

Fred Bitsillie is seventy-six years old and lives in the Gíníbit'oh Community, a small area known as Néedziiní (Game Corral). He belongs to the Hooghan Iani (Many Hogans People) clan and the Ma'iideeshgiizhnii (Jemez People) clan. He told the story of the Long Walk, the parts he still remembers from his grandfather's story. His grandfather was known as Hastiin Bisii Ligai'i (Man With White Hair). He also had a Mexican name, Monterio Lopez.

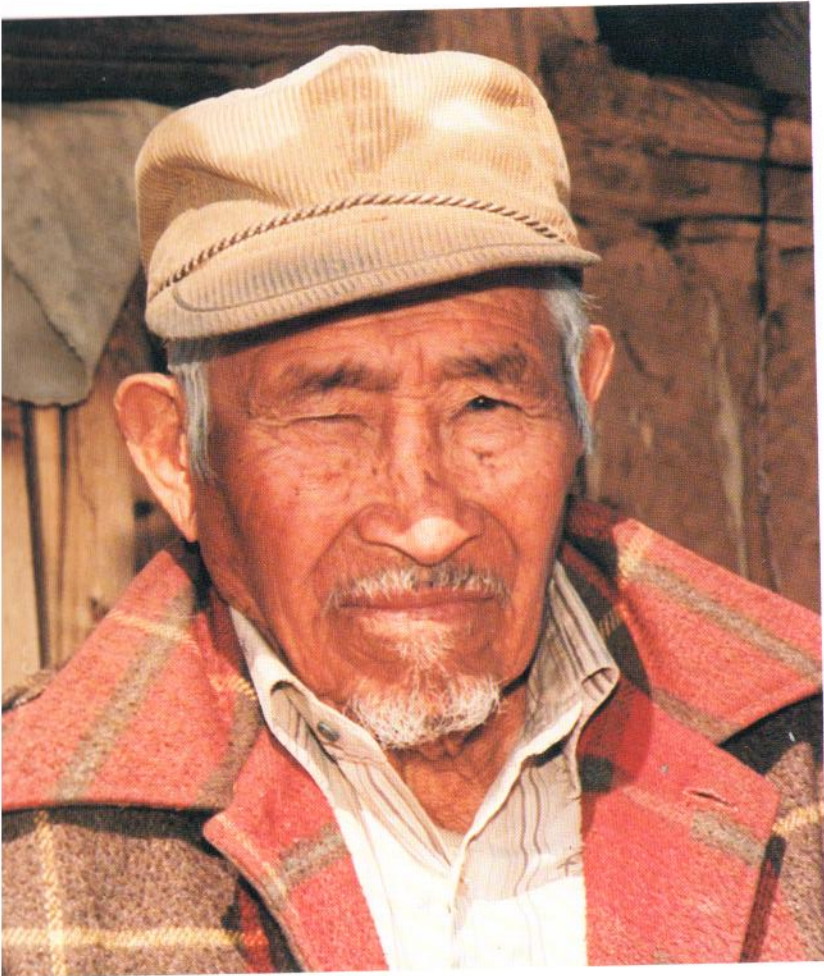
A long time ago people trapped animals near Néedziiní with a special type of corral. Once animals got into it, they were unable to escape. This type of hunting was connected with rituals.

The Nódá'í (Utes), he said, used to travel through this village. Their trails still exist among these hills. At that time the Navajos fought with many tribes. On the western side of the Navajo reservation, they fought with the Dziłghá'í (Apaches), the Kíis'áanii (Hopis), the Chishí (Chiricahua Apaches) in Arizona, and the Nódá'í (Utes) in New Mexico.

When the Navajos were rounded up from their hideout by the United States Cavalry, they were driven on foot to Hwéeldi (Fort Sumner). Many days were spent journeying on foot. They stopped for a rest whenever it got dark, but they were usually closely guarded by the soldiers. The Navajos traveled through Grants and Séí bidaagai (Los Lunas). When they reached Séí bidaagai during the evening, they stopped for the night on the west side of the Rio Grande River. The soldiers kept close guard. A huge bonfire was built to keep them warm for the night.

Later that night, they heard someone scream very loud from another group of Navajos. They saw a young Navajo man yelling and running toward the bonfire. He jumped into the bonfire, and everyone just watched him burn up. Nothing was done to stop him. This incident was called ajíz'chę' (convulsions).

The next day they continued on their journey. They traveled for many more hard days before they finally reached a place called Hwéeldi. Many Navajos did not stay long; they escaped. Though they were probably missed, there was little that could be done about them because there were so many Navajos in captivity to guard.



My paternal grandmother used to tell me these stories about the journey to Hwéeldi (Fort Sumner). She did not go to Hwéeldi, but her maternal grandmother made the journey. This is the way she told her story.

