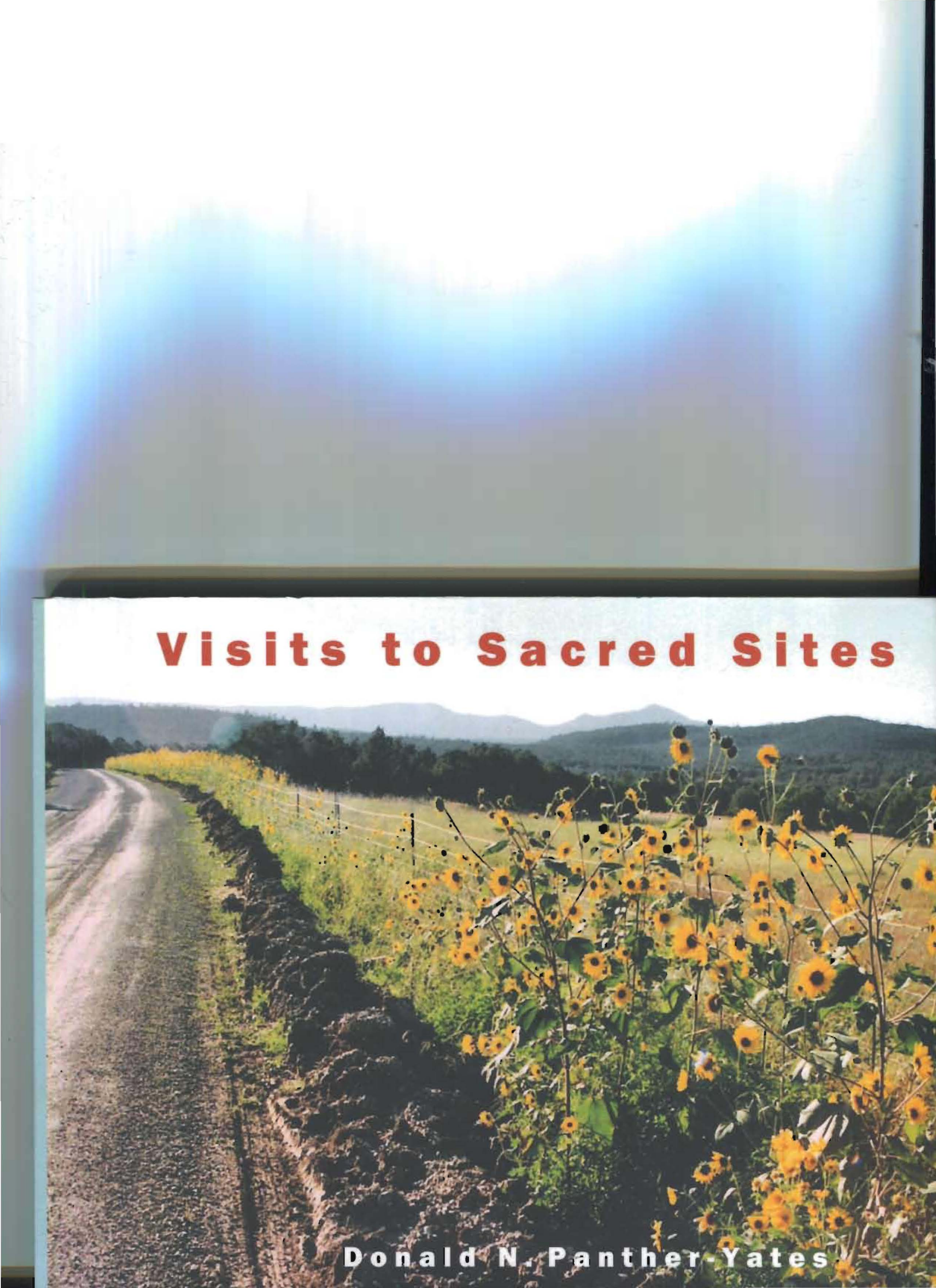


A photograph of a dirt road winding through a field of yellow wildflowers, with mountains in the background. The road is on the left, curving into the distance. The field of yellow flowers is on the right, in the foreground and middle ground. The mountains are in the background, under a bright sky.

Visits to Sacred Sites

Donald N. Panther Yates

Visits to Sacred Sites

**Articles and Photography from the Santa Fe Sun-
News**

By Donald N. Panther-Yates



Panther's Lodge

Published electronically in Santa Fe, N.M., July 28, 2007

REPUBLISHED BY PANTHER'S LODGE, March 2014

ISBN 13: 978-1497436077

ISBN-10: 1497436079

To order copies, contact DNA Consultants

telephone toll free (888) 806-2588

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Foreword

These articles with their accompanying photographs were published in the Sun-News over the years from 2004 to 2007. They began when my wife and I moved to Santa Fe—unintentionally, I should add, because we originally had our sights set on Phoenix. When we got to Clines Corner in the U-Haul truck, we veered off the highway to visit the City of the Holy Faith and stayed.

The definition of sacred site is a rather loose one. As an American Indian, I regard every site inhabited by my people as sacred, consecrated by the sheer fact that indigenous tribes had lived there. This was especially the case in the Southwest with its fantastic ruins, admired all over the world as high points of Native North American civilization. I went to pay homage to the ancestors.

There are too many people to thank for the opportunity to visit these places and make this record available to the reader. My chief thanks go to Skip Whitson, publisher of the Sun-News, who always encouraged me in the work, to Father William Sanchez for guided me to the Decalogue Stone, and to Orlando Vigil, who took me to La Bajada, my first sacred site, and served as a constant source of local information for all the following excursions. I cannot adequately express my appreciation towards all the correspondents and experts who verified historical and linguistic interpretations. To my wife, Teresa Panther-Yates, I am also most grateful.

The Author

▮ Petroglyph National Monument ▮

After touring the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center one spring morning, we drove out to the west side of Albuquerque to take in the “rock art” of the Petroglyph National Monument. The food in the restaurant was out of this world—the exhibits, disappointing.

