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No. 65 (December 1968)

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The Southwest, U.S.A. The Indians and some of their Dances

BY S. M. AND J. E. MEAD

Dr S. M. Mead is a member of the Ngati Awa tribe (Bay of Plenty) and has affiliations with the Ngati Manawa (Murupara) and with Te Arawa. His wife, June, is a member of the Ngati Porou tribe, East Coast. They have two children, Linda and Aroha. The Mead family left for America in August, 1965 and returned to New Zealand in May 1968. The family resided most of the time at the University of Southern Illinois, at Carbondale, where S. M. Mead studied for a doctorate in anthropology. While at Carbondale Linda attended a local high school from which she eventually gained a high school diploma. Aroha attended primary school at Carbondale and later at Salem, Massachusetts where the family stayed for ten months prior to returning home to New Zealand. The family existed on grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropology. This was supplemented by a graduate assistantship at the University of Southern Illinois and by money earned by the family at baby-sitting.

The Southwest area of the United States has three tremendous attractions for strangers and tourists: its Indians, its land and its obvious antiquity. All are spectacular and well worth seeing. The Southwest region includes the states of New Mexico, Arizona, Southern Utah and Colorado, the corner boundaries of which all touch at a spot called the Four Corners. The land is desert country, hot, dry, parched and breathtakingly beautiful. Parts of it, such



A map of the Southwest region showing the principal Indian Tribal reservations. Not shown in this map is the Pueblo of Cochiti which is between Santo Domingo and Santa Fe

—Map drawn by Karl Peters, Department of Anthropology, Auckland



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as the Grand Canyon, must be rated as being among the greatest tourist attractions in the world. For sheer immensity and grandeur the Grand Canyon is difficult to surpass.

There are many Indian tribes in the region and many of them have had colourful histories, but while they have all had their great moments all have also had some sad experiences as minority groups. Best known to Maori readers because of the Cowboy cult are the Apaches, the movie villains who are supposed to delight in shooting burning arrows into covered wagons. More important numerically, however, are the Pueblo Indians, the Navaho and the Hopi. The archaeological remains in the area reveal that Indians have been in the Southwest for many hundreds of years, at least 2,000 years ago, and they were agriculturists, who specialized in the growing of corn and squash.¹ The obvious signs of antiquity both of the land and of the people are a special feature of the Southwest. Many of the region's archaeological sites are also great tourist attractions.

It was in the summer of 1966, during the months of June, July and August that we were able to visit this historic region of the United States. Our visit was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, some funds from the University of Southern Illinois, plus a little of our own savings. We shall show in the following paragraphs that we took advantage of the opportunity and saw as much as we could. The unique part of the whole experience, for us, at least, is that we went everywhere as a family unit; thus, four Maoris benefited from the generosity of the Americans and not merely one individual. The following description is limited mainly to the living Indians and especially to some of their present-day ceremonial activity which we had the pleasure of seeing.

When we woke up on the morning of June 24, 1966 we were just east of Amarillo, in Texas, and had slept in our station wagon on the roadside with lots of other travellers. Sunrises and sunsets in Texas are beautiful. The horizon is far-sweeping, the land undulating and the grass comparatively green. On this day we entered the Southwest from Texas. The change in scenery from Texas into New Mexico is sudden and dramatic. There is no green grass over the border. Instead there are hundreds of acres of burnt red land covered with stunted and sparse vegetation. There are strange and weird mountain shapes, table tops, jagged rocky formations and the sky above is a clear duck-egg blue. From out of this unencumbered sky the sun beats down savagely. The station wagon becomes a moving stove with all the elements turned on, and we know that we are in desert country following a black shimmering ribbon of road which is completely flanked by hot, dry, red earth. We were heading for the city of Santa Fe. The city was very different from any we had seen in other parts of the United States. Adobe style architecture was everywhere in evidence. For some strange reason the town itself seemed to blend with the environment, its periphery melting gracefully into the landscape. We arrived there at 4 p.m. and Santa Fe became our headquarters in the Southwest.

