summer to be a prehistoric ruin at Pecos. Inadequate oversight, an unskilled workforce, a hasty schedule, an ignorance of history and an unscientific mission – to uncover rooms for tourists as fast as possible – combined to wreck havoc on South Pueblo. Yet, ignorance sometimes worked to the ruin's benefit. As the CCC crews excavated Kiva 16, located at the northern end of the room block, they became increasingly perplexed by a scarcity of artifacts in the fill. Shouldn't an ancient kiva have at least *some* broken bits of pottery or stone flakes in it, they wondered? The answer came when they reached the floor of the kiva and found a flat stone. Turning it over, they read "Andover 1919." Kidder had beat them to it, thankfully.

In January 1939, the crews shifted their picks and shovels to the Spanish church and convento. They gained a new boss too, perhaps in response to the wanton destruction they had caused in South Pueblo. William Witkind was a professional archaeologist with the Museum of New Mexico and he quickly moved to impose some order on the chaotic excavations. He divided the crews between a substantial reconstruction of the old church and a not-so-systematic excavation of the adjacent convento, its first ever. In the church, thousands of fresh adobes were laid in new walls, some of which were so poorly built that they required auto parts, chicken wire, and steel beams as reinforcement. In the convento, rooms were dug out rapidly and carelessly, revealing a confusing puzzle of walls and floors. Over the months, snow, rain and tempers flew. Money was tight and some crew members proved to be unreliable. To make matters worse, the Cuarto Centennial celebration loomed over them like an impatient parent. By early 1940, the pressure was nearly intolerable. Despite Witkind's best intentions, the integrity of the work, which was guided not by archaeological principles but by tourism concerns, suffered proportionally.

It was a daunting chore for a solitary archaeologist to coordinate so many workers and so much work. Witkind labored valiantly under stressful conditions. He kept notes, took photographs and generally tried his damnedest to maintain professional standards. The convento, with its labyrinthine passageways and collapsed walls, proved especially vexing. Witkind tried his best to unravel its story while keeping crews busy. It was his prayer that all would end well when he pulled everything together into a Final Report after the Cuarto Centennial party wrapped up. Witkind knew that much can be forgiven in archaeological fieldwork with a thoughtful and thorough Final Report. Alas, the state of New Mexico had other ideas.

When the centennial celebrations came to a close in December, his employer refused to pay for a Final Report on the excavation. The reasons are lost in the fog of history, but one thing was clear: it was a terrible mistake. Perplexed and upset, Witkind resigned his post, joined the military and disappeared into the great maw of World War Two, never to return to New Mexico. The state later claimed its decision was due to a lack of money, but in truth it was more a matter of mission. William Witkind's work was never considered to be principally archaeological, so no Final Report was required. The state – and the federal government – got what it wanted, a party for the tourists and busy work for the unemployed. The ruins simply got it.

After Witkind's abrupt departure, Pecos fell back into a familiar state of neglect. In 1941, the state built a house for a caretaker, but the project ran out of money before a well for the structure hit water. It would take nine more years before a custodian could move into the building. In the meantime, Witkind's work went to pieces. His carefully applied plaster on the church cracked and fell off; the unprotected eight-foot high original adobe walls in the convento melted into four-foot high piles. Vandalism returned to Pecos too, as did the careless curious. Overnight guests at a dude ranch up the valley were given a shovel and a bucket by management and told to "help themselves" to Pecos. No one, apparently, stopped them. They didn't stop themselves. Perhaps they thought of themselves as admirers, not vandals. The ruin, of course, could not tell the difference.

The installation of a caretaker in 1951 changed little. The vandals and destructively admiring melted away, but that was about all. No official trail existed for the few visitors who dropped by and no interpretive publication was available. The state refused to spend much more than the $100 monthly salary of the custodian for the park. The plaster continued to peel and the walls kept slumping. It was a State Monument in name only.

The arrival of Vivian O'Neal as the new custodian in 1958 improved things. O'Neal, who was independently wealthy, brought energy, competency and an intense passion for history to the job. She gave tours of the ruins and even provided educational material for visitors to read at her own expense. The pulse of the old ruin, wildly erratic for twenty years, stabilized for a time and beat steadily. Unfortunately, state legislators responded to O'Neal's vivacity – and wealth – by cutting off all funding to the Monument in 1961. The custodian and her beloved park were literally on their own. Both must have wondered how long the pulse of the place could be sustained.

In 1947, the state of New Mexico tried for the first time to interest the National Park Service in Pecos. Their reasoning had nothing to do with beauty or history and everything to do with money. The state was nearly broke. A quick divestiture of the park seemed like a bright idea. The Park Service politely declined. A few years later, the Director of the Museum of New Mexico tried again, this time on the grounds of the Monument's historical significance to the nation. He argued that Pecos was ideally suited to interpret the lengthy period of European-Indian contact in the Southwest. The ruin stood, he insisted, as a symbol for the "Age of Exploration" and should be allowed to tell its story. The Park Service declined again – but this time Pecos had their attention.

In 1958, the Park Service historian Robert Utley was assigned to contemplate Pecos. It didn't take him long to zero in on a similar historical angle as he evaluated the park's candidacy. The theme, he suggested, could be: "Contact with the Indians." Ultimately, he recommended that Pecos be included in the national park system because

> *of its close association with many early Spanish explorers of the Southwest, because its missionary activity spanned nearly the entire period of Spanish settlement, because of its major role in the Rebellion and Reconquest, because it vividly exemplifies in its hostility to the Spanish and its extermination by epidemic the impact of Spanish rule on the native population, and because, finally, it exhibits fine surviving remains to illustrate all of these values.*

Utley's enthusiastic endorsement, however, was met with immediate opposition from George Miller, the Acting Regional Director of the Southwest Region, who apparently preferred only natural parks, such as Yellowstone or Carlsbad Caverns. It was a hotly debated topic in the Park Service at the time. The recent additions of cultural sites to the national park system, including historic homes, battlefields, forts, ruins and other 'unnatural' locales was gathering a full head of steam. A number of factors were responsible for this, not the least of which was Park Service Director George Hartzog's politically astute desire to broaden his agency's clout, and financial support, by placing a national park unit in as many Congressional districts as possible. The American public responded vigorously by flocking to these new sites, Civil War battlefields in particular. Still, the 'old guard' remained convinced that the Park Service was veering away from its original mission – to protect natural areas – and said so publicly.

Miller also fretted that Pecos would become a money pit. New Mexico, he suspected, was still trying to dump the park in order to ease its budgetary worries. "Stabilization," he warned in a letter, "will be a sizeable recurring expense." On this score he was absolutely spot-on. However, his objections were disregarded as the Pecos juggernaut gathered steam. An investigative report issued by the Park Service in 1962 detailed two general purposes for Pecos as a potential park unit: (1) to reveal the struggle between European colonization and the way of life of "an ancient Indian people;" and (2) to interpret the "full pageant of Spanish exploration and settlement of the Southwest."

Significantly, prehistory and the history of archaeology in America were intentionally set aside as secondary themes. This upset archaeologists in the region who began to raise a stink. A struggle ensued between prehistorians and historians over priorities in the park. It was not just a philosophical debate either since scarce interpretation and stabilization dollars would be allocated according to these priorities. Should visitors focus on the church and convento? Or should North Pueblo and the areas where Kidder dug be given greater emphasis? Where should an anticipated excavation project take place, in the Spanish sector or the 'Indian?' No satisfactory answer to this debate arose by the time Congressional hearings took place. In fact, both sides continued to argue after the establishment of the park and well into the planning process during the following years.

Despite this controversy, the Park Service's *Report on Pecos* was well received by nearly every interested party, including New Mexico's congressional delegation. Legislation to establish Pecos National Monument was introduced in Congress by Representative Thomas Morris on January 19, 1965. The first public pronouncement of the park's impending transfer to the federal family was made on March 2nd. A news release stated that the bill's purpose was to "stimulate an appreciation of the pueblo culture and the historical and scientific aspects of the Pecos story." The bill also proposed the construction of new facilities, authorized new excavations and mandated the stabilization of existing walls.

It contained nary a word about beauty.

The bill breezed through the House with little discussion and was sent to the Senate on April 27th. It passed out of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs on June 14th and was submitted to the full Senate the following day, which quickly approved it. The only squabble occurred over whether or not the Park Service intended to "restore" the ruins or merely stabilize them. Director Hartzog assured the Congress that the Park Service was no longer in the business of restoration, which is expensive and time-consuming. This resolved, Congress sent the bill to President Johnson who signed it on June 28th, 1965, creating the 213th unit of the national park system.

According to the text of the final legislation, Pecos National Monument had been created "in order to set apart and preserve for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people a site of exceptional historic and archaeological importance." A new star had been fixed to the national park firmament. Now all it needed was a shine.