We started off from Tsé biyah anii'áhi (Chaco Canyon) herding our sheep. We were told that there were many enemy troops on the move. There were riders on horseback telling everybody to evacuate the place and to move to Tséhootsooi (Fort Defiance). "If you are still here we will make sure that none of you will be alive," they said. It was scary news to hear.

There were four or six of us, including a small baby in a cradleboard, when we started on our journey to Tséhootsooi. I do not remember how many nights we camped between Tsé biyah anii'áhi and Tséhootsooi. We went through To haach'i' (Tohatchi) and camped there.

There was one man, whose name I do not remember, who went on ahead to Fort Defiance to find out some information on what area we would be settling in or when we would get to Hwéeldi. The next day he came back to our camp. Then we started off again, traveling through mountains, trees, and evergreens. It was like a jungle, but we kept moving. We put all our belongings on horseback and herded our sheep along the way.

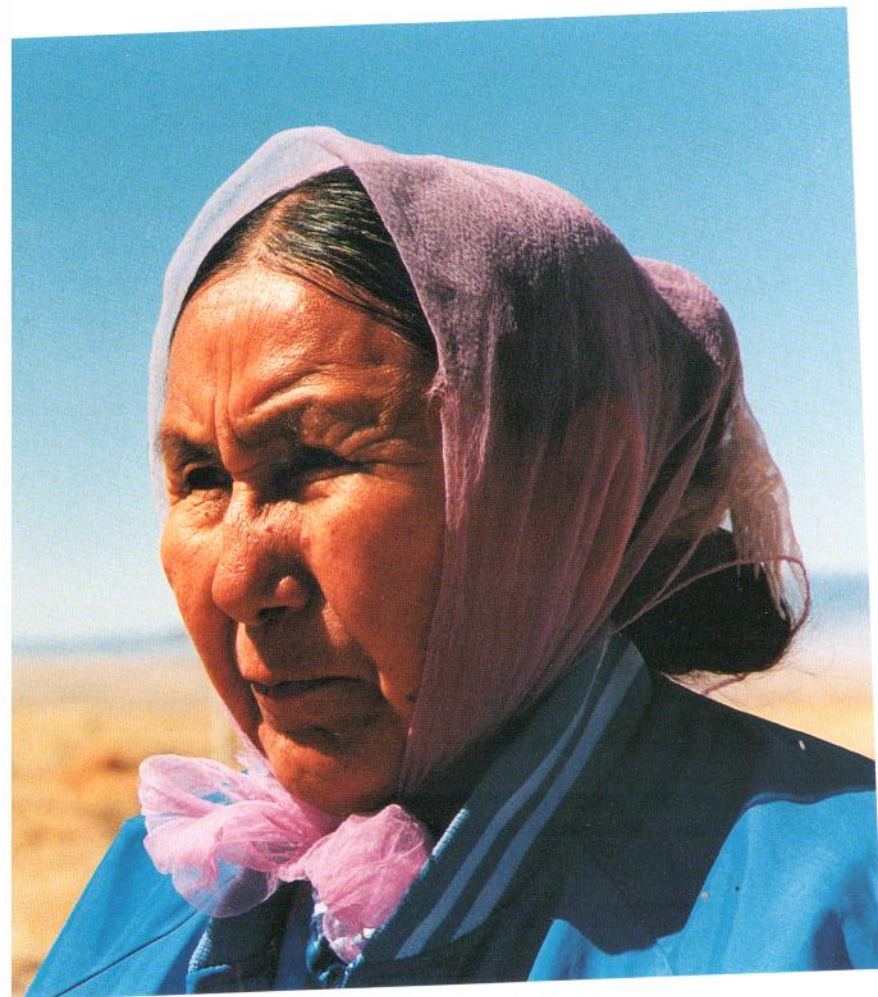
There were two women, three men and a baby. It was not far from Tséhootsooi that we camped again. The next morning we were taking out our corn and coffee to cook when suddenly enemy troops attacked us. We quickly got on our horses and hid. We forgot about the baby and left it leaning in the cradleboard. We forgot about our sheep and our belongings. We left them all behind. Later, when we got back to our camp, the baby was still leaning in its cradleboard, and our belongings were still there. The enemy killed most of our sheep.

We started off again heading for Tséhootsooi. Many people were moving in from different areas. The place was fenced all around. We moved inside to an area along the fence and camped there for some time. Soldiers watched us all the time. Navajo men asked permission to hunt rabbits and other small game for our everyday meals.

When it was time to depart from Fort Defiance to make our journey to Hwéeldi, there were many big wagons with four horses in front of each one. Two women were put in our wagon, and two men were riding horses behind it. Others traveled on foot.

I do not remember our first night camp, but our second was at Tsé yaaniichii' (Rehoboth). The wagon train was long, with some people traveling on foot. Goats and sheep were put in wagons with small children and elderly people.

When we left Tsé yaaniichii', a white man took over the driving. Somewhere in that area one of our horses became tired. We thought that the horse was healthy, so two of us butchered it while two soldiers watched. When we were finished, we took a little bit of the horse meat with us on our journey. Two women came over and wanted some horse meat, too, so we gave them some.



