

Brief History

The Navajo and Mescalero Apache had seen their homelands occupied, first by Spaniards and Mexicans, and later by Anglos when American forces invaded New Mexico in 1846. The new American government saw only the raids by the Navajo and Mescalero Apache on the settlements of New Mexico. But there were also raids on the Navajo for slaves and on the Mescalero Apache for their territory. With the American invasion and occupation of the Southwest, raids against and fighting with the tribes increased. Expansion into Mescalero Apache territory in South-Central New Mexico accelerated after the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ceded the Southwest to the United States. Fort Stanton was established in the heart of the Mescalero territory in 1855 to protect settlers in the area. Pressured into a smaller land base and hunting area, the Mescalero either had to raid the surrounding ranches and settlements or face starvation. In the late 1850s and just before the Civil War, tribal leaders such as Navajo Zarcillos Largos and Mescalero Apache Cadete tried to work with the U.S. Army to reduce tensions with little success. The Civil War brought a Confederate invasion of New Mexico in 1862, followed by Brigadier General James H. Carleton's arrival as military commander in New Mexico and Arizona. The unsettled state of affairs brought increased raiding by and against the tribes. Carleton, who had served in New Mexico in the 1850s, sought to put the Navajo and Mescalero Apache lands to more productive use through mining, agriculture, and raising stock. He determined to end the "Indian problem." Carleton believed that basic changes in Indian culture were needed to stop the raiding. If tribal members were moved onto a reservation, they could be transformed into self-sufficient farmers. The education of Navajos and Mescaleros in agricultural pursuits would be an experiment. (Thompson 1972, pp. 348-349)

General Carleton sent Colonel Christopher (Kit) Carson and his New Mexico Volunteers along with other military units against the Mescalero Apache. This campaign was characterized by the unwarranted massacre of Mescalero headman Manuelito and at least 11 of his followers as they were coming into Santa Fe to make peace in October 1862. (Kelly, 1970, p. 13) Thereafter, troops covered the Mescalero homelands with orders to kill the Apache men "whenever and wherever" they could be found, and to capture the women and children. By the next month the bands of Cadette, Chatto, and Estrella were forced to surrender because they could not procure enough food or water to survive. In December 1862, more than 200 Mescalero were sent under military escort from Fort Stanton to the newly established Fort Sumner on the Pecos

River inside the vast, open, and remote Bosque Redondo Reservation in east-central New Mexico. In February 1863, another 100 Mescalero Apache joined those already there. Colonel Carson wrote General Carleton from Fort Stanton in early December 1862 that the "country adjacent to this post, now begins to assume the appearance of industry and civilization. . . . Settlers are arriving every day from all parts of the Territory" (Carson to Carleton, December 10, 1862, Microfilm Publication — hereafter "M" - 1120, roll 29, frame 0962). The Mescalero had not yet been gone a month from their homelands. Navajo headmen met with General Carleton in late 1862, and again in summer 1863, and offered to police their own tribal members. In return, they would not go to Bosque Redondo. Carleton flatly rejected their plea and threatened military action unless the Navajo voluntarily went to the reservation. Colonel Carson received orders to campaign against the Navajo. If any Indians gave themselves up they would be received and sent to Fort Wingate, and then on to Los Pinos. No Navajo Indians were to be retained as servants. "All must go to the Bosque Redondo." (Condition of the Tribes, 1867, p.100; General Order 15, June 15, 1863, Arrott Collection; Carleton to Carson, Sept. 19, 1863, Arrott Collection.)

Military posts were established in and on the edge of Navajo country; Fort Defiance in Arizona was reestablished as Fort Canby, and Fort Wingate in New Mexico was established halfway between Fort Canby and Albuquerque. Prior military efforts in this region failed to stop Navajo raiding against New Mexico communities and ignored settlers' raids into Navajo territory to kill Navajo men and capture women and children to sell as slaves. The subsequent military campaigns were a continuation of the civilian raids against the Navajo.

It took Carson and the New Mexico Volunteers longer to capture or force the Navajo to surrender because of their direct resistance and their larger land area of occupation. Carson first directed his forces to an area east of the San Francisco Mountains and west of the Hopi villages, with scouting expeditions north of Ganado and west of Canyon de Chelly, Arizona.

The military excursions into Canyon de Chelly in January 1864, combined with a lack of food and sustenance, forced many Navajo to surrender at Fort Canby and at Fort Wingate I (south of Grants, New Mexico). Here they were held and marched under military escort to the post of Los Pinos (Bosque Farms), where they were held for some time. The taking of Navajo as slaves did not cease even as they were surrendering. As one example, Major E. W. Eaton wrote from Fort Wingate on February 2, 1864, that as Navajo leader Delgadito's party arrived at the post, they were attacked by a "party of Mexicans who killed some of his men, took women and children prisoners, and drove off some of their stock" (Eaton to Cutler, February 2, 1864, M 1120, roll 23, frame 1035). These raids against the Navajo continued throughout the forced marches and their internment at Bosque Redondo. It is estimated that between 1,500 and 3,000 Indian slaves, or peons as they were called in New Mexico, were held at a time when the nation was fighting a civil war against slavery. Navajo women and children, taken by force or purchased, were held as slaves or domestic servants in New Mexico households. (Condition of the Tribes, 1867, p. 326.)