We had a charming talk with the Lakota lady at the cash register. Was there a discount for being Indian? Triple A? We have always wondered why the government charges Native Americans admission for visiting the stolen land and tribal relics of their people. Apparently, it has something to do with art. Many years ago, I attended the gala opening of the Heye Museum of the American Indian in New York City. My companion, an Indian woman from Philadelphia, nearly choked on her champagne when we got to a display case of beaded moccasins. “Those are my grandmother’s!” she screamed. She insisted the director open the case and give them back to her.

Petroglyph, as it is called, consists of a seventeen mile long mesa west of the Rio Grande overlooking the snow-capped Sandia Mountains. The land was formed by volcanic

eruptions "about 150,000 years ago," we learned. ("That's not very old," I thought to myself.) We picked our way up the asphalt path to the first site in Boca Negra Canyon. Below us was the sand-filled cone of a volcano. Along the path were "cultural expressions" (according to the signage) scratched and pecked in the basalt and granite.

One petroglyph, placed conspicuously at the beginning of the path, depicted a mesa built on an eagle's claw with a stick atop it and a line drawn to a four-pointed star. Next came a prominent petroglyph of a "quadruped." We felt we could go beyond the interpretive sign here, for we recognized it as a mountain lion by its long tail. Shortly after that, we noticed a small cave with an outcropping ledge. We passed the figure of a chief holding a tomahawk, then a medicine man with a rattle. Could they mark the residence of the chief and next to it, that of the religious leader of the village? On top were the outlines of two stone houses. The guide booklet informed us these were the ruins of Spanish sheep pens.

In 1963, the Book of the Hopi assembled the testimony of nineteen elders, with the purpose of making a clear record of their religious ceremonies for their children and grandchildren. According to it, after their emergence into the present Fourth World, the people were given instructions to wander to the four *pasos* (turn-arounds) and pursue their spiritual growth before reuniting in the Four Corners Area. Settlements were marked with the star each group was following, along with the number of stages it had completed in their migrations. Thus the symbol found at Chichén Itzá in Yucatan shows that the Maya covered only one round. The Eagle Clan, however, went south, north, east, west, back east, north again and south again before gaining admission to Oraibi on Third Mesa in Arizona. It is now one of the four principal Hopi clans.

The symbols of stars, parrots, and eagles at Petroglyph tell a story. So far from being "cultural expressions of the Pueblo people," these compose the history of the Eagle clan on West Mesa outside Albuquerque. They demarcate the concrete eastern boundary of Hopi land.

So follow your star and go read the story for yourself. One tip I can give you: You can avoid the admission price by parking your car after hours outside the gate at Rinconada Canyon and walking in. There you'll see another parrot and a rare katsina along the two-mile hike under the rim. And check out the blue corn tacos at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center.



Rinconada Canyon at Petroglyph.



Mountain lion petroglyph near top of Boca Negra.

III Shadows of Chaco Canyon III

We didn't really know what to expect, only that we had to go. Pueblo Bonita and the other ruins at this ancestral Pueblo center are at the top of most people's must-see list in the Four Corners Area. As an American Indian recently relocated to Santa Fe, I regarded an outing to Chaco Canyon as a pilgrimage of obligation. So on a bright, sunny Saturday morning in October, three of us set forth after mistakenly selecting the shortest route on the map. By about eleven o'clock, the humble Volkswagen had entered on a muddy track deep in the spruce-forested Jemez Mountains. Signs warned that the road was closed in the winter months. We were almost ready to turn back when we sighted our first oncoming vehicle, a four-wheeler, which we took as both a good and bad sign.

After a peppery lunch at El Bruno's in Cuba, we headed west out of town on a four-lane highway that took us past Apache desert lands covered with sage. The turnoff to Chaco Canyon World Heritage Park (so designated since 1990) was onto a narrow blacktop that wound south into bare, gently rolling grazing territory belonging to the San Juan Navajo Indians. Another turn put us on a lonely washboard road that became increasingly

rugged. The last eighteen miles to the park took us an hour. By the time Fajata Butte came into view and we checked in at the visitors center, it was three o'clock. The site closes at sunset. Incredibly, over a hundred visitors still lingered, including some Dutch backpackers and a yellow school bus full of what we learned were grandmothers from Ohio, many with walkers.

We went on the circuit road and parked at the first great house, Hungo Pavi (Reed Spring). The name is thought to be the same as Shungopavi, one of the mother villages of the Hopi on Second Mesa. I thought of a dear friend, David Mowa, the village chief who once welcomed us to the campground beside the Hopi Cultural Center. As it turned out, we were to encounter many echoes and reminders of the Hopi. After touring the elevated kiva of Chetro Ketl, we walked along the Petroglyph Trail toward Pueblo Bonita, stopping to make tobacco offerings in the rock cup beside a figure we identified as a marker for one of our clans, Bird. A large croaking raven flew overhead.

Nothing prepared us for the eerie beauty and spirituality of Pueblo Bonita. As we stood on the overlook, the raven returned. The air brushed by his wing feathers filled our ears like a rushing whirlwind. Six smaller birds passed the same way. They all flew into a cliffhole over the Bird Clan marker. Later, we saw that the setting sun cast a shadow there that resembled a long-beaked raven looking over his shoulder on a perch. The Grandfather Raven disappeared into the top of the shadow's head.