The planning process, and the struggle between the historians and prehistorians, continued through the summer and fall. A Master Plan emerged in October with new themes that included "The life story of the Pueblo Indian" and "His conquest, revolt, and subordination by the Spaniards." It called for an archaeological excavation in North Pueblo, including the exhumation of a few of Kidder's trenches and rooms. The prehistorians, apparently, had prevailed. However, Congress had appropriated only $500,000 for the preparation of Pecos most of which was devoted to stabilization and visitor access. A major dig in the ruined pueblo seemed beyond the park's reach, so the powers-that-were in the Park Service decided on a more modest excavation in the church-convento complex instead. The historians must have chuckled into their coffee mugs at the news.

The park debuted as the nation's newest National Monument on January 1st, 1966. A few months later, Tom Giles, a planner in the Southwest Regional office, came on as the park's first Superintendent. A friendly, practical fellow, the first thing Giles did in his new job was repair a leaky lawn sprinkler with a piece of wood. It was an unintentionally symbolic act; repair would be the chief activity for many years to come at Pecos. Two other permanent employees joined Giles in the caretaker's tiny house. Verna Hutchinson handled the paperwork and Felix Sena oversaw maintenance in the park. Together, they hoisted an American flag outside the house and set to work. The pulse of the park, weak and erratic since 1935, suddenly grew strong and steady. Help had not only arrived in force, apparently it was here to stay.

In 1995, Pecos threw itself a party to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of its inclusion in the national park system. It was a low-key affair, mostly cake and candles. A brief history of Pecos under Park Service management was put on display in the visitor center, and a lecture or two arranged. A short notice appeared in the newspapers. At the appointed hour, the staff laid down their keyboards, shovels, trowels and telephones to cram into the tiny dining area of the administrative building for a moment of official commemoration. The Superintendent said a few words, followed by a humorous comment about growing old by the Chief of Interpretation who had worked at Pecos for fourteen years. We nodded and smiled and blew out the candles. After the cake was done we put on our various hats and went back to our respective jobs.

Except for me and two others. That's because there was a special guest in attendance. Tom Giles made the trek out from Santa Fe and stayed to regale us with amusing stories of the early days, such as the first day on the job for Gary Matlock, the park's second archaeologist, who took a head-first tumble into the newly excavated convento kiva while peeking under its tarp – right in front of his highly amused crew (he wasn't hurt). A warm and outgoing fellow, Giles overflowed with delightful anecdotes. He must have been a delight to work alongside. Later, when I asked yet another question about those heady days, he said simply "Everybody did everything that was necessary, and we had an awfully good time doing it." It was easy to believe him. Taking a broad view of his job description, Giles helped interpret the ruins for visitors, fixed things when they broke down and kept a practical eye on the park's day-to-day operations.

His primary concern, he told me, was preparing Pecos for the steady flow of visitors that was sure to follow federal blessing. The park was a mess; it needed a foot trail, picnic tables, a public restroom, interpreters, brochures, an administrative headquarters and a visitor center – and it needed them all right away. To achieve some of these goals, Giles implemented a Living History program at the park, hiring young people from Pecos village and Jemez Pueblo to act as seasonal interpreters. A Native American-style bread oven was built adjacent to the new headquarters and demonstrators were brought in to bake bread and explain age-old food-making traditions. The public loved it, he said. Giles was very proud of the program's success, I could tell. He wanted to bring the past back to life in a sincere manner and was pleased with the results.

His greatest disappointment involved the visitor center. He convinced a well-known architect in Santa Fe, William Lumpkins, to design a new visitor center at a significantly reduced fee. The final plan produced by Lumpkins, according to Giles, was brilliant. It featured an adobe-style building that was spacious, friendly and pleasing to the eye – this in an era when the Park Service was building its famously tacky steel-and-cement visitor centers. The prospect of a beautiful visitor center at Pecos excited Giles. However, when he took the plan to the Park Service's architects in Denver, they turned it down flat. They felt threatened, Giles told me, by a project that was not developed in-house. More likely, they felt threatened by its elegance, comfort, and creativity. Either way, the result was the same: no visitor center was built at Pecos during Giles' twelve-year tenure.

Giles also struggled with the ruins themselves, especially the adobe church. In addition to education and interpretation, the mission of the park was to preserve the ruins for future generations – the question was *how*. The exposed adobe walls continued to crumble bit by bit under the accumulated pressure of winter snow and summer rain. Something had to be done before everything melted into dust. Inexperienced with earthen architecture, the Park Service had not a clue. Giles said they first tried spraying the adobe walls with a liquid plastic, which did a wonderful job of shedding the rain and snow, but a lousy job of letting the walls 'breathe.' Moisture, trapped under the plastic layer, began eating away at the dried earth and soon the walls were crumbling at a faster rate than if they had been left alone. When they abandoned the project and began pulling off the plastic layer, Giles said, big chunks of three-hundred year-old adobe walls came with it.

The eroding walls in the convento were another headache. Frank Wilson, the Park Service's Regional Historian, suggested to Giles that he simply remove all the original Spanish adobe from the walls down to the stone foundations and rebuild the walls with modern, amended adobes! It would cut down substantially on maintenance costs, he said, and the public would never know the difference. He was joking, Giles assured me, but I wonder. It was an age when the Park Service did not think twice about pouring pink Portland cement on historic walls or knocking down walls in order to clear a path for visitor trails. Already at Pecos, the Park Service had dug drains through floors, punched pathways through walls, poured additional cement in the church, and constructed a few artificial walls all in the name of the "visitor experience." Fortunately for archaeology and posterity, Giles did not take Wilson's 'joke' seriously.

While the staff struggled with the pressure of preserving and prepping Pecos for its new career as a National Monument, the park itself was busy coming back to life. Visitation rose slowly, but steadily. As word spread of the park's new status, especially around the Southwest, the trickle of the curious became a small stream. The rapidly rising popularity of national parks across the nation, abetted by a prospering middle class, contributed to the revival of Pecos, as did the completion of the nearby Interstate highway. Toss in Santa Fe's rising star as a tourist destination and you had a recipe that put Pecos on the map for good.

The village of Pecos rediscovered the park as well. In August of 1969, parishioners returned to the park's little red church to celebrate Sunday Mass there for the first time in at least a hundred and thirty years. The historic moment was captured in a lovely short film made by the Park Service (Giles again) called *Una Promesa*. It was a promise fulfilled, the villagers said. As part of the celebration, villagers carried a painting of the Virgin from their church, two miles distant, to the park, singing songs of faith in Spanish as they walked. The Sanctuary of the little red church was decked out with rugs and flowers and a white cloth was laid over a simple wooden altar. Four priests filed into the ruined church at the head of a large congregation, taking their places at the altar. The faithful, perhaps one hundred in all, stood under a bright sun, listening to a Mass spoken in Latin, English and Spanish. For a day, life as it once was returned to Pecos.

During my second summer at the park, I was asked to videotape the annual Feast Day Mass as part of an ethnographic project for the Park Service. I quickly learned that not much had changed since 1969. More people drove to the park from the village and fewer people attended overall, it seemed, than in that earlier year. There was only one priest this time, Father Rick, who miraculously appeared in the middle of the congregation wearing a showy white robe and tennis shoes. Everyone sat in chairs this time. Conspicuously, there were no Native Americans present, as there had been in 1969. There had been a row in the 1970s, I was told, when a Jemez elder denounced the assembled worshippers for stealing their land and exterminating his people. Otherwise, the ritual looked pretty much as it had for every year over the past two-and-a-half decades.

The Mass itself was straightforward and fairly short, I thought, which was a good thing because a hot sun blazed down on mostly unprotected heads. Father Rick thanked the park staff and blessed the church before diving into a sermon about fishes and loaves. I videotaped as much as I could stand – literally. After thirty minutes my back began to scream for mercy. Between the heat, the back strain, the chore of taping and my self-consciousness, I missed most of Father Rick's proclamations. One, however, did catch my ear. He said it was "the Indians' dream to someday return to this place and this church to live and pray here once more."

It was a theme I had heard before.

Earlier in the summer, Todd had journeyed to Jemez Pueblo with a group of Park Service officials to discuss topics of mutual concern. He came back rather disturbed by the experience. He told me he had anticipated a meaningful dialogue about Park Service stewardship of Pecos, cultural sensitivities, and better communication. Instead, they were harangued, he said, with a laundry list of complaint against Big Brother Government. The Jemez wanted monetary compensation; they wanted the artifacts from Kidder's excavations returned; they wanted their dead reburied. Most of all, he said, they wanted the land back. "Really?" I replied, somewhat incredulously. "They want the park back? What would they do with it?" Todd shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "Do you think they can actually get it back?" I asked. "I don't know," he said wearily as he turned his chair around to face his computer.

This conversation set me to thinking. Was the National Park Service here to stay at Pecos? Or was it one more chapter in a long, complex book? After *only* thirty years, the Park Service looked to be well entrenched at Pecos. It had become a capable steward of the park and its resources. The park's annual budget had grown to nearly one million dollars and it employed twenty-one people in varying capacities. It had put up signs, repaired fences, stabilized walls, paved roads, laid trails and erected new buildings. It had welcomed, educated and entertained strangers from all walks of life and from nearly every corner of the planet. It had even granted people permission to worship and marry in its little red church. The Park Service had made plans for the future too. Could it walk away – ever?