I worked for the university at Santa Fe but when not working my family and I explored the city and the Indian reservations around it. Santa Fe is a remarkable city. It is a city of artists, writers, amateur

historians, anthropologists, silversmiths, and traders. It has three museums, a beautiful 'open-air' opera house, and innumerable gift shops selling Indian jewellery and odd curios. It is also a city of Indians who come to it from the surrounding reservations of Taos, Picuris, San Juan, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, Tesuque, Cochiti, Santa Domingo, San Felipe and Zia. The city maintains positive relationships with the Indians through the Southwestern Association on Indian Affairs, the United Indian Traders Association and through its institutions of learning. Of particular interest to Maori readers is the fact that in Santa Fe is located the Institute of American Indian Arts, the American counterpart of our New Zealand Institute of Arts and Crafts which is housed at Rotorua. We visited the Institute where Indian students from all parts of the United States, including Alaska, are trained in the arts. It is a vital institution with imaginative goals, which makes a reality of the dream of education through the arts. Such, then, is

¹ U.S. Dept of the Interior Handbook, *Meso Verde National Park*, 1966.

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A sketch showing the apartment-like adobe houses of Taos Pueblo
—sketch by Karl Peters

the city which was our home base for just over two months.

On our second day at Santa Fe we saw Indians dancing for the first time. A small group of dancers from the Taos Pueblo performed a war dance, a horse dance and some hoop dancing in the plaza of the city. A platform was erected for the group and they performed free of charge for the tourists. On July 9, we visited the pueblo of Taos which is 6,950 feet above sea-level. The pueblo, nestled snugly in the mountains, is north of Santa Fe. On arrival at the pueblo we stopped behind a row of cars. We noted an Indian dressed like an Arab, with a white cloth draped over his head, approach each car and pass a large book into each. He waited a few moments and then collected the book in one hand and into the palm of his free hand the motorist placed some money. When our turn came we discovered the book was a visitor's book and that the price of our inquisitiveness was 75 cents. There was a special fee of \$1.25 for taking photographs. We declined to pay this fee for budgetary reasons.

The pueblo itself is spectacular and certainly nothing like a Maori pa. The centre of the pueblo is like a large square; this is the village plaza. A stream of sparkingly clear water runs through the plaza and on either side of the small stream and some distance from it stand the house clusters of adobe several stories high. These clusters resemble apartment houses which are more striking in this pueblo than in others around Santa Fe. The rooms in the cluster are surprisingly cool as we discovered when our daughters beckoned us over to a house from which the sounds of bells and the thump of a drum issued. The centre of interest was a chubby 8-year-old Indian girl who was performing a hoop dance. The bells on her legs jingled and jangled and her father sat in a corner and played his drum. She

passed the hoop over her body, then she stepped over it with dainty little steps forward and back. With her body stooped she would then pass the hoop over her. Her performance delighted the little group of tourists. This was the human angle; always more interesting to watch than empty buildings. The dance ended, the chubby performer put the hoop away tidily in a corner, grabbed an open bowl, and then she stood before each member of her admiring audience. With the bowl wellstretched forward there was no mistaking its purpose. The dancer was quite stonyfaced about it, but her father nodded and smiled for her.

On this same day we visited another pueblo called San Ildefonso. The buildings in this pueblo are not as spectacular as those of Taos but the village is famous in another way. Here lives one of the greatest Indian potters of the Southwest, a woman called Maria, and her son Popovi Da. Maria uses the coiled technique of pottery making. In the early 1900s she and her husband Julian Martnez began experimenting with the traditional black-on-red ware of San Ildefonso and 'discovered' a novel way of firing clay which produced a strikingly beautiful black ware. The body of the jar is in burnished black and the

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patterns in matte black. This kind of finish can be called black-on-black and is now produced in many other pueblos besides San Ildefonso. Nevertheless, it is to Maria's shop that pottery lovers go. Her work is of high artistic and technical quality; most definitely the work of a great artist. The starting price for her creations is about \$20—for a small saucer.

During the summer months the Pueblo Indians perform dancing ceremonies which are variously referred to as Green Corn Dance, Tablita Dance Fiesta Day or more simply, as Saint's Day. The ceremonies are a mixture of customs from catholicism and Indian religion and they run into several days, culminating finally in a public performance of dancing. The Cochiti Indians held their Tablita Dance on July 14 and it was on this day that we saw one for the first time. We saw several others before leaving the Southwest; one at Santa Ana on July 26, one at Santo Domingo on August 4, and one at Zia on August 15. For the Cochiti day we were fortunate in being able to go with Dr Charles Lange and his wife, who explained the solemnity and the significance of the Tablita Dance to us. Dr Lange did fieldwork in the Cochiti Pueblo for his Ph.D. thesis and thus he was an authority on these people and their way of life. It would be repetitive, though extremely interesting to describe each Tablita Dance we saw, so we will confine our comment to the most spectacular one we saw—the Santo Domingo ceremony.

