CHIRICAHUA APACHE HOMELAND IN THE 
BORDERLAND SOUTHWEST*

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ABSTRACT. The creation of the present United States–Mexico boundary in the mid-nineteenth century interrupted and disregarded the traditional territorial space of the Chiricahua Apache, whose ancestral homeland transcended this new line. As a result of their land claims, the United States created a reservation for the Chiricahua Apache, but it was later withdrawn. Today members of this group officially reside among Mescalero Apache in New Mexico and Fort Sill Apache in Oklahoma. This essay assesses the historic and contemporary impact of geographical borderland changes for the Chiricahua Apache and discusses the legacy of a transformed homeland. Keywords: Chiricahua Apache, borderland Southwest, Native Americans, regional identity.

Fort Bowie National Historic Site is located in Apache Pass, which separates the Dos Cabezas Mountains from the Chiricahua Mountains in southeastern Arizona. The fort, a strategic site in the U.S. relations with the Chiricahua Apache, closed as a military installation in 1894 and opened in 1964 as a historic site administered by the National Park Service. According to its official Web site, “Fort Bowie commemorates the bitter conflict between Chiricahua Apaches and the U.S. military—a lasting monument to the bravery and endurance of U.S. soldiers in paving the way for settlement and the taming of the western frontier. It provides insight into a ‘clash of cultures,’ a young nation in pursuit of ‘manifest destiny,’ and the hunter/gatherer society fighting to preserve its existence” (NPS 2012). Neither the official Web site nor the public display at the historic site mentions the Chiricahua Apache ancestral homeland.

Nevertheless, Chiricahua Apache were part of this borderland before it was either Mexico or the United States. The region is a homeland for the Chiricahua through their historic occupation of distinct environments and by way of negotiation with neighboring peoples over some five centuries. The creation of the present U.S.–Mexico boundary in the mid-nineteenth century ignored the traditional territorial spaces of this native group. Chiricahua Apache land claims led to the creation of a short-lived reservation in the United States; no reserve for them has ever existed in Mexico during the modern era. In time the U.S. government removed the Chiricahua Apache from their reservation and other lands in Arizona and New Mexico.

In this article I assess the historic and contemporary geography of the Chiricahua Apache and interpret the legacy of the changed borderland for them. I explore

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how the dominant societies on either side of the international boundary largely ignore regional identity and suggest that history is not merely a way to understand the past but also a strategy to construct the present.

**Thematic Framework**

Attachment to place is part of a larger association that cultures have with a land; and that bond can hold deep sentiment and thereby be considered part of a culture's place and regional identity. Identity is a theme that has concerned historical and cultural geographers over many generations. It is particularly concerned with how people and place intertwine to create meaning that becomes recognized as a quality of distinctiveness, so that a people come to represent the place they have collectively forged but that also has shaped them.

Two conceptual contexts frame my interpretation of Chiricahua Apache geography: place-naming and homeland. Historical perspective establishes a time and place of Chiricahua belonging to the borderland. I then focus my attention on the Chiricahua, their preferred ecological habitation, and how they interacted with their native neighbors and with Euro-Americans in the region. The narrative is constructed chiefly through secondary accounts distilled from the anthropological and historical literatures about the Chiricahua, supplemented with native accounts of pilgrimages to the lost homeland and contemporary efforts to reclaim it.

William Bright documented Native American place-naming authoritatively (2004), and Thomas Thornton traced the method to early anthropological research, including Keith Basso’s work with the Cibecue Apache (1997). Like earlier place-name studies, Basso found descriptive naming to far exceed other naming typologies—commemorative, for example—for Native Americans. Richly descriptive names for places illustrate the power of words to convey meaning about the landscape, creating a vision of a place in the mind of those who have never been there. Descriptive place-names are important as well to discourse and storytelling, for they arm a speaker with a place narrative that imparts how “Wisdom Sits in Places” (Basso 1996). In the geographical literature, Stephen Jett’s 1997 study of Navajo place-naming deserves special mention, given its association with the U.S. Southwest and among an Athapaskan people related to the Chiricahua. In his study of place-names in Canyon de Chelly on the Colorado Plateau of northeastern Arizona, Jett found descriptive topographic naming the most frequent type of place-name for 245 features and suggested that this practicality may be part of an Athapaskan tradition common to mobile peoples who employed place-names as mnemonic devices to facilitate travel (1997, 490–491).

A theme in the story of Chiricahua geography, especially in light of their lost homeland, is the use of place-names associated with their heritage that persist on contemporary maps. Unlike the studies referenced above, however, my data collection did not engage Native American guides to interpret the meanings of descriptive place-names. Rather, I mapped selected place-names that are chiefly commemorative and most likely have their origins in Euro-American assignment.
How non-native settlers and others selected native names that celebrate the Chiricahua is largely unknown, but the persistence of names shadows the long legacy of this Apache group in the borderland.