The wagon train did not wait for us. They were far ahead. When we were finished, we started off again following the ruts made by the wagon train. We caught up with the rest of the wagons at Tsoodzil (Mount Taylor) near Grants. The soldiers who were killers passed, but they did not bother us. I do not remember how many nights we camped on our way to Hwéeldi. The route we took was a little south of Albuquerque, but we did not know where we were or what that area was called.

It must have taken a month or so to get to Hwéeldi. It was not an exciting place for us Diné. We had to choose the area where we would live for several years. We had started out with three horses, but one got tired and we killed it. The soldiers gave out food such as, beans, corn, cornmeal, bacon, but we did not know how to cook it.

Then one day a Mexican lady came around to the camp telling us to make blankets for ourselves. "They do not have enough blankets, and it gets really cold at night," she said. So she taught me and many other women how to weave blankets. The Naat'anii' siláo (majors) disapproved. They said, "Do not teach them anything." The Naat'anii' siláo walked around the camp watching us, but the Mexican lady taught us how to weave blankets anyway. To this day we still weave blankets, but we call them Navajo rugs. It was good that we learned because some of us elderly women traded the rugs with the traders.

About a year or two later, I do not remember exactly how many years it was, many of us women began meeting together to pray and sing chants every night with a man named Hastiin Ch'il Haajiní (Manuelito or Man With Slant Streak) who was a medicine man then. His statue now stands in the window of a building in Na' nízhoozhí (Gallup). He was one of the important chiefs of the Diné. Many of us were lonely for our homeland and our sheep, so we kept praying and singing chants.

The baby who went to Hwéeldi in her cradleboard grew up to be a teenage girl while we were there. I do not remember how old she was then.

About a year later, our Chief began meeting with the main officer of Hwéeldi Wááshindoon (Fort Sumner government), and we started hearing words that we might have a chance to go back to our homeland. Our leaders made us promise that we Navajos would give up our bad habits. Our leaders put their thumbs on a treaty. Many other Diné witnessed the treaty being signed. In return, the soldiers would educate our children and give us sheep and some wagons for transportation. To this day the Diné have not broken the promise they made then.

This is the story told by my paternal grandmother.



Anna Haney is from White Rock, New Mexico. She is seventy-two years old and is of the Bit'ahnii clan (Under His Cover People). This story was told by her grandmother.

I really do not know how it all started, but it was hunger that caused the conflict between the Navajos and other tribes, such as the Utes, Hopis, and Chiricahua Apaches. They were all stealing livestock from each other.

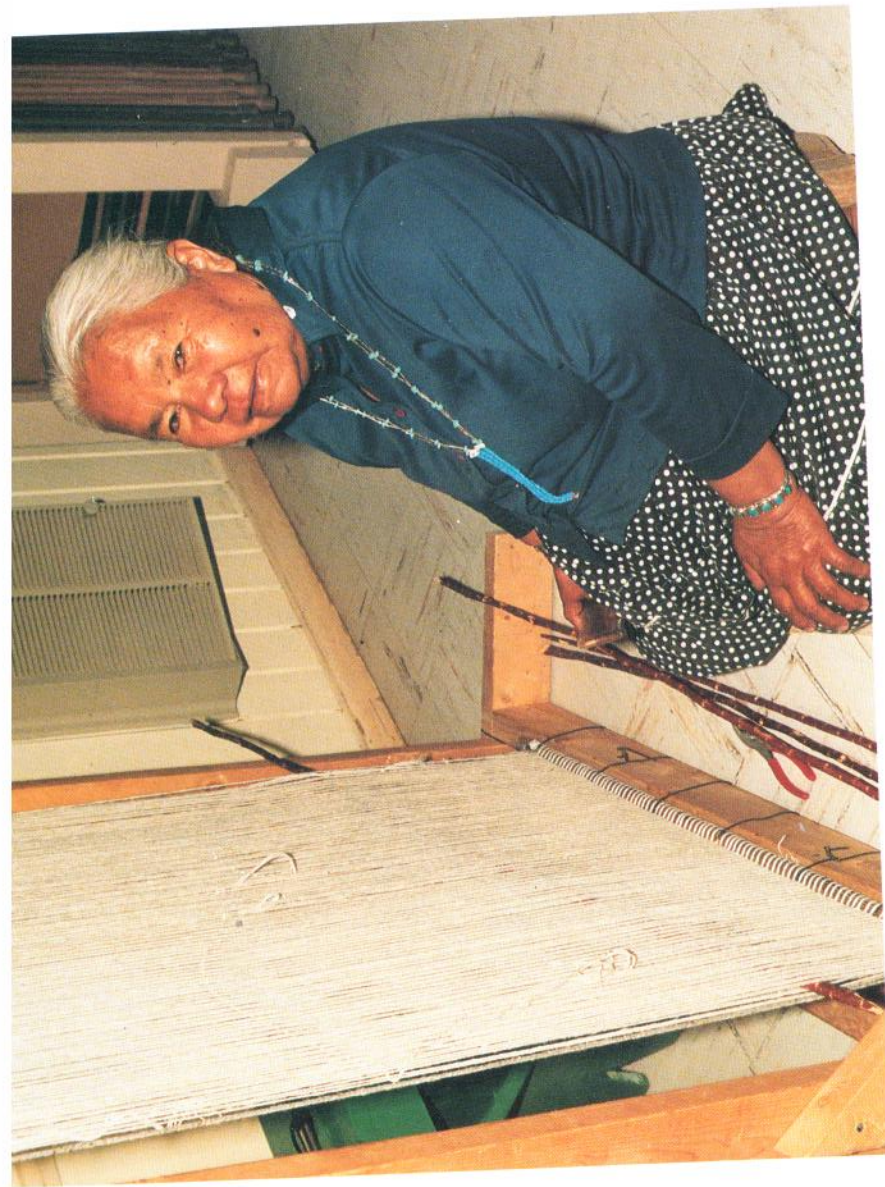
The Navajos did not stay in one place because they were fleeing from enemies all the time. In fact, the Diné (the People) used to sleep under rocks or in small caves. They did not have many sheep, just enough to provide milk and mutton for food. The Diné stayed away from their homes and small corn fields during the day. It was safer at night, so they would sneak into their fields and get corn to take back to their hiding places.