I only knew this: a part of the soul of the Park Service now rested at Pecos. The park had grown and matured under federal guidance and as a result reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the Park Service and its mission. Pecos had become a two-way mirror, allowing visitors to peer deep into the depths of history, while reflecting light back on its federal stewards, and beyond. In front of that mirror stood Pecos and the Park Service, mutually dependent on one another. The park belonged to the Pueblo's descendents at Jemez, of course, but by dint of affection and tireless effort on behalf of dedicated federal employees, spread out over thirty years, it also belonged now to three hundred million Americans.

They might be loathe to let go.

The Curse of Pecos

One day in February of 1969, while standing at a table near the kitchen of the tiny administrative headquarters, the park's first archaeologist, a middle-aged woman in horn-rimmed glasses, suddenly clutched her chest and fell to the floor. Three days later she was dead. A few years later, the wife of the subsequent archaeologist died in a plane crash in a remote part of Alaska. In 1941, William Witkind, the solitary archaeologist who had directed the excavation and reconstruction of the park's church and convento, disappeared into World War II, where, it was rumored, he died. In the 1850s, Theodore Koslowski's son was struck dead by lightning while scavenging adobe bricks from the church.

It was the Curse of Pecos, I was told, playing hell with the curious.

Although I put very little stock in any talk about curses, I did tiptoe around the office and through the ruins for a while when I first learned about it. After giving me a checklist of things to do on my first day on the job, Todd said casually "Oh, by the way, there's a Curse here. Better be careful." After he ran down the aforementioned list of tragedies, he concluded with a sardonic "Good luck." He left me standing in the convento, staring stupidly around. A Curse? Here? I wandered deeper into the ruin, peering for any malevolent spirits that might be lingering in the corner of a room. Eventually, I sauntered to the top of North Pueblo. "This place is too beautiful to be haunted," I said to myself. The extinction of the pueblo had created bad karma for us colonial types, to be sure, but vindictiveness? I thought it unlikely.

Blithely dismissing the Curse of Pecos as yet another product of popular misimagination – Kidder, after all, thrived and lived a long life – I set to work making maps and taking photographs. I dug into the past as well, pawing through drawers of old photographs and pouring over old reports in an effort to better understand my role as an architectural documentarian. Since my daily work concentrated on the church-convento complex, I confined my research to previous stabilization and excavation projects there. Shortly, I was cursing the extreme disorganization of the files and the poor record-keeping of prior administrations. History at Pecos was a mess. Todd, who had arrived at the park only ten months before I did, was more than happy to pass this particular misfortune my way. So, I waded into the troubled waters of documentation at Pecos with my courage steeled in anticipation of what I would find.

What I discovered was this: the real Curse of Pecos was something else altogether.

In the spring of 1966, the Park Service sent Jean Pinkley, an interpreter at Mesa Verde National Park, to Pecos to direct a new excavation in the Spanish church and convento. The bespectacled Pinkley, an archaeologist mostly by association, hired a crew of local villagers and prepared to begin work. She apparently entered into the project with some reluctance, possibly because she did not consider herself to be a professional archaeologist. Whatever her reservations, she worked diligently, commencing the excavation in the southeastern corner of the old monastery and worked steadily, room by room, toward the church. Convinced that much of the labor involved simply removing the eroded wall fall and backdirt of Witkind's 1939-1940 dig, Pinkley neglected most archaeological conventions and controls. She had a tiny budget and an eager crew, so she may have considered speed and efficiency as her top priorities.

It proved to be a fatal decision.

In the spring of 1968, her crew made a spectacular discovery. While digging in the vicinity of the church they struck a series of massive stone foundations, which, when completely uncovered looked all the world like buttresses. Buttresses to *what*? Pinkley hit the history books. In short order, she found the answer. She had unearthed the remains of the great 1620s church, the same one described in 1626 by Curate Alfonso de Benavides as a "most splendid temple of singular construction." It had been completely destroyed in the Pueblo Revolt and forgotten. Even the great Kidder failed to solve the riddle of the Pecos churches, conflating, as everyone else did, the present 1717 church with its predecessor. Pinkley's discovery of the 1620s church put a significant piece of Pecos history back into its proper place. Historians and archaeologists promptly hailed her achievement across the region.

Privately, however, Pinkley was deeply troubled by her unexpected find. As her crews labored all that summer to uncover the massive outline of the great church, Pinkley became increasingly despondent. The structure's presence told her in no uncertain terms that she was actually digging in *unexcavated* soil, not merely Witkind's backfill.

Furthermore, there was a very good chance, she realized, that she had been working in unexcavated soil for some time, possibly since the opening day of the project! If she had been following standard archaeological procedures this might not have mattered, but Pinkley *had not taken detailed notes or photographs*. She had committed the cardinal sin of archaeology: digging without documentation. There were other deadly sins: she had not screened the dirt for artifacts, or excavated in controlled levels, or collected soil samples for analysis, or laid a grid over the site in order to guide her excavation. In other words, she had severely damaged the archaeological integrity of the church and convento.

This is important because cultural resources, unlike endangered species, once damaged cannot be made whole again. Once disturbed, soil can never be put back the way it was. When the last occupants leave a site, fifty or five hundred years ago, the integrity of the resource starts an uneven beeline to oblivion. The occupants cannot be brought back to repair their homes, so structures collapse, stone by stone, over time until they return to the earth from which they sprang. Under the best of circumstances, resource managers, such as national park archaeologists, can only retard this inevitable slide toward nothingness, not stop it. Unfortunately, when people dig in the dirt and expose walls and floors to the wear and tear of the elements, including the picks and shovels of an excavating crew, often they hasten a site's demise. And like the children's fable, once Humpty Dumpty falls off his wall, no one can put him back together again. It is a frustrating paradox for archaeologists – we can leave a site alone and let it degrade slowly over time and learn very little about what happened there, or we can dig in a site and reveal knowledge, but speed up its slide into oblivion.

The answer is documentation. Maps, photographs, notes, reports, artifact collections, and analyses are an effective counterbalance to the damage archaeologists do to a site. Good documentation ensures that while the physical integrity of a site may be compromised, its intellectual integrity is not. Thanks to Kidder, all archaeologists live by a simple rule: when in doubt, write it out. Pinkley did almost none of the above. She took a few photographs, scribbled a few monthly notes to her boss, and produced a map, but that was all. Archaeology, as in much of life, is in the details and Pinkley skipped the fine print. She dug through a whole new layer of the convento without creating detailed documentation or making systematic observations. She plowed through the complex like a battleship in the night, only to realize the following day, under the full glare of the sun, what irreparable damage she had done. Then she died.

The real Curse of Pecos began to reveal itself.

Sometimes it is not simply the lack of documentation or the absence of a Final Report that haunts us today. Poor training, sloppy work and wrong-headed goals also contribute to our bewilderment. For example, over the course of his excavation, Witkind reassigned numbers to the rooms in the convento so many times that even studious readers of his notes become hopelessly lost. Maybe he assumed a Final Map would correct this fundamental error of judgment, but no Final Map has ever been located. Yet, even when they are found, final products are sometimes not sufficient. The principal investigator of the South Pueblo project in 1938, John Corbett, bequeathed us a fine Final Map, but wrote only a *two-page* Final Report, most of which is a catalogue of artifacts. We know where he worked, but not what he did there, or why or how. The rooms he dug up sit like open wounds that have never healed. In these, and other ways, the Curse of Pecos grew stronger.

Not even the Spanish friars were immune. In 1776, a Franciscan prelate named Atanasio Dominguez came to Pecos as part of a region-wide survey of the Spanish missionizing effort. His charge included an order to scrutinize the architecture of each Mission and write a report. The keen and meticulous Dominguez did a brilliant job – everywhere except at Pecos. As he climbed the stairs to the second story of the convento he apparently became disoriented. He mixed up his norths and souths, easts and wests so that his report is nearly impossible to follow today, especially when compared to the actual layout of the rooms in the living ruin. In his account, doors appear and disappear, stairs turn left instead of right; even horses are stabled in what should be monk cells. Clearly, Witkind and Pinkley were not the only ones bewildered by Pecos.

By 1971, the Curse had nearly scored a complete victory – with a little help from the Park Service. Mirroring Witkind's departure, after Pinkley's death the adobe walls of the convento, now only four feet high, were left exposed to the elements, continuing their grim march to oblivion. After Superintendent Giles' disastrous experiment with the plastic spray, the only viable option seemed to be backfilling everything, which would have been unpopular with the tourists. No one liked this choice. Another idea was to cover the ruins with a huge metal roof, ala Casa Grande Ruin, in southern Arizona. It was vetoed for budgetary reasons. Stabilization seemed to be the only acceptable compromise – what did that mean exactly? Not another round of plastic spray, obviously. Portland cement? Clean off the adobes from their foundations and replace them with modern ones? The Curse of Pecos was undoubtedly rooting for the latter option.

