



LAS July 2012 Headlines:

The Tall House

by Marc Severson, the Tucson Citizen, June 28, 2012

One of the most famous archaeological sites in the southwest is Chaco Canyon. Chaco lies in northwest New Mexico somewhere between Gallup and Farmington. Actually Chaco Canyon is not a site but a district containing thousands of archaeological sites and it is recognized as a World Heritage Site.

I will be taking you to some of the lesser known places in Chaco Canyon in some later posts but for now I am stopping at an outlier about 50 miles south of Chaco and it is one that is integrally related to the prehistoric cities of the canyon.

Outliers in the professional archaeologist parlance are habitation sites that are somehow connected to a larger sphere of influence but located somewhere outside its core.

Driving from Gallup, exit at Thoreau (pronounced 'threw'; it's named for a former railroad man) as if to take the short cut to Farmington, New Mexico. Traveling by this back road toward the Bistii Wilderness, and eventually Farmington, as I am sure you have done many times, you may have noticed in passing an interesting rock formation east of the highway near Crownpoint. It looks much like a natural spire of sandstone when seen from the road traveling 70 plus miles an hour. Closer inspection though, discloses that while it is a stone spire, it is of man-made origin.

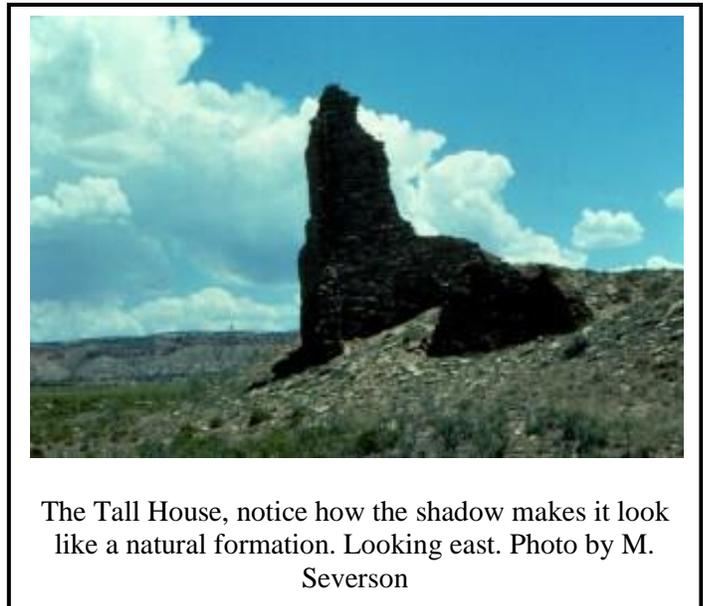
The Navajo (*Dine'*) have named it *Kin Ya'a* — the Tall House.

It represents the remains of what must have been an imposing structure in its day. Archaeologists refer to it as a 'tower kiva' because there appears to be a ceremonial significance to the interior room at the top of the tower. Modern kivas are ceremonial rooms in pueblo towns and by the referential process of archaeological interpretation, archaeologists have identified these rooms as being ceremonial in ancient pueblos also. Tree ring dates place the building of *Kin Ya'a* around 1100 AD.

Generally kivas make up a small percentage of the overall rooms in a village. Tower kivas are a unique structure even among these less common specialized rooms because rather than being subterranean as are most prehistoric kivas, they rise several stories into the air.

One theory is that building a kiva so high up gives it a stronger connection to the realm of the sky and therefore increases the viability of any prayers for rain that originate there. Since it appears that some tower kivas may be several of the structures stacked one atop the other, they may also replicate the four worlds of pueblo myths.

Tower kivas are not exclusive to sites that are linked to Chaco Canyon but they are most commonly found in Chacoan towns. The one at Chetro Ketl, the second largest town in the canyon, has some interesting stone projections that appear to allow for entry by those adventurous souls brave enough to ascend the exterior of the tower in that manner. A more likely function is to illustrate to the people when it was time to re-plaster the exterior walls. When the rock projections start to show it's time to start mixing more plaster.



The Tall House, notice how the shadow makes it look like a natural formation. Looking east. Photo by M. Severson



Here in a close-up of remains of the tower kiva interior wall where you can see the reddish coloring of oxidation on the sandstone bricks indicating that the structure probably burned. Looking north.
Photo by M. Severson

The Chetro Kettle tower kiva has been excavated to illustrate the amount of work that went into the foundations of the structure. Not surprisingly it sits upon an impressive stone base excavated more than twenty feet into the Chaco soil. West of Pueblo Bonito, the compact town of Kin Kletso has two structures that appear to be tower kivas. If you are interested in learning more about Chaco you can go to the NPS site. 1)

Most archaeologists agree that the tower kiva at Kin Ya'a has a very specific reason for its placement at this particular Chacoan town. But because they are archaeologists they don't all agree on what that reason is. It all depends on who you talk to.