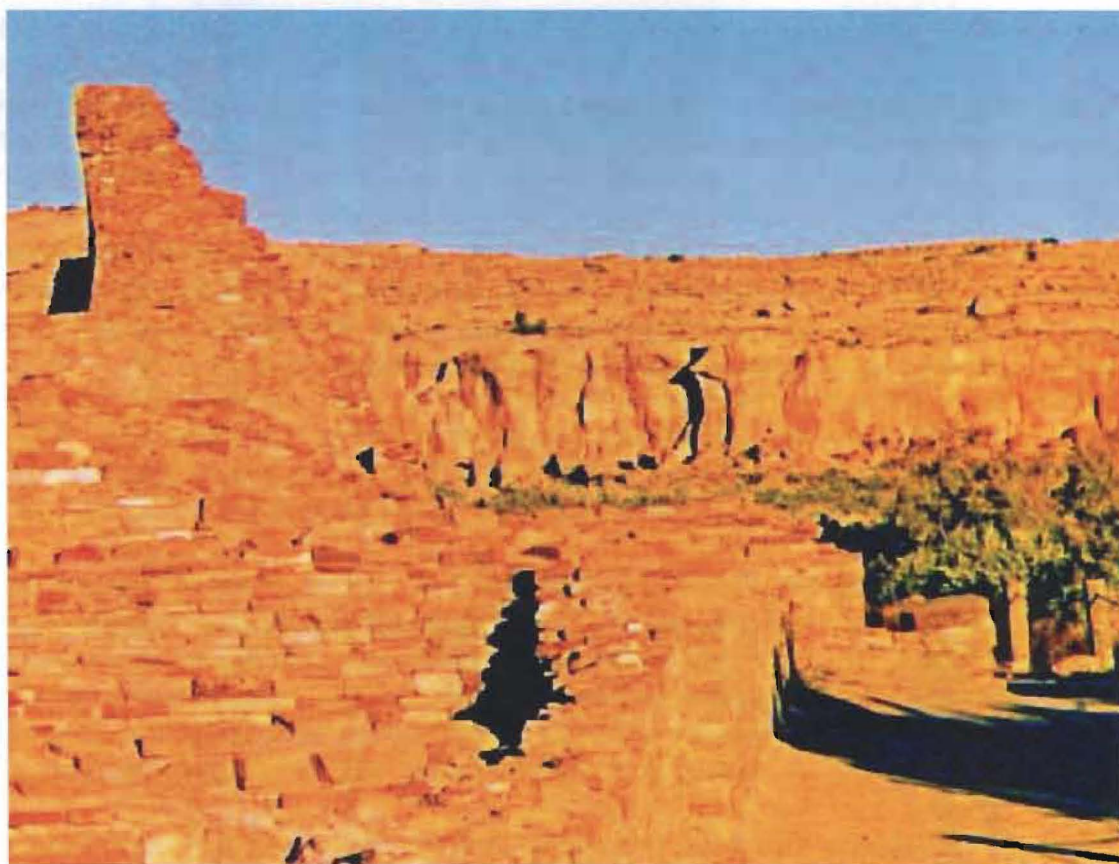
It was a magical moment, but nothing to compare with the sight that greeted us as we came around the bounding stone walls, some three stories high, to the pueblo's entrance. Down a long ceremonial avenue leading back to Hungo Pavi stood the figure . . . could it be? . . . of Kokopelli, the humpback flute player. There was his hunch, his

flute, and his headdress or horned cap, and he was facing, dancing toward the south. It was ten minutes to six, just before the sun dipped below the horizon in the west. Everything was a golden red with deep shadows. If we had not been delayed in our journey through the mountains we would not have arrived at the proper time to see the hundred-foot-tall effigy.

We took the interstate home and arrived back in Santa Fe within three and a half hours (one entire hour on the killer road). Go see the Giant Kokopelli at Chaco Canyon for yourself, but don't take the road through the Jemez Mountains, and don't leave too early in the day. Pay your respects to the Grandfather Raven, too.



Outline of giant Kokopelli shadow in Chaco Canyon.



View of Kokopelli figure in mesa cliff at end of east road from entrance to Pueblo Bonito.



Raven shadow.

III

III Quetzalcoatl's Cave III

There it was, unmistakable proof that the ancient Indians had writing. We were standing at the entrance to a shallow cave overhanging the exposed kiva and ruins of Bandelier, a town built by the Ancestral Pueblo, now inhabited chiefly by Ranger Indians. This tribe is easily identified by their khaki shorts and Smokey Bear hats. In a textbook case of Hinged Ogham (a type of writing), the sign plainly read . . . well, we weren't sure.

Just a moment before this, we questioned one of the local specimens about all the stonework. How did the people who lived here hew and dress all those large blocks of sandstone, limestone, and even granite, we wondered, if they had no metal?

With obsidian knives.

Have you ever tried to chisel a boulder with a piece of volcanic glass, we wanted to ask. No matter. We went on to the site that is called Quetzalcoatl's Cave. According to anthropologists, Quetzalcoatl (Feathered Serpent) was a mythic figure, a god associated

with the wind and air and who was a prominent part of much Mesoamerican belief. We had no idea what a cave consecrated to him was doing in New Mexico, although we remembered that the English novelist D.H. Lawrence made a lot of the Feathered Serpent when he lived in Taos - probably because of the phallic symbolism.

Ogham (pronounced AHM) is a stick figure writing system that came before the Phoenician, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin alphabets. The oldest specimens are found in North Africa and Spain. They are believed to date from as early as 5,000 years ago. We photographed the inscription, which includes two crosses and a face, made a tobacco offering in the rock cup indicated, looked around and left.

Bandelier National Monument is twelve miles southwest of Los Alamos. To get there from Santa Fe take US 84/285 north to Pojoaque, then travel west on Hwy. 40 towards Los Alamos, then west on Hwy. 4, passing through White Rock. The road takes you through forests with elk herds and little sign of human habitation.

At Bandelier interesting huge cliffs surround a circular village in ruins and one of the largest known kivas.

Months afterwards, I was able to contact the right authorities and consult the proper reference guides to read the inscription. I read it as HLHL CLOZ THE DR, which I translated from the Anasazi to mean, "Hello, Hello! Close the Door!" I showed this to a friend of mine, and he said I was wrong. According to him, the sign said, "Parrots Bought or Sold Here, Proprietor, One White Feather." Then I realized that I was reading the inscription in the wrong direction. Ogham can be written left to right, right to left, or boustrophedon (back and forth).

