



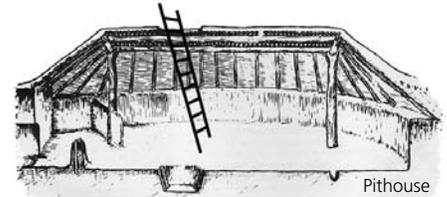
Activity 3: Background Information

Ancestral Puebloan Chronology at Mesa Verde

MODIFIED BASKETMAKER PERIOD (A.D. 450 - 750)

Basketmaker III (A.D. 500 - 750)

The first Ancestral Puebloans settled in Mesa Verde about A.D. 550, during the Modified Basketmaker Period (Basketmaker III). Homes during this period were **pithouses**, the first permanent shelters that Ancestral Puebloans built. They dug a large circular hole several feet deep and eight to ten feet wide, and planted four upright timber posts inside the hole to make a square framework for the roof and walls. Branches, bark, and plant material were laid against this frame to form a flat roof and slanted walls. The pithouse was then capped with a layer of mud, making it a weather-tight and secure living space for a single family. A hearth (fire pit) provided warmth, and a hole in the roof served as both a chimney and entryway. Some pithouses only had one room, but others had a second, smaller storage room connected to them called an antechamber. They used stone-lined cists partly buried in the ground as storage bins to protect food items from rodents and other animals.



Pithouse



Basket with corn
by Talela Hales

The main characteristic of this and previous Basketmaker time periods is the predominant use and skillful creation of finely woven **baskets**. Baskets served as containers for storing food and carrying supplies. Tightly woven baskets lined with pitch held water. These baskets were also used for cooking by inserting hot stones which heated the water. Ancestral Puebloans also began to make **pottery** during this period. They developed plain gray ware and some pieces with simple black designs drawn on a lighter background. Although pottery did not yet replace baskets, pottery made some tasks easier, especially cooking, storing food, and collecting water.



Shard of early
pottery type



Stone knife
by Deborah Kelly Galin

Ancestral Puebloans did not have metal, so they used raw materials from their environment to make the tools needed to meet their basic needs of food, water and shelter. Tools made of stone, bone and wood were common. Stone was used to make **knives**, axes, and other tools needed for things like cutting, scraping, and pounding. Bones were made into **awls** for sewing, scrapers for working animal hides, and the hollow bones of birds strung and used in jewelry. During this period, the **bow and arrow** replaced the spear, atlatl (spear-thrower) and dart for hunting. Snares and nets were woven from natural plant fiber and used for capturing small game. Digging sticks, with fire-hardened points at one end, were used for planting crops of **corn**, beans, and squash. The **mano and metate**, found in almost all households, were used for grinding corn. In addition to farming, the Ancestral Puebloans also gathered wild plants, such as nuts from the pinyon pine tree, berries from the serviceberry bush, and pads of the prickly pear cactus. **Yucca** leaves and fibers were often used to make woven articles such as sandals, ropes, and snares. Soft cradleboards, which looked like backpacks, were woven from twigs, yucca, and rabbit fur, and were used to carry babies.



Mano and metate
by Deborah Kelly Galin



Bone awl
by Marna Bastian



Bow and arrow
by Deborah Kelly Galin



Yucca by Marna Bastian
Yucca cordage by Deborah Kelly Galin

The Modified Basketmaker Period at Mesa Verde was one of settlement as well as change. The Ancestral Puebloans had settled and become successful farmers, living in pithouses clustered into small villages. Change also came with the introduction of the bow and arrow and the beginnings of pottery, both of which improved their way of life.

DEVELOPMENTAL PUEBLO PERIOD (A.D. 750 - 1100)

Pueblo I (A.D. 750 – 900)

Across the mesa tops, some families began to move into larger communities and worked together in the fields to improve the harvests. They also continued to hunt for game and gather wild seeds, nuts, fruits, and berries.