“Homeland” is a theoretical construct used to elaborate a people’s historical attachment to place. In 2001 Richard Nostrand and Lawrence Estaville revived this idea as a geographical concept, enlisting more than a dozen authors to explore its application to Euro-American and Native American groups across America. In a dissenting view, Michael Conzen suggested that only Native American groups have the legacy of claiming homelands resulting from American historic injustice (2001, 271). Accordingly, Jett and Steven Schnell argued for Navajo and Kiowa homelands, respectively (Jett 2001; Schnell 2001). The Navajo, according to Jett (2001, 168), possess a highly developed sense of homeland, one that is “unequalled among non-Native American ethnic groups in the United States” despite a history and archeology which indicate that their ancestors arrived in the Southwest relatively recently. Similarly, Schnell suggested that the Kiowa who share an Oklahoma reservation with Comanche and Apache still anchor themselves psychologically to that area, which is only a fraction of their original domain yet to which “they maintain an intense loyalty” (2001, 142).

The concept of homeland is gaining momentum for Native American people who have been chiefly neglected in the context of historic American nation building. John Welch and Ramon Riley related how the White Mountain Apache in Arizona are asserting the “indivisibility” of land and culture as central to their heritage (2001, 5). Themes like “how land was lost,” “putting place to work,” and “a future for the past” reinforce how homeland is reclaimed both territorially and spiritually (pp. 5, 8, 10). Furthermore, legal precedent for the rights of Native American groups who seek reassessment of their homeland boundaries based on naming is increasing. Susan Gooding analyzed how the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in Oregon use layered identities on a map of permanent places through generational naming to reinterpret their associations with place (1994, 1181).

The Chiricahua Apache are beginning to assert historic claim to territory situated in the borderland. A legal case is percolating that would establish a foothold for the Chiricahua in a southern part of one state, a place that has not been theirs for more than a century.

The Chiricahua Apache

The Apache peoples are Athapaskan speakers with ancestral roots in Alaska and Canada. Linguistic affiliation which links Apache to other Athapaskans is reinforced by evidence which shows that the speakers share a biological ancestry. In the Southwest, so-called Western Apache, including the Chiricahua, are linguistically related to Eastern Apache, such as the Jicarilla and the Lipan, yet the kinship systems are different. The Western Apache are thought to be ancestors of a migration to the Southwest from mountain habitats of eastern Arizona above the
Mogollon Rim during the early 1600s. In Arizona, New Mexico, and northern Mexico they segmented into small groups, became associated with particular mountain areas, and thereby developed distinct regional identities (Perry 1991, 6–10).

Beyond oral history, modern understanding about the Chiricahua Apache derives largely from ethnographic fieldwork launched in the 1930s, almost exclusively from the pioneering studies of Grenville Goodwin and Morris Opler (Goodwin 1971). Contemporary observer accounts from the colonial Spanish and Mexican eras, as well as historical writings from the nineteenth century and later have prompted modern Chiricahua Apache to insist that no history written by the Apache exists, only history written by white men about the Apache (Bourke [1891] 1971; Forbes 1960; Spicer 1962; Morehead 1968; Goodwin 1969; Schroeder 1974; Worcester 1979).

Opler recognized three Chiricahua Apache bands (1941, 1983). The easternmost band referred to themselves as cihéne (Chihenne), or “Red Paint People.” This band has been variously called “Ojo Caliente Apache” (or “Warm Springs Apache”), “Coppermine Apache” (after the Santa Rita copper mine), “Mimbrenos Apache,” and “Mogollones Apache,” each in reference to geographical areas occupied in west central and southwestern New Mexico during historic times (Figure 1). The second Chiricahua band called themselves cokanén (Chokonen). No translation of this name exists, but some historical sources refer to it as the “Cochise Apache,” after the name of their great leader. In historic times the band occupied southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico west of the continental divide. It is to this band that the name “Chiricahua” is attached, after the Ópata word chiguicagui, or “Mountain of Wild Turkeys,” in reference to the Chiricahua Mountains in southeastern Arizona as they were known to that historic Sonora, Mexico, native people (Sweeney 1991, 3–4; Bright 2004, 104). The third band was called nédnaí, or “Enemy People.” It occupied northwestern Chihuahua and northeastern Sonora states in present-day Mexico. This band is sometimes referred to as the “Pinery Apache” or “Bronco Apache,” in reference to both its isolated habitat in the Sierra Madre and its wild or breakaway character, having fled from the United States in the 1880s across the border to permanent residence in Mexico (Goodwin and Goodwin 2000).

