Mesa Verde

Basketmaker III to Pueblo I
Mesa Verde Prehistory

• Paleoindian period pre 5500 BC
• Archaic period 5500 to 1800 BC
• Basketmaker I (not widely accepted) 1800 to 1000 BC
• Basketmaker II 1000 BC to AD 500
• Basketmaker III AD 500 to 750
• Pueblo I AD 750 to 900
• Pueblo II AD 900 to 1150
• Pueblo III AD 1150 to 1300
• Post Pueblo AD 1300 to 1700s
Mesa Verde
Baskemaker III AD 500 - 750

• A period of population growth
  – Immigration
• Beans adopted
• Bow & arrow adopted
• Pottery adopted
• Farming spreads
  – Climate favorable

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Dispersed communities

Basketmaker III communities consisted of loosely clustered farmsteads:

One to three pithouses

Each pithouse was home to four to eight people

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Rohn & Ferguson 2006
Farming, Gathering & Hunting

• Corn, beans, and squash
  – Storage for 1 year
• Pigweed, goosefoot, sunflower, lambsquarter, ricegrass (leafy greens & seeds)
• Hunted elk, deer, bighorn, rabbits, rodents
• Turkey also taken as wild game
  – Beginning of domestication
Tres Bobos

Figure 3.2. Reconstruction of Tres Bobos Hamlet, a characteristic Basketmaker III settlement. Note the brush-covered shelters, outdoor work areas, and pit structure with antechamber.
Tres Bobos (5MT4545)
BM III Habitation Circa AD 600
Knobby Knee

LEGEND
Historic ditch
Inferred
Post
Pit structure
Room
Posthole alignments
Later Pueblo II structures

METERS
Knobby Knee AD 610 to 650

- 21 miles NW of Cortex, CO
- One to three families
- Several small pithouses
  - More than one building episode
- One over-sized pithouse (community?)
- A surrounding stockade
- Abandonment
  - People took useful items, left heavy items
  - Burned the dwellings
Pueblo I AD 750 to 900

- Population continues to grow
- Above-ground architecture becomes common
- Pithouses still used
- Sites such as Duckfoot become common
Duckfoot site

• Three attached above-ground units
  – Each housed an extended family
• Jacal & masonry construction
  – Slim poles, tied together as a mat
  – Coated with mud to make adobe walls
• Front rooms for living
• Back rooms for storage
  – 2 years of storage
Duckfoot Site

Figure 2.1. Architectural suites at the time of initial site construction. Pit Structure 4 and Room 17 were added later as part of Architectural Suite 2 (see Figure 1.5).
The Unit Pueblo

- Common architectural unit during Pueblo I
- Spread throughout the Mesa Verde Region
Economy

• Turkey domesticated
• Corn & beans = staple
  – Two-handed manos & metates
• Squash also
• Still some hunting & gathering

• Resource depression of wild foods in crowded areas
Pottery

- Neckbanded gray ware
- Paddle and anvil – bottom
- Addition of bands for neck
- For cooking & serving food
Household

- More stuff than during Basketmaker III
- Heavier plant processing tools
- Farm tool kit included
  - Digging sticks and hoes
  - Plain and decorated pottery
  - Red ware traded from west

- Pithouses took on communal labor or religious functions
  - People lived in roomblocks
Aggregation & Expansion

Late Pueblo I communities consisted of densely populated villages and a few scattered farmsteads.
U-shaped pueblos
McPhee Village

- Excavated by the Dolores Archaeological Project
- In the Dolores River Drainage
McPhee Village

Figure 3.6. Plan of McPhee Village with enlargement of McPhee Pueblo. An outline of the Knobby Knee site is inserted for size comparison.
McPhee Village

- One of the largest Pueblo I sites
- 25 households in the large section
- Estimated population size of 500 people
- More than 100 rooms in large roomblocks
- Farmland controlled for many mile around
  - Dispersed small “farm field houses”
Why aggregate?

• Protection/defense
• Economic security against crop failure
• Marriage/kinship opportunities
• Probably 8000 people in the Mesa Verde region at the peak of Pueblo I
Pueblo I summary

• Transition from pithouse villages to pueblos
• Increased emphasis on farming
• Depression of wild resources
• Increased investment in sedentism
  – Tool kit & masonry architecture
• Aggregation into large communities for political, social, & economic reasons
Transition

Bedeenker communities consisted of loosely clustered farmsteads.

Late Pueblo I communities consisted of densely populated villages and a few scattered farmsteads.

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Population decline

• Late Pueblo I villages lasted < 40 years
• By AD 900 population declines dramatically
• Moved southward to the Chaco Canyon area
• Some people persisted in productive areas
• Abandonment, left behind household materials
  – Some structure intentionally burned
Decline

- May have been driven by climate
- Cold period may have reduced corn productivity