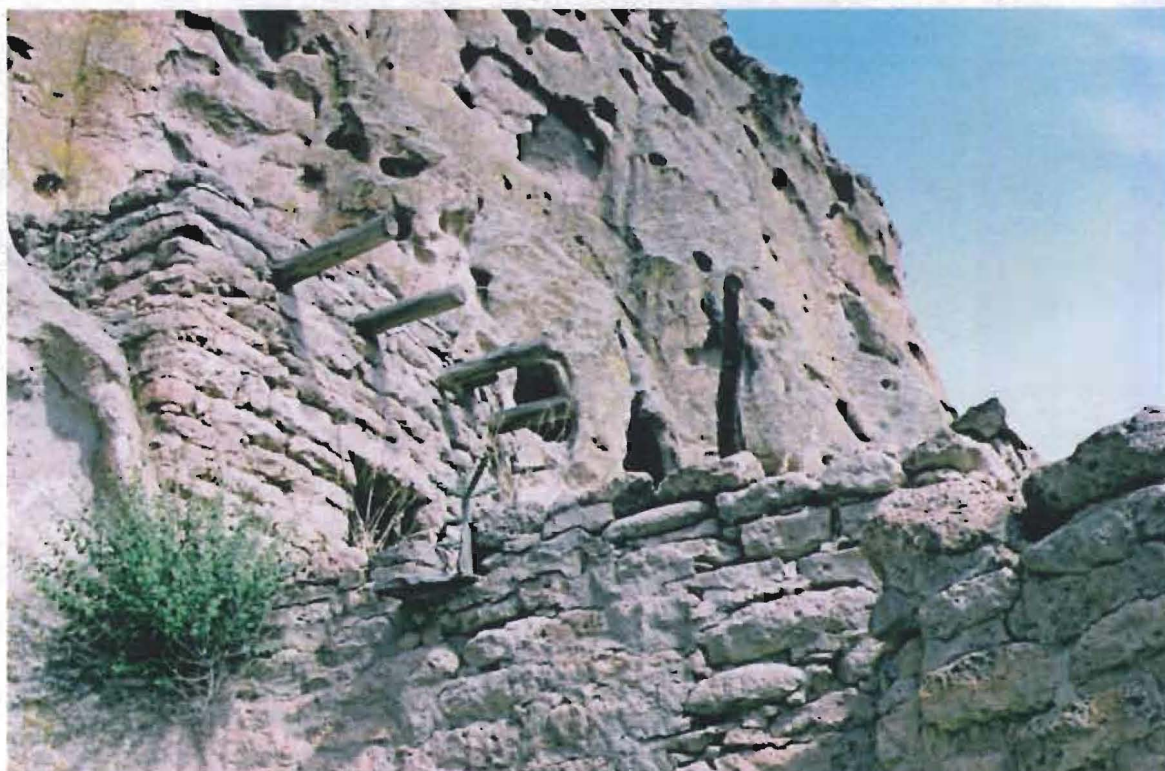
My problem was resolved by a book which I think is out of print because it is considered academic contraband, *America B.C.*, by Barry Fell. A professor of biology at Harvard, who died several years ago, Fell earned the enduring hatred of the anthropological establishment by elucidating Mystery Hill in Massachusetts, and a host of other ruins throughout America, as the remains of North Africans, Celto-Iberians and Vikings. He became associated with the theory of diffusionism. There is no better way to have your publications rejected, lose tenure, and risk being Baker-acted or audited by the IRS than to seriously suggest that human beings could cross the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean before Columbus. I think of the B.C. in Fell's masterpiece as standing for just that: Before Columbus. The academics scream "Nothing before Clovis!" Maybe that, too, is what Fell meant.

The Bandelier inscription was in a style similar to a stone sign discovered on Manana Island, beside Monhegan Island, about 10 miles offshore from the coast of Maine, a variety of ogham found only in North America. It lacks vowels and is of the Bronze Age, its closest cousins being Phoenician inscriptions scattered throughout the Mediterranean, Iberia and Ireland. Most examples of ogham are epitaphs or boundary markers. The Manana inscription says (in something like ancient Libyan): "Ships from Phoenicia, Cargo platform."

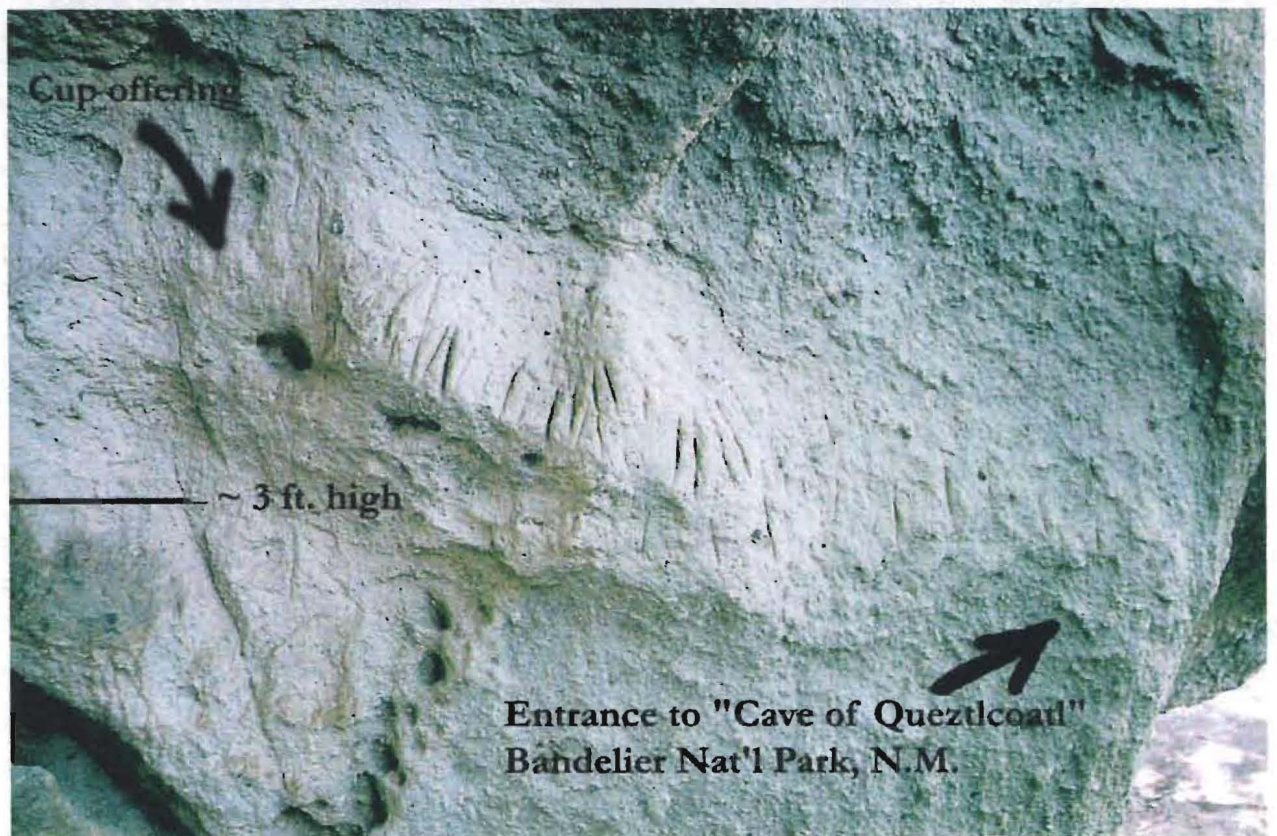
Tentatively, I read the ogham letters (right to left, like Hebrew) as: Q-H-T-Z-H-L C-TL-H-TL-H.