Although pithouses were still in use, Ancestral Puebloans began building clusters of above ground homes called **pueblos**. The new surface structures were flat roofed rooms, sometimes joined together in long rows. Walls were woven like giant baskets between a series of upright wooden posts. The entire structure was covered with mud. This was called jacal (hä-käl), or wattle and daub construction. By the end of Pueblo I, sandstone slabs were sometimes added around the foundations, marking the beginning of stone masonry construction.



Artist rendition of an early pueblo in Mesa Verde



Olla
Inspired by Marna Bastian

Agricultural and hunting tools such as bows and arrows, digging sticks, stone knives and axes were similar to those of Basketmaker times, but pottery use and quality increased dramatically. Ancestral Puebloans continued to make undecorated gray pottery for cooking, eating, and storing food, and large jars called **ollas** (ô'yäs), to collect water. They also produced a white pottery on which artists used yucca fiber brushes to paint a variety of black designs. Miniature pottery vessels were also created at this time, perhaps by young potters as they practiced the craft of pottery making.



Yucca sandal
by Talela Hales



Spindle by Marna Bastian

Yucca fibers and other natural fibers were still used for sandals, rope, and other cordage. Turkey feathers were often wrapped around yucca cordage and woven into blankets for added warmth. The Ancestral Puebloans also began trading for cotton with others living in warmer climates farther south. They used **spindles** that looked like long tops to twirl the cotton into yarn, and then wove the **cotton** yarn into small articles like belts and shirts. Cradleboards became more rigid so babies could be carried or propped up against a tree or wall while their mothers' worked. The stiffer cradleboard included a wooden pillow that flattened the back of a baby's head, reshaping the heads of future generations of Ancestral Puebloans.



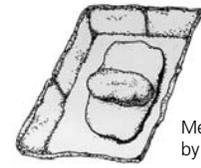
Woven cotton cloth
by Talela Hales

Pueblo II (A.D. 900 – 1150)

During the Pueblo II time period, Ancestral Puebloans continued to experiment with new architecture. As they became more skilled with stone masonry, they replaced jacal construction with sandstone blocks. The **pueblos** became sturdier structures that were less likely to catch fire. A typical community called unit pueblos, included both pit structures and above ground rooms. The earlier pithouse did not disappear, but it was changed. The altered structures were constructed entirely underground, and the roof was flat and level with the ground surface. The flat roof created a courtyard or outdoor workspace within the village. This new underground room, called a **kiva**, became a ceremonial site, meeting space, and occasional winter residence.

While the Ancestral Puebloans made changes architecturally, many of the tools used throughout this time changed very little. Stone knives, scrapers, and axes were still common. Bows and arrows and snares were still used for hunting,

which supplemented the main foods of corn, beans, and squash. Clothing was still made primarily from animal hides, yucca fibers, and cotton. As the importance of corn in their diets grew, the people designed special grinding areas known as **mealing bins** in their pueblos. They were large side-by-side grinding troughs in a specific part of the village. Their size suggests that groups of women worked together to grind and prepare corn in these areas using manos and metates.



Mealing bin
by Marna Bastian



Ladle
by Marna Bastian



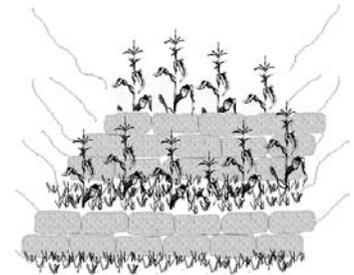
Bird effigy pot
by Marna Bastian

Trade and interaction increased between the people of Mesa Verde and other Ancestral Puebloan communities. Pottery continued to be both an essential tool and an important trade item. The people used it in new ways, creating a great number of types of pottery such as **ladles** (they had once used dried gourds), mugs, bowls, lidded jars, pitchers, canteens, and **effigy pots** (small pots in the shape of ducks, birds and other animals). Gray colored **corrugated pots** were commonly used for cooking and storage jars during this time. Corrugation was a pinching technique of the clay coils that made up the pot, creating a rough ridged pattern on the outside. The fingerprints of potters can still be seen in the coils of some corrugated pots.



