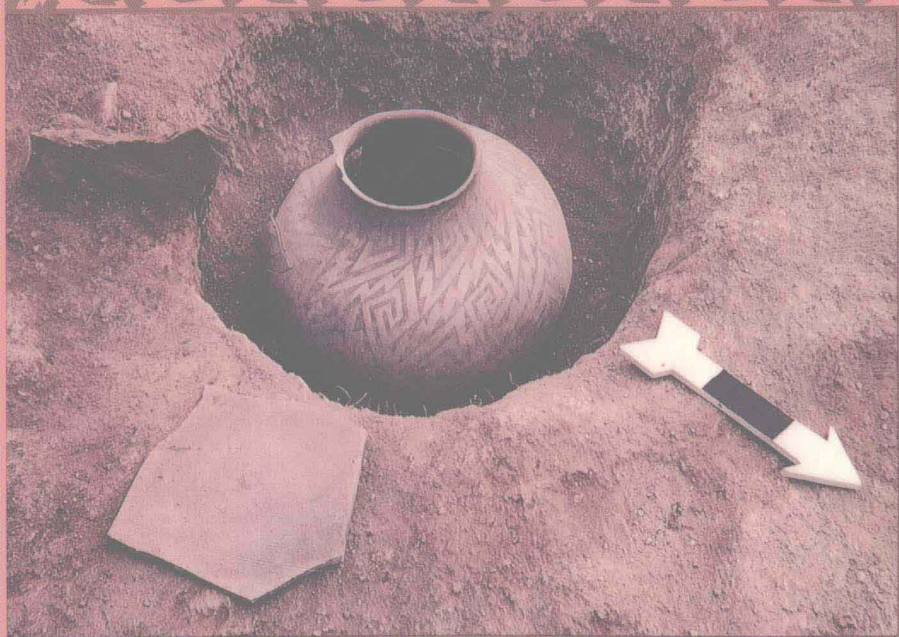


A VIEW FROM BLACK MESA



The Changing Face of Archaeology

GEORGE J. GUMERMAN

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A View From Black Mesa



To Essie, Wolf, and Liz

Preface



SOUTHWESTERN ARCHAEOLOGY, indeed, archaeology throughout the United States, is changing at a colossal rate. Advances in technique, increases in the amount of work undertaken, and the resulting accelerated pace of discovery have been widely publicized.

Less well known is the changing sociology of modern archaeology—who does the work, why, how, and the effect personality has on the results of archaeological projects. This book attempts to elucidate not only the method and theory of contemporary archaeology, and its historical antecedents, but the sociology of archaeology as well.

The vehicle for understanding these changes is a great archaeological endeavor on Black Mesa on the Navajo and Hopi reservations in northeastern Arizona near Monument Valley. The fifteen-year-long, and still continuing, project provides a basis for understanding the revolutionary changes sweeping American archaeology.

The chronicle is in many ways a personal narrative for it is important to understand how an individual's academic training, personality, and biases affect the archaeological research. It is the meshing of personalities, individual research interests, skills,

weaknesses, the state of archaeological art, and bureaucratic and logistical demands that shape any archaeological project.

No longer can the contemporary archaeologist afford the luxury of being intellectually responsible for all phases of a large project. In the past dynamic individuals could secure the funding, provide the intellectual thrust, organize the expedition, supervise all the assistants and laborers, and write the entire final report. These individuals depended on their own skills and did not have to worry about government supervisors, tribal governments, and university or museum bureaucracies. Today, as unfortunate graduate students soon learn, large-scale archaeology involves a broad array of specialists and requires a great deal of nonarchaeological activity. The principal investigator, if it is a single individual, must coordinate and orchestrate rather than dominate the intellectual thrust of the project.

This book describes the reshaping of the approach to archaeological research. The changes are not complete, and they never will be, nor have they been accomplished without some stretching and even tearing of the fabric of the organization of archaeology. The redefining of the methods, goals, and organizational structure of archaeology, the modifying and fine tuning of research designs, provides the tableau within which archaeological research results must be viewed.