It occurred to me that we had visited a place where the gods are buried, at least one of them. Perhaps the presence of a Viking war-lord with dragon-shaped longboat who ran with the likes of Hannibal, King Tut and Aida accounted for all the clean streets and nice

stone buildings. Either that, or the Ranger Indians rebuilt the place with the help of a government grant and Boy Scouts.



Pueblo ruins at Bandelier.



Tomb of Quetzalcoatl? It begins with a cross and five strokes standing for the sound Q (on right). Go judge for yourself by visiting Bandelier.

IV

III Coatis on La Bajada III

Lying just fifteen miles south of Santa Fe, La Bajada ("the going down") represents a key landscape demarcation between what the Spanish colonial world termed the Río Abajo ("river below") and Río Arriba ("river above") regions of New Mexico. Between the years of 1926 and 1932, this was part of Route 66, and this section covered the same path as part of El Camino Real ("the road royal"), the oldest European highway in the New World.

On a snake-free spring Saturday, after repeated invitations, we were taken there by the gracious Vigil family. It was an outing that proved most interesting, one supremely worthy of this series.

No sooner had we piled out of the vehicle to marvel at the expansive view of the valley with Cochiti Lake, and the point where the Santa Fe River and Río Grande join, than Orlando found the first artifact in this strange area at the crossroads of history. He had been telling us stories of ancient accidents on the road, including a model T wrecked

among the sharp rocks. "I think I found why her brakes failed," he said, holding up a rusted bolt and vintage gasket. He also had a handful of World War I carbine shells and pointed out some unmarked graves at the stark, wind-swept, upper road station. It used to take travelers an entire day to climb the treacherous road, full of switchbacks and edged with precipitous bluffs. Some vehicles had to climb La Bajada in reverse because that was the only gear low enough to make the steep ascent!

To experience this thrill, we had paid our dues. On the way to La Bajada, Steven, the driver and youngest Vigil son, had taken us to a site just opposite Cañón and La Cienega where he said there were some little-known petroglyphs. We rode out Agua Fría and Airport Road—through a suburbia that reminded me of the better parts of Juárez—until we parked just inside an inconspicuous barbed wire fence and climbed the rocky hill on foot. "Look, a horse," said Ellie, pointing to the first petroglyph. A horse? No, I said, I thought it was a different kind of animal, one that served as the symbol of the now-vanished American Indian village.

It was a coatimundi, a raccoon-like carnivore that like many of our New Mexico fauna, is not supposed to be here. Its range is claimed to be the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts of southern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico and the Big Bend to Brownsville areas of Texas. Yet there it was, etched in stone. And as we traveled down La Bajada Road, there were its unmistakable tracks, along with elk and coyote. We read later in a wildlife book that its habitat was canyons of desert mountain forests, usually near water.

It is a nosy, busy little creature, gregarious and possessed of a voracious appetite. It constantly chatters as it travels about in groups of from six to twenty-four, holding its tail almost erect. What better totem for a group of Indians, I thought to myself. The New

Mexican variety is called the white-nosed coati. The only other member of this species, the brown-nosed coati (*Nasua narica*) occurs only in South America. Like so many rare brothers of the indigenous Americans, it is so inconspicuous today that it doesn't even make the guidebooks or endangered species lists.