Fortunately for Pecos, Gary Matlock came to the rescue. In 1971, as the new park archaeologist, he set sail on a multi-year plan of stabilization that literally saved the convento from dissolution. His brilliant idea was to encase the original adobe walls in modern adobes, amended with a liquid acrylic that resisted penetration by water while letting the bricks 'breathe' a bit. The acrylic would double the lifespan of the modern adobe walls while protecting their precious cargo. Best of all, the new adobes could be manufactured in a way that made them look like the original thing, down to the color, texture and dimensions of the original Spanish adobes. It made all the difference. In fact, once Matlock and the crew were done the entire convento looked like someone previously dressed in rags who had been given a new suit of clothes. The ruin practically strutted in its new duds.

Better still, Matlock documented every stage of his work. He took numerous 'Before' photographs of every room in the convento – which were invaluable to my effort. He jotted down notes, made measurements, took samples and wrote great reports. In doing so, he stood on the shoulders of Al Hayes, a well-respected Park Service archaeologist who was dispatched to Pecos on an emergency basis in the wake of Pinkley's death to make sense of the mess she left behind. Hayes waded right into the thick of things and even got a lick in at the Curse when he authored a slender but incisive book titled *The Four Churches of Pecos*. In many ways, it was the Final Report that Pinkley never wrote. Together, Hayes and Matlock turned the tide in the park. The inevitable slide to nothingness being experienced by the church and convento, steepened dramatically by well-meaning but destructive attention by the park's overseers, slackened to a gentle grade. Although he didn't quite get to finish the big stabilization job at Pecos before he transferred to Alaska, Gary Matlock did manage to stagger the Curse with a mighty roundhouse. Whether it was a knockout punch or not remained to be seen.

Almost accidently, a wonderful secret was revealed during the course of my documentation duties at Pecos. During my first week on the job, Todd mentioned that there were two different colors of original Spanish adobes in the convento: red and black. I frowned. Red and black? What did that mean? I knew that adobes were created by mixing dirt and water and placing the glop into wooden forms to dry in the sun. Then the bricks were stacked into walls, held together by adobe mortar. After the roof was added – flat ones in New Mexico's case – the walls were plastered with more mud. Sometimes they were also whitewashed with a mixture of lime and water. I knew that the practice of adobe architecture had come to New Mexico via Old Mexico via Spain via North Africa. In fact, the word '*a-dobe*' can be traced back to ancient Egyptian via Arabic and means 'sun-dried mud brick.' As a construction technology, I knew that it was at least 4000 years old and popular in arid environments, but I didn't know much more than that. "Why would you make bricks of different colors?" I asked Todd. He shrugged. History is a mystery, his shoulders seemed to say. The answer, if there was one, would be up to me to figure out.

The principle duty of my job at Pecos was to document (map) the original adobes *in situ* in the church and convento as they became exposed during routine maintenance. Matlock had saved the day, but his stabilized walls eventually deteriorated, necessitating their replacement. Every summer, a list of walls needing new amended adobe bricks was compiled by Todd and the Chief Mason of the four-person stabilization crew. When an eroded wall was torn down, I swooped in to take pictures, measurements and make maps of what lay hidden underneath while the crew worked on another wall. When I finished, the crew returned to the wall to seal it back up with fresh adobes. Round and round the convento we went. At least we had maps now!

Within a month, I had mapped my first black adobe bricks. I was familiar with the red adobes – the little 1717-era church was full of them. Todd told me that the top courses of the convento walls were also built with red bricks, though the lower courses were black. Sure enough. On the third wall that I documented – a nice tall one in an old part of the convento – I saw five rows of gray-black adobes above the wall's stone foundation. They had the look of a fireplace – sooty, friable and flecked with charcoal. Above them were two courses of red adobes, just as Todd had described it. Five courses does not make a complete wall, so this meant the construction crew changed the source of their adobes from black to red soil before this part of the old convento was finished.

Curious.

Looking closer, I noticed that many of the black bricks, unlike their red compatriots, had bits of broken pottery sticking out of them. That suggested they had been mined from the trash piles outside the pueblo's walls, perhaps near one of the deep middens that Kidder had excavated. This wasn't my idea – Al Hayes broached this theory in his book *The Four Churches of Pecos*. Hayes had dug a long trench outside the massive 1620s church, finding only black bricks. This told him that the original church was entirely constructed of black adobes. Such a big church, Hayes logically concluded, would have required a huge deposit of readily available soil – such as the deep middens. This led him to speculate that the Spanish ordered the villagers to dig up their trash to make the adobes they required. Hayes also speculated that this decision did not sit well with the Pecos, because they knew what the Spanish did not: their ancestors were buried in the soil.

So, a possible construction sequence might have been: the big 1620s church was built with ‘trashy’ black adobes, followed by the convento, which had the first five rows or so of the walls in its early rooms made of similar black adobes before switching to ‘clean’ red bricks for completion. This was a good start, I thought. Little did I know that things would become much more intriguing.

As I sat on an overturned bucket making my map of this big wall, staring over my sunglasses, under a big floppy hat, I noticed two things: first, some of the black adobes were actually *brown* and had a lot less ‘trashy’ materials in them. They had the same dimensions (width x depth x height) as the black adobes, meaning they were made in the same wooden forms. Both the black and brown adobes were set in a maroon-colored mortar. None of this was news to Todd, who grunted when I mentioned it and nodded toward a report that he had written during his first summer at Pecos, when he was doing the documentation work. He had also noticed two different types of Black adobes set in maroon mortar. In fact, he labeled the adobes Type I and Type II (typologies are a key tool for archaeologists because they help them reveal patterns in time and space). I translated his grunt: “didn’t you read my report before you started?”

Oops.

Second, I noticed that the dimensions of the red adobes in the convento wall were not the same as the red adobes in the 1717 church. But they weren’t the same dimensions as the Black Types either! They were slightly shorter, wider, and thicker than the Black bricks, indicating that new wooden forms had been made. This suggested that some sort of break in the construction sequence had taken place between the Black episode and the Red in the convento, which corresponded with their placement above the five courses of Black adobes. Why the change in soil? Why new wooden forms? The arrival of a new Padre? Did the Pecos rebel against orders and refuse to dig in their trash any longer? Did they destroy the original wooden forms in protest? Did the padre accede to their demands and 'start over' essentially with new forms? Or did he simply run out of money after building the big church?

Questions, questions.

Next, I noticed a second type of original mortar associated with the Black adobe Types. It was distinctly orange and appeared higher in the walls, suggesting it was used later in the construction of the convento. I decided to label the maroon mortar Type I and the orange Type II. Now we had two Types of Black adobes and two Types of associated mortars – to go along with two Types of Red adobes (including the Red adobes in the 1717 church). Great! Now what? I shrugged mentally and kept making my maps, though I received permission to collect soil samples from each of the Types. Maybe they would be useful at a later date.

Next, I took a closer look at the Red adobes in other convento walls, eventually discovering over two summers *five* separate Types of red adobe bricks. There were slight color and content variations among the red Types, subtle yet distinct. Additionally, I observed *four* mortar Types associated with these Red adobe Types. Toss a yellowish adobe Type that we found later in the tiny Lost Church (the first church built at Pecos), and the grand total of adobe and mortar Types in the park eventually reached *seventeen*. This time, Todd did not shrug. In fact, he seemed rather perplexed by the news. What was going on? Why were there five separate Red adobe Types in the convento? And which one could be associated with the construction of the second story of the convento, which we know from historical records was in place by 1663? What was the story these adobes and mortars were trying to tell us about history at Pecos? It felt like a puzzle – I had many of the pieces, but lacked the overall picture.

Fortunately, help arrived half-way through my first summer at Pecos. As I entered the convento one day, I noticed a distinguished middle-aged man in a leather jacket with a graying beard and an Indiana Jones-style fedora on his head set at a slightly rakish angle, standing contemplatively in one of the rooms. He held a clipboard in one hand and a long pointed stick in the other. Since he did not appear to be a typical tourist, I approached him cautiously. “Can I help you?” I asked with a smile. He turned his head my way and surveyed me up and down, slightly scowling as he did. “No,” he said. He turned back to his original object of contemplation. I realized suddenly that he had no idea who I was, since I didn’t wear a Park Service uniform. So I tried again, this time introducing myself.

I’m very glad that I did.

Such was my formal introduction to Jake Ivey, a historian with the Park Service’s regional office in Santa Fe. His specialty was Spanish Colonial architecture and he had recently been assigned to write a structural history of Pecos. It was Jake’s job to unravel the complex sequence of architectural development in the mission. So, not only did he look like a private detective, he *was* one. His job was to sleuth for clues about which rooms were built first, which walls were added later, where the stairways were and so on. I didn't envy his job. Jake had not only to peer through the haze of three hundred years of history, but he had to contend with the mighty Curse of Pecos – the ghosts of Witkind, Pinkley, and nearly thirty years of stabilization work in the park. Jake said it was like arriving at a crime scene fifty years too late and after the cops had bungled the primary investigation. Somehow, though, I felt confident that Jake would get to the bottom of the crime.

I think it was the fedora.

