



The Long Walk Home - *Hwéeldigo ‘inda’asdee’*



Barboncito

We are the children of the Holy Ones and now seven to eight generations since the Long Walk.

We are torn about sharing the experience of our grandmothers and grandfathers of that time. Today’s elderly have been told never to revisit in any form “the time of suffering.” They are the last to have seen the tears of their elders, who remember those who suffered and returned home and those who died never seeing their homeland again.

Today, our youth want to know the history of their families and communities and it is a source of pride in the strength of our people’s spirit and will. The Diné way of life continues through us today.

The Four Sacred Mountains

We believe that the land between Blanca Peak or Sisnaajiní in Colorado; Mount Taylor or Tsoodzil in New Mexico; the San Francisco Peaks or Dook’o’ooskíid in Arizona; and Hesperus Peak or Dibé Nitsaa in Colorado is an area prepared for the Diné, the Navajo people.

The land gives all of us, the Diné, who live here a sense of belonging and a sense of identity. It is said that the Holy Ones placed us here between the Four Sacred Mountains to be protected,

blessed and heard. We are known by name because we are the beloved children of the Holy Ones.

The survival of our people and our ancestors who made their lives here depended greatly on their skill, talent, resourcefulness, endurance, and even cooperation with the environment. The land provided everything needed: clothing, medicine, shelter, water and food.

Neighbors and Enemies

Several neighboring tribes lived in territories that overlapped and they began to compete for the available resources. As neighbors they would trade valuable items and as enemies they would rob each other. When communities were prosperous everybody traded and shared generously.

Lean times brought out the hunger in everyone. In desperation, people robbed their neighbors, invaded other communities for what they needed and took what they did not have. These desperate measures left the victims angry with a desire for vengeance. Challenges to peace and trust grew.

The 1700s was a time for groups to create alliances against a common enemy, which frequently

changed, that is both the alliances and the enemy. Raiding and fortification became part of daily life. Raids occurred for livestock, food, supplies and even Diné slaves. Alliances were created for the same reason, but especially for protection.

The Diné became tenacious about defending their homeland, their birthright. As the conflicts and foreigners trespassed into Diné bikéyah, the Diné gained momentum in the fight. They became fierce in protecting their homes and families and determined to bring back those taken into slavery. The Diné were feared and even hated for the continued invasions of the surrounding communities.

Canyon de Chelly

Canyon de Chelly or Tséyi’, was a focal point for enemies to scout Diné. It was considered the refuge and fortress of the area. Spanish and later American armies kept watch on the activities of the Diné at Canyon de Chelly.

In the 1840’s, the coming of American, Bilagáana, settlers added to the ongoing conflict. Military posts were established within Diné territory, but the Dine’ fiercely resisted.

During this time, Americans felt it was their right to seize land or anything else owned by Indians. For a while the Americans tolerated the constant battles with Diné and other Native tribes, but eventually they could no longer endure the fear and insecurity. By 1849, the New Mexico territorial government found it necessary to call upon the U.S. Army to help with the “Indian Problem” and subdue the Diné.





Removal



Fort Sumner, Bosque Redondo, New Mexico

Colonel James Carleton was ordered to lead the campaign against the Diné. He firmly believed that by removing the people far from their familiar homeland to an isolated and confined area, the Diné would forget their heritage and become acculturated to being American. Once the Diné were assimilated they would be moved on to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. This “experiment reservation” was forty miles square and located on the Pecos River in eastern New Mexico, named by Carlton as Fort Sumner. This was far beyond the protection of the four Sacred Mountains.

Carlton was able to convince the now-infamous Colonel Christopher “Kit” Carson, (Bi’ee’hichxíí’) to join him in the subjugation of the Diné people. In the fall of 1863, Carson led what he called the “Scorched Earth Campaign” against the Diné on their homeland, including Canyon de Chelly.

It was the time of great fear. Everything considered Diné property was burned; livestock, hogans, corrals, and fields were all destroyed. In Canyon de Chelly, the precious peach orchards originally planted by the Hopi people and cherished by the Diné were also destroyed by fire.

Beginning in the winter of 1863-64, faced with starvation and loss, thousands of Diné surrendered to the U.S. Army and held at Fort Defiance. The Diné walked the entire distance of nearly four hundred miles to Fort Sumner or Bosque Redondo. The available horses and wagons were used only by the army and not used to transport people.

At this time, the nation’s efforts were focused on the Civil War. This would eventually cause the failure for the “experiment reservation” at Fort Sumner.

Fort Sumner

The Diné were imprisoned for four years at Fort Sumner or Hwéeldi, as the Diné know it. During those years, the Diné longed to go home and return to their traditional way of life. They endured the sufferings of starvation, loneliness, dysentery, death, severe weather conditions, homelessness, and diseases.

Even the soldiers began to recognize that the Diné were suffering greatly and believed it was wrong. The military personnel began to report to their superiors on the conditions not fit even for the enemy. A federal peace commission

headed by General William T. Sherman arrived at Fort Sumner to investigate claims of deplorable conditions for the Diné that were held in captivity.

Negotiations began in order to end the suffering and the incarceration of the Diné people. During this time, the Diné appointed one leader to represent them to the United States. The leader was Barboncito from Canyon de Chelly, who pleaded for his people to return to their homeland. By May 1868, final negotiations were made at Fort Sumner.

Returning Home

On the morning of June 1, 1868, the Navajo Treaty of 1868 (Naahtsoos Sani) was signed between the United States and 29 Diné leaders. The Diné were allowed to return to the defined Navajo Reservation, land held in trust by the United States for the Diné people under the condition that the Diné must never commence raiding again.

Not all Diné people made the trek to Fort Sumner. Those who hid or left, wandered for the next several years without a permanent home from fear of being caught and taken away.

Some of the Diné families moved to the areas of Grand Canyon, Navajo Mountain, Monument Valley, and the San Juan River.



We as the Diné are here today because our ancestors endured and came home for us. We have our homes, we have our language, we have our land, and we have our songs because they came home. Look at our faces and into our eyes and see the children of those who returned home. We are the beloved people of Changing Woman who live within the Four Sacred Mountains.