Other sources have recognized a fourth band, the bedonkohe, or “Geronimo’s Group,” a small contingent from the Mogollon Mountains of New Mexico (E. Ball 1970; Stockel 1993). This band assimilated into other bands, especially the cokanén, during the nineteenth century. Ironically, perhaps, although some anthropologists do not recognize this band as a legitimate Chiricahua subgroup, its legendary leader and his exploits are seared into the memory of Americans, who associate him chiefly with the generalized Apache experience in the Southwest (Goodwin and Shearer [1988] 2007).

Little solid evidence exists for a determination of Chiricahua Apache, or even Apache, historical demography in the Southwest border region. Analysis of one subregion during the Spanish and Mexican periods suggested a maximum popula-
Fig. 1—Bands, heritage sites, and toponyms in the Chiricahua borderland. *Source of band boundaries: Opler 1983. (Cartography by Barbara Trapido-Lurie, Arizona State University, from the author's sketch)*
tion of 850 Apache in northern Chihuahua alone (Griffen [1988] 1998, 81–89). Others hypothesized that, between 1790 and 1863, the population of all Chiricahua bands combined did not exceed 3,000 (Opler 1983, 411; Sweeney 1998, 7). Whatever the estimates, it seems possible that the total population of Chiricahua Apache in
Arizona alone was never more numerous than the population of an American small town, yet they came to dominate an area the size of France for nearly three centuries (Perry 1991, xi).

A MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

James Kaywaykla (ca. 1880–1963), a Chiricahua Apache who related an oral history of his people to Eve Ball, declared: “We were essentially a mountain people, moving from one chain to another, following the ridges as best we could” (1970, 75). Mountains were both defensive refuge and sacred ground to the Chiricahua Apache. The basin-and-range landscapes and mountain islands of the borderlands of New Mexico, Arizona, Sonora, and Chihuahua were their favored habitats (Figure 2).

Whereas each Chiricahua band developed attachments to specific ranges in this region, band mobility necessitated general knowledge about all mountain environments in its domain. The cihéne, for example, were intimate with the Mogollon Mountains and Black Range of their homeland in New Mexico. The band was also familiar with the Peloncillo and Florida Mountains as well as various ranges in the Sierra Madre of Mexico that divide Sonora from Chihuahua. The cihéne regularly traversed these uplands when raiding communities in Mexico, then returned to the mountains of their homeland (see Figure 2). Raiding parties developed keen environmental knowledge about the passes through and around mountains, the locations of springs for water, the distances between targeted villages and ranches, and potential refuges en route.

It was not unusual for raiding parties to range hundreds of miles from their homeland village to mountain ranges that are, technically, outside the boundaries of Chiricahua band geographies. Most notably, mountain ranges east of the Rio Grande in New Mexico and Texas, including the San Andres, Sacramento, Sierra del Diablo, Guadalupe, and Quitman, as well as several ranges in Chihuahua, became favored haunts for the famous cihéne leader known as “Victorio,” who ranged far from his New Mexico home near Cañada Alamosa during the late nineteenth century (Thrapp 1974) (see Figures 1 and 2).

Beyond environmental knowledge, mountains were central to the spiritual and belief systems of Chiricahua Apache, as they were for other Apache groups (Stockel 2007), a centrality that reinforces attachment to place. Mescalero Apaches, who today include some Chiricahua Apache, revere mountains as a spiritual ecology (M. Ball 2000, 2002). Summits of mountains are pinnacles that have stood above the floodwaters that once covered and devastated the earth, and mountain habitats afford a diversity of vegetative associations that provide powerful medicinal herbs used in rituals. Mountains can also act as directional and boundary markers, and they possess sacred qualities. The Mescalero, for example, are said to define the core of their traditional lands as bounded by four peaks (Carmichael 1994, 92).

Among select identified heritage sites that are part of Chiricahua geography, four are mountain peaks: Mogollon Baldy, in the Mogollon Mountains; Guadalupe
Peak, in the Guadalupe Mountains; Sierra Blanca, in the Sacramento Mountains; and Salinas Peak in the San Andres Mountains (Opler 1941, 269; E. Ball 1970, 11; Goodwin 1971, 124) (see Figure 1). Sacred mountains are repositories of gan (mountain spirits). In 1932 the Apache John Rope related how Warm Springs Apache regularly visited a rock ledge on Mogollon Baldy, a nearly 11,000-foot peak in west central New Mexico, so they could pray to the gan (Goodwin 1971, 124). The Apache also celebrate gan—sometimes called “crown dancers”—in ritual dances (Opler 1983, 416) (Figure 3).