The stealing went on at night. All of a sudden the enemies would raid the Navajos. From any direction, the enemies would attack, so the Diné were scared and alert all the time. There was a tool called "tsindildoo'hi" (owl whistle) which was used to send warning signals to others when there were enemies close by who were going to attack the Navajos. A lot of the Diné ran away into the mountains where they couldn't be found by the Mexican soldiers. Some resisted being taken from their homes and were killed. Others were captured or turned themselves in to the Mexican soldiers. They were taken to Hwéeldi (Fort Sumner) as slaves.

My great-grandmother was captured by the Mexican soldiers and taken to Hwéeldi as a slave. She was barefooted all the time. There she cooked for the soldiers every day until she got tired of cooking, and decided to run away. She said, "Many of the Diné had run away from Hwéeldi, back to their homeland, saying 'Ch'óoshgai (Chuska Mountain), my home.' " Some Diné made homes, but others did not. My great-grandmother decided to take a chance at getting home, so she took off in her bare feet, running for days. She did not want the enemies to catch up with her and take her back to Hwéeldi. Her feet became blistered from running, so she stopped and put some tsin bi jeeh (spruce pitch) on both feet to keep them from getting sore.

In those days, the Navajo religion must have been powerful for the Navajos because bears, coyotes, and owls were present when the Navajo people needed guidance.

When my great-grandmother was at the Jemez Mountains, she looked around and saw a wide canyon in front of her. There was no way up the mountain. She started to climb the tallest ch'ó (Douglas fir tree) to get to the top of the canyon. As she was climbing the tree, one of the branches broke off, and she fell back to the ground and hurt herself. Then she saw a bear sitting on the rock. She was sitting under the tree watching the bear for a very long time because her whole body was hurting, and she could not move. She started crawling toward the bear



Jane Hasteen is in her late seventies. She lives in the Ginibit'oh Community, a small area known as Tle'Lijlchi (the Hidden Matches). Her clans are the Hooghan Laní (Many Hogans People) and the Tódich'ii'nii (Bitter Water People).

She told the story of the Navajos and the Naałání (Comanches) when they were in conflict. The story was passed on to her from her grandmother. She was known as Asdzag'Libahí (The Graylady). She died of old age, but she was a young girl when the conflict started between the Navajos and the Naałání. She said the Naałání hunted them day and night. The Navajos either survived or were killed before they reached a safe place. Some of them died of starvation, others from wounds from the Naałání's arrows and spears.