When I told Jake that I had observed different Types of adobes and associated mortars in the convento I immediately endeared myself to him. "That's good," he said simply. Actually, Jake was so intrigued by what I told him that he asked Todd if we could examine the original convento walls systematically. This would mean pulling healthy stabilized adobes off the walls, some only a few years old. Todd heartily consented, so Jake and I spent two summers prodding secrets out of the convento. The stabilization crew was amused by our coming-and-goings. Since Jake did the adobe peeling, while I did the mapping, he quickly earned the nickname 'Jake the Wall Destroyer' from the eldest member of the crew, who I think meant it only half-in-jest. In any case, we were off-and-running on our research project.

Our big break came in the fall of the second summer. In Room 45 of the convento, we exposed a 'late' wall – one that Jake knew from historical records was built after the Franciscan padres reoccupied Pecos in 1696, after the Pueblo Revolt. We were amazed by what we found. We saw Red adobes sitting in a new mortar Type that was shot-through with bits of white plaster, much like the plaster that we knew was used to whitewash the original convento. I suggested to Jake that the Franciscans had created this mortar by 'recycling' broken or fallen plastered adobes from the pre-Revolt convento. In other words, to expedite the repair of their home, perhaps the padres made a decision to create fresh mortar out of old adobes by grinding them up and adding water, rather than haul in new soil. Jake thought this was a fine idea. In fact, after we found a number of other walls composed of mortar and adobes shot-through with bits of plaster, we began to date these constructions to the post-1696 period. Suddenly, a chronology of construction began to take shape.

Eventually, Jake and I expanded our investigation to include every Spanish-era adobe structure in the park. We even prodded and sampled Lost Church, discovering a new adobe Type in the process. We also discovered that Lost Church had not been properly backfilled after its excavation in the 1950s. Nearly *four-hundred year-old* adobes lay directly exposed to the elements! We heard the Curse snicker, at least until we had the structure covered thickly with dirt when we were done. We also poked around in Square Ruin, a mysterious pentagonal ruin which lay on the other side of Glorieta Creek, finding, to our surprise, Black adobes on its stone foundations. This suggested to us that the building had been constructed in the 1620s, possibly contemporaneously with the first phase of the convento. This was big news because the best guesses by previous researchers for the date of Square Ruin fell in the 1700s.

Suddenly, the Curse began to squirm.

Everything came together one summer when we dug in the 'cellar' – the name Jean Pinkley assigned to a subterranean room in the convento of considerable size and mystery. From photographs taken during her excavation, we could tell it was a square room, with an adobe floor, adobe stairs and white-plastered walls. It was a highly unusual structure for a convento. Jake said he knew of no other 'cellar' in all of Spanish colonial New Mexico. Even Pinkley considered it unusual enough to actually backfill it when she finished working there. Unfortunately, she neglected to take any detailed notes. Perhaps she thought Witkind had beat her to the punch. In any case, he hadn't.

Pinkley did make one observation about the 'cellar' that intrigued us. She wrote that the room had been constructed with red adobes. But which red? We had identified five separate Types, each from a different period of time. Could we date the 'cellar' the way we had been able to date walls in the convento and Square Ruin? And if so, what would that date be? Jake knew from the historical records that a great drought struck the region in the mid-1660s. He assumed that a 'cellar' located in the heart of a convento would be related to the storage of food. Perhaps the room was built as a response to the drought itself. I viewed the room as a possible test case for the adobe-and-mortar typology. Would it corroborate or contradict the model? There was only one way to find out.

After running a lengthy bureaucratic gauntlet, permission was granted to us to dig in Pinkley's backfill and by early July we were shoveling weeds away from the surface. We spent the next three weeks digging a giant hole in the ground. We began by following the East wall of the room down, digging carefully through the dirt until we hit the adobe stairs. Looking closely at the steps, we noticed they appeared to be worn in the middle, possibly by countless feet, and appeared to have been repaired at least once. This was really cool. Then we carefully examined the bricks behind the white plaster on the East wall, followed by a surgical hole straight to the floor so we could see the bricks there.

All three areas displayed similar adobes: what we called ‘early Red’ or pre-Revolt (pre-1680) Red. Jake’s 1660s theory began to look good. On closer examination, however, the floor adobes appeared to be of Black adobe dimensions, which was very curious. This suggested to us that red soil had been poured into the same wooden forms used to make Black brick. If this was true then the early use of Red adobes could possibly be pushed back in time somewhat, perhaps to the 1640s, which might explain the wear-and-tear on the staircase adobes. This didn’t, however, help Jake very much.

Not that Jake cared. Good historians learn early how to roll with the punches, which was a useful skill to have at Pecos. It also helped us handle what came next in the ‘cellar’ – which came as a *huge* surprise. Piqued by our peek at the adobe floor, Jake lobbied Todd for an expansion of our excavation. In particular, he wanted to peer into an alcove that was visible in one of Pinkley’s photographs but totally ignored in her notes. What function, he wanted to know, could an alcove serve in a subterranean room? Storage? Or would it indicate another function for the room altogether?

Permission granted, we dug carefully toward the back wall of the room, our excitement growing. Soon it turned to incredulity when it became clear that the alcove was not an alcove at all. It was a massive *fireplace* instead, four feet wide and two-and-a-half feet deep. It had a shallow firepit at its base, which still held bits of burned soil. A bell-shaped portion of the fireplace’s back wall had been ceramicized by intense heat. Two postholes near the front of the fireplace indicated the presence of a hood or flue. We were stunned. Why didn’t Pinkley mention this *at all*? No one else did either, apparently. And why did she call this a 'cellar' when clearly it wasn't? Cellars don't have massive fireplaces. And why such a big fireplace in such a small space? Why was it all underground? What were those wily Franciscan padres up to in here?

Pecos kept throwing questions at us.

While Jake pondered the deeper meanings of our discovery, I arranged for a sample of the burnt adobe in the back wall to be collected and sent to Colorado State University for archeomagnetic analysis. As I understood it, when iron particles in soil are subjected to intense heat they line up in the direction of the magnetic North Pole, which has drifted substantially over time. A map of this drift has been established, which allows researchers to date the last time a fireplace or hearth was used with relative precision. We gave the CSU professor our best guess for the date of the room, based on the intersection of my typology and Jake's reconstructed history of the mission, massaged by the dimensions of the floor adobes. Our guess? 1640-1660. The professor's conclusion?

1640-1660 – on the nose.

Later in the summer, as I was documenting the 'cellar' – it took five maps, eighty-six photographs and twenty-four soil samples to complete properly – Jake stopped by with a cohort of Spanish Colonial historians, who had come to see the anomaly for themselves. What was it, they asked aloud? Storage seemed out of the question. A fire that massive would have dried everything to dust. Curing meat seemed out as well. A place of refuge from attack? One person observed that the fire would have sucked all the oxygen out of Franciscan lungs. And why such a big fireplace? Could it have been a source of heat for the convento during wintertime? No one had heard of such a thing, nor did it seem practical from an engineering perspective. The evidence of the room's careful construction, and white-plastered walls, suggested that the Spanish considered the room to be significant, but significant for what?

Jake and his colleagues arrived at their best guess: the room was part of a distillery operation. The fire was used to heat a large cauldron, possibly for the production of brandy. The rest of the room was used as storage for the wood used to keep the fire burning bright. The stairs allowed the Franciscans access, while the room's location – just outside the back wall of the convento – suggested a need for proper ventilation. Besides, there was historical precedent for such work. Jake knew that the Spanish ran distillery operations at their missions in California and Texas, though they functioned nearly a century later. He was not aware, however, of any distillery operating in New Mexico at any time. If this was a distillery, Jake said, at Pecos, in the 1640s, then it was truly a singular occurrence.

As a result of our work, a picture of Pecos in the 1620-1680 period as a vibrant, diverse and economically robust mission began to emerge. This contrasted with the stereotypical view of life on the Spanish frontier as harsh, austere and economically marginal. At Pecos, the Spanish built a huge church, added a second story to their convento, opened a distillery, constructed a large building across the creek (Square Ruin) possibly as part of an expanding cattle operation, built a hacienda and military barracks – and did it all within forty years of arriving at the village. The mission, in other words, was alive with activity; the air would have been filled with the sounds of cows lowing, wood being chopped, hymns being sung, and brandy bubbling, perhaps. It was a vision of Pecos not fully contemplated previously.

There was no end, I realized, to the story of Pecos.

From Folsom to Fogelson

An event occurred on December 21st, 1989, that changed Pecos forever. On that late December date, the *Santa Fe Reporter*, a weekly alternative newspaper, shouted the following headline:

> **HUGE RESORT CITY EYED FOR PECOS: Developers Seeking Greer Garson Ranch For Project Called 'Santa Fe East 2001' Airstrip Could Endanger Pecos Ruins**

A Greek real estate developer, living in Florida at the time, had entered into secret negotiations with the stepson of Colonel E.E. 'Buddy' Fogelson, a rich Texas oilman who married Academy-Award winning actress Greer Garson in 1949, to obtain both halves of the nearly 12,000-acre Forked Lightning Ranch, which completely surrounded Pecos National Monument. After Fogelson's death two years earlier, Miss Garson had inherited the northern half of the ranch while the stepson had inherited the southern half.