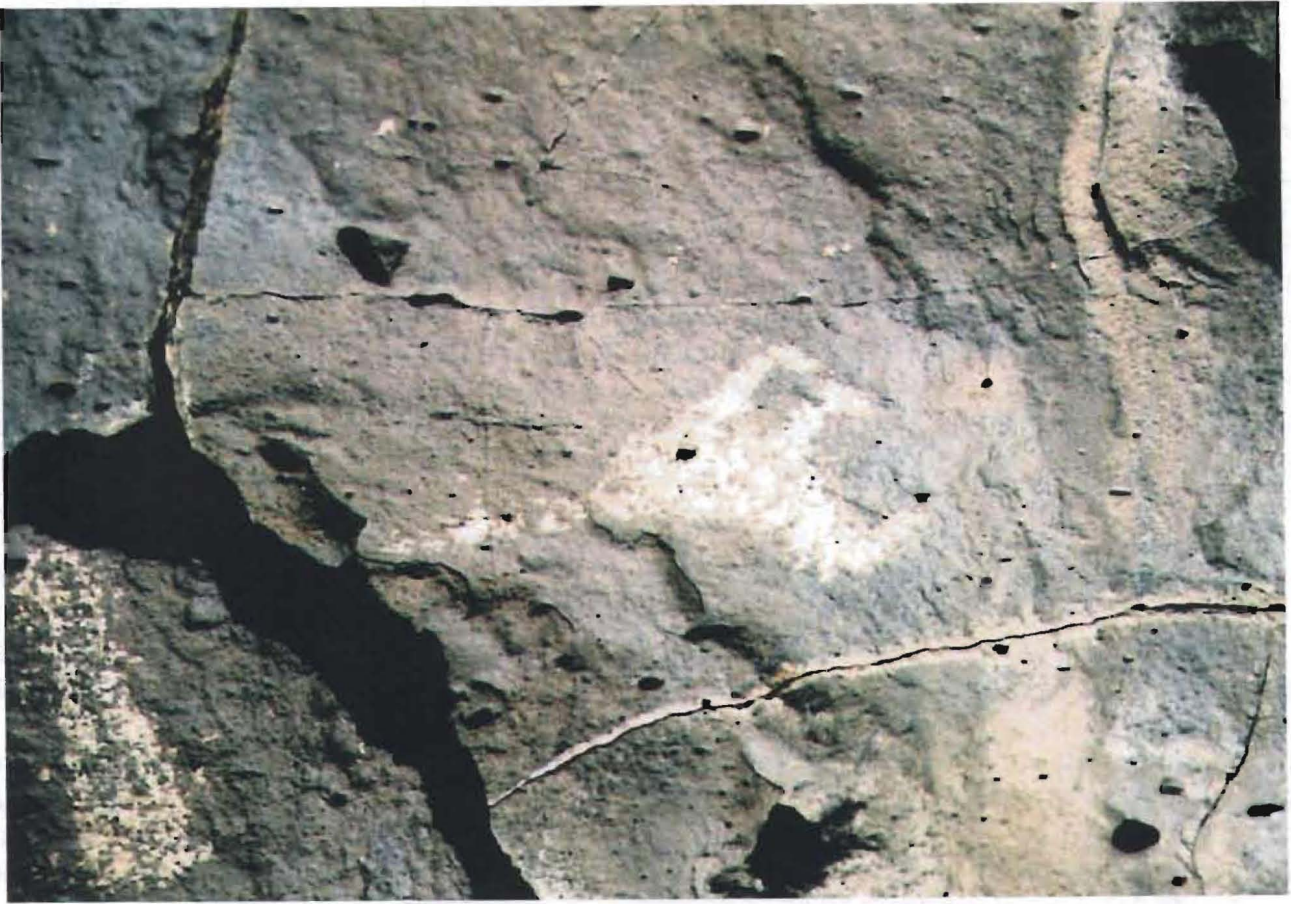
As I said, we paid the price for our adventures. Just as we prepared to leave the first petroglyph site, a patroller from the Bureau of Land Management stopped us, searched our car, and gave us a whopping fine in dead presidents for driving on roads barred to motorized traffic. We searched for the warning sign as we left and had difficulty finding it—a thin rebar about four inches wide with lettering in what I guessed might be thirty-six point typeface.

La Bajada is an ideal excursion only a short driving distance from Santa Fe. The walk is easy down the abandoned road, but you must arrange for someone to deposit you atop the hill and meet you at the bottom. Our citation from the BLM will be dismissed for community service we will perform picking up litter and rubbish (we noticed a brown divorce-style sofa near the entry). So by all means, descend the Bajada, but watch out for snakes and tiny warning signs. Enjoy the coatis.



Coati footprint.

Coati petroglyph.



V

Ш Н о р і Ш

We worried about our trip to Hopi, but as it turned out, we needed not to have tied ourselves in knots. Would the Hopi accept us Indians from the Southeast? Would we be able to make contact? Would they reject us as *bahana* (non-Indians)? Would we knock around without meeting anybody or seeing anything, or would we be able to make this into the pilgrimage to a sacred American Indian site as we planned?

So my wife and I arrived one afternoon in August in Second Mesa, after driving through the Painted Desert and climbing the twisting road to the Hopi Cultural Center. It was a wind-blasted, nondescript crafts place *cum* restaurant surrounded by a parking lot and campground interspersed with junipers. No one was around. Since it was late, we picked a camping spot, set up our tent, and went to bed.

After a turbulent night, I awoke the next morning to find Teresa already gone, apparently to the only watering hole in the visitors center. This was primitive camping. She soon hove into view toting the portable shower bag and followed by a Hopi man trying to help

her carry it. We invited the stranger to coffee over our campfire and learned he was the village chief, David Mowa, a prominent silversmith.

David told us we were the only ones in the campground. A Belgian couple had pulled in during the early hours of the morning but quickly left "after all the wind," he said. "They ran." Ah yes, the wind! Teresa spoke of several disturbing occurrences in the night—strange visions of angry spirits. I had a dream of an animal that doesn't exist, or at least one I did not know existed until our excursion that day to Sun Park, the petroglyph monuments of the Hopi beyond Moenkopi.

We were introduced to Bertram Tsavadawa, a genial katsina maker and only licensed guide to the petroglyphs. We drove with him some forty miles west, past Oraibi, beyond Third Mesa into Navajo lands. With the benefit of his running commentary, we learned Sun Park contains all the legends and migration stories of the Hopi.

The highlight of our visit proved Prophecy Rock, an eye-level fresco of the story of the Five Worlds of Creation. Bertram elucidated it all. Other petroglyphs were hundreds of feet in the air. All had their cup offerings, where we left a pinch of tobacco and a prayer. But the best part of it all for me happened before this.

I had lagged behind my wife and Bertram and stood looking at the opening of a cave. There I had what I believe to have been an experience intended only for me. A sleek jet-black animal emerged and allowed himself to be seen. It was a blackfox.