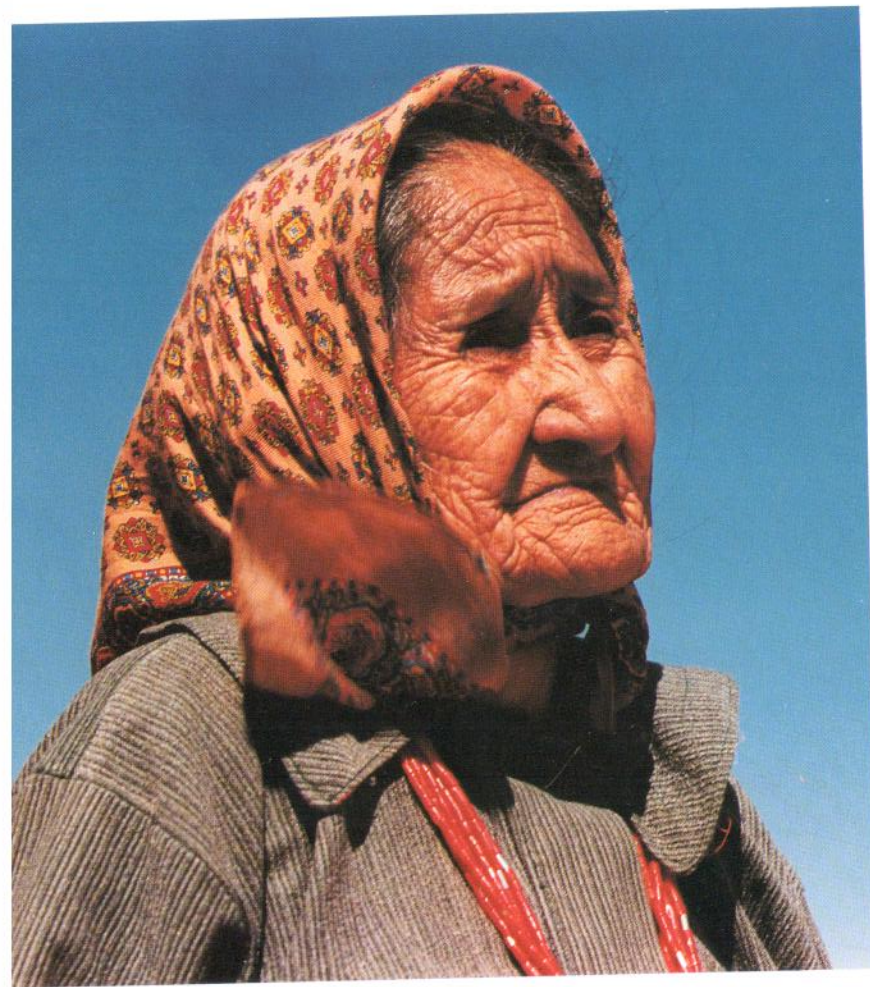
Days and nights were spent in hiding, searching for food and fleeing for safety. Times were hard when food became scarce so they survived on native food such as, t'oh chin (wild onions), hasza'aleeh (wild parsley), chaasht'ezhii (wild carrots), nahóoyai' (wild potatoes), and kílsíniih (yellow mariposa tulip). I do not know how they managed to get by in the winter time when the water sources were frozen. There were native foods they had to dig, similar to today's store flour. When they had to stay hidden for three or four days at a time, they had to ration this flour, about a handful to each person.

Some of the Navajos found shelter and safety in sweathouses. Some died before they found safety. The cold weather and snow made it much harder for the children, the elders, and the pregnant women. Some of the elders and children died of starvation or exposure. The pregnant women would deliver their babies in the sweathouses, but the newborns usually froze to death. There was blood spilled on the snow which was horrifying to see. My grandmother said she witnessed a young lady delivering her baby in the sweathouse that they happened to have spent the night in, but the baby froze. The mother left the baby in the sweathouse the next day and fled to another place to hide.

I think my grandmother and the people she was with had a horse to get away on, because she used to say that their seats were sore from riding double on horseback.

There was a time that the United States Army rounded up Navajos and marched them to Hwéeldi (Fort Sumner). Many Navajos died on the way. My grandmother did not mention how many years they spent there. Many of the Navajos did not return to their homeland. They probably died of starvation and illness. At Hwéeldi, the Navajos suffered from many hardships. Some of them escaped and made it back to their homeland by hiding in the canyons and caves.

During that time there was no written history as there is today. The stories were told orally. It is hard to remember everything that happened and was told to us about the time that the Navajos were rounded up and marched to Hwéeldi so many years ago, maybe over one hundred years ago now. My grandmother said that when the Navajos were released, they were very few in number. From the few Navajos who survived, today's population has grown.



What my grandmother told us about her experience was terrible and horrifying. She did not want to talk about it. She used to say it was not worth telling others because they suffered from everything. She told us that if she had been killed during the conflict, the young girls would not be here today. If the Navajo women had all been killed during the conflict, there would not be any Navajo people today.

My grandfather did not make the journey to Hwéeldi. He gathered his story of the long walk from the people who had gone and come back. These stories he told to us, but we were too young to remember. I do not remember any of his stories today. My grandfather was known as Hastiin Tłééjį Hataali (The Night Chanter).



Ruth Pablo lives at Lake Valley, New Mexico. She is of the Tsenahabíłnii (Sleepy Rock People) clan. She remembers what was told to her by her paternal grandfather.

As children, we used to ask him to tell us the story about the Navajos. His version of the story began with saying that there were enemies all around of all different tribes, the Pueblos, Utes, Apaches, and even the Spanish people.

The story began in the area around Cuba, New Mexico, or somewhere in the Jemez Mountains. There were two Pueblo boys who were sheep herders. These two boys moved around with the herd, setting up temporary sheep camps while the herd grazed. One day a certain band of Navajos decided to stage a raid with the intention of getting back at the harassment they were getting from the Pueblo Indians. The two boys were killed, and their herd of sheep was taken from the area.

