

Andrea Fisher

Fine Pottery

Zuni Pueblo



Welcome sign at Zuni Pueblo

Archaeologists have dated some sites on the Zuni Reservation back to the Paleo-Indian Period, more than 4500 years ago. During the Archaic Period (2500 BC to 0 AD), the forebears of the Zuni were hunter-gatherers and just beginning to develop agriculture. The Basketmaker Period (0 AD to 700 AD) saw agriculture become more developed and the Zunis were making their first pottery. The Pueblo I Period (700 AD to 1100 AD) saw an expansion of the population and settlements in the Zuni River area along with the development of the first painted Zuni pottery.

The Pueblo III Period (from 1100 to 1300 AD) saw further population growth in the Zuni River area and a shift from small houses to larger, plaza-oriented villages. The Pueblo IV Period (1300 to 1500 AD) was the time of the great drought and migrations as many tribal groups abandoned the Four Corners area and moved to locations near the Rio Grande, Rio Puerco, Zuni River and Little Colorado River. The main Zuni Pueblo was founded

during this time but there were several other large villages in the area, too.

In 1540 there was a major battle fought between the Zunis and the forces of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado. Coronado was almost killed but his soldiers did win the battle. As Coronado traveled with horses and sheep, they were probably the first such livestock the Zunis had ever seen.

In 1542 Coronado passed by Zuni again on his way back to Mexico. He left three Mexican Indians behind with the tribe and they most likely informed the tribal leaders of the extent of the Spanish domain in Mexico and the power they exercised there.

The Zunis were mostly left alone until a Catholic mission was built at Hawikku in 1629. At first the Zunis were friendly with the priests but that had changed drastically by the time of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. The tribe built a village near their fortress at Dowa Yalanne and prepared to defend their people and way of life against the Spanish army. Don Diego de Vargas arrived in 1692 and was allowed to ascend to the top of Dowa Yalanne. He found many relics from the destroyed missions there and was able to arrange a peace between the Spanish and the tribe. Between 1693 and 1700 the tribe consolidated all their small villages into what is now the Pueblo of Zuni.

The railroads arrived in New Mexico in the 1880's and right behind them came the first Anglo traders. Over the next 50 years Zuni pottery turned more and more to what the traders wanted. With the push into mass production, the quality fell off. The end result was the value of Zuni pottery fell way off and the potters tired of what they were doing. Pottery making dropped off in the 1940's until only ceremonial vessels were being made. The Zuni pottery revival began after Daisy Hooee began teaching pottery making at Zuni High School in the 1960's and 1970's. Josephine Nahohai brought traditional Zuni

pottery designs back into the community in the 1980's and Jennie Laate continued teaching pottery making at Zuni High School. Many of today's well known Zuni potters thank Jennie Laate for her teaching and inspiration. In the 1990's Noreen Simplicio taught pottery making at Zuni High School and for several years in a row, she had more than 100 students in her class.

Today, because so many Zuni potters learned their craft at Zuni High School, they mostly also use electric kilns for firing their works. Other than that, they all use the same traditional methods of gathering and processing the clay, making their pottery and painting their designs, traditional processes that are practiced in virtually the same way in all the pueblos.

For more info:

Zuni Pueblo at Wikipedia

Pueblo of Zuni official website

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