The purpose of the structure may have long been open to debate but I like the signal tower aspect that has been presented in many discussions. The idea is that fires built atop the kiva could be used to signal other sites far away, especially at night. Kin Ya'a lies along the Great South Road out of Chaco, in fact the road bisects the pueblo diagonally.

To read more information on Kin Ya'a and a nice interpretive reconstruction painting go to the NPS brochure 2).

If you want to go to Kin Ya'a I better tell you my story.

Anyone traveling to Chaco today normally enters by the Pueblo Pintado road between Bloomfield and Cuba, NM; built a decade or so ago to facilitate visitation to the remote site. Back in the day, a generation or more in the distant past, this adventurous explorer used to enter the canyon by the south road at the old trading post (TP) turnoff

and return the next day by the Blanco TP or Nageezi TP road. I have always been a lover of bad roads.

Of course, while on tour, I also wanted to stop and see Kin Ya'a since I drove right by it. Not bothering to get directions, (Don't say it!) I felt I could find my way to the site. After all, I am a trained archaeologist. I've surveyed hundreds of miles of desert without getting lost. I can surely find my way to a stone spire that anyone can plainly see.

Yep.

On my first attempt I wound up in a local front yard somewhere south of Kin Ya'a. Sitting there slightly embarrassed but unashamed I watched as a Navajo granny in long skirts came out her front door. She looked at the huge white van loaded with *bil-ganas* (the term Navajos use for 'white people') that was being driven by some big guy with a nervous smile on his hairy face. She slowly shook her head, turned around and walked back in the house shutting the door behind her

As you can tell by my photos, I did finally find my way to Kin Ya'a but I still owe that granny an apology.



This site is unexcavated, which means all the information is still there waiting for future improvements in archaeological techniques. Looking northeast. Photo by M. Severson



Loveland Archaeological Society, Inc.

A Colorado Non-Profit Corporation

LAS Find of the Month, July 2012:

Members can bring an artifact to be entered into the competition at the monthly meeting, which will be judged based on the following rules:

1. Must be a member of LAS in good standing.
2. The artifact must be a personal find.
3. It must have been found within the specified time frame, i.e., within the month prior to the meeting.
4. The artifact doesn't have to be a Colorado find—all that matters is that it was found in the last month.

The Find of the Month for July 2012 was made by Rohn Miller.

Type: Stemmed lanceolate, possibly Alberta

Material: Niobrara Jasper

Location: Morrill County, Nebraska



LAS News and Upcoming Events:

Obituary

Mr. Paul Lange died June 8, 2012 with his family at his side. He was a longtime member of the Loveland Archaeological Society. For those who would like to make a contribution towards a tree in Paul's honor at the McKee Medical Center's Wellness Walk can do so by sending their donation to the McKee Foundation "In memory of Paul Lange," 1805 East 18th Street, Loveland CO 80538. Paul was a nurse for 38 years and loved the outdoors.

May – October 2012 Free tours are offered by the Lamb Spring Archaeological Preserve in cooperation with Douglas County Community Planning and Sustainable Development the first Saturday morning of the month from May through October. For more information visit the website at <http://www.douglas.co.us/lambspring/>.

August 7, 2012 August meeting. Annual picnic/potluck at Sharon Lundt's home starting at 6:00 pm. Bring a dish or dessert to share. The address is 905 Willowrock Drive, Loveland. A map is attached.

September 1-3, 2012 Loveland Archaeological Society Labor Day Weekend field trip to the Harris Ranch at Bosler, Wyoming. A map and instructions will be included in the August newsletter.

September 4, 2012 September meeting. Program / Guest Speaker to be announced.

September 29-30, 2012 2012 Loveland Stone Age Fair. If you have any questions you may phone Kevin Zeeck at 303-682-0471 after 6:30 PM, MDT (kevin.zeeck@gmail.com), or Janet Wagner at 970-278-4049. As a reminder, there is no buying, selling, or trading of authentic artifacts, and no soliciting to buy, sell, or trade. For more information go to <http://stoneagefair.com>. Plan now to attend!