Santo Domingo is southwest of Santa Fe. It is one of the largest Pueblo Indian groups in the Southwest and the people speak a language known as Keresan. The tourist misses most of the early morning ritual associated with the Tablita Dance, such as the early morning mass where several marriages are consecrated, this being a propitious and highly favoured day for marriage. There is also a historical pageant in which the spirit figures known as *koshari* encircle the village to place a spiritual cordon of protection around the people. Runners are sent out east, west, south and north and in time they return with messages from the frontiers. The north and



Maria and Julian, famous potters of the Pueblo of San Ildefonso
**—photo by courtesy of New Mexico Department of
Development**

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ners return with a purifying liquid which the warriors drink. At the conclusion of the historical part of the ceremonies the participants return to their respective kivas.

The kivas are round-shaped adobe structures each with a ladder leading up to it and each with a hole at the top through which dancers disappear and re-appear. The pueblo is divided into two divisions, each with its own sacred kiva. The kiva divisions are known as the Turquoise and the Squash. Each kiva has its own set of dancers, its own standard—a pole some fifteen feet in length festooned with bunches of parrot and woodpecker feathers, beads, ocean shell and a highly symbolic fox skin—and its own set of spirit figures.

The Santo Domingo people are generally regarded as the most conservative of the Pueblo Indians. They will not permit inquisitive journalists and anthropologists into their pueblo to study the people nor will they answer any questions about the more intimate aspects of their ceremonies, nor permit recording of any kind, by tape recorder, camera or notebook. These strictures actually apply to all the Pueblo Indian villages. Visitors may, however, watch their tablita dance and I can verify the fact that the Santo Domingo tablita dance is an impressive and awe-inspiring spectacle. The people make a memorable occasion of it.

It is memorable because of its scale and the spirit in which it is performed. In the first group of performers we saw there were over 220 dancers in the team and they were supported by a chorus of nearly 100 persons. The other team numbered about 180 dancers with a supporting chorus of about eighty. The teams performed alternately from the morning until sundown. The day was beautifully clear and very hot. Spectators who had arrived before us



The costume of the Santo Domingo tablita dancers. Both hold greenery in their hands. The woman wears a decorated tablita on her head, and her dress is black with bands in red. Around her neck are turquoise ornaments. The man has greenery on his arm bands, turquoise ornaments around his neck and a rattle in his right hand. The sketch shows the typical stance of the dancers.
(After Roediger, 1961)

The costume of the drummer and members of the chorus is completely different from that of the dancers. The drummer wears a long shirt and pyjama-like trousers. He also wears turquoise ornaments around his neck and a decorated metal belt around his waist

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had appropriated most of the available shade around the plaza, so we climbed up onto the adobe roofs on the north side where the view was good. A westerly breeze was blowing, occasionally kicking up clouds of dust which temporarily enveloped the entire plaza. The adobe dust, the heat, the spectators sitting on the ground or on chairs, or perched up on the roofs as we were, and the gay colours of Indian dress all added to the general setting for the dancing.

With its standard raised high and the drum beating, the Turquoise kiva group from the east side of the plaza made its way behind the buildings and finally emerged from the western end of the plaza. First to appear on the dancing ground was a *koshari*, a man dressed in loincloth and his body painted in ghostly fashion. Behind him came the standard bearer dressed in white and then followed a sprinkling of costumed dancers. Meanwhile to their left the drummer came into view followed by a solid mass of the brightly costumed members of the chorus. The chorus arranged itself into five files after which one member stepped forward and took over the drum while the other melted into the chorus. The *koshari* and standard bearer stood their ground waiting for the drummer to begin the dance. During the waiting period the rest of the dancers fell in behind them in two files with male and female dancers alternating in each.

