

New Mexico Quarterly

Volume 27 | Issue 4

Article 24

1957

Anthropological Research in New Mexico

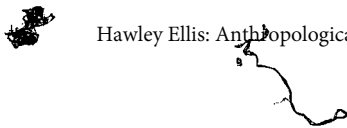
Florence Hawley Ellis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq>

Recommended Citation

Hawley Ellis, Florence. "Anthropological Research in New Mexico." *New Mexico Quarterly* 27, 4 (1957).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol27/iss4/24>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the University of New Mexico Press at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Quarterly* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.



FLORENCE HAWLEY ELLIS

Anthropological Research in New Mexico

A. V. Kidder, dean of Southwestern archaeologists, enjoys quoting one of his eastern advisors who assured him, sometime before 1920, that he should choose a field other than the Southwest because it was "a sucked orange." Ever since the latter part of the nineteenth century, archaeologists have been digging, deducing, and pulling hair over new discoveries and their meaning.

Archaeology is anything but a static science. Since 1930 three major Southwestern cultures which flourished after the time of Christ, have been recognized as distinct from the single culture (Basket Maker-Pueblo) previously known. Until 1928 the idea that Paleo-Indians might have lived in the Southwest—or in the Americas—was considered a concept of crackpot amateurs. Anyone suggesting that man might have seen, killed, and eaten animals of those types characteristic of the Pleistocene but becoming extinct sometime before the Recent period quickly was stripped of his scientific reputation by "conservative" brothers. It required three field seasons and numerous invitations to eminent anthropologists to view *in situ* the first recognized Folsom points associated with the remains of ancient bison in northeastern New Mexico before the presence of man in the Southwest some thousands of years before Christ was accepted.

Such suspension of credence protects a field where science and adventure walk together, but field research which was gathering momentum slowly about 1930 has progressed with acceleration ever since. The Clovis culture, older than the Folsom, was identified in old bed deposits. The Sandia culture, identified by the peculiar asymmetry and cruder workmanship of its points, took its name from the mountains in which the first site was found; its date is generally accepted as of

One of the country's leading experts on Pueblo ethnology and archeology, Florence Ellis received her A.B. and M.A. at the University of Arizona and her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. She is now Professor of Anthropology at UNM.

about 25,000 years ago, the oldest yet known for the United States. Numerous other sites representing these cultures have been found throughout New Mexico. Indeed, after heavy spring windstorms, archaeology classes may show an appreciable absence list because students are out seeing what new has been uncovered.

An especially interesting site is that near Lucy, toward the southern end of the barren flats once filled by Pleistocene Lake Estancia, where Sandia, Scottsbluff, and Pinto points have been found in place by University of New Mexico excavations during the past three years. Most intriguing among these points are the previously unknown "fluted Sandias," which suggest that the Sandia culture may be directly ancestral to—or at least overlap—the Clovis, which in turn was ancestral to the Folsom, a culture succession of some 15,000 years. Almost every type of point known for ancient man in the Southwest and adjoining areas has been picked up from the eroded Lucy Site surface and from numerous other sites in the state. Pinto points were first described for eastern California, but from the numerous sites now recognized in the Grants and Acoma area and eastward one can picture these Californians trekking along an early Highway 66 in a procession reminiscent of the Dust Bowl migrants of the 1930's, though in the opposite direction. The "J" culture, represented at Lucy but especially concentrated in the drainages of the Puerco and San Jose, appears to have been a relative of the Pinto and may have lasted as late as 2,000 years ago. On their eastern periphery these hunters met those of the Atrisco culture, a recently described offshoot of the Cochise. The Atrisco groups, who lived largely along the western edges of the Rio Grande Valley, relied upon gathering grass seeds and other plant foods as much or perhaps more than they relied upon hunting. The Cochise culture is known also for southwestern New Mexico (as well as in southern Arizona and northern Old Mexico), where in Bat Cave on the southern edge of the Plains of St. Augustine the most primitive corn yet found anywhere was excavated during the 1940's. This cave, and others since worked in the Mogollon Mountain area, indicate that agriculture has been carried on in New Mexico since about 2000 B.C., instead of only since the time of Christ, as hitherto supposed.

