

Andrea Fisher

Fine Pottery

Cochiti Pueblo



View west across Cochiti Pueblo

Cochiti Pueblo lies fifteen miles south of Santa Fe along the west bank of the Rio Grande. What is now Bandelier National Monument is the pueblo's most recent ancestral home. They may have relocated to the Bandelier area from the Four Corners region around 1300.

Cochiti legend says that Clay Old Woman and Clay Old Man came to visit the Cochitis. While all the people watched, Clay Old Woman shaped a pot. Clay Old Man danced too close and kicked the pot. He rolled the clay from the broken pot into a ball, gave a piece to all the women in the village and told them never to forget to make pottery.

In protohistoric times, human effigy pots, animals, duck canteens and bird shaped pitchers with beaks as spouts were common productions of the Cochiti potters. Many of these were condemned as idols and destroyed by the Spaniards. That problem left when the Spanish left in 1820 but the fantastic array of figurines created by Cochiti potters was essentially dormant until the railroad arrived. Then Cochiti potters were among the first to enter the tourist market and they produced many whimsical figures into the early 1900's. Then production followed the market into more conventional shapes.

Legend has it that a Ringling Brothers Circus train broke down near Cochiti Pueblo in the 1920's. The tribe's contact with the ringmaster, trapeze artists, opera singers, sideshow "freaks" and exotic animals paved the way for a variety of new figural subjects. An astute observer will find angels, nativities, cowboys, tourist caricatures, snakes, dinosaurs, turtles, goats, two-headed opera singers, clowns, tattooed strongmen, Moorish nuns and even mermaids in the Cochiti pottery pantheon, most produced only since the early 1960's and based on characters described in Cochiti's oral history.

A few modern potters make traditional styled pots with black and red flowers, animals, clouds, lightning and geometric designs but most Cochiti pottery artists now create figurines. Most notable is the storyteller, a grandfather or grandmother figure with "babies" perched on it. Helen Cordero is credited with creating the first storyteller in 1964 to honor her



At Bandelier National Monument

grandfather. The storyteller style was quickly picked up by other pueblos and each modified the form to match their local situation (ie: clay colors and tribal and religious traditions). In some pueblos, storytellers are also now made as drummers and as a large variety of animals.

Today, Cochiti potters face the challenge of acquiring the clay for the white slip. Construction of Cochiti Dam in the 1960's destroyed their primary source of their trademark white slip and gray clay. Now the white slip comes from one dwindling source at Santo Domingo, Cochiti Pueblo's neighbor to the south.

Most outsiders who visit Cochiti Pueblo these days do so on the way to or from either the recreation area on Cochiti Lake or Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument.

For more info:

[Cochiti Pueblo at Wikipedia](#)

[Pueblo of Cochiti official website](#)

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