The drummer was now ready. He began pounding his drum at first slowly and then accelerating the rhythm until the correct tempo had been reached. Then the chorus began stepping in time to the drum and finally burst into a chant. The concerted noise from about 100 voices filled the whole plaza. When the chorus members began stepping to time so did the *koshari* and the standard bearer. A loud rattling noise from the male dancers heightened the atmosphere of excited expectancy and the dancing began. At the eastern end of the plaza was a covered shed in which an effigy of the village's saint was housed. The *koshari* with the dancers following pranced their way slowly towards the shrine. As they advanced more and more dancers fell in behind until finally the whole group of nearly 220 dancers had joined. The two lines of dancers were so long that, hardly were all performers actually in the plaza area when it was time for the leading *koshari* and standard bearer to turn because they had reached the covered shrine. They turned, keeping in step and to the rhythm of the drum and the chant. They danced in between the two lines while each line made a left U-turn gradually snaking towards the western end of the plaza. Thus back and forwards they went, keeping strict time all the way, and changing the choreographical pattern each time. The dancers were going through a definite sequence.

Each line of dancers is led by a man and the tail ends of the lines gradually diminish in height because the children are positioned there. The Turquoise group had eight *kosharis*, one generally leading while the others wove in, out and between the lines. Their freedom of movement contrasted against the strict patterned movements of the dancers. Every now and again a *koshari* would rush over to a dancer to restore any item of costume which may have dropped off or loosened. The *koshari* often performed humorous little antics which delighted the spectators and raised smiles on the dancers' faces. They also encouraged the dancers in their gruelling marathon of forty-five minutes of dancing in the burning sun. There were some among them who were superb solo dancers.

The general purpose of all the ceremonial seems to be a concerted effort to effect some control over the forces of nature, to bridge the gap, as it were, between man and nature. The spirits are invoked to bring rain which will increase the chances for successful crops, which in turn will ensure the livelihood of the villagers for the season. These are agricultural people who live in a country where growing conditions are difficult, without irrigation. It is an article of faith among the Indians that the ceremonial will bring rain. The Indians' faith does not appear to be altogether groundless. It rained at San Felipe on July 25, at Santa Ana on July 26, at Puye on July 31 and at 6 p.m. at Santo Domingo the rain came down!

The custom at all the tablita dances is for the two kiva groups to dance until sundown. It is interesting to reflect upon the fact that the practice of dancing until sundown with two teams alternating has also been recorded for New Zealand. At

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Some of the boys who took part in the dancing at Puye during the celebrations of 1966
—photo by the authors

the Bay of Islands in 1834, Edward Markham watched a performance by two teams of women, forty in each. Each team, apparently, had a master of ceremonies and a dance leader. The people sitting on the ground chanted continuously while the women danced. According to Markham the dance had a religious purpose and no food could be eaten or even cooked while the ceremony was on. It was not until sundown when the dancing was completed that the food ovens were prepared.

We saw three gatherings of Indians which were not traditional as is the case with the tablita dances. Each was a response to the modern situation. The first of these was the Puye Cliff Ceremonial which we saw on July 31. It is an annual event and the one which we witnessed was the tenth one held. Situated north of Santa Fe, Puye is part of the Santa Clara Indian Reservation. It is perched atop a table mountain in the Pajarito Plateau. The village, as it stands today, is an archaeological site, in which the buildings have been excavated, stabilised but not reconstructed. An archaeologist, called Edgar Hewett, excavated it in 1907 and recovered 4,270 artifacts from it—stone figures, polishing stones, potsherds and round shaped *metates* for grinding corn. After excavation the site was returned to the Santa Clara Indians, who now use it as a tourist attraction and as the venue for their annual Puye Cliff ceremony. This could well provide an example which some enterprising Maori tribes might like to follow. It is a way of utilising archaeological sites on tribal lands.

The ceremony is run like a gala day with stalls selling food, drinks and curios and with teams performing dances. Tourists are welcomed and they are permitted to move around, ask questions and take photographs, all for \$1.25 per adult. Here we saw exhibitions of the buffalo dance, the rainbow dance, the corn dance performed by 28 children, the basket dance, the eagle dance, the hoop dance and Santa Clara's version of a war dance. These were

It was at Puye where we saw another idea which Maoris could well take up. In one stall, Indian women were selling *paraoa parai* (fried bread) which was made on the spot. Each wheel of golden *paraoa parai* cost 25 cents each. The stall was a very popular one and the women running it were kept very busy. It is fun to see your 'order' frying in the pan. In taste the Indians' fried bread was just like ours. Since so many Maori women are expert at making this kind of bread there is no reason why similar stalls cannot be started here. It could be as good a 'money-spinner' here in New Zealand as it was at Puye.

