



The Navajo's Long Walk Home *Hweeldi go inda asdee*



We are at the dawn of the seventh generation since the Long Walk. We are torn about sharing the experience of our grandmothers and grandfathers of that time. Today's elderly have been told never to revisit in any form "the time of suffering." They are the last to have seen the tears of their elders, who remember those who suffered and returned home and those who died never seeing their homeland again. Today's youth want to know the history of their families and community and it is a source of pride in the strength of their people's spirit and will. The Navajo culture lives through us today.

The Four Sacred Mountains

It is believed that the land between Blanca Peak or Sisnajini, in Colorado, Mount Taylor or Tsodzil, in New Mexico, the San Francisco Peaks or Dook'ooosliid in Arizona and Hesperus Peak or DibeNistaa in Colorado is an area made for the Navajo people, Dine'. The land gave all the people who lived here a sense of belonging and a sense of identity. It is said that the Holy Ones placed the Navajos here between the Four Sacred Mountains to be

protected, blessed and heard. We are known by name because we are the beloved children of the Holy Ones.

The survival of the people who made their lives here depended greatly on their skill, talent, resourcefulness, endurance, and observations and even cooperation with their environment.

Neighbors and Enemies

Several developing cultures discovered that their territories overlapped, and they began to compete for the available resources. As neighbors they would trade valuable items and as enemies they would rob each other. When communities were prosperous everybody traded and shared generously. Lean times brought out the hunger in everyone, in desperation people robbed their neighbors, invaded other communities for what they needed and took what they did not have. These desperate measures left the victims angry with a desire for vengeance.

frequently changed, that is both the alliances and the enemy. Raiding and fortification became part of daily life. Raids occurred for livestock, food, supplies and even Navajo slaves. Alliances were created for the same reason, but especially for protection.

The 1700s was a time for groups to create alliances against a common enemy, which

The Navajos became tenacious about defending their homeland, their birthright. As the conflicts and foreigners trespassed into Dine'bikayah the Navajos gained momentum in the fight and became fierce in protecting their homes and families and to bring back those taken into slavery. The Navajos were feared and even hated for the continued invasions of the surrounding communities.

Canyon de Chelly

Canyon de Chelly or Tsegi, was a focal point for enemies to scout Navajos. It was considered the refuge and fortress of the area. Spanish and later American armies kept watch on the activities of the Navajo at Canyon de Chelly.

Americans felt it was their right to seize land or anything else owned by Indians. For a while the Americans tolerated the constant battles, but eventually they could no longer endure the fear and insecurity. The U.S. Army was called upon to help with the "Indian Problem." By 1849 New Mexico territorial government found it necessary to call the U.S. Army to subdue the Navajos.

In 1846 the coming of American, Biligana, settlers added to the on going conflict. By 1861





Colonel James Carleton was ordered to lead the campaign against the Navajos. He firmly believed that by removing the people far from their familiar homeland to an isolated and confined area the Navajos would forget their heritage and become acculturated to being American. Once the Navajos were assimilated they would be moved on to Oklahoma, Indian Territory. This "experiment reservation" was forty miles square and located on the Pecos River in eastern New Mexico, named by Carlton as Fort Sumner. This was far beyond the protection of the four Sacred Mountains.

Carlton was able to convince the now-infamous Colonel Christopher "Kit" Carson, (Bi'eehlichii) to join Carlton in the subjugation of the Navajo people. In the fall of 1863 Carson led what he called the "scorched earth campaign" against the Navajos on their homeland

including Canyon de Chelly. It was the time of great fear. Everything considered Navajo property was burned; hogans, shade houses, corral, fields were all destroyed. In Canyon de Chelly the precious peach orchards originally planted by the Hopi people and cherished by the Navajos were also destroyed by the fire.

In the spring of 1864 thousands of Navajos had surrendered to the U.S. Army and were gathered and held at Fort Defiance. The Navajos would have to walk the entire distance of nearly four hundred miles to Fort Sumner. The available horses and wagons were used only by the army and there was no way to transport people; the nation's efforts were focused on the Civil War, which would eventually cause great suffering for this "experiment."

Fort Sumner

The Navajos were imprisoned for four years at Fort Sumner or Bosque Redondo or Hweeldi', as the Navajos know it. During those years the Navajos longed to return to their homes and their traditional way of life. They endured the sufferings of hunger, loneliness, dysentery, death, severe weather conditions, homelessness, new and unknown diseases.

Even the soldiers began to recognize that the Navajos were suffering greatly and believed it was wrong. The military personnel begin to report to their superiors on the conditions not fit even for the enemy. Word eventually got to

the Washington officials that conditions at Fort Sumner were deplorable for the Navajos that were held in captivity.

Negotiations began in order to end the suffering and the incarceration of the Navajo people. At this point in time Navajos appointed leaders to represent them to the United States. One leader, from Canyon de Chelly, was Barboncito who pleaded for the return of his people to their homeland and also participated in the negotiations. Final negotiations were made on the site of Fort Sumner of May 1868.

Returning Home



On the morning of June 1, 1868 the Navajo Treaty of 1868 was signed between the United States and the Navajo people by their representatives. The Navajos were allowed to return to the defined Navajo Reservation, land held in trust by the United States for the Navajo people. The condition that was issued was that the Navajos must never commence raiding again.

Navajos, Dine', are here today because our ancestors endured and came home for us. We have our hogans, we have our language, we have our land, we have our songs, because they came home. Look at our faces and into our eyes and see the children of those who returned home, we are the beloved people of Changing Woman who live within the Four Sacred Mountains.

Not all Navajos made the trek to Fort Sumner. Those who left and headed west wandered for the next six years without a permanent home from fear of being caught and taken away. These people are in or near the communities of Grand Canyon, Navajo Mountain, Monument Valley, and the San Juan River.