Out of this venerable Cochise culture, the earliest stages of which go back some 10,000 years, grew the Mogollon culture, whose people chose to live in the high country on both sides of the state line now dividing Arizona from New Mexico. For a number of years the Chicago Museum of Natural History has been exploring and reporting upon a

series of these sites north of Silver City. The Mogollon was of great influence upon the emerging Basket Maker–Pueblo culture (from which the modern Pueblos have descended) in the Four Corners area in the first centuries after Christ, and lost its identity after 1000 A.D. through amalgamation with the now-expanded northern pattern. The extent of occupation of the Rio Grande Valley by people of early Mogollon and people of Basket Maker–Pueblo background and the relative degrees of their inter-influence is a problem of considerable interest. This contrasts sharply with the query of the early 1930's: "Why was the Rio Grande Valley uninhabited until a late period?" There is now no question that it was inhabited and its tributaries likewise, but not until erosion removed the sand could the sites be known.

Two of the most important contributors to New Mexico archaeology in the last few years are the Pipeline and the Highway salvage projects. Archaeologists sponsored by the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe move just ahead of bulldozers and ditch-diggers to excavate and so preserve data from sites on a new highway survey. Archaeologists hired by the pipeline companies with advice from the National Park Service do the same. Funds and equipment for labor are backed by the pipeline companies and the Highway Department, and data are published. Further related salvage work, including sites up to the hacienda period, now is being carried on in the area eventually to be flooded by reclamation projects in the San Juan Basin.

Excavation of early prehistoric ruins and ruins occupied by Pueblo people in the early Spanish period, north of Santa Fe, has interested both the Laboratory of Anthropology and the University of New Mexico. Evidence of Spanish contact is seen in bits of Majolica ware, and of Spanish conflict in pieces of broken church bells. The Laboratory has uncovered the foundations of the first church at Pecos, not mentioned in any of the accounts known but probably built before 1622 and hence one of the earliest in New Mexico. Moving in something of the opposite direction, Laboratory excavations have indicated that the existing San Miguel chapel in Santa Fe, long set forth as the oldest church in America, probably was not built until after 1710 (as shown by tree ring dates). The building of today was raised upon the location but not directly upon the traceable foundations of an earlier structure, probably built shortly after the founding of Santa Fe in 1610, but apparently so thoroughly ruined during subsequent political or Indian disturbances that the ground was cleared before reconstruction began. A similar study of the ground plan of La Castrense, the old military

chapel on the south side of the Santa Fe plaza, was made when the modern building which had covered the site was torn down.

New Mexico long has counted living Indians and archaeological sites among the assets of the state, but not until the last two or three years have the Indians realized that specific location of the homes of their ancestors might be of major importance to them. The Government of the United States, weary of periodic Indian complaints regarding lost lands and wary of the propaganda comments of less-than-friendly nations, ordered that compensation be made for all areas which the tribesmen could prove had been lost through Government negligence in protection of their rights. For years anthropologists had been hazarding more or less educated guesses as to which tribes once had occupied certain districts where ruins were widespread. When such information became an obvious necessity as background for the land claims cases, anthropologists were hired who could work from the traditions carried by living people and the potsherds left in old dumps of the home pueblo and in ruins of related period and culture complex. For the first time the Pueblo people saw reason to record details of social organization, customs, and history which previously they had attempted to keep secret in the hope that such secrecy would longer preserve the native way of life. Discovering that considerable knowledge of the past already had been lost through death of old people and lack of time or interest among the young, some of the tribes have even contemplated making tape recordings of certain matters for their own future use. To archaeologists the extended surveys involved in the land claims studies are of much importance; to ethnologists, the possibility not only of knowing more about tribal customs and history but also of improving understanding between research workers and natives is of deep importance. Without data the land claims may fail, but without data—also—studies in cultural dynamics, such as acculturation, culture change, inter-personal and group relationships, have no chance.

In many parts of the United States ethnologic research is largely a matter of re-combining the information available in libraries, such information often being woefully scanty. Yet it is not unusual to find that an Indian knows less about the ways through which his people oriented their lives for centuries than is to be found in books. In the Southwest neither as many sites have been plowed up nor as many Indians plowed under as elsewhere in the U. S.; the area remains a major laboratory for feet-upon-the-ground archaeology and ethnology as well as for head-in-the-sky development and testing of theories. Far

more than ever before has come out of the area since it was categorized as a fruit to be tossed away. Among the problems which Southwestern anthropologists would like to live long enough to see worked out are those pertaining to the adaptation of Indian peoples to working and living in cities. Linguists, still in the early stages of studying the complicated Southwestern native languages, are beginning to offer some understanding of the basic ways of thought of these people, their postulates concerning the nature of the universe and the relationship of men to it and to each other. Areas still almost untouched in all parts of New Mexico are sufficient to offer happy hunting grounds throughout the remaining years of the archaeological older generation and the lettuce years of their juniors.

And who can tell what the winds will blow out next spring?