The second non-traditional gathering of Indians occurred at Gallup not far from the Arizona border. What we saw was called the 1966 Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial and this was the 45th held since its beginning in 1922. This is really an exciting and big time annual event for Indians and tourists alike. On a Friday afternoon, August 12, we found the grounds where the event was being held. There were huge exhibit halls there, where one could see Indian artists displaying their personal work and demonstrating their skills. Katchina doll manufacturers worked at their trade, Navaho sand painters showed

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A typical kind of outdoor adobe oven used by the Pueblo women for baking their bread. The oven shown here is at San Ildefonso —photo by courtesy of New Mexico Department of Development

how they 'painted' their pictures with coloured sands, a Navaho woman demonstrated the craft of rug-making and Hopi silversmiths made jewellery. As this was the second day of the demonstrations the Indian craftsmen and women looked rather weary and, understandably, a little bored with the whole thing. However, the best Indian work in the country was being displayed at Gallup.

That night we attended the evening performance of singing and dancing by Indians from all over the Southwest, for example, by the Navaho, Zuni, Taos Laguna, Apache, Hopi, Utes and Crow Indians, to mention but a few. The programme began with a Navaho medicine man making fire by the traditional method. With his fire the huge log fires in the arena were ignited and then other fires on top of the hill where the Indians camped were also lit. The fires signalled the start of the grand parade of all the evening's performers, who were introduced in turn as they came before the emcee's box. Later the grounds were blessed by an Indian chief and then a speech of welcome on behalf of the Indians was given by another Indian leader. With these formalities over, the dancing and singing items began. We saw once again exhibitions of the buffalo dance, the hoop, basket, eagle and war dance but there were many dances performed here which we had not seen previously, such as the sunflower



Buffalo dancers from the Tesuque Pueblo, ten miles north of Santa Fe. Notice the buffalo headgear which the dancers wear
—photo by courtesy of New Mexico Department of Development

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dance of the Zuni, the butterfly dance of the San Juan, the hohokam dance of the Pima. One of the great advantages of attending the Gallup ceremonial is the fact that one gets a chance to see a great variety of well-performed dances. As well as this, one gets an opportunity of seeing many different Indian groups with their distinctive costumes.

The third non-traditional gathering was held at Santa Fe: this was the Annual Indian Market which we saw on August 20. One side of the city square or plaza was given to Indian craftsmen and women who set up their stalls right in front of the Palace of the Governors. For two days the city gave the Indians a chance of selling their wares in a part of the city which was bound to attract a huge volume of visitors and potential buyers. Indians taking part were the Jemez, San Juan, Santa Clara, Tesuque, Acoma, Santo Domingo, Cochiti and San Ildefonso. The wares being sold included rugs, pottery, rings, brooches, bracelets, necklaces, and dolls. These were all handmade objects. It seemed to us that the Market was one more example of a deliberate effort on the part of the city fathers to find a place in Santa Fe for the local Indians. The general atmosphere was happy, gay and indicative of hopeful racial relations. One of the men responsible for the Market was Mr Al Packard whom we had the pleasure of meeting on several occasions. A lot of the organisation and the worry for the Market fell upon his very adequate shoulders. As to who actually profits from the Market the answer is, obviously both the Indians and the city merchants. But the occasion is social as well as economic. I met many of Santa Fe's notable citizens there and on the Sunday the Market area was packed with people and the Indians were doing fairly good business.

