



The Town of Springerville presents

## Explore the Past at Casa Malpais

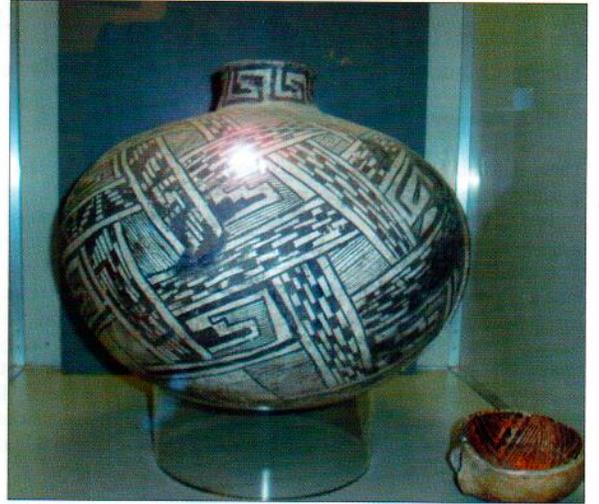
by Bill Farbstein

Picture in your mind an extended family or clan wandering through this area of Arizona well over a thousand years ago. This clan may consist of as few as eight or nine upward to twenty or more, all of them related to an elder or a common ancestor. These groups of Paleo-Indians are large game hunters, descendants of people that crossed the Bering Strait when it was a landmass. Now they wander throughout the continent looking for woolly mammoths and other large game. They take little from the land and leave just trails in their wake.

Many generations later Archaic Indians following in the old footsteps hunt and gather and plant small gardens in areas near reliable water sources like our Little Colorado River. They build pit houses, shallow dugout circular structures about 12-15 feet in diameter with roofs made of poles and matting and mud. When the area they are using runs low on game and usable vegetation they move on, sometimes to return and sometimes not.

In the late 1100's and early 1200's, a clan following the paths of those before them and with knowledge of planting and raising crops stop near what is now Springerville. Looking around, these Mogollon or Western Puebloans, can see that there is protection from the cold north winds alongside the south face of the basalt lava cliffs. There is a close source of water, a variety of game animals and a flood plain by the river that is just right for farming. Settling in and taking a closer look they realize they can take advantage of the terraces formed when the edge of the lava field sloughed off and left flat areas. These areas can be used for dry farming, trading or ceremonial plazas. The highest terrace can be used for their homes and for the great Kiva.

They wisely take advantage of the fissures in the lava, created during the cooling period after the eruptions 800,000 years before. Over these fissures they place large flat slabs of stone, wedged into place with openings left for access to passageways and chambers below. First, four walls are erected, using the abundant lava rock, then three more added for extended family and then more and more walls are put up as others wander in and decide to stay. For protection from predators and other uninvited visitors, they don't use doors, but access the rooms through the roofs using wooden ladders. Some families decide to build two and possibly three stories high. As this pueblo grows and prospers more people move into the area. Being a centrally located site is conducive to becoming a trade and ceremonial center for those that live in the surrounding area.



Four hundred years pass since the ancient people disappeared from Round Valley. The heavy mud roofs begin to cave in the timbers supporting them, walls collapse upon themselves and the winds slowly cover over the ruins with soil. Silent mounds of rocks and dirt remain along with the voices of the spirits in the breezes.

In the 1860s, Hispanic sheepherders settle in this area for the same reasons as their predecessors. Soon cattlemen arrive followed by pioneering Mormon families. Children play among the ruins finding pottery shards and arrowheads. In 1883, the Zuni people bring anthropologist Frank Cushing from their pueblo to show him an ancestral site. He was the first person to record his findings in letters and drawings to the Smithsonian Institution for whom he worked. He gave it the name, "fissure type pueblo."

Formal investigation of the site didn't occur until the late 1940s when archeologist Edward Danson and others connected to the Peabody Museum recorded and published data about the site. The potential significance and importance of this pueblo led to it being designated a National Historic Landmark site in 1964. Beginning in early 1991, limited excavations of only the rooms that had been previously disturbed began. The work stopped in late 1994 as the scope of work agreed upon by the Town of Springerville and Hope and Zuni consultants, was basically completed...

So if you've never been to Casa Malpais, or if you'd like to revisit, please come out and watch history unfold before your very eyes as guides take you on a journey back in time. The site and visitors center is located at 418 E. Main St. in Springerville. Museum hours are Monday-Saturday 8:00 to 4:00. Tour times are 9:00, 11:30 and 2:00 Tues.-Sat., March through November weather permitting. Special school and group tours are available, call for reservations. Call 928-333-5375 for further information.