

Chaco Culture

National Historical Park
National Park Service
Department of the Interior



The Heart of Chaco

If you scan the horizon from east to west your eyes are sure to pause upon the impressive Chacoan buildings known today as Chetro Ketl, Casa Rinconada, Pueblo del Arroyo, Kin Kletso, and Peñasco Blanco. Many of the “hills” you see dotting the landscape represent even more fallen villages. And there were many more communities within the canyon, and far beyond, with deep physical and spiritual connections to Chaco. But it is here at Pueblo Bonito that you may hear the heart of Chaco beating the loudest.

A few thousand people may have lived in Chaco Canyon during its heyday—and thousands more were drawn here from far-flung locales to attend great gatherings, ceremonies, and trading events staged in the plazas below. Imagine how it might have been if you had been standing here then, amidst those bustling crowds, within the towering, gleaming walls of Pueblo Bonito. Imagine all the sights, sounds, and smells you might have enjoyed—the brilliantly colored ornaments and clothing, the colorful macaw feathers, shells, and turquoise—the pounding drum beats, flutes, conch-shell trumpets, and hypnotic chanting of singers echoing off the canyon walls—and the fragrances of foods and fires wafting near and far.

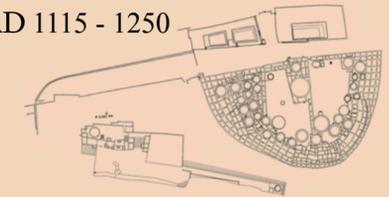
Chaco was vibrantly alive then—and—it still lives today. The people moved away in the 1200s, but they never forgot Chaco. Their songs, stories, languages, ceremonies, pottery, art, turquoise, corn, shells, architecture, sun-watching are still very much with us today. You can still find them in the ongoing history and traditions of the Hopi people, the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico, and the Navajo people, who continue to revere and honor this place. Just listen to the heart of Chaco, still beating...



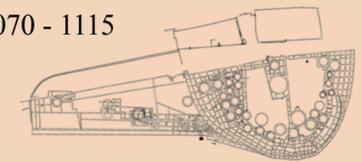
Valerie Martinez of the Tewa Dancers of the North at Pueblo Bonito 2004. Photograph by Jim Spadaccini, IDEUM

Illustrations showing 5 construction phases of Pueblo Bonito by John Stein, Dabney Ford, and Richard Friedman.

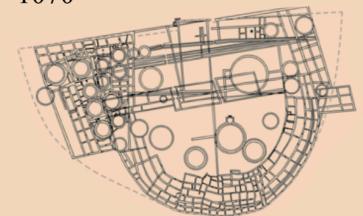
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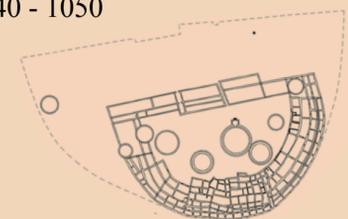
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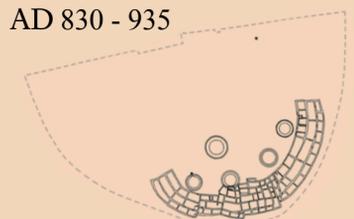
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Much like the great cathedrals and palaces of Europe and the pyramids in Egypt and Mesoamerica, Pueblo Bonito was planned, designed, and constructed by successions of people over several centuries. All the while, generation after generation maintained the unique form and design of the structure—one that continues to inspire awe in us a thousand years later.