According to the *Reporter*, the Greek developer intended to build the "biggest destination center in New Mexico" on the property. This developer, who admitted that he had been west of the Mississippi River only once before in his life, came to New Mexico a few years earlier at the urging of a business partner. "When I did, I fell in love with it," he said. He began looking for property to purchase because, as he put it, he wanted to "do something good" for the state. Apparently, he found it.

However, someone with a different sense of what was "good" for New Mexico leaked the story to the *Reporter*. It hit with the impact of a small thermonuclear bomb. The developer's plan for 'Santa Fe East 2001' included:

- An airstrip
- A 300-room resort hotel and Olympic-sized pool
- A 454-acre shopping center
- A 729-acre athletic center
- A 160-acre convention center
- A racetrack for cars
- Two 18-hole golf courses
- A hunting preserve
- A health clinic
- A shooting range
- Lots of residential housing
- Luxury vacation homes

Until this moment, the Forked Lightning Ranch had consisted mostly of a small herd of Santa Gertrudis cattle, a ranch house, an old trading post, a few corrals, two dilapidated skeet towers and a ton of open space. Obviously, these things were no longer "good" for the area. What the upper Pecos River valley needed, the developer said, was a planned city half the size of Santa Fe. The developer, with his deep ties to the state and his profound knowledge of the historical and social currents at work in the region, was just the man to build it. He meant no harm. After all, he "loved" New Mexico, didn't he?

Two days after the story broke, four hundred villagers crammed into the American Legion hall in Pecos to discuss the proposal. The nearly unanimous sentiment ran against the planned development despite the promise of new jobs and greatly increased economic return for an otherwise poor community. "I haven't found anybody who actually supports this proposal," said one resident who attended the meeting. Opposition ran strong, he continued, because people knew this development would "rip the heart out of all the communities on the Pecos River. It would absolutely devastate them." When the village's Board of Trustees convened a second meeting a few days later and voted unanimously to oppose the construction of 'Santa Fe East 2001' the audience broke into sustained applause. The Greek developer, however, said later that he was undaunted by the Board's vote, and the village's feelings. Obviously, these people did not know what was "good" for their own community.

Shortly after the vote, Greer Garson weighed in. From a hospital bed in Texas she issued a proclamation stating she had decided to "reconsider the negotiations regarding the sale of the ranch" to the developer. She claimed she had been kept in the dark about the scale of the proposal and was rather annoyed to learn of it first from the *Reporter*.

Garson loved the Pecos Valley. She and Buddy had spent many summers after their wedding on the ranch and they had grown deeply attached to the area. They had become patrons of the park, giving land and money, including a substantial donation toward construction of a new visitor center in the 1980s. They were also big benefactors to Santa Fe, giving money to schools, libraries, churches, theaters and museums throughout the city. So, the bad publicity hit Garson hard.

On December 31st, George Adelo, the mayor of the village, and Stewart Udall, a Santa Fe resident and former U.S. Secretary of the Interior, jointly authored a letter to Congress and the Bush Administration in which they urged the federal government to acquire Greer's half of the Forked Lightning Ranch. They suggested that the ranch be merged with Pecos National Monument and the new property be redesignated a National Historical Park. They wrote:

> *Because of the remarkable range of its cultural and historical resources and because it was the site of the pioneering work of the great archaeologist A. V. Kidder, Pecos has the potential to be our nation's pre-eminent archaeological-historical park. The Forked Lightning Ranch not only contains some of these resources, but provides a scenic and recreational backdrop that, we are convinced, would readily qualify Pecos for true national park status.*

The initial reaction of New Mexico's congressional delegation to this letter was positive. However, Manuel Lujan, President Bush's conservative Interior Secretary, and a former congressman from central New Mexico, could not be reached for a comment. In the past, he had resisted the federal acquisition of private land, so some were nervous. In any case, all eyes turned toward Washington.

Meanwhile, the Greek developer fought back. In an interview with the newspaper that scooped the initial story, he vigorously defended himself, his motives and his mega-resort idea. He shrugged off the village's reaction. Two thousand desperately needed jobs would be created, he insisted. "We are coming here to do good," he said again, "we don't come here to create problems for the people." His huge resort would be a "satellite community" to Santa Fe, he went on, helping to relieve rising pressure on that city's economic and residential infrastructure. Then there was the issue of Progress. "The state of New Mexico is behind" all other western states in development, he said, citing Phoenix as an example, apparently without irony. The state should try harder to catch up, he continued. Then he mentioned the resort's plans for an international fashion show and a winter version of the famous Santa Fe Opera.

All of which led one newspaper reporter to sum up the situation this way:

> **An elderly bedridden movie star. A Greek business tycoon. Sacred Indian ruins. An outraged community. An undisclosed plan to build an international resort and residential complex more than half the size of Santa Fe…**

The end came quickly. On January 4th, Fogelson's stepson promised publicly not to sell his half of the ranch to the tycoon. A week later, the *Reporter* ran its second scoop when it disclosed that the Greek developer was wanted by Florida police on a warrant for failing to appear at a hearing on worthless check charges. Worse, he had been arrested and convicted forty-eight times in Greece on charges that included check violations, misappropriation of funds, labor law violations, defamation, and other misdeeds. For these crimes, the U.S. State Department had listed the developer in 1986 as "possibly excludable."

Greer Garson responded to this news by canceling all current and future deals with the developer. He huffed and puffed for a time, threatening a lawsuit to recover his "investment" but eventually he went away and was never heard from again. An audible sigh of relief was heard across the region, especially from the park and its employees. That was a serious bullet dodged. But would there be another? What would Garson do with the land now? After all, she had considered some sort of development project for the ranch. That specter still haunted the area. In fact, two months later the stepson sold his half of the Forked Lightning ranch to a Santa Fe real estate speculator, though one without a criminal record. Was it a sign of things to come?

Garson, who was still ill, appeared indecisive.

"This means we have won the battle but not the war," said the lawyer representing the village of Pecos. "There's going to be somebody else looking at that land, so we've got to get it into public ownership. It's as simple as that."

On March 8th, legislation was introduced into Congress by Senator Pete Domenici, a Republican, and Senator Jeff Bingaman, a Democrat, and Representative Bill Richardson, all of New Mexico, authorizing the National Park Service to acquire Garson's half of the Forked Lightning Ranch. However, Secretary Lujan opposed outright purchase of the property by the federal government, so a third party was needed to complete the deal. Garson, contrary to public impression, was not willing to simply donate the ranch to the government. The land's estimated value was $5 million – a painful donation even for a celebrated philanthropist. The puzzle was finally solved when the Conservation Fund, a national preservation organization, came up with the necessary cash to make the purchase. It swung a deal with the Richard King Mellon Foundation to buy the ranch and donate it to the Park Service. Garson, for her part, agreed to a reduced price.

On Tuesday, May 22nd, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the bill creating Pecos National Historical Park on a vote of 415-0. The only dissent came from the head of the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau who called the expansion of the park a "blatant land grab" and "another extravagant waste of taxpayers' money." He promised to oppose the new park "at every level." Another ranching official complained that the federal government already owned more than a third of New Mexico and that private business people "cannot compete with the bottomless U.S. Treasury." It probably didn't matter to them that the U.S. Treasury was not paying for the property. Meanwhile, the U.S. Senate piggybacked the Pecos bill to one creating a new National Monument near Albuquerque and both passed without much of a debate.

On June 28th, 1990 – the anniversary of the old Monument – in a quiet ceremony at the White House, President George H.W. Bush signed the bill and Pecos National Historical Park was born. The whole process, incredibly, from news scoop to bill signing took only slightly more than six months. At a celebration held at the park a few weeks later, Greer Garson, through a spokesperson, praised the outcome, saying that an "important part of New Mexico history had been preserved." A representative of the Conservation Fund called the acquisition "a birthday present to the park that will be treasured for generations to come." Secretary Manuel Lujan called it a "win-win" for all involved, especially the residents of the valley. There were smiles all around.

Then they cut the cake.

With its 6000-acre expansion, Pecos became heir to ten thousand years of human dreaming, including prayers for prosperity, salvation, enterprise, stability, longevity, health, happiness and immortality. It also became host to a parade of historically distinct people – native villager, religious missionary, colonial adventurer, Spanish settler, Plains raider, French trader, Mexican homesteader, American expansionist, northern Unionist, southern Separatist, eastern romantic, southwestern intellectual, rodeo entrepreneur, state custodian, federal bureaucrat, vacationing capitalist, Hollywood actor, scheming developer and casual visitor. It could now interpret a nearly unbroken line of dreams from prehistoric times to the present day.

Whenever I gave a tour of the park to visitors, I usually began this way: "Perhaps no other national park in the United States can interpret the ten thousand year timeline of North American history as completely as Pecos can. The expansion of the park in 1990 to include the northern half of the Forked Lightning Ranch means it can now embrace everything from aboriginal hunters to Greer Garson." I usually threw in the Santa Fe Trail, a Civil War battle and dude ranching for good measure. "In this way, Pecos has truly earned its title as a National Historical Park."