The majority of the captured Navajo were sent from Los Pinos to Bosque Redondo between January and May 1864, through multiple removals of people in groups of varying sizes. At least four groups of about 1,000 men, women, and children were sent through Santa Fe and San Jose to Tecolote, New Mexico, or through Tijeras Canyon, Galisteo, and San Jose to Tecolote. They then moved south generally along the Pecos River to Bosque Redondo at Fort Sumner. The winter weather was bitterly cold, and the Navajo did not have sufficient clothing to keep warm. Close to 200 people died from cold and exposure during one march. (Thompson to Cutler, April 15, 1864, M 1120, Roll 25, frame 0785.) There are accounts by Navajo descendants of the Long Walk that describe how elderly people, pregnant women, and otherwise lame or disabled people who lagged behind the marching columns were shot and killed because they could not keep up. Wagons were provided on some marches to carry people, but the oral histories are powerful testimony of the severe conditions that the Navajo endured, from both natural and human causes.

Conditions at Bosque Redondo were horrid. General Carleton underestimated how many people would require shelter, food, water, and clothing. Supply efforts proved problematic and expensive. Crops were planted, but they failed repeatedly due to the poor soil and water, semiarid conditions, and insect infestations. The captives suffered from malnutrition, sickness, and inadequate medical care. Navajo leaders in 1867 estimated that one-half of their people at the Bosque had died. (Norton to Mix, M 234, roll 554, frame 0500.)

Adding to the misery were raids from neighboring Plains tribes. Bosque Redondo, which covered 1,600 square miles (40 miles square), had been established in the midst of country claimed by the Kiowa and

Comanche. Members of these tribes attacked the Navajo and Mescalero Apache and their horse herds on the Bosque several times. Unable to fight back, the captive Indians were sitting targets for the mounted and armed Kiowa and Comanche. An average of 400 soldiers were to guard and supposedly protect the captives, but the large land area to be covered and the various duties of the soldiers left them ill-equipped for these tasks.

By 1865 more than 8,500 Navajo shared the Bosque Redondo Reservation with about 500 Mescalero Apache. No matter how much they tried, including setting up checkpoints, the U.S.

Army could not stop escapes. Several times, more than 100 Navajo escaped and eluded pursuit until they reached their homelands or returned to the Bosque because of hunger. For all their efforts, the troops were doggedly inept at pursuit and recapture of the escaped Indians.

On the night of November 3, 1865, the Mescalero Apache escaped from Bosque Redondo *en masse*. They were pursued but not recaptured; their pursuers did not even catch sight of them. (McCleave to Cutler, Nov. 3, 1865, M1088, roll 1, frame 0731.) However, the Mescalero remember the soldiers catching up with them and shooting men, women, and children dead. That same month more than 600 Navajo disappeared, presumably following the Mescalero example, and left the reservation to return to their homelands.

Controversy surrounded Bosque Redondo's impact on the local and regional economy. At the height of occupation, close to 9,000 American Indian people had to be fed, clothed, sheltered, and provided protection on the reservation. Meat had to be provided, as did flour because the crops failed each year. The army contracted throughout the territory for purchases of beef and wheat. Because of the volume of food required for the reservation, prices of goods shot up so much that ordinary New Mexicans could not afford them. To supplement supplies, goods from the states were shipped 900 miles to the territory over the Santa Fe Trail. Not only were these goods expensive, but the cost of transportation doubled the basic price.

Political controversy also swirled. The price of goods, the reservation location, and General Carleton's personality provoked lively discussions in the territory's newspapers and public places. The tide of public opinion gradually turned against the general. In January 1866, the New Mexico Territorial Legislature asked President Andrew Johnson for Carleton's removal. (Thompson 1976, p. 102.) Also, several commissions investigated Bosque Redondo, and although the findings were generally supportive of its operation, eventually political and military circles in Washington, D.C., realized that Carleton's so-called "experiment" was a failure. The Navajo people wanted to go home. Their desire was eloquently expressed by an unknown Navajo in 1866:

If the government wants us to remain here we will do so and do the best we can — but cannot be as contented as we would be in our old homes — we shall think of them — we all think of them. There is something within us which does not speak but thinks — and though we remain silent yet our faces speak to each other. Cage the Badger and he will try to break from his prison and regain his native hole. Chain the eagle to the ground — he will strive to gain his freedom, and though he fails, he will lift his head and look up to the sky which is home — and we want to return to our mountains and plains, where we used to plant corn, wheat, beans, peppers, melons, and onions." (Graves Report, M234, roll 553, frame 0343.)

After four years of Navajo captivity, two members of an Indian Peace Commission, Lieutenant General William T. Sherman and Lieutenant Colonel Samuel F. Tappan, signed a treaty of peace with the tribe on June 1, 1868, at Fort Sumner. Signing for the Navajo was Head Chief Barboncito and 28 other Navajo

chiefs and headmen. The treaty included provisions that war would cease, and that a reservation of land was to be provided for Navajo use and occupation.

Sherman, writing to General of the Armies Ulysses S. Grant seven days after the treaty signing, said: "I found the Bosque a mere spot of green grass in the midst of a wild desert, and that the Navajos had sunk into a condition of absolute poverty and despair. To allow them to remain was to assume an annual cost of their maintenance forever of about half a million [dollars]" (Sherman to Grant, M 619, roll 639, frame 0127). The Navajo argued successfully that the reservation be established in their homelands, allowing them to return to their own country. Supply wagons and equipment were assembled promptly after the treaty was signed. On June 18, 1868, the return walk commenced. On July 23, about 7,000 Navajo arrived at Fort Wingate, led by Barboncito and with a military escort. They were home. (Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1868, p. 624.)

From The Long Walk Feasibility Study, National Park Service.