So far we have written mainly about the Pueblo Indians. We did, however, drive through the extensive territory of the Navaho Indians in the northwestern part of New Mexico. Some 31,650 Navahos live in the State of New Mexico, but a larger number, 57,200 live in Arizona. Though their reservation contains 16,000,000 acres, most of it is semi-desert, rocky and sandy. In some areas it is claimed that 240 acres are required to maintain one sheep per year (Dutton 1965: 40). The hogans (dwellings) of the Navahos are much smaller than the settlements of the Pueblo Indians near Santa Fe. Each settlement consisted of about eight to ten houses and each settlement is many miles from the next one. Many of the Navahos, who dress like cowboys, rode not broncos but half-ton pickup trucks, either a Ford or a GMC. When travelling through the Navaho reservation we saw more vehicles pulled up on the side of the road because of punctures than we saw anywhere else in the United States. This reminded us very much of our own people in back-country areas of New Zealand where the puncture is an ever-present hazard. Maori and Navaho drivers seem to share the common misfortune of frequent punctures.

Hemmed in by Navaho land is the reservation of 631,000 acres which belongs to the Hopi Indians. The villages of the Hopi are

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situated on three high mesas or table mountains, known as First Mesa, Second Mesa and Third Mesa. At a meeting of anthropologists and archaeologists at Flagstaff, Arizona, we were told that a snake dance was to be held at the village of Shongopovi, on the Second Mesa. A number of the participants, including us, deserted the Pecos Conference and headed northwards to Tubo City and then eastwards to the Second Mesa. Much of the country north of Flagstaff looked like the inside of a red-hot brick kiln—stark, strangely beautiful but forbidding. We were thankful to be seeing this wild, fire-of-hell country on the run. The date was August 27 and we reached Shongopovi village at 2.15 p.m. about two hours too soon because the snake dance was scheduled to begin at 4 p.m.

Our early arrival gave us plenty of time to look around and try to find a handy position from which to view the ceremonies. Indian custom does not help much in this quest. Here, as in the pueblos near Santa Fe, the people are invited into the plaza which is the public arena but the boundaries of the plaza are marked by the houses of the local Indians. The owners of these houses, naturally establish claim to the areas adjacent to their homes so that the outsider does not get much of a choice. The more wealthy visitors could, however, buy a seat on an owner's rooftop—somewhat like our Scotsman's stands at Eden Park,

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Auckland. Though visitors are welcome to attend Indian ceremonies nothing is done to provide comforts for them. Visitors must fend for themselves. The Indian explanation for this is that the celebrations are religious ceremonies which are part of their life. They are not staged specifically for visitors. To one accustomed to the Maori scene, the almost cavalier treatment of visitors by the Pueblo Indians stands in marked contrast. This practice impressed upon us how different the attitudes of the Pueblo Indians to the Great American Society are from Maori attitudes to Pakeha society. The Pueblo Indians almost ignore white visitors while Maoris pay almost too much attention to them.

Just before 4 p.m. a group of snake dancers dressed simply in a blanket wrapped around the waist or stomach filed into the plaza from their kiva and walked towards a temporary structure of cottonwood at the opposite end of the plaza. They crowded around the entrance of the structure which was marked by a white woven blanket. Breaking from the huddle, the dancers proceeded to insert bamboo branches into the structure in which the snakes were kept. The job completed they filed back to their kiva and disappeared into it.

Nothing further happened until 4 p.m. when out of the adobes came the snake maidens, fourteen of them, dressed in black and red costumes and with their hair done in a variety of coiffures. The snake maidens, each with a bowl of white corn meal sat on forms arranged in three rows to one side of the plaza. About fifteen minutes later, members of the chorus formed a single file and walked briskly towards the cottonwood snake-house. Each held two small rattles, one in each hand and each man had the area around the mouth and lower jaw blackened, giving the appearance of a black gag. Their costume was very similar to that of the corn dancers of Santo Domingo except that they carried no greenery.

The group circled the plaza in an anti-clockwise direction three times. Each time one of them came directly in front of the snake-house he sprinkled corn meal onto the ground and tramped it into the ground with the right foot. The stamping upon the corn meal produced a hollow thud which suggested there was a hollow of some kind below the spot. After each chorus member had done the stamping ritual three times the chorus formed a file on each side of the snake-house and rustled their gourds quietly to a simple one-two time.

Then out of the kiva came the twenty-five snake dancers, this time vastly changed in appearance. Their faces were blackened and their hair smeared with clay. Waist garments were of a reddy ochre colour and appeared to be made of buck skin. On their feet they wore moccasins also of an ochre colour and the rest of the body was painted in ochre. Behind the knee joint and just below it each dancer had turtle-shell rattles which made a distinctive low rattling noise. Like the previous group, the dancers circled the plaza and performed the corn meal sprinkling ritual followed by a solid stamp. The ritual was performed six times in front of the snake-house after which the dancers formed into a large circle with members of the chorus.