This book is not meant as a definitive statement about research on Black Mesa. In many cases it has been necessary to generalize about specific research projects and to delete many of the qualifying statements which scientists find necessary to surround their work. In other instances ongoing research is modifying statements made in this volume, and new research endeavors have had to be left out. In sum, readers interested in the specifics of any individual study used as an example here must refer directly to that study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume, a labor of love, was not accomplished without a great deal of assistance. I am especially grateful to the School of American Research where this book was written and its president

Douglas Schwartz and his friendly and helpful staff. Funds making my stay at the school as a resident scholar possible were provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Peabody Coal Company, and Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

It is obviously impossible for me to thank the hundreds of individuals associated with the Black Mesa Archaeological Project. I hope that my blanket expression of gratitude conveys some sense of my deep appreciation to all of them. Peabody Coal Company officials deserve special thanks for putting up with something they never totally understood. Equally supportive were high-level Southern Illinois University officials, Lou Shelby, Worthen Hunsaker, Don Wilson, John Guyon, and Mike Dingerson, who often acted as seeing eye dogs through the blindness of bureaucratic red tape. Numerous individuals were of help in reviewing and commenting on this manuscript, especially Barbara E. Cohen, Robert Euler, Robert Layhe, William Lipe, Judy Machen, Gary Melvin, Shirley Powell, Joe Stevens, Gwinn Vivian, and John Ware. Most of the drawings were rendered by Dana Anderson. Photographs were taken by Robert Euler, Robert Dunlavey, Wolf Gumerman, Paul Long, John Richardson and John Ware.

GEORGE J. GUMERMAN

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A View From Black Mesa



I

The Changing Face of Archaeology



BLACK MESA LIES in the northeast corner of Arizona like the upturned palm of a giant hand, fingers spreading to the southwest. These fingers are the Hopi Mesas. On them perch the ancient but still-inhabited villages of the Hopi Indians, without whose ancestors there would be no raw material for this book.

Under the sandstone cap and thin soil cover of Black Mesa lies a thick layer of low-sulphur coal, the important energy source for the urban Southwest and the object of intensive mining by the Peabody Coal Company. Since 1967 Peabody has supported archaeological work on Black Mesa, demonstrating that there are indirect, though ironic, benefits from surface mining. Results of these archaeological investigations are not architecture and artifacts—crumbling walls, broken pots, corn-grinding implements, and arrowheads—but technical reports which describe the behavior of prehistoric people who lived on Black Mesa.

This particular type of archaeology is generated by Indian tribal, state, and federal statutes requiring that information be gathered before it is lost to the bulldozer's blade or the rising waters of a dam, and that it become part of the public record. While the gathering of such data is supported by public policy, public trust, and in most instances public monies, the public itself has benefited

