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Review of *On the Edge of Purgatory: An Archaeology
of Place in Hispanic Colorado*. By Bonnie J. Clark

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On the Edge of Purgatory: An Archaeology of Place in Hispanic Colorado. By Bonnie J. Clark. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011. xxvi + 148 pp. Maps, photographs, illustrations, tables, references, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Bonnie Clark's book is a welcome addition to the small body of published literature regarding Great Plains historical archaeology. It concerns two habitation sites located on the Piñon Canyon Maneuver site, a modern military base in the canyon lands of the Purgatory River (which the Spanish named *El Río de Las Ánimas Perdidas en Purgatorio*) in southeastern Colorado. The river is the lifeblood of this region, with a deep record of occupation by both prehistoric and historic populations. Clark searches for Hispanic Colorado, which she identifies as both a people and a place. But unlike other historical archaeology studies, this one has few written records to rely upon for building a story of the peoples of the past. The goal of Clark's work is to place these two sites into a broader social fabric of Hispanic place.

Chapter 1 sets the historical stage for Clark's narrative. This area of Colorado has long been considered *despoblado*, a territory outside of the Spanish core of New Mexico, but nevertheless maintaining a Hispanic identity (under both Spanish and Mexican influence). Clark identifies several of the major events and processes that affected this region, including the development of New Mexican settlements, Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, the development of the

Santa Fe Trail as a major Mexican/American trade route, the development of land grants, and the Mexican-American War of 1846–48. As of the 1870s, 90% of the region still had ties to New Mexico.

The focus of chapter 2 is the archaeology of the two historic sites recorded and tested by Clark and her crew, including La Placita, a cluster of six habitation structures surrounded by additional livestock features. First settled in the late 1880s, the site appears abandoned by 1898. It is contrasted with the Wild Plum site, located only two miles away. Wild Plum also dates to approximately the 1890s, and appears to contain two to three occupations, including a household, as well as later ranching and mining activities. How the residents of these sites made a living, including by ranching and gardening, is the subject of chapter 3, in which Clark details several of the artifact classes recovered during her work, discussing the use of ceramics and other common household items, some of which appear in period Montgomery Ward catalogs.

Chapter 4 considers the uses of plazas in the New World, with laws governing Spanish settlement dating back to the 16th-century Law of the Indies. Clark argues that La Placita was conceived, built, and used as a plaza; her argument is supported by the architecture itself as well as associated features and artifacts. Dealing with landscapes and the meaning of place in chapter 5, she identifies slight differences in Hispanic and Anglo use of place, in particular in concepts of land use. For example, Clark contrasts whether lands were modified into new, artificial forms or were altered in a lower-intensity method, simply taking advantage of local ecological conditions. In her concluding chapter, she discusses how archaeologists should begin to view such places as La Placita not as discrete “sites,” but instead as parts of a larger “place,” urging researchers to broaden their scope of inquiry to that of the landscape scale.

Archaeologists and historians will find *On the Edge of Purgatory* useful on several levels. First, it helps in diversifying the archaeology of Colorado by broadening the range of economic adaptations as well as ethnic populations discussed in the archaeological literature. Second, it is a valuable introduction to landscape archaeology and the concept of place. So often archaeologists become trapped in the concept of an archaeological site as an analytical unit, rarely attempting to integrate sites into broader spatial (and conceptual) units. Clark is to be commended for bringing greater diversity to the theoretical and topical literature of historic Colorado.

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