During my last summer in the park, an archaeologist with the Pecos Archaeological Survey discovered the broken blade of a chert projectile point on the eastern side of the newly expanded park. Although over a hundred points had already been discovered by the Survey, supporting my theory that the whole park is basically one big archaeological site, the surveyor knew immediately that this point was different. These spear points, called Folsom after a cache of blades found at a sizeable bison kill site near Folsom, New Mexico, are rare. They are a priceless store of information to scholars, as well as highly attractive to collectors. They are one of archaeology's golden eggs and I bet that surveyor was smiling like a kid on Easter Sunday.

With its discovery, the timeline was now filled out.

The Folsom Period ranged roughly from 9000 to 8000 B.C. It was part of a longer Period called the Paleo-Indian, which ended around 5000 B.C. It was a time when nomadic bands of aboriginal Native Americans roamed across the landscape in search of wild food and a good place to sleep. Native Americans originated among the tribes of eastern Asia, a theory confirmed by DNA tests. They migrated to this continent in boats and by walking across the Bering Land Bridge which was exposed as recently as 20,000 years ago, though the exact date of their arrival is a matter of considerable debate (sometimes consensus among scholars is as hard to find as a Folsom point). Successive waves of immigrants brought different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to the 'new world.' The descendants of these people make up the five hundred nations of Native Americans in existence today.

Although the Folsom culture faded away in the Southwest, prehistoric peoples remained nomadic for another six thousand years. The Paleo-Indian Period gave way to the Archaic Period, which is represented at Pecos by the presence of small basalt spear points. The age-old pattern of wandering across the landscape, gathering plants and hunting wild game varied only slightly over the centuries. If a group of people chose to remain in one place for a length of time, they usually picked a cave or rock shelter for their temporary home. Some caves were so popular that a significant amount of what we know about Archaic people has been discovered below their floors. Of their wanderings, we know little. While their presence in the upper Pecos River valley is a certainty, what they did, and where they were going is not so clear. Most likely, they were visitors, much like ourselves, who came and saw but did not stay.

By 800 AD, many of these ancient nomadic tribes had begun to settle down, at least for a season or two. They constructed wood-and-mud homes in shallow pits, usually in clusters. These 'pithouses' signaled a significant change in prehistoric Native American lifestyles; soon more people would be living in villages than wandering around. At Pecos, a cluster of pithouses was discovered behind the administrative building in the mid-1970s. They were found the usual way – by accident. While trenching for a new sewer line for two mobile home trailers, archaeologists found evidence of three packed dirt floors. Excavation revealed the floors to be oval shaped. It also revealed postholes, firepits, artifacts, and other evidence of what is called the Developmental Period. They are the only pithouses so far discovered in the upper Pecos River Valley.

The trend toward village formation accelerated rapidly, and not just at Pecos.

All across the Southwest, ancestral Puebloans began aggregating into larger and larger settlements. Agriculture, once simply a supplement to hunting, was intensified until the cultivation and harvesting of crops, primarily corn, beans and squash, became the dominant method of feeding people. This, in turn, encouraged the development of larger villages. The precise reasons why prehistoric peoples abandoned 20,000 years of nomadic habit and tradition for this highly modern business of living in one place year round is the subject of much speculation among archaeologists.

This history of village-building at Pecos, called the Coalition Period, is well represented, especially in the expanded park. Coalition-era sites include Dick's Ruin, Long House, Forked Lightning Ruin, Shimpo, Loma Lothrop, Arrowhead Ruin, and numerous smaller sites. To the south of the park is Rowe Ruin, to the north is Hobson-Dressler Ruin. Forked Lightning, excavated by Kidder in the late 1920s, is typical. Constructed of dried mud, it demonstrated numerous building episodes. As the village expanded over time, new rooms were added, new kivas built and new fields sowed. The ruin, which was occupied from roughly 1000 to 1300 AD, eventually grew into a large and powerful pueblo. Between 1300 and 1400 AD, however, most of these Coalition villages were abandoned, probably in response to the construction of a new stone pueblo on a nearby, wind-swept mesa, signaling the start of what archaeologists call the Classic Period. Soon, Pecos Pueblo became the only game in town. The long transition from nomadism to sedentary life in the valley was finished.

The Spanish occupation, as already noted, is extremely well represented at Pecos. Until the Forked Lightning Ranch was acquired, however, the park was unable to tell the rest of the story. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, as the pueblo and mission began to fade, the fertile fields adjacent to the Pecos River upstream from the pueblo began to be occupied by Spanish-speaking settlers. Eventually, a village formed, grew and prospered. Villagers began to look elsewhere for new agricultural opportunities as the best land became scarce. Some eyes turned south. Today, we know of at least four homes on the ranch property dating to this era. Although none have been excavated so far, a survey of their walls and artifacts already has told us much about life along the river during those years.

The famous Santa Fe Trail ran across the expanded park, though its ruts are barely visible. It functioned from 1821 to 1880, when the railroad, traveling much of the same path, put it out of business. In the 1850s, Theodore Koslowski built a small trading post on Glorieta Creek astride the Santa Fe Trail, now part of the park. This structure, which was expanded over time, became a focal point for economic activity in the region. During the Civil War, it served as headquarters for the Union Army (Camp Lewis to history buffs) during the three-day Battle of Glorieta Pass. Included in the congressional mandate for expanded park, this pivotal Civil War engagement, touted by some as the "Gettysburg of the West," marked the high-water point in the Confederate attempt to wrest the West away from the Union.

In early 1862, Confederate President Jefferson Davis gave the green light to General Henry Hopkins Sibley, a not-often sober West Point graduate, and his ambitious scheme of capturing the gold mines in Colorado. Supposedly, Sibley intended to keep going and capture the sea ports in California for the Rebel cause as well. Sibley's plan required his volunteer army of Texans to march up the Rio Grande, defeat three separate Union garrisons, capture Fort Union – the largest fort in the region (and the real objective of his campaign, many historians think) – rouse Southern sympathizers in the mines near Denver, survive a crossing of the Rockies and stroll triumphantly into San Francisco under the Stars-and-Bars.

He made it as far as Pecos.

In late March 1862, he was met in Glorieta Pass by a strong force of federal soldiers, augmented by a large contingent of Union-loving Colorado miners, and engaged in a three-day fight. Although the Texans held the field on the final day, having pushed the Union forces back some distance, a surprise Union raid behind enemy lines caught the Confederate supply wagons lightly defended and destroyed them. Returning from the battlefield in high spirits, the Confederates discovered that their grand plan had literally gone up in smoke.

The next day they headed back to Texas.

Sometime after the Civil War, a flour mill, called a *molina*, opened for business along the Pecos River. Its presence tells us that the population of the valley was rising in this period, and that commercial activity had begun to grow alongside agricultural life. Apparently the mill operated until 1921, when it fell silent, a victim to old age and changing technologies – and possibly a shrinking customer base. It is hard to say for certain. What is certain is that when the surrounding ranch was purchased from the Gross-Kelly Company by a flamboyant businessman from Texas in 1925, the old mill was torn down and all the residents in the vicinity evicted.

This businessman, who called himself Tex Austin (he had been born Clarence Van Nostrand), had made a fortune in an unlikely endeavor: the rodeo. Not as a bronc buster, but as a promoter. Shortly after purchasing the ranch, and some adjacent land, Austin exercised his new wealth by ordering the construction of a large, square, one-story house on a bluff overlooking the old mill. The house was designed by John Gaw Meem, a soon-to-be-famous Santa Fe architect, and became the centerpiece of a dude ranch for wealthy tourists.

Austin called his new home the Forked Lightning Ranch.

In 1939, Colonel Fogelson purchased the Forked Lightning Ranch from an insurance company. A destitute and despondent Tex Austin, his last rodeo promotion ruined by a crusading animal rights activist in England, had committed suicide a few years earlier in Santa Fe. An oilman of great wealth and generosity, Fogelson used the ranch as a summer home for himself and his fledgling Santa Gertrudis cattle operation. He and Greer Garson spent many happy summers at the ranch, transforming the house into one of the social centers of the Santa Fe area. A ticket to a party at the Forked Lightning during the 1960s and 70s was a coveted item. After Fogelson's death, Garson left reluctantly and only when the altitude began to affect her health. Near the end of her life, went the rumor, she forbid mention of the ranch – its happy memory was too much to bear.

A visitor center for the park was built in 1985 and carries Fogelson's name, reminding us of what one person with a big heart can achieve.

The transfer of the northern half of the Forked Lightning Ranch from private to public hands put the last piece of the story in place. Pecos National Historical Park was now steward to an amazing slice of American history. It accepted the challenge earnestly, no doubt knowing that one day it too would become a chapter in a story that has no end.

During my last summer in the park, I achieved a small, personal dream. Employing a grant, I spent three weeks directing an archaeological excavation in the site of the old flour mill, located directly below and across the river from the Forked Lightning ranch house. Ever since I had been doing archaeology, starting as a fourteen-year old volunteer digging my way through a Hohokam ruin in Phoenix, Arizona, with more enthusiasm than skill, I wanted to captain my own little project. I wanted to lay out my own grid, devise my own dig strategy, select which units were dug first and make all the basic decisions that every principal investigator did. When the project was approved, I felt on top of the world.