Chanting then began, accompanied by the rhythmic rustling of the gourds flourished

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by the chorus members. The dancers held a long feather in the right hand and this was handled like a soundless rattle being switched up and down and then from side to side. The low chanting plus the soft rustling of seeds within the small gourds created a serious ceremonial atmosphere for what was to follow. The spectators watched in expectant silence for a full twenty minutes during which time the dancers began to perspire. They were standing in the burning sun which was sufficient to make even the spectators drip perspiration.

The chant over, there was a regrouping of the dancers and the chorus. The chorus members formed an open U-formation on either side of the snake-house while fourteen of the dancers paired off. The inside dancer of each pair rested his right hand on the right shoulder of his partner. The chorus struck up a different beat and

the paired dancers began a solemn dance around the plaza again in an anti-clockwise direction. The dance was slow and heavy with a strong accent on the right foot which produced a thud and an equally heavy rattle

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of the turtle-shell. The dancers who were not paired remained inside the circle of the dancers. Up until this time no snakes had been handled, but the moment had arrived. As the paired dancers approached the cottonwood snake-house the outside dancer bent down, approached the house and picked up a small snake from within it. He held the snake in his mouth, its head to the right side of the mouth and the tail dangling down on the left. Some dancers held the snake's tail in the left hand. With the snake secured, the pair of dancers continued their anti-clockwise dance. After a snake had been danced around the plaza it was released on the ground and watched by the free dancers. On each succeeding round the snakes handled became larger.

Towards the end of the dance there were snakes galore in the plaza. Several of the inside dancers had handfuls of them, likewise the chorus members. The outside dancer of each pair held a large snake in his mouth and each time one came abreast of the snake maidens, sprinklings of corn meal were thrown on him by the maidens. It was an awesome spectacle to watch. The spectators looked on in wonder mixed with fear. A keen eye was fixed on the snakes writhing about on the ground because some of them were attempting to escape into the crowds. The free dancers, however, watched them and kept them away from the spectators. Eventually the dance ended and the snakes were taken up by runners and returned to the areas from which they were gathered. As far as we could tell no dancer was bitten by a snake. If the dancers were concerned for their own safety they showed no sign of it but we were certainly fearful and apprehensive on their behalf, it was a great relief, therefore, to see the snake dance of Shongopovi come to an end.

The only other 'snake-dance we saw was at Bountiful, Utah, It was performed by Mr Robert (Apache) McLean, a Utah schoolteacher,

who has made a life-time hobby of learning and performing Indian dances. We met him at the home of Hinauri and Bill Tribole, a spot in the United States which is familiar to all who have met the Triboles and been entertained by them. The Tribole home is a *marae* for Maori and Pakeha visitor alike. It was at this marae that Apache performed his snake

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[View Image](#)

dance. I took the opportunity of checking my observation of the Shongopovi snake dance with Apache.

Among the many things he told me the most important are the following; (1) the timing of the dance depends on when the first rays of the rising sun strike a certain landmark. (2) The snake dance goes through a nine-day cycle. What we saw was the final day. (3) The snakes are collected well before the ninth day, from areas marked off in cardinal directions, east, west, north and south. (4) One should avoid meeting a snake collector when he is gathering snakes. The penalty is to hand over to him valuables, money or food. (5) The snakes are returned roughly to the same areas from which they were collected. (6) When the snakes curl up under rocks it is thought that they are in contact with the underworld. (7) When the dancers tramp the ground in front of the snake-house, called a *kīsi*, they strike a board, which is connected with a drain-like connection, called a *sipapu*, to the kiva. This underground channel is thought to be connected with the underworld, that is, with the Indian's version of the Maori Rarohenga. (8) Some of the young snake dancers are undergoing their final initiation tests for kiva membership. (9) The initiates usually handle the largest snakes. (10) The snake dancer's partner is referred to as the 'hugger', and his job is to hold the attention of the snake by waving his feather wand.