Kaywaykla called Salinas Peak in the San Andres Mountains of central New Mexico a “Sacred Mountain.” Young men would visit the site to become tested as warriors; and, although “it is true that all mountains were places of refuge, the Sacred Mountain was held in such great awe that people approached it in fear; for it was there that the Mountain Spirits dwelt, they who are the link between Ussen [the Apache God] and Earth people” (E. Ball 1970, 16). A mountain or mountains, then, could be both refuge and potentially sacred. The Chiricahua call one of the high ranges of the Mexican Sierra Madre the “Blue Mountains” (“Sierra de Azul” in Mexico) because they were so isolated that they were considered a “Promised Land” where refuge permitted peace and safe distance from enemy threats or attacks (E. Ball 1970, 123; M. Ball 2000, 269). The Blue Mountains are said to be the mountains that survived the great flood and thus are sacred to all Chiricahua (Opler [1942] 1994, 1–2). Similarly, Kaywaykla termed Guadalupe Mountain on the southeastern New Mexico and West Texas border a “sacred peak” because “it keeps perpetual watch for enemies from the east. In our language it is called ‘Say-achee [Sacred Mountain]’” (E. Ball 1970, 38).

The Chiricahua Apache also revered canyons and springs. For the cihéne, both Cañada Alamosa and nearby Ojo Caliente in west central New Mexico were historic sites (see Figure 1). Cañada Alamosa was a favored locale “not only for its beneficent water but because it was a place of natural defense” for many Chiricahua bands that sought refuge there, including those of the renowned nineteenth-century chiefs: Cochise, Mangas Coloradas, and Victorio (E. Ball 1970, 29–30; Thrapp 1974; Sweeney 1991, 1998).

**Relationships and shifting geographies**

Chiricahua Apache engaged others inside and outside their traditional homeland, among them other Chiricahua bands and Native American tribes, Spanish colonials, Mexicans, and Anglo-Americans. These relationships impacted the geographical extent of their region, causing expansion and contraction at various times from the 1600s to the 1800s.

Neighboring native groups seem largely to have been on difficult terms with the Chiricahua. One interpretation of the word “apache” is that it derives from a Zuni word *apachu* (enemy), and the O’odham people of southern Arizona called all Apache *O:bi* (also “enemy”) (Sweeney 1991, 3; Jacoby 2008, 20). The enmity between Chiricahua and the Ópata of Sonora was said to have been so great that
when the Spanish impressed Ópata to fight with them against Apache the Sonoran natives could not be trusted with captured Chiricahua, lest they murder the captives (Cortés [1799] 1989, 26–27). In the 1700s the Spanish Commander Jacobo Ugarte of the Provincias Internas used Mimbres Chiricahua Apache band members to fight against other Chiricahua bands, gaining the Mimbres the sobriquet mansos (tamed Apache) among Spanish speakers (Thrapp 1974, 17).

During the long period of Spanish occupation of the borderland Southwest—from the 1600s to the early 1800s—the Chiricahua, perhaps more so than any other Apache group, were a near constant thorn in the sides of colonial administrators. From the earliest Spanish explorations into the borderland, Chiricahua Apache resisted efforts to settle in one location and thus submit to Spanish control. The colonial process of reducción (resettlement into mission-based villages),
which worked for the Spanish among native sedentary agriculturalists in New Spain (Mexico) and the upper Rio Grande of New Mexico, was completely contrary to the Chiricahua Apache system of periodic movement and mountain association (Radding 1997, 277). The Chiricahua were known to abandon a settlement
upon a death or an illness in the band, thereby seeking purification at a new location (Cortés [1799] 1989, 57).

The chief concern among Spanish colonials was to halt the perpetual raiding of their settlements in Sonora and Chihuahua. The most dramatic attempt to combat these raids was the order to exterminate the Apache via the erection of a cordon of presidios extending from Tucson, in Arizona, to La Junta, in West Texas (Croix 1941; Morehead 1975) (Figure 4). The Spanish hoped that the line of forts would deter the Chiricahua, all of whom except the nédnaí typically resided north of the cordon and raided south of it, into northern Mexico.

By the late 1700s, however, the Spanish had conceded that the line of fortification was ineffective: Chiricahua raiding parties simply went around and between presidios, and the cavalry companies that manned the forts were unable to track down Apache movements through the basin-and-range environment of the borderland (West 1993, fig. 21). In 1786 a formal Spanish decree recognized the futility of Apache extermination through military means and turned instead to a policy of establecimientos en paz that was an early signal of a policy revived later, when the borderland became part of U.S. territory (Griffen [1988] 1998, 23–27; Sweeney 1991, 8). Under the new policy the Spanish tried to attract Chiricahua to what they termed rancherías adjoining or near presidios, which offered tribute that included