The Navajos had created the conflict between the two tribes by killing the boys and taking their sheep, and due to the conflict the Navajos became the hunted. Because they were hunted, they raided for food to keep from starving and to keep warm. For the Navajos to survive, they continued to raid in a wider area, and that is how the Utes, Apaches, and the Spanish people got involved as enemies of the Navajos. All the mountains in the area, and even those of Arizona, Colorado, and Utah were places that the Navajos roamed to find refuge. They went from mountain to mountain to evade the enemies.

The other tribes and the Spanish had guns to fight with, while the Navajos only had bows and arrows and knives which were usually handmade.

My grandfather must have been a very young boy, because he says so in his stories. He said that he really does not remember much. What stands out in his story is the hunger and cold that they encountered. He said that they would spend nights any place they thought would be warm and comfortable. The places he mentioned are caves, under rocks, in washes and even in the brushes. Sometimes the weather would be severely cold or wet, but they made the best of the situation. He said that they hid the little children, even babies, in the washes and placed shrubs over them and continued to run for their lives from the enemies. Sometimes it took days before someone was sent back to pick up the children.

Because of the raids and being the hunted, and because of the suffering the Navajos were going through, the U.S. Army gathered the people and transported most of them to Fort Sumner, New Mexico. Some of the Navajos who were sent to Fort Sumner spent four years there. Not all stayed there for that long, though some were there even longer.

As the years passed, there were delegates or people of higher status who met continuously to try to determine what could be done about the Navajos. One day one of the delegates made a suggestion. He said that they should send them back to their lands, with the agreement that they would live in peace and send all their children to school to be educated and to disarm them forever. A treaty was signed to honor the agreement. Another reason the Navajos were sent home was the drought on the Navajo land. They needed to work their land to revegetate it.



Norma Keesonnie lives at White Rock, New Mexico. She is of the Kinyaa'aanii (The Towering House) clan. She is sixty-one years old. This story was told to her by her grandmother.

My grandmother, whose name was Naazbaa', journeyed down to Hwéeldi when she was just a baby. Her mother was killed along the way by the enemies. My grandmother was an orphan, so the relatives had to feed her milk by using sheep or goat intestines as a container until she was able to eat.

While the Diné were running from the enemies, they endured many hardships. There was no food, so people had to do anything to stay alive. For instance, some people boiled dead animal bones and skins to eat. Sometimes a covered wagon went through hauling corn, and some of the corn would spill. When the Diné saw a wagon, they followed it to pick up kernels that had spilled out.

The enemies killed pregnant women. The women were cut open. The fetus was taken out and put by the mother's body and left behind.

When the Diné were gathered at Fort Sumner, they were placed in a circle that was fenced in. The people thought they were all going to be killed in the circle, but they were spared. Instead, many pretty girls were selected to live with army officials. Maybe that was the reason the Diné were not killed.

The Navajos suffered and died from starvation and sickness. While the people were in camp, an epidemic spread through the camp which killed many more people. There was no medicine for the disease. The people boiled coyote manure to cure chicken pox, and it helped. Skin sores were another problem among the people. The Navajos used skunk musk to cure the sores. Musk is from the gland of the skunk and is used as a protection against the enemy.

After so many years in the camp, the people were finally released from Fort Sumner. They were extremely thin and weary when they returned to Fort Defiance. Upon their arrival, flour, bacon, and coffee were distributed. The people were so hungry that they ate the flour and bacon without cooking them. This caused many more people to die. Soon after that the people were taught how to make flour into dough and how to cook bacon.

At that time, the women did not wear skirts and blouses. They wore a woven dress called "biil."



The story goes on to say that the Navajos were finally set free to return to Navajo land. The number of days it took them to return, my grandfather did not remember. When they returned some Navajos were brought to Fort Wingate, and others to Fort Defiance, Arizona. Rations were distributed to them at these two forts.

As the years passed, life became easier and more pleasant, as it is today. He said there were conflicts that arose, but the People learned to cope with the problems and to solve them.



Mary Pioche is from Lake Valley, New Mexico. She is of the Nóóda'í (Ute) clan. She is sixty-two years old. This is the way her grandmother told her the stories of the Long Walk, Hwéeldi Baa Hané.

When men and women talk about Hwéeldi, they say it is something you cannot really talk about, or they say they would rather not talk about it. Every time their thoughts go back to Hwéeldi, they remember their relatives, families, and friends who were killed by the enemies. They watched them die, and they suffered with them, so they break into tears and start crying. That is why we only know segments of stories, pieces here and there. Nobody really knows the whole story about Hwéeldi.

My paternal grandmother lived with a man named Béégashii Ligai Bi'da'í (White Cow's Uncle). He got his name because he journeyed back from Hwéeldi (Fort Sumner) on a white cow. He and his family moved to Hanáádlí (Carson, New Mexico) and lived there when they first came back from Hwéeldi.