Such, then, were the Indian activities which we saw while in the Southwest. There is little in the Maori experience which prepares one to observe the Indians, their way of life and the land upon which they dwell. The Indians are brown-skinned but their costumes and manner of dressing have always been totally different from that of the New Zealand Maori. The objects and ornaments made by the Indians are part of a different world view and are based on a natural environment nothing like the temperate zone of New Zealand. The agricultural pursuits of the two peoples were centred around a different crop; whereas the Indians were essentially corn-growers the Maoris were sweet-potato cultivators. The Indians and the Maoris, however, share one feature in common. They are both minority groups. Consequently, some of the problems

The Editor of **Te Ao Hou** is always glad to hear from new contributors, Maori and Pakeha. Articles, news items, photographs, stories and poetry dealing with all aspects of Maori life and culture are welcome. Apart from short news items, all contributions published are paid for.

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they face today are the same. What is of particular interest to Maori

observers is to see how another minority group, in this case, the Southwest Indians of the United States, faces and meets the challenges of the present situation. Here we cannot avoid the temptation of comparing notes because we are part of the situation. A comparison of the progress made by the two minority groups, bearing in mind their different histories and circumstances, leads us to conclude that the New Zealand Maori should be proud of what he has accomplished.

As a minority group the Maori has made tremendous strides which tend to be overlooked and overshadowed by the emphasis on present shortcomings. By contrast, the Southwest Indians appear to be more hesitant about reaching out into the Pakeha world. This hesitancy, however, does not apply to Pakeha technology. The Indians are just as keen on cars, trucks, refrigerators and television sets as the New Zealand Maoris. Their caution springs from their fear that the Pueblo social and religious order will be destroyed by the Great Society if they do not contain it.

The Pueblo Indians have succeeded in retaining much of their social organisation and a great deal of their religious and ritual practices. The corn dances and the Hopi snake dance we saw are evidence of this. They have managed to stem the disruptive inroads of the Great Society over a much longer period of contact than is the case in New Zealand. In this respect they are much more successful than the New Zealand Maori and it could well be that they have lessons to offer the Maori. Actually, there is much that one group can learn from the other. It would be to the mutual benefit of both minority groups if cultural inter-changes could be arranged between the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest and the Maoris of New Zealand. The

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[View Image](#)

time has come for the Maori to use one of his new nets to fish up ideas from international waters.

SUGGESTED READING

Dutton, Bertha P. (Ed.), 1965. *Indians of the Southwest* (Pocket Handbook). Santa Fe, Southwestern Association on Indian Affairs, Inc.

1. An easy-to-read reference book and essential reading for any visitor to the Southwest. The handbook provides information on the past and the present of the Indians, on their arts and crafts and on their ceremonies and dances.

Roediger, Virginia M., 1961. *Ceremonial Costumes of the Pueblo Indians*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

2. The author deals very fully with the ceremonial costumes used in such dances as the tablita, buffalo, eagle, eagle katchina, deer and many others. The book is well illustrated.

Squires, John L. and Robert E. McLean, 1963. *American Indian*

3. Dances are described and the steps and movements are illustrated. The second author is an undisputed authority and an exponent of Indian dancing.

Underhill, Ruth, 1953. *Red Man's America: A History of Indians in the United States*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

4. Chapters 8 and 9 deal specifically with the Southwest and describe the history of the Mogollon, Hohokam, Pueblo, Pimians, Navaho and Apache.

Watson, Don, 1961. *Indians of the Mesa Verde*. Colorado Mesa Verde Museum Association and Mesa Verde National Park.

5. The book is concerned with the pre-history of the Indians who used to inhabit the spectacular cliff houses at Mesa Verde, Colorado. The book is easy to read and the story is fascinating.

White, Leslie, A., 1962. *The Pueblo of Sia, New Mexico* (Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 184). Washington, Government Printing Office.

6. The book provides a detailed description of the people of Sia, whose pueblo we visited. It deals with the social organisation, religion and ceremonials of the people and contains a description of the tablita dance. The author is a well-known anthropologist.

Wormington, H. M., 1964. *Prehistoric Indians of the Southwest*. Denver, Denver Museum of Natural History.

7. This book is recommended for readers interested in the archaeology of the area.

There are, of course, many other books, pamphlets and articles published in journals which one could read. The literature on the Southwest is vast and extensive. What is listed here provides merely a good starting point.

