Mesa Verde

Pueblo II    AD 900 to 1150
Continuity

• The regional population declined from AD 900 to 1000
  – “Southward shift in reliable summer rainfall” (Lipe)
  – Meanwhile, population booming south of Mesa Verde

• By AD 1050, population growing again

• Agricultural productivity high (in general)
Artifacts

- Corrugated cooking pottery
- Decorated whiteware
  - Mancos Black on White

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Settlements

• Variability in site form
  – Some pueblos like Pueblo I
  – Development of Great Houses at many sites

• Roughly 20 Great Houses built in Mesa Verde region
  – Most people lived in small farmsteads

• But, basic residence pattern at all PII sites *uniform*
  – Roomblock, pit structure (kiva) to south/southeast, midden beyond

• What varies is the size of villages
  – Aggregations of residences (multiple roomblocks)
Community Organization

- Much like PI, with bigger centers

Late Pueblo II communities consisted of farmsteads loosely clustered around a community center (a great kiva, a great house, or both)
5MT8943

- Extreme SW Colorado
- Occupied AD 1050 to 1120
- Very much like a PI pueblo
- Same residence pattern
  - Roomblock, kiva, midden
Big Juniper House

• AD 1080 - 1130
• On Mesa Verde itself
• Much larger, formal masonry kivas
• Planned roomblock architecture
• Highly productive agricultural fields nearby
PII architecture

• Bigger roomblocks
• Full masonry architecture by late 1000s
• Large front rooms for living
  – Food remains, hearths, sleeping areas
• Small back rooms
  – Storage of corn

• More investment in housing than before
Chaco North

• We will discuss Chaco later
• But it was huge from AD 900 to 1100 in northern New Mexico
• In the mid 1100s Chaco declines
  – Large sites Chaco-like site appear just south of Mesa Verde
  – Chacoan great houses proliferate through the Mesa Verde region during the next century
Spread of Great Houses

Fig. 22. Early Pueblo II Chacoan outliers
940-1020 AD

Fig. 23. Late Pueblo II communities with Chacoan structures
1020-1050 AD

Fig. 24. Early Pueblo III Chacoan outliers
1050-1115 AD

Larry Benson, USGS
Why?

• Was Chaco a chiefdom or republic-like polity?
• Did it’s “capitol” move to Aztec?
• Were Mesa Verde great house sites outlying members of the same polity?
• Or were those sites simply “culturally similar?”
Lowry Pueblo
Lowry Pueblo
Lowry Pueblo
Lowry Pueblo
Edge of the Cedars
Escalante Ruin
Escalante Ruin
Yellowjacket Greathouse
Evolution of Kivas

• Early PI – “protokivas”
  – 12 to 20 feet across, 3 to 4 feet deep

• PII – small circular structures
  – 10 to 15 feet in diameter, subterranean
  – Roof part of outdoor living area

• Late PII – masonry lined, with pilasters & benches
• “Keyhole” shaped kiva in Mesa Verde

• Structure
  – Vent shaft, sipapu, deflector, post supports, hearth
Mesa Verde Kivas
Kiva Function

• Today, have religious function... in the past?
  – Supported by consistency in form
    • North – south orientation of vent tunnel, fire pit, sipapu
    • Some think Puebloans view world as bowl, sky as basket

• In the past, also used for household tasks
  – Remnants of corn processing, pottery making tools
  – Food remains in hearths
  – Would have been warm in the winter, cool in summer
Great Kivas

• Over-sized kivas
  – Appear as early as BMIII
  – Common at great house sites

• Probably facilities for communal gatherings
Aztec Great Kiva
Population Growth & Decline
A.D. 600-1300

Modeling period begin date (A.D.)

Number of households

Pueblo II Population Growth

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Pueblo II Summary

• Population growth
• Some aggregation into large communities
  – But mainly dispersed farmsteads & hamlets around centers
• Generally a peaceful time in the region
Terminal PII

• 1130s, severe drought, no new great houses

• Some evidence of conflict
  – Likely due to economic disruption, cultural change (end of Chacoan influence)

• Things really change during the Pueblo III period
Droughts?

Larry Benson, USGS