



Ancient Peoples of the American Southwest

Stephen Plog

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The American Southwest is home to some of the most remarkable monuments of America's prehistoric past, such as Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde. Visitors marvel at the impressive ruined pueblos and spectacular cliff dwellings but often have little idea of the cultures that produced these prehistoric wonders. Stephen Plog, who has spent decades working in the region, provides the most readable and up-to-date account of the predecessors of the modern Hopi and Pueblo Indian cultures in this well-received account. Ten thousand years ago, humans first colonized this seemingly inhospitable landscape with its scorching hot deserts and freezing upland areas. The initial hunter-gatherer bands gradually adapted to become sedentary village groups, and the high point of Southwestern civilization was reached with the emergence of cultures known to archaeologists as Anasazi, Hohokam, and Mogollon in the first millennium A.D. Chaco Canyon became the center of a thriving Anasazi cultural tradition. It was the hub of a trading network extending over hundreds of miles, whose arteries were a series of extraordinary roads that are still being discovered and mapped. To the south lay the settlement of Snaketown, focus of the Hohokam, where the inhabitants built courts for a ritual ball game--intriguing echoes of ancient Mexican practices. The Mogollon people of the Mimbres Valley created some of the world's finest ceramics, decorated with human figures and mythical creatures.

Interweaving the latest archaeological evidence with early first-person accounts, Professor Plog explains the rise and mysterious fall of Southwestern cultures. As he concludes, despite the depredations and diseases introduced by the Europeans, the Southwest is still home to vibrant Native American communities that carry on many of the old traditions.

Ancient Peoples of the American Southwest Details

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Sue says

Very informative book but also written in the style of a textbook which can be difficult reading. If you're interested in the peoples of the southwest, I would recommend some historical novels by Kathleen O'Neal Gear and Michael Gear. "People of the Silence" and "People of the Moon" are two related but still stand alone books on the Anazasi, then there are a three book series also based on the southwestern peoples--"The Visitant", "The Summoning God", and the "Bone Walker". Enjoy.

And there's my commercial for my favorite authors!

Ann says

Excellent book by a careful scholar. Plog examines what little (in many cases) evidence remains from prehistorical societies and constructs possible events. He never tries to make the evidence fit a theory but lays out possible interpretations. Some of these interpretations challenge long held ideas. He finds no evidence that drought was a direct cause of the abandonment of the cliff dwellings and points to evidence of internecine conflict and overconsumption of scarce resources. He treats religious rituals with respect, writing for example, that the kachinas bring the rain, instead of the Hopi believed the kachinas brought rain. Contains many helpful illustrations and charts.

Brendan Steinhauser says

"Ancient Peoples of the American Southwest" is a good read about the Pueblo cultures of New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. If you are planning to visit some of the famous cliff dwellings in the American Southwest, this book provides a dose of history and anthropology to help you better understand who the Pueblo people were, and how they lived their daily lives. I highly recommend this book.

Michael Brady says

Extremely accessible and thorough summary of pre-history in the Southwest.

Socraticgadfly says

This is a very strong introductory-level book to the different American Indian cultures of the Southwest. It's not a Steve Lekson or something like that, but Plog is writing an overview, and shouldn't be compared to a Lekson or Stuart, among others. Books like that are recommended by me for those who may want more depth after reading a book like this, which is ideal for people with little familiarity with the Anasazi and even

less with the Mogollon or Hohokam.

A bonus point is carrying all three cultures from the prehistory of archaeology and anthropology into history with a brief final chapter.

Paul Kinzer says

An interesting review of Pueblo history, mostly through archaeology. Early parts of the book are very dry reading for a non-archaeologist, but it seemed to pick up halfway through. Lots of photos, drawings, and maps kept me interested. Having visited a few of the sites (Casa Grande, Homolovi, Montezuma Castle, Tuzigoot, Gila Cliff Dwellings) helped me visualize some of the descriptions, and certainly made it more engaging than it otherwise would have been, and piques my interest in visiting more of them. I'm giving it 3 stars not because of the content, but because of the textbook like experience.

Colin says

This book is straightforward in conception, and executed with clear writing and excellent images. It sets out to map the different archaeologically-defined cultures of the Southwest, tell you what kinds of things archaeologists find at Southwestern sites, and then give a sense of how major sites fit into the culture maps and chronologies that archaeologists have reconstructed. As a reader new to this material, and interested as a traveller more than a scholar, this seems to me just how such a book should be written. True, this is decidedly an outsider's perspective on the ancient cultures of the Southwest; now I will want to read books that speak about these places and their peoples with an indigenous voice. But I've read so many "introductions" to a cultural topic that actually fail to introduce it because they are so busy picking apart, or embroidering new patterns onto lore they assume you already know. This book never falls into that trap. For example, it will tell you what sites archaeologists classed as "Anasazi", and what features join these sites together, rather than spend all its time deconstructing the history of that term. I hope that there are books that do the picking apart. But I'm glad this one does what it does instead.

Cary Kostka says

A great way to dive deeper into the early peoples of the American southwest. The author did a great job of balancing his written descriptions and findings with photos of the archeological evidence he cites.

Hunter McCleary says

Excellent overview of the three primary cultures that made their pre-historic mark on the Southwest. Also has a good discussion of why these cultures sort of abandoned the communities they worked so hard to construct. Nice epilogue of his favorite places to visit. And yes, all you climate change denying morons, it is happening again. We are eating our own lunch.

22 Ancestral Puebloans diverged from Aztecs about 5000 years ago.

31 Ancients exploited a variety of micro climates with minimal migration.
30 Dendrochronology more precise than radiocarbon.
454 Natural progression from hunting to ag.
46 Rabbit a key diet component.
52 Corn and squash were originally tropical plants.
53 First steps toward village life.
56 By 200 AD people had become less mobile.
57 By 700 living in the same place throughout the year.
73 Hohokam culturally closer to mesoamerica.
75 Hohokam known for irrigation and ballcourts.
77 Mogollon lived in more temperate valleys and known for exquisite pottery.
79 Iconic Anasazi structures were the exception.
89 Mimbres a Mogollon subset known for their pottery.
90 Mimbres pottery an artistic explosion.
112 Rainfall spike coincided with population boom in 1050.
115 Mass exodus began before 1130 droughts.
115 Prehistoric people often failed to live in ecological harmony.
144 Did the more dense communities outgrown their resource base?
146 Defense the only logical explanation for some sites.
150 Cannibalism.
152 The Great Drought of 1276-1299.
157 Hopi saw population increase in 13th century while others declined suggesting a migratory influence.
160 Internecine strife not uncommon.

Andrea says

Great intro and overview.

Bill Dilworth says

Ancient Peoples of the American Southwest (Ancient Peoples and Places) by Stephen Plog (1997)

Libby says

Pretty boring textbook style book, but very informative.

Dejanira Dawn says

For my prehis arch class

Alan Kroeber says

Great book on the archaeological study of the Ancient Puebloan cultures.