Nobody ever thought that the people who lived around the plateau would be gathered, but they were herded out of the plateau area by the enemies. They even used horses to chase the Navajos out. They killed men, but not the women and children. The Navajos were gathered there and taken to Hwéeldi. The Mexicans and white men must have had lots of livestock, because the Navajos stole sheep and other animals from them. Maybe that is why they were gathered. Nobody mentioned this to me, that this was the reason for Navajos to be gathered.

The place where the Navajos lived was hilly, and they were told not to run away. People made their homes on the sides of the sloped hills, but I do not know what materials they used. Cowhides were used for doors. They suffered from many needs and from lack of food. Wolves also lived in the area.

At Hwéeldi the Diné still had squaw dances. They used a ndiyíli bitsiin (sunflower stalk) as their horse and rode it to the squaw dance.

There was a man named Naabeeho' Tom (Navajo Tom). I am not sure if he was the brother to Béégashii Ligai Bi'da'í (White Cow's Uncle), but he was a brother to somebody. He ran away from the enemies to Dziłná'oodilíi (Huerfano) and then on to Dibé nitsaa (La Plata Mountain). He lived there for years. When the Navajos came back from Hwéeldi, they started looking for the man named Naabeeho' Tom. One person knew where he was, so he went up to Dibé nitsaa, and he was still there hiding from the enemies. He had lived on deer meat and rabbits. He was alert to any enemies when he went hunting.



My grandmother used to tell the story of the Long Walk. She said her maternal uncle and aunts lived together with her mother. The uncle, who had a wife, was the head of the family. One of the aunts was the mother of Ruth Beyale Pablo's grandmother. The family had sheep and horses.

The family understood the conflict between the Navajos, Mexicans, Utes, and different Indian tribes. These enemies often organized a group to search for Navajos and would herd away the Navajos' livestock.

As a child, I did not understand why the livestock were taken away by the enemies. When I asked my grandmother, she said, "The Diné brought this upon themselves."

Only women and girls were taken by the enemies. Women sat on the horses, but girls were tied down. Boys had their throats cut, and men were shot. After the men and boys were killed, the enemies gathered the sheep to be herded to the enemies' homeland. Horses were set free among the herd with women and girls on them.

My grandmother's uncle owned a smart horse named Mule's Mother. The horse could hear the enemies approaching from far away. When the horse heard the sound of hooves, it ran into the campsite to warn the family that danger was coming. Other horses followed him to the campsite. The family immediately packed their belongings and traveled day and night until they reached a safe place to camp.

The uncle traveled ahead on horseback to meet with elderly men to find out what was happening. One day he returned to camp with a story that people were being gathered at Fort Defiance. For safety the family decided to move there. They settled in for the night and prepared for the long journey ahead.

The flock of sheep were rounded up, and the horses were packed with their belongings. That evening my grandmother's mother, who was a young lady then, was holding a sheep saying, "Please, let us eat this sheep." The family butchered the sheep, and the mutton was cooked and eaten.

Before daybreak, Mule's Mother came running. The enemies were right behind the horses, so the people fled on horseback leaving everything behind.

My grandmother's mother forgot her coral beads, so she rode back to the campsite. It was mid-morning when she came upon a hill from where she could see the campsite. No one was around and the coral beads were still hanging on the tree. She placed the beads around her neck. Before leaving the campsite, she glanced around and noticed that the family's belongings were in one pile, burning. The flour was scattered, and millstones and battens were broken. The flock of sheep was gone.

She hurriedly rode away from the campsite to be reunited with her family. On the way back, she met her worried uncle, and they embraced each other with happiness because she was safe. A few other family members returned, too.

About a month after the family had fled from the burning camp, my grandmother's son, who was a child, craved mutton. Horses were butchered to cure the craving, but it did not help. The child soon died from lack of mutton.



ANNIE SUCCO'S STORY

Annie Succo is fifty-two years old and lives at White Rock, New Mexico. She is of the Tó'aheedlínii (The Water Flows Together) clan. This is the way her maternal great-grandmother told her the Long Walk stories.