Known by the technical term *Martes pennati*, the blackfox is also called the fisher, or marten. It is a ferret or badger-like animal that is not supposed to exist in Arizona,

though I have seen them in Tennessee and even New Mexico. The weird thing about my sighting one in Sun Park was that my Cherokee ancestor was Blackfox, one of the last traditional chiefs of his people. He died in 1811.

The blackfox lives in caves and feeds primarily on bats. Spelunkers call it a "cave coot" and joke about whether it really exists. When I discussed my encounter of the blackfox with David Mowa, he seemed to understand. "Oh, yeah, they've spotted those over north of Walapi." Hopiland also has bears, elk, deer, mountain goats, coatis, antelope, and mountain lions.

The Hopi are among the most hospitable people in the world. Take a trip to Hopi. You don't have to announce your coming. Be respectful. Pull into David Mowa's free campground and hire Bertram Tsavadawa to be your guide to the petroglyphs at Sun Park. If you're lucky, you will have an experience there you will never forget.

Sun Park.



VI

Ш Abiquíu Ш

To most people, a pilgrimage to the tiny pueblo of Abiquíu on the Chama River northwest of Espanola would be to visit the home of patron saint of New Mexican painting Georgia O'Keeffe. Our mission was different. After a Middle Eastern flavored lunch at the Abiquíu Inn (noticing copies of the Koran for sale in the gift shop), we ventured into town to verify reports of a historic crypto-Muslim community in what was—and as we learned, still *is*—Penitente territory.

The Tewa Pueblo Indians were those encountered here by the Spanish. The Navajo, Apache, and Ute came later. Of these, the Tewa alone left their heritage, visible today in the ubiquitous use of adobe, an Arabic word, strange to say.

The brotherhood of the Penitentes is a secret order of lay priests whose flagellation and crucifixion practices earned them the anathema of the Catholic Church and won them endless attention from religious scholars and folklorists. Their origins entwine with those

of Abiquíu. The village began as early as 1598, when it was garrisoned as the northern outpost of New Spain. It was repopled with Genizaros, outcasts and renegades, in 1735.

Bringing together ex-slaves, half-breeds, renegades, and other outcasts, the Genizaro settlement pursued a maverick course both in politics and religion. Abiquíu emerged as a place of forbidden trade with the hostile Ute Indians, as well as the center of the Penitentes' *moradas* (chapter houses).

No one seemed about in downtown Abiquíu until suddenly two boys whizzed by on bikes. "They looked Arabian," said my wife. We admired the church of St. Thomas, a severe adobe structure dominating the plaza, noted a library and bar, nothing else, and sallied forth to find the Penitente church, hopefully also, a cemetery.

The Penitente church sits atop a hill with stations of the cross strung around the arroyos. It has windows, shuttered, on one side only, and a No Trespassing sign across the drive. If you know what to look for, you can make out a large dome in the north like some archetypal rose-colored object from a Georgia O'Keeffe painting. That's Dar-Al-Islam, an adobe mosque built in the 1990s by the now-sizable Moslem population in Rio Arriba County—over 400, according to recent census records.

The cemetery is found by following one of the many roads out of town that wind through the hills. Among the signs of crypto-Muslim burial practices we noted were fenced enclosures for individual graves and raised mounds of cleared dirt, four to twelve inches high. We learned from New Mexicans familiar with the region there are vestiges of Arabic in the local services, closed to outsiders.

"The Muslims are attracted to New Mexico for the same reasons as everybody else," said a local landholder. It's the sacredness of the land and its power to inspire.

And the self-mutilation rituals? "We live in a world where people do not think you have to suffer," said our informant. "It's a good and necessary thing to be reminded of this condition of life."

So by all means make a pilgrimage to Abiquíu. It is a journey into the multi-faceted religious past. It is living affirmation of the secret faith, spurned and discarded by secular society, which calls us to New Mexico. And perhaps best of all, it is a reminder that we live in a dangerous world, just like our ancestors who lacked modern comforts and conveniences.

After you go there, maybe you will understand why the tiny beauty of O'Keeffe's pansies strikes many as a frightening abyss.



Penitente church.



St. Thomas Catholic Church.

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VII

III Hidden Mountain III

The Los Lunas Mystery Stone is a must-see but its location is something of a state secret. You need a \$25 access permit from the public land office to visit it, only officials are explicit about one thing. They cannot, and will not, give you directions. We would never have found this Hebrew version of the Ten Commandments had it not been for a local *chuetto* (crypto-Jewish parish priest). In an age when Muslim and Jewish monuments worldwide are being desecrated, his name will remain as closely guarded as the stone's whereabouts.

Suffice it to say that the Mystery Stone rests in a hidden cleft amid the dry, juniper-studded hills south of Albuquerque, near the edge of the Isleta Pueblo Indian Reservation. This exact spot was awarded to 20 families from Tome and Los Chaves, just east of there, by Governor Del Valle in 1761, and was called Los Quelites, Spanish for "Lambs Quarters." Pesach was celebrated on the tableland above the Covenant Stone, as we prefer to call it, until authorities suppressed the heretical enclave and broke their altar in two.

Theories abound about how an archaic Hebrew text of the Ten Commandments could have been incised in two-inch high uncial capitals in the face of a multi-ton boulder of volcanic basalt. They range from a mad professor's joke on the world to a marooned Phoenician, to a troupe of boy scouts, to.... Few seem to want to believe it can exist, but there it was before our very eyes. Cyrus Gordon was professor of Semitic studies at Brandeis University. He judged the writing 6th-century Byzantine Hebrew.

