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## TOWNS ON THE LANDSCAPE

Movement of peoples is not easy to trace. It is rather like the shallow water running along the sandy bed of the Rio Grande in August the geologists' "braided stream." A broad stream may split into two or more smaller rivulets, with braids that may or may not rejoin. Occasionally one of these smaller strands curls off by itself, becomes isolated, and dies in the sun.

When Mesa Verde was abandoned about 1300, the departing Anasazi did not pack up as a group and march down to the Rio Grande Valley. Yet over time the Indian villages there, along with Zuni, Acoma, and Hopi towns farther west, became the new centers of Anasazi culture. While the population in the Rio Grande Valley burgeoned during the fourteenth century, the Estancia Basin, easily accessible through the Tijeras and Abo mountain passes, also experienced rapid growth.

Several stone villages and towns developed in the Estancia Basin during this period. The ruins of three are preserved at Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument: Quarai or "Cuarac," Abo, and Gran Quivira, or "Las Humanas" as it would be named by the first Spaniards to arrive in the area. These three form a triangle, with Quarai and Abo about ten miles apart on the northwest side of the basin, and Las Humanas about thirty miles southeast.



*Left ... Pueblos of the Estancia basin shared certain architectural characteristics. The stone masonry walls of multi-story dwellings usually were covered with mud plaster. Wood for ceiling beams and lintels was gathered from the mountains nearby. Exterior doorways and windows were tiny and few. Ceiling entries were more easily constructed, and ladders could be withdrawn quickly to deny aggressor access.*

## QUARAI ...

Quarai is set in a juniper forest that slopes toward a tree-lined, spring-fed stream, which flows from the base of the Manzano Mountains. This stream trickles eastward through land the people farmed, to the salines out in the Estancia Basin. Timber and game abound in the nearby mountains, and plentiful red sandstone makes a fine building material.

Quarai residents spoke Tiwa. Early archeological testing hinted that Quarai was built, then abandoned, and later reoccupied. Later surveys found material dating from the supposed missing period, which tends to disprove the abandonment idea. Visitors might agree that Quarai was just too beautiful, and the living too easy, for anyone to leave, unless extraordinary circumstances compelled them to do so.

## ABO ...

Abo was built on another outcrop of the same red sandstone, around the shoulder of the Manzano Mountains from Quarai and astride the trail to Abo Pass, which leads to the Rio Grande Valley. Abo, too, stood beside a cluster of springs giving rise to a precious desert stream. The mountains are farther away from Abo than from Quarai, but Abo had the advantage of being on the trade route through the pass. Despite their relative proximity to Quarai, the people of Abo spoke Tompiro.

## LAS HUMANAS ...

On rocky, gray Chupadero Mesa, which forms the south edge of the Estancia Basin, stand remnants of the round stone house that was the beginning of Las Humanas. As with Quarai and Abo, Las Humanas was built from the rock upon which it stood. The building became an impressive structure of perhaps 240 rooms arranged in concentric circles around a central kiva.

The Tompiro-speaking community of Las Humanas had trade advantages as the settlement nearest the nomadic Indians who lived on the plains to the south and east. Also, the sandy soil nearby was good for raising corn. Still, water was more scarce at Las Humanas than at Quarai and Abo, which had streams nearby. The people at Las Humanas compensated as best they could, building surface water catchment systems, cisterns, and wells.

It is easy to see what the Indians of the Estancia Basin built; the ruins are in the park. They made houses from stone gathered locally and wood from the mountains nearby. These buildings were not at all like modern farmers' houses. Rooms were small because available timbers used to support the roofs usually were short. Small rooms also were easier to heat.



*Left ... Alibates flint for this large knife from Las Humanas was queried in nothwest Texas.*

*Razor-sharp Chalcedony (translucent quartz) point with equally-spaced side notches (bottom), from Las Humanas.*

Doorways were tiny and few, in part because doors were difficult to make and operate without metal tools and hinges, which were unknown to American Indians. Moreover, an exterior doorway, even if closed, was a weak spot that was difficult to defend. Ceiling hatchways were easier to make and protect. Ladders were used to climb up to the roof and then down through the hatch. In the event of an attack, defenders could deny the aggressors access by simply withdrawing the ladders.

Rooms were sparsely furnished and served principally as a refuge from bad weather or enemies. Judging from where the tools and "stuff of life" they left behind have been found, it is evident the people slept, cooked, and worked outside most of the time.

Anasazi town planning always included a plaza. In fact, much more everyday life went on in the plaza than in the rooms. Women made pottery and cooked, kids harassed barking dogs, turkeys looked for loose grain, and men chipped projectile points from imported stone. There were fires for warmth, for cooking, and for firing pottery. Virtually every stick of wood for miles around a town was scavenged.