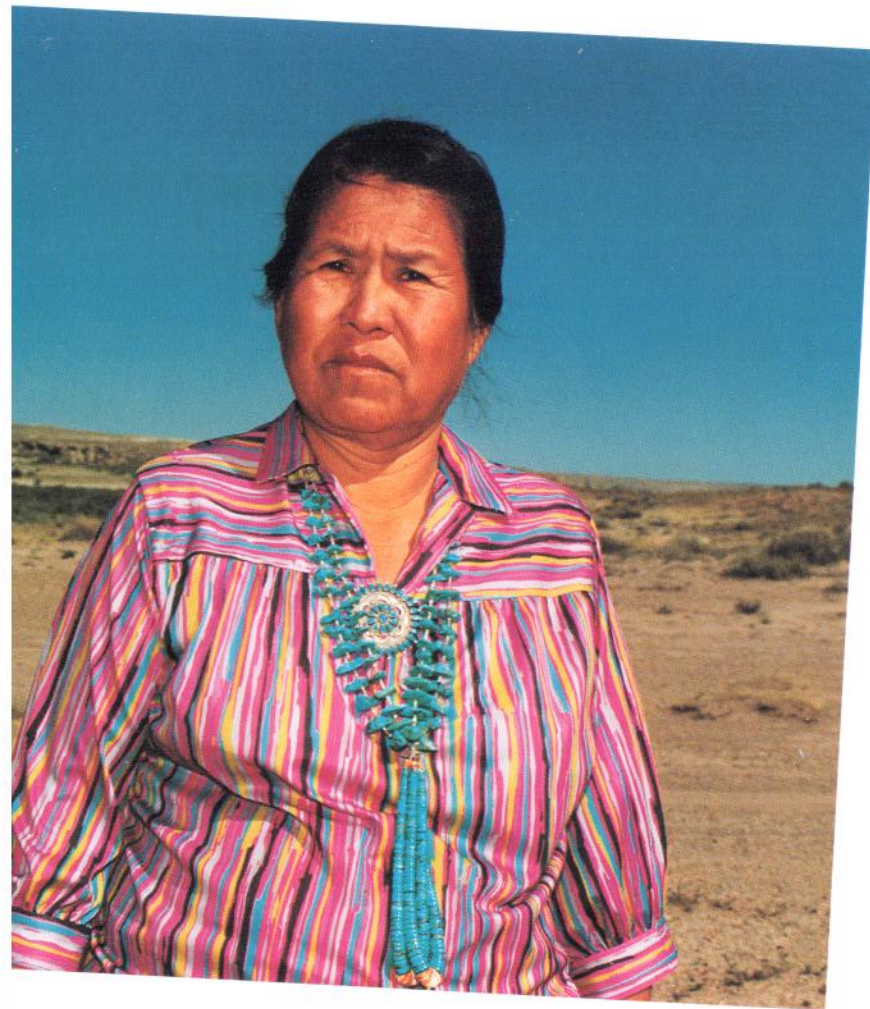
My grandmother's mother went to Hwéeldi. They called her Asdzaaítsoi (Yellow Woman) when she was a little girl. I do not know how many years they lived at Hwéeldi.

White men's and Mexicans' livestock were taken by the Navajos because they camped with their sheep and goats on the Navajo land. There was thievery going on. The Navajos, Comanches, and Utes were involved with stealing little things from each other. We Navajos did steal animals, but mostly from the Mexicans. That is how it all started. That is why all the Navajos were gathered together, so something could be done with them. The Navajos that were really bad, the worst thieves and worst killers, would be shot. For this reason, the enemies started hunting for Navajos all over Navajo land, to be gathered and taken to a place east of Albuquerque. I do not remember the name of the place. They were gathered there for some years, until something could be done with them.

The Diné (People) say it is a very sad story. When you think about it now, it feels that in some way we, the Navajos, were to be extinguished. Maybe some of the stories were true, and the experiences we had at Hwéeldi were a lesson because of all the things we did to Mexicans and other tribes.

When the Navajos were hunted down by the enemies, many Navajos ran away with their families to hide in the mountains. Some lived on the highest hills or rocks of the mountains, suffering from lack of food. Those who were strong continued to live through the cold weather and lack of food. They had small Hozhóójí (Blessing Way) ceremonies for themselves to help them continue to live. They tried to keep it a secret and not have too many ceremonies at their hidden place. Those who were weak died from hunger or cold weather.

The Diné who went to Hwéeldi suffered from lack of food and many other hardships. Some were put on unsaddled horses with their hands tied in the back and a blindfold around their eyes. That is how they made their journey to Hwéeldi. Along the way many Navajos lost their lives because of hunger; some were shot by the enemies when they got weak from walking or tried to run away. Navajos who lived through the worst made it through life and lived again. Those who ran away from Hwéeldi back to their homeland suffered from lack of food. Some Navajos lived at Hwéeldi for years, suffering from lack of food and cold weather. They did not have a home to live in at Hwéeldi, just a small hut in the ground like a prairie dog or rabbit home. The Diné used a medicine man to help them pray for serious matters of their lives, but they kept their ceremonies short.



On the way to Hwéeldi, the Diné had little food. They took mostly blue corn for bread that was baked in fire-ash ground and deer meat; they had no sheep or goats as mutton. The only time they had mutton was when they stole sheep or goats from the Mexicans. They knew how to prepare blue corn bread and bake it in the fire-ash ground.

When they were leaving Hwéeldi, they were shown how to prepare American food, such as meat and flour. The flour was mixed with water and made into tortillas. Before, they had eaten it raw. They were sent home by different directions to the mountains. Families were told which way to go and to live there, in places such as Tuba City.