



## Chaco Canyon Place Names

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In 1849, Lieutenant James Simpson, a member of the Washington Expedition, surveyed many areas throughout the Southwest. He described and reported on many ancestral Puebloan and Navajo archaeological sites now associated with Chaco Culture NHP. Simpson used the names given to him by Carravahal, a local guide, for many of the sites. These are the names that we use today.

However, the Pueblo Peoples of NM, the Hopi of AZ, and the Navajo, have their own names for many of these places. Some of these names have been omitted due to their sacred and non-public nature. Many of the names listed here are Navajo since the Navajo have lived in the canyon most recently and continue to live in the area. These names often reveal how the Chacoan sites have been incorporated into the culture, history, and oral histories of the Navajo people.

There are also different names for the people who lived here 1,000 years ago. The people who lived in Chaco were probably diverse groups of people. "Anasazi" is a Navajo word which translates to "ancient ones" or "ancient enemies." Today, we refer to this group as the "Ancestral Puebloans" because many of the descendants of Chaco are the Puebloan people. However there are many groups that speak their own languages and have their own names for the ancient people here. "Ancestral Puebloans" is a general term that accounts for this.

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**Chaco**-A map drawn in 1776 by Spanish cartographer, Bernardo de Pacheco identifies this area as "Chaca" which is a Spanish colonial word commonly used to mean "a large expanse of open and unexplored land, desert, plain, or prairie." The term "Chaca" is believed to be the origin of both the word Chacra in reference to Chacra Mesa and Chaco.

The Acoma place name for Chaco is W'aasrba shak'a which means a "place of greasewood" and it may have been shortened to "Chaca." The Hopi place name for Chaco Canyon is Yupkoyvi, "the place beyond the horizon." The Navajo name for the canyon refers to a large boulder that used to stand behind Pueblo Bonito. The term *Tsébiyaanii' áhá* refers both to this rock and to the canyon itself. The boulder fell in 1941.

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**Front country sites:** These sites are found along the main loop road.

**Fajada Butte**-Fajada means "belted" or "banded" in Spanish and describes the black seam of lignite coal exposed midway up the butte. This landmark occurs in several Navajo stories as *Tsé Diyinnii*, or "holy rock."

**Una Vida**-In Spanish, this means "one life."

**Hungo Pavi**-Edgar Hewett, an archaeologist who worked at Chaco in the early 1900s, believed the name was a corruption of the Hopi town named Shungopovi. William Henry Jackson, on an expedition in 1877, thought it was based on the Spanish phrase for "hooked" or "crooked nose."

**Chetro Ketl**-The meaning of this name is unknown, although there are several Navajo names for this site. The name *Tséyitah*, or "inside among rocks" and the term *Nast'a Kin*, "house in the corner" may refer to the location of the building in a natural drainage area. The name *Tsé Bidádi ni 'ání*, or "covered hole," may refer to sealed concavities in the cliff behind the site.

**Pueblo Bonito**-In Spanish, this means "pretty village."

**Pueblo del Arroyo-** This translates to “village by the wash” in Spanish. The Spanish may be based off of the Navajo name, *Tabaah Kin*, which has a similar meaning.

**Casa Rinconada-** In Spanish this means “cornered house” or “house where the canyons meet.” Casa is Spanish for house and *rinconada* is from *rincon*, or “corner.” In New Mexico and southern Colorado *rinconada* came to mean “dead end,” “box canyon,” or “secluded place.” Casa Rinconada is located in such a place. One Navajo name for this great kiva is *Kin Nahazbas*, or “circular house” which refers to round rooms in general.

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**Backcountry sites:** These structures can be found by hiking our backcountry trails.

**Wijiji-** This likely derives from the Navajo word *Dewoozhii*, meaning “greasewood.” Another nickname is *Kin Dootl’izhii* meaning “turquoise house.”

**Pueblo Alto-** This is Spanish for “high village.” Situated on top of North mesa, this great house was named by William Henry Jackson in 1877.

**Kin Kletso-** This comes from the Navajo *Kin Litso* or “yellow house,” which describes the light colored sandstone used to construct the great house.

**Casa Chiquita-** In Spanish this translates to “little house,” likely because this is a smaller great house. The Spanish name may be a translation of one of the Navajo names for this site, *Kin Yazhi Hooghan*, or “little house home.”

**Penasco Blanco-** In Spanish this translates to “white cliff” or “white bluff,” likely named for the light colored sandstone bluff beneath the site. The name of this geographical feature (but not the site itself) appears in Spanish military report written by Jose Antonio Vizcarra in 1823.

**Tsin Kletzin-** This likely derives from the Navajo *Tsin Lizhin* which means “black wood.” The reference may be to charred timbers found at the site. The site was first described by J.S. Holsinger of the General Land Office in 1901 translated the name as “house in the beautiful wood.” As early as 1914, the building had been called *hermoso* meaning “beautiful.”

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**Outlier Sites:** These Great Houses are located in detached units from the main section of Chaco Culture NHP. Please ask for general information about these sites at the front desk. These are just a few of roughly 150 outlier sites that formed the Chaco system.

**Pueblo Pintado-** This is Spanish for “painted village.” Pueblo people on the Washington Expedition called it Pueblo de Montezuma. This site is also known as Pueblo de los Ratones, or “village of the mice,” Pueblo Colorado or “red village,” and Pueblo Grande, or “large village.” Its Navajo name is *Kin twell*, or “wide house.”

**Kin Bineola-** This comes from the Navajo *Kin Bii’naayoli* which means “drafty house,” “whirlwind house,” or “house in which the wind swirls.”

**Kin Klizhin-** This likely derives from the Navajo *Kin Lizhin* which means “black house” which possibly refers to the charred timbers or dark charcoal found there.

**Kin Ya’a-** In Navajo, this translates to “house rising up high.” Kin Ya’a is a great house near Crownpoint which according to one Navajo story is a place where a group of Navajos settled with the Chacoan people. They later became known as *Kin yaa’aanii*, the “towering house clan,” likely based off the tower kiva found at the site.

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