



THE NAVAJOS

AT A GLANCE: THE LONG WALK AND THE ESCAPE TO UTAH

The Navajos' ancestral homeland covered parts of what is now Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. The Navajo people believe that their ancestors emerged into the place between four sacred mountains and that they have lived there since time immemorial. Without the Navajos' knowledge or consent, the United States laid claim to these lands in 1848 as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the U.S.-Mexican War.

As the Civil War began in 1861, the United States government sought greater control over New Mexico in order to protect gold shipments coming from California and to guarantee that the area would not fall into Confederate hands. Federal officials also wanted to secure valuable mining and grazing lands for white settlers, who had moved into the Navajo homeland in the 1850s and 1860s. These outsiders threatened the Navajos' livelihoods and way of life, and the strain on resources and cultural differences between the two groups led to constant tension. After many soldiers were removed from the area to fight in the Civil War, conflict between the Navajos and settlers escalated.

In 1862, Brigadier General James Carleton was given command of New Mexico Territory. Carleton, like many non-Indians at the time, felt that the best way to resolve the conflict was to remove the Navajos to a reservation, where they would be taught to farm and learn Christianity. As a destination for the Navajos, Carleton chose to build the Bosque Redondo Reservation, guarded by the nearby military post Fort Sumner, on the Pecos River in eastern New Mexico. Though many military officials warned the site contained

insufficient resources, Carleton persevered with his plan and sent word to the Navajo leaders that they must surrender by July 20, 1863. Noted trapper and scout Christopher "Kit" Carson was chosen to oversee the removal of the Navajos from their homeland to Bosque Redondo. Carson and his approximately seven hundred soldiers, scouts, and New Mexico volunteers began a series of patrols through Navajo land, destroying crops, homes, watering holes, and livestock in order to force the Navajos to surrender.

Facing starvation, in the winter of 1863/1864 many Navajos decided to surrender to the U.S. government at places like Fort Canby and Fort Wingate. In the book *Diné: A History of the Navajo* Peter Iverson writes, "Albert H. Pfeiffer led an expedition through Canyon de Chelly in January 1864, taking as prisoners Diné who were 'half starved and naked.' Pfeiffer reported that he killed one Navajo woman 'who obstinately persisted in throwing rocks and pieces of wood at the soldiers.'" After they surrendered to the army, the Navajos endured a three hundred mile forced march, with little food, clothing, shelter, or medical attention, through unusually cold winter conditions. Many sick and elderly died, and other tribes took the Long Walk as an opportunity to raid the Navajos for women and children who could be sold into slavery. The Long Walk continued throughout 1864, and over eight thousand Navajos made the long journey to Bosque Redondo. Numbers vary as to how many Navajos died or disappeared along the trail, but it may have been two hundred or more.

Once the Navajos reached Bosque Redondo, they found miserable conditions. The compiled



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problems of poor planning by Carleton, a feud between the army and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Navajos' unfamiliarity with how to prepare the food provided, bad water, and crop destruction due to weather and insects all meant that the Navajos had insufficient food and shelter. In 1868, in response to Navajo petitions and concern over conditions at Bosque Redondo, a treaty was signed that allowed the Navajos to return to a reservation in their ancestral lands. Though they had participated in large-scale farming and had lived in large settlements while at Bosque Redondo, once they returned to their homeland they resumed their traditional lifestyle, including living in small groups and practicing their own cultural traditions.

Utah plays an important part in the story of the Long Walk, as many Navajos were able to escape the army raids. The secluded and difficult-to-reach areas in what is now known as southeastern Utah, though loosely controlled by the opposing Ute tribe, made excellent places of refuge for the Navajos. For example, a Navajo man named Haskeneinii, who lived near Monument Valley, was able to escape the advancing troops and live at Navajo Mountain for the next four

years. Through the efforts of Navajo leaders in Utah, particularly Manuelito, Utah's Navajos were able to survive and avoid being moved east. These Navajos continued to fight the soldiers and settlers who attempted to force them off their land. Cooperation with the local Paiute bands was another factor that allowed the Navajos to survive both Ute and U.S. Army raids. The Paiutes were especially useful allies because they often helped to mediate conflict between the Navajos and Utes. In 1933, due to their continuous presence in southeastern Utah, this area was restored to the Navajos' reservation, though, as a testament to the fact that it was an area of joint occupancy, this section of the reservation is referred to as the "Paiute Strip."