Corrugated pot by Marna Bastian

During this time, Ancestral Puebloans began using new farming techniques to help conserve water and reduce erosion. **Check dams**, for instance, were built along sloping, narrow drainages, creating a terrace effect. The dams slowed water runoff from rainfall or melting snow. As the water slowly ran down the drainage, soil would be captured behind each dam. These pockets of soil retained moisture and became perfect places for planting.



Check dams and terrace

The Developmental Pueblo Period was one of experimentation, expansion, and exploration of new possibilities while the Ancestral Puebloan people learned from the experiences of their parents and grandparents before them.

CLASSIC PUEBLO PERIOD (A.D. 1100 - 1300)

Pueblo III (A.D. 1150 – 1300)

Sometimes called the Classic or Great Pueblo Period, some of the most famous archeological sites in Mesa Verde were built during the Pueblo III time period. Mesa Verde's world-famous **cliff dwellings** of Cliff Palace, Spruce Tree House, and Balcony House were all built during this time.

The population at Mesa Verde increased greatly during Pueblo III. The Ancestral Puebloans used whatever fertile land was available to plant the crops needed to meet the needs of the growing population. Irrigation systems, including check dams, terraced plots, ditches, and even reservoirs were engineered and constructed to maximize water conservation.



Cliff Palace, largest cliff dwelling in Mesa Verde National Park

Much like their ancestors, the Ancestral Puebloans of this time period also used elements of the past as a base for continued change, experimentation, and development. Increasingly, the Ancestral Puebloans built larger, more complex stone and mortar pueblos on the mesa tops, and by A.D. 1200, many began moving down into the cliff alcoves and building their dwellings there. Cliff dwellings and pueblos often stood several stories high. At many sites, rooms were decorated with earthen (dirt) plaster in colors of pink, brown, red, yellow, or white. Rooms for sleeping and storage were usually clustered around a kiva. And the kiva roof provided an outdoor courtyard for working, food preparation, cooking, and gathering.



Black-on-White jar
by Talela Hales



Paired mugs
by Deborah Kelly Galin

In some kivas, looms hung from ceiling to floor for weavers to practice their art. Expertly dyed and woven cotton textiles were worn as clothes. Sandals, sashes, cords, and ropes were twisted and woven out of yucca fibers. The Ancestral Puebloan's pottery progressed to a point where some researchers consider it to be the "highest artistic expression" of the culture. Although corrugated grayware continued to be used for cooking and storage, the pottery of this period is known for its beautifully detailed geometric designs, called **Mesa Verde Black-on-White**. They even painted the inside of bowls with elaborate designs. **Mugs** of all sizes were especially popular during this period, and reveal the fine artistic skills of the potters.

The artistry of the Ancestral Puebloans was shown in other ways too. Stones were drilled and strung to make bracelets, and bones were shaped and polished to create rings and other ornaments. They also traded for materials not found locally, such as **turquoise** from the south, and shells from the Pacific ocean to produce necklaces and other jewelry.



Turquoise frog
by Talela Hales

Meanwhile, the tools for daily activities remained similar to those from earlier time periods. Bows and arrows; bone utensils such as bone awls and scrapers; stone tools such as axes, knives, manos, and metates were all used in the pueblos and cliff dwellings.

By the end of the Classic Pueblo Period, after living over 700 years in Mesa Verde, the Ancestral Puebloans departed. It appears that family by family, they packed up their most essential and portable belongings and moved away, eventually settling along the mesas, rivers, and streams to the south where their descendants live today. What they could not take with them, are the artifacts and features studied by archeologists today. By carefully examining the pithouses, pueblos, and cliff dwellings, as well as the baskets, pottery, bone and stone tools, archeologists are able to better understand how the Ancestral Puebloans once lived in Mesa Verde.