It says, *"I am Jehovah thy God who hath taken thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves. There must be no other gods before my face. Thou must not make any idol. Thou must not take the name of Jehovah in vain. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Honor thy father and thy mother so that thy days may be long in the land that Jehovah thy God has given to thee. Thou must not murder. Thou must not commit adultery. Thou must not steal. Thou must not give a false witness against thy neighbor. Thou must not desire the wife of thy neighbor nor anything that is his."*

The inscription is marked with an unusual tree growing from beneath the boulder. It has serrated pea-green curled pinnate leaves, twisted smooth gray roots and stem, and a weeping ungainly shape, closest in our opinion to a honey locust. Our source could tell us little about it except it was unique, with beautiful red foliage in autumn. After doing some research, we believe it a rare False Acacia (*R. Pseud-Acacia tortuosa*). Since this hybrid is a prized garden plant, first introduced into North America in 1640, this seemed to lend credence to the explanation that it was Spanish crypto-Jews who carved the stone it shades. Perhaps we should have said "guards." Several species of acacias contain cyanide and can cause sudden death. Others were the source of gum Arabic and medicinal balms in antiquity.

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are



Bro

One of our party wore cowboy boots, and another, flip-flops. If you should go looking for the stone, be advised to dress for desert rock climbing, and carry a lot of water. If you are meant to find it, you will.



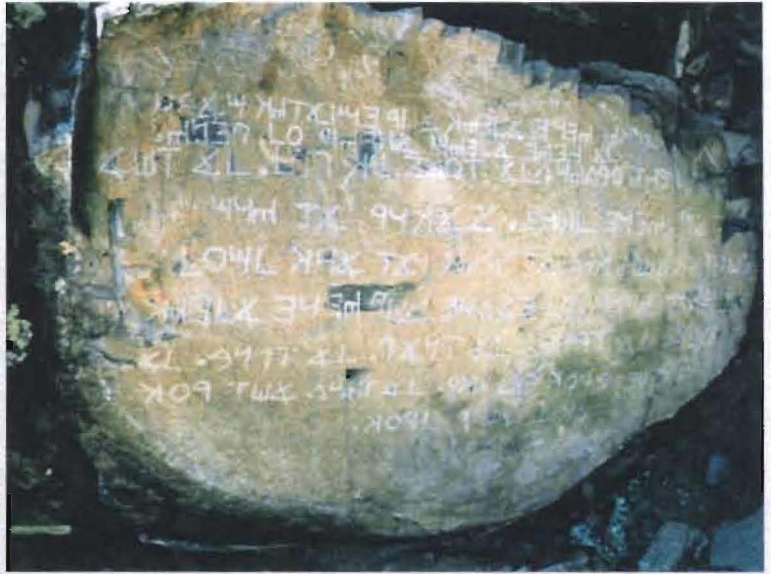
Broken altar on ridge of Hidden Mountain.

Cabalistic Star of David petroglyph with Ten Commandments.





Setting of Decalogue Stone.



Close-up.

VIII

III Diablo Canyon III

The pickup bumped across the washboard road as my host pointed out intermittent ruined tracks of the Chili Express that used to roam through the arid hills. He seemed to have a memory that included eras, continents, vanished peoples, not just the sweeping local changes he had experienced in his short 70 years. We were on our way to see Diablo Canyon, a wind-haunted, precipice-bounded arroyo leading down to the Rio Grande across from the modern citadel of White Rock outside Los Alamos.

Remarking on the dead pinions and moribund junipers, the Santa Fe native dismissed their devastation as simply part of the natural cycle. "It'll grow back in a couple hundred years," he said.

Like other sacred Native American sites, Diablo Canyon was named by the white man. Devil's Tower, Big Witch Cove, Hell's Gate, the Badlands. . . the list goes on and on. Whereas most old-time Indians regarded the woods and forests as full of spirit, sanctified

realms of ceremony, the arriving European saw them as places of devilry and evil. Just read Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown."

We were not successful in locating the high caves that were the main purpose of our trip. They were supposed to be midway up on the cliff, facing east-southeast (to Jerusalem), full of metal and treasure marked with Scottish and Masonic emblems.

Was the site possibly connected to a settlement of French Jews who set sail from Rome in 770 and survived among the ancestral Pueblo Indians until about 900?

In 1924, a hoard of gray-to-blue lead tablets was discovered in cement-like caliche near an abandoned limekiln in Arizona. The trove could have come from anywhere and was of unknown age. Excavated by field crews from the University of Arizona Museum, the site yielded inscriptions that told of a band of Hebrew refugees who fled Charlemagne's Frankish regime and sailed across the Atlantic to a land they called Calalus, ruled by Silvanus Toltezus (Toltec).

Hebrew tags like *shalom*, *qaddash*, *elohim*, *goi godol* (great nation) confirmed the group's origins. Besides the names of the kings, Isaac and Israel, there were menorahs, a pair of Hebrew chalices (*habdalah*), incense spoons, numerals I to X in double column signifying the Ten Commandments, and words in carefully-drawn square Hebrew script. The presence of "Masonic" symbols, however, prompted most to sense a fraud.



What struck the finders as anachronous Templar images may in actuality be cabalistic figures. The unique map of the colony is a sophisticated device, much like a coat of arms, and its shape is echoed in the eight divisions (*shemona peoth*) carved in Hebrew down the stem of a *nehushtan* (Moses staff). It seems improbable to most people, but in the 8th century, southern France was a thriving independent Jewish principality under the Babylonian *gaon* Machir. It was also the birthplace of the Cabala.

A previous column of mine mentions cabalistic petroglyphs on the butte above the Los Lunas Decalogue Stone, an eighth-century version of the Ten Commandments in Byzantine Hebrew hidden away here in New Mexico (Sun-News July 2005). A connection?

The Indian capital that the Jews wrested from the "wild" Toltec ruler fronted a large plain encircled by hills. This description well fits Santa Fe, uniquely surrounded by the Jemez, Sangre de Cristo, Ortiz and

San Pedro mountains. Perhaps the city was considered sacred even before it received its name from the Spanish. We might speculate that when the founders of Calalus were overthrown, they secreted their treasure in nearby Diablo Canyon, Santa Fe's access route to the Rio Grande. At any rate, we can hardly imagine a more remote, inhospitable and forbidding spot, a true "badland."



Looking down on Diablo Canyon's debouchment onto the Rio Grande from the White Rock overlook.