After making the transition from below-ground to aboveground living, the people did not totally forget those pithouses. Instead, the form became the kiva, the underground ceremonial chamber that occurred throughout the Anasazi world. In many ways life in the Estancia Basin Indian towns centered around the kivas. Kivas were entered through a hatch in the roof, which also served as a chimney for the firepit. Sometimes the walls were painted with elaborate designs, such as those found at Las Humanas.

Descendants of those people still use kivas today, and choose to keep much of their religious life private. Still, judging from the effort that went into ancient kiva construction, the ceremonial year must have been as rich then as now. Dances with steps and stories passed

down since ancient times are still performed throughout the year, to keep the universe in order, reverse the change in day's length, or bring rains.

*Left ... golden eagle bone flute*



Occasionally, trusted visitors may be permitted to hear the stories of these people, their gods, and their wanderings. These stories were once told around the stone homes and in the kivas of Quarai, Abo, and Las Humanas. Life moved around and through kivas in a way modern visitors might not recognize.

The people made no clear distinction between the secular and the sacred. Planting corn and beans was as much a religious act as praying for rain to help them grow. Life depended on both. There was a ceremony for everything: hunting, planting, harvesting, rejoicing and mourning, marriage, and death.

The people were dryland farmers, but this was chancy land for agriculture. Water was a problem, and so was the short growing season. If the people escaped the danger of a late frost and the equal danger of an early one, and if the rains came, then the harvest could be bountiful.

Several varieties of corn, squash, beans, and cotton were grown around the Estancia Basin. Amaranth seed was used, and likely was cultivated rather than simply gathered. Corn was a staple, of course, and it took much of a village's effort to plant, protect, and water.

But even with seed strains and techniques adapted to this dry climate more than 6,000 feet above sea level, some years the crops fared poorly. Archeological evidence reveals that the people suffered the effects of occasional malnutrition.

The Anasazi were hunters as well as farmers. Rabbits, pronghorn, turkey, deer, even the mighty bison ended up in their stewpots. The people of the Estancia Basin hunted more than their Anasazi cousins elsewhere.

One of the surprises found by archeological excavation at Las Humanas was the unexpectedly high ratio of animal bones to potsherds in the trash: about seventy bones per hundred shards. At Badger House ruin in Mesa Verde National Park the ratio was less than two bones for every hundred shards. The people also continued to gather wild seeds and plants-archeologists have found many pinion shells on floors and around doorways.



*Left ... Pueblo people often built new dwellings directly over abandoned room blocks. Excavation revealed three layers of construction at Las Humanas. The site plan shows how early-phase fourteenth-century circular structure lies beneath the late-phase, sixteenth-century rectangular building.*

In modern Pueblo Indian villages, most dwellings are occupied at any given time. A few rooms, and sometimes a whole cluster, may be abandoned, while new rooms are added. Old villages, too, were modified constantly. Sometimes whole sections were abandoned, while new construction happened on the "other side of town." In other cases, new structures were built directly over ruins of the old.

Archeologist Alden Hayes, during a dig in the 1960s, found something like that at Las Humanas. Sifting through the ruins, he discovered that about A. D. 1550 a new, semi-rectangular house block was constructed atop the ruins of the original circular house. The older structure, built 250 years earlier, had been abandoned, although the kiva at its center had been maintained and a retaining wall had been built to keep crumbling debris from collapsing into the kiva. Apparently a good part of the new building was planned and built all at once, because a long wall with no obvious joints connects many units.

The rebuilding coincided with the introduction of a new kind of pottery, Tabira Black-on-white, which replaced the Chupadero Black-on-white style that had been favored by Las Humanas residents for many generations. Shards of the new pottery were found on the floors of the new rooms.

Also about A.D. 1550 the people at Las Humanas began to cremate their dead, after centuries of burials. A change this profound must have been preceded by some very serious discussion in the kivas.

The introduction of rectangular building plans, the Tabira pottery style, and the practice of cremation may well have arrived with a group of immigrants from the Zuni-Cibola area, two hundred miles west through Abo Pass. Did something happen to compel these people to risk a permanent move to the Estancia Basin?

On July 7, 1540, gunfire exploded the silence of the southwestern desert for the first time. Vasquez de Coronado, a young explorer extending the northern fringes of the Spanish Empire in the New World, had arrived at the Zuni Pueblo of Hawikuh. After brief consideration, Coronado accepted the counsel of his priests, and ordered his troops to attack. That violent encounter in the Zuni area may well have precipitated the large-scale emigration to Las Humanas. The gunfire must have echoed in the Estancia Basin as the story tumbled from the lips of the newcomers. Strange and powerful men from across the sea had arrived.



*Red Kotyiti Glaze-polychrome olla from Las Humanas*



*Chupadero Black-on-white olla from Las Humanas*



*Tabira Black-On-white canteen from Las Humanas*



*Tabira Polychrome with stylized feathers from Las Humanas*