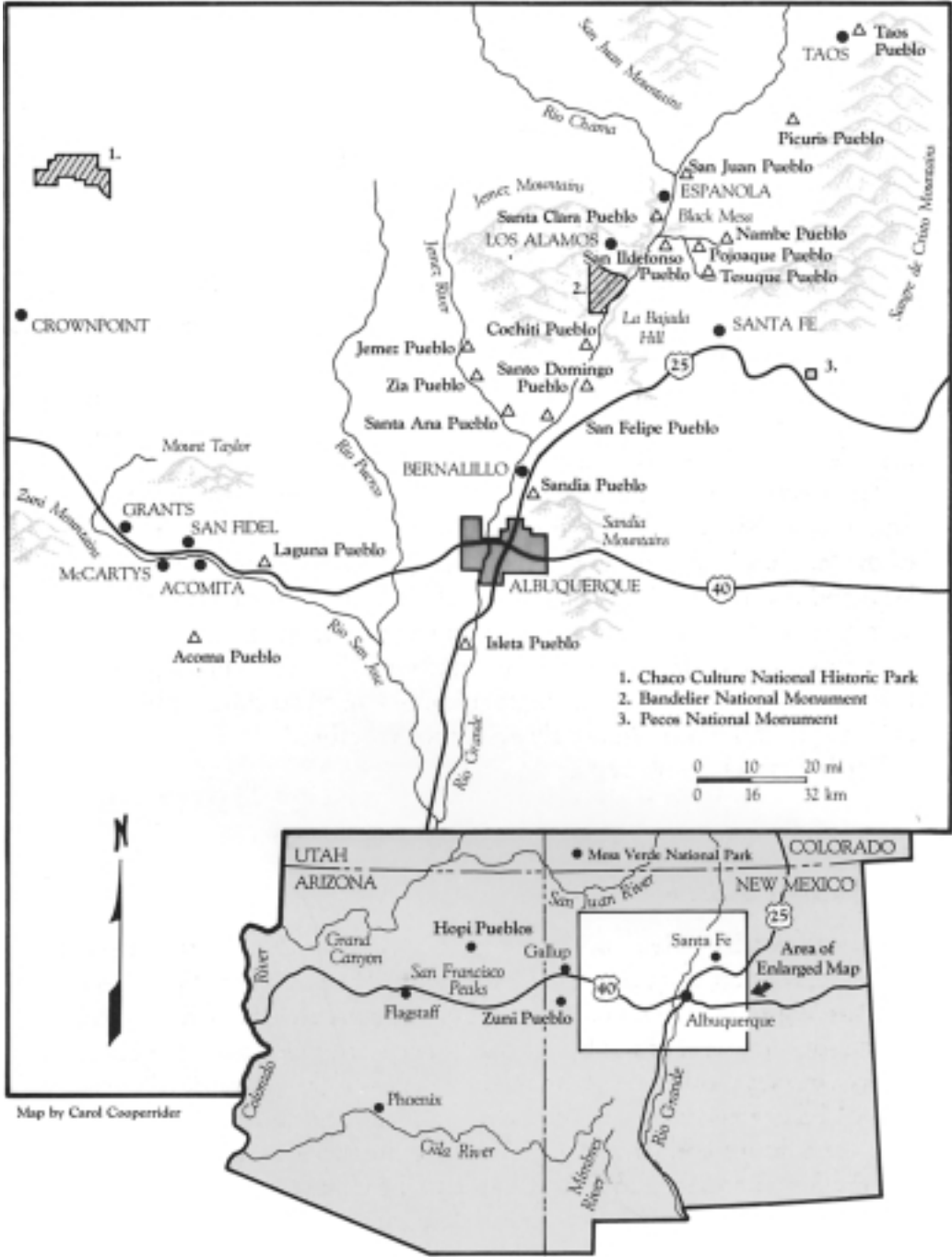


# Pueblo Pottery



*Lucy Lewis decorating pottery, Acoma Pueblo, ca. 1980.*

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The Pueblo groups of New Mexico and Arizona are believed to be descendants of the prehistoric Anasazi and Mogollon cultures that inhabited the region.



*Black-on-white Anasazi pitcher, ca. 1100-1200 A.D.*

When first encountered by Spanish explorers in the 1500s, Pueblo peoples were living much as they had for centuries. They inhabited stone and adobe towns (*Pueblo* is the Spanish word for “village”), farmed nearby fields, and shared distinctive arts and religion. Although they have many common cultural

characteristics, there is variation between the 20 Pueblo groups in their language, social organization, and other lifeways. Today there are about 30,000 Pueblo people in the United States, the vast majority of whom reside on their ancestral lands or in nearby cities.

The Pueblo groups are widely recognized for their achievements in arts and crafts, particularly their distinctive pottery. Archaeologists believe pottery technology was introduced into the Southwest from Mesoamerica about 500 B.C. where it became an integral element of Anasazi and Mogollon cultures. These prehistoric groups created a ceramic tradition that has been continued and expanded by historic Pueblo groups. The modern Pueblo pottery on display represents the work of potters from Acoma, Cochiti, Hopi, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, San Juan, Tesuque, and Zia pueblos.

### Acoma

The works of potters such as Lucy Lewis, Rose Chino Garcia, Marie Z. Chino, and Juana Leno are included among the many Acoma ceramics on display. Traditional Acoma jars are characterized by thin walls and undefined necks and are decorated with orange and black geometric and bird



*Acoma jar made by Lucy Lewis in 1963.*



*Flora Naranjo smothering kiln fire to create blackware, Santa Clara Pueblo, ca. 1970.*

designs on a white background. Modern artists often create pottery based on these earlier vessels as well as experiment with new shapes and decorations. Acoma potters are also noted for their revival of prehistoric pottery styles and motifs, such as the black-on-white vessels on display.

### Santa Clara and San Juan

The potters of Santa Clara and San Juan pueblos are historically known for their polished redware and blackware vessels, either undecorated or incorporating incised and carved lines.

The deep red and black of these pots is created during the firing process—a freely burning, oxygen-rich fire produces iron oxide that creates redware; smothering the fire toward the end of the firing process prevents oxygen from reaching the pots and creates blackware.



*Helen Cordero making storyteller, 1979.*

### Storytellers

Although figurative pottery has been a part of Pueblo pottery tradition since prehistoric times, the famous “storyteller” figures are a 20th-century innovation. The first Pueblo storyteller figure was created by Helen Cordero of Cochiti Pueblo in 1964, based on memories of her grandfather telling stories to children. Many other Pueblo potters also began making storytellers, creating a great variety in subject matter and styles. Cochiti potter Ada Suina made the storyteller on display in 1983.

### Resources

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LeFree, Betty. *Santa Clara Pottery Today*. University of New Mexico Press, 1975.  
Ortiz, Alfonso. *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 9, *Southwest*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979.  
Trimble, Stephen. *Talking with the Clay: The Art of Pueblo Pottery*. School of American Research Press, 1987.

### Credits

Map from Trimble (p. 3). Photos are from Trimble (Lucy Lewis, p. 72–73); Ortiz (Anasazi pitcher, p. 117); LeFree (smothering fire, p. 65); Babcock, Monthan. and Monthan (Helen Cordero, p. 26)