The feeling didn't last very long. Suddenly, I had a ton of work to do. Worse, the Pecos River refused to subside enough to let us cross over to the mill site. A long, heavy winter combined with a wet spring kept the river high and noisy. More than once, I was ready to blast across in the truck, but I dared not endanger any of my volunteers. So I kept pushing the start date back and back. Finally, I took the plunge, literally. In mid-July, I loaded my truck down with gear and eased it across the swollen, but less rowdy, river. Unfortunately, Todd, following in a government vehicle, hit the water too hard. The truck swallowed a giant mouthful of water and died. I crossed my fingers and prayed this wasn't a harbinger of things to come.

It was. Little did I suspect that the Curse of Pecos lay in wait for me among the soft colors and gentle rustling of the cottonwoods, plotting its revenge.

The mill site itself was an enticing, oval-shaped, duff-covered mound of dirt and who-knew-what resting right below a stone wall of appropriate height and width for a wooden flume and water wheel. We knew from historical documentation that the mill operated at least through World War One, before being abandoned and eventually dismantled. It had been owned by one Archibald Catanach, who had married into a prosperous Hispanic milling family in the area. The Catanach mill, as we called it, was one of many owned by this extended family at the time. Flour – or grist – mills were big business back then and their owners were usually pillars of the community. Every town needed a mill. In fact, mills were one of the very first structures erected after the founding of a new village. At one point toward the end of the nineteenth century, as many as three hundred grist mills may have been running simultaneously in northern New Mexico. To study these molinas is to study much of the development of Hispanic community during this period.

Trouble is of the three hundred mills in existence circa 1900, practically none remain. Most have been either vandalized, dismantled or neglected utterly. Most are lost to time and history, never to return. Especially valuable are the early mills, which were very modest wood-and-adobe structures. No one thought to preserve these simple buildings, whose main purpose was wholly functional. They were not romantic, like a stone pueblo, nor were they durable, like a church. Some were as temporary as their owners. They are largely lost to scholars as well, overlooked for many of the same reasons. But for some, all of this mystery and obscurity makes the search for the lost molinas all the more exciting.

One searcher was Earl Porter, a large man in spirit and physical size who looked more at home in his cowboy hat and suspenders, sitting on the tailgate of my truck spinning yarns, than as the nuclear engineer he had been for twenty-some years. Retired, Earl had thrown his considerable personality into a quest to discover and preserve what remained of the old mills in the region. He had already visited hundreds of mill sites and catalogued each into his computer. He was also the Mill Master at Las Golondrinas Living History Museum, south of Santa Fe. In that capacity, he had secured the purchase of two beautiful historic mills, one a village ‘ditch style’ molina, the other a three-story commercial brick-and-adobe building, transporting both back to the outdoor Museum. Thanks to Earl’s prodigious talents and energy, both mills were quickly up-and-running, grinding flour and basking in their new-found lives. He was a one-man encyclopedia on mills and I was excited that he was excited about our plans to dig at the Catanach mill.

Earl hoped it would plug various holes in the molina fabric of the area. He said it was the only remaining mill on the upper Pecos River; it existed at a time of technological evolution in mill mechanics and probably it had been designed by a prominent miller – judging by the two mill stones conveniently left behind on the mill site. Exposure of the mill's foundations, floor plan, wheel base and mechanical supports would allow Earl to make all sorts of calculations concerning horsepower, wheel diameter, capacities and other details that only a mill buff or an archaeologist could love. As an extra bonus, Earl had never participated in an excavation before.

So we set out a grid and went to work. All indications were positive. From its headgate on the Pecos River, a long ditch contoured for nearly a quarter-mile along the base of a hill, flowing toward the mill site. The remains of a wooden flume picked up where the ditch ended and approached the drop-off spot at the top of a tall stone wall. Another ditch ran from the base of this wall directly downhill, back to the river. The oval-shaped mound, which was oriented properly to be the base of the old mill, was covered with historic artifacts, including nails and fragments of shaped wood. Then there were the milling stones. Earl could tell, by determining which way they turned, that they were of an American design. This was all good news. So, with much anticipation, we turned our first shovel of dirt.

Three weeks later – nothing. Oh, we found a ton of trash. We had more nails, bits of broken window glass and odd parts of milling machinery than we knew what to do with (other than wash and analyze them). We also found an oval-shaped layer of intensively burned soil, which contained most of the aforementioned trash. Knowing that the mill had been dismantled under the orders of Tex Austin in 1925, the burned soil told us that his crew also torched a big pile of debris when they were done. As for everything else – apparently Tex desired that all above ground traces of the mill be obliterated. We also discovered the source of the artificial mound that had so intrigued us. It consisted exclusively of fist-sized river cobbles, the remnants of a major flood on the river – probably the great flood of 1929, since the burned soil layer existed below the cobble layer. But nothing more.

We were stunned. Where were the mill's foundations? They had to be *someplace*. We assumed that Tex would have simply knocked the mill down, not dig it up. So I trenched and trenched, digging wide and deep, but nary a foundation could be found. Taking a break one day, I noticed that our trenches had created a crucifix in the middle of the site. As I looked, I swore I could hear laughter – it was the Curse of Pecos, sitting in the branches of the trees, giggling hard.

Determined to prevail, we kept digging. Jake Ivey joined in the fun too (bringing his fedora along) even though mills were not his forte. We leapfrogged the oval-shaped mound and dug energetically in the area where the water wheel should have resided, according to Earl. *Should have*. We found nothing but a bunch of grouchy cottonwood tree roots. We kept going. We dug deeper, we dug back toward the mound, we dug fat trenches, we dug long, skinny trenches, we dug randomly, we dug judgmentally, we dug all over.

No foundations. Nada.

In the end, we sat on our tailgates and in our folding chairs, munching our sandwiches and chips, and *talked*.

Did Tex Austin actually order the removal of the mill's foundations? They would have been neither an eyesore nor a danger to his guests. Why would he bother? And why were the two grinding stones still there? Earl said mill stones were always the first to be hauled off either as souvenirs or to be used someplace else. But there they were. And why was the wooden flume left to rot in place? It looked awful and posed a threat potentially to the safety of any children playing in the vicinity. What would he have done with the foundation anyway… That's when a bell rung. The house. Did Austin dig them up to use in the construction of his new, spiffy home? Earl was doubtful, but admitted that he couldn't come up with a better theory.

We were beat, physically, intellectually and emotionally. Even Jake was stumped, which said a lot. His frowns and his silent musings told me the game was up. So, at the end of my allotted three weeks, we put our tools down, loaded the screens into the trucks and packed everything up. I took a few more photographs, added the final touches to my map and headed back to the office. All that was left to do was the backfilling. I was not sure who was more disappointed, Earl or myself. As an archaeologist, I knew the risks. More often than not, what you find is not what you expected to discover. Sometimes one is pleasantly surprised, as we were with the colored adobes in the convento, sometimes disappointment lurks among the trees.

Besides, there is no such thing as a 'failure' in archaeology. Negative information, such as a missing mill, is important too. We learned things from our exertions, from the artifacts, from the maps, from looking and pondering. If Tex chose to wipe the mill off the face of the earth, so be it. That was his decision. And now we know more than we did. We still dug into the past. Earl did his genealogical research on the Catanachs that he had postponed for years and the park acquired another bit of information about the incredible history of this land.

I still had to write that Final Report too.

When I drove across the ford one last time, I reflected for a moment on my long-standing dream to direct a dig. I knew in my heart that this would be my one and only shot. I never planned a career in archaeology and did not intend to pursue it much further. I love the romance, the hard work and the exuberant feeling you get from pushing the frontiers of knowledge back, an inch at a time. I love working outdoors, I love dirt and grids and layers of mystery. I especially enjoy the camaraderie of fellow explorers, most of who are in it for the love of knowledge and the sheer adventure of it all. The discipline has given me much over the years and I have tried to give something back. And I wanted, for just a moment, to see what it was like to be the boss.

As I crested the hill and drove past Austin's ranch house, I considered the future. This was my last summer at Pecos, I knew. I needed to move on in my life – though to what wasn't clear yet. Still, I already looked forward to the day when I could return to the Forked Lightning Ranch and walk the new interpretive trail planned for the mill site. I would remember the frustration and the laughter, the lingering lunches under softly swaying trees, the intense discussions about history and strategy. I'd recall Earl's jolly stories, Jake's puzzled frowns and our volunteers' joyous energy.

I'd recall other memories as well, of eating hot peppers with the stabilization crew, talking with visitors, sharing potlucks and laughter in the cramped lunch room, giving tours of the ruins to school kids, digging upside down in the convento 'cellar,' working alongside the amazing park staff and admiring the lingering beauty of a crisp September afternoon. I would also remember the lightning bolt that struck the church during my last week at Pecos, taking a big “bite” of a wall and reminding us of the awesome power of nature.

I knew they would be great memories, of a time long gone, in a place of exceptional beauty that was once the center of the universe.