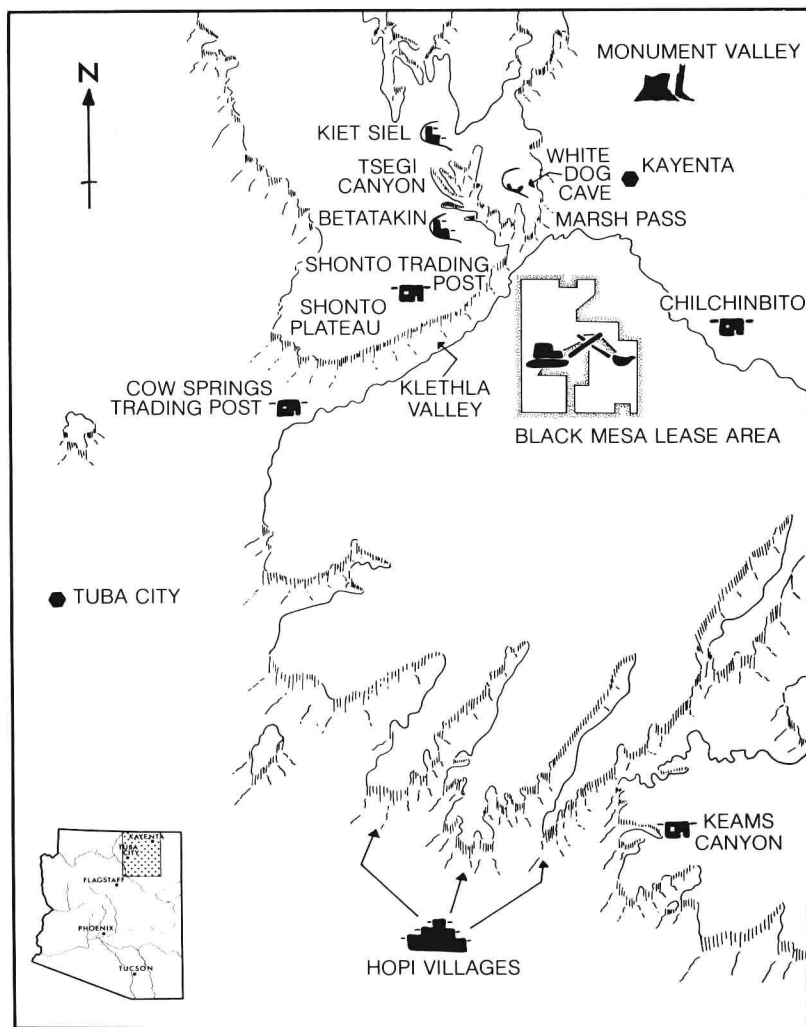


Figure 1.1. Black Mesa and environs

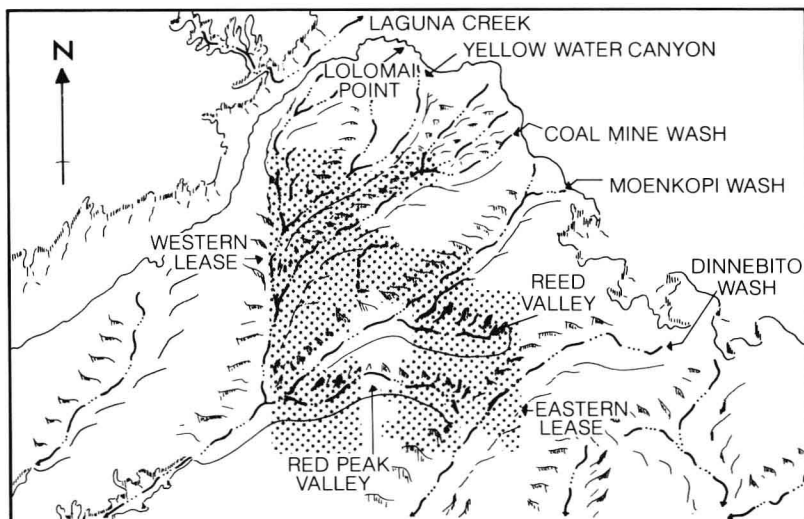


Figure 1.2. The northeastern part of Black Mesa showing Peabody Coal Company's lease area

little except in the very general sense that human knowledge has increased. Virtually no laymen and relatively few professionals have read the highly technical, statistic-filled reports.

This book endeavors to make the substance of one important archaeological project accessible to the general reader. The writing of such a book is based on a conviction that modern archaeology's true goal is not the spectacular find, but increased understanding of human behavior in the past and appreciation for its influence on our own lives.

The Black Mesa Archaeological Project (BMAP) provides a good vehicle for making the archaeologist's work more accessible and for examining the changing face of southwestern archaeology.

The project area encompasses 64,858 acres of the Navajo and Hopi Indian reservations on the northeastern portion of Black Mesa, an area leased to the Peabody Coal Company for mining (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). The prehistoric people who lived in this harsh but beautiful environment were the Anasazi, the ancestors of the modern Pueblo Indians.

Black Mesa was not a major Anasazi population center, although it was situated in the heart of Anasazi country. Cliff dwellings like those found at Navajo National Monument and Mesa Verde, and large prehistoric towns such as Chaco Canyon in New Mexico, were absent. Nor was Black Mesa a focal point for trade or Anasazi culture innovation. Instead, the prehistoric people of Black Mesa were simple farmers living in small groups spread out over the rugged, piñon- and juniper-studded landscape, scratching a living out of the arid soil.

The spartan lifestyle and relative material poverty of these people would seem to make Black Mesa an unpromising and certainly unexciting area in which to conduct archaeology. But, it is precisely because of the paucity of spectacular remains that Black Mesa is a unique natural and cultural laboratory for understanding Anasazi behavior. The majority of the Anasazi did not live in the grandiose cliff dwellings or hugh trade-oriented towns, but in rural areas like Black Mesa (Fig. 1.3). They produced and consumed few luxury goods and left very few things that impress the modern eye. Yet they played a vital role in a complex social and economic system.

The large Anasazi population centers cannot be understood fully without understanding the broad network of smaller communities such as those on Black Mesa. The reverse is also true, for

Figure 1.3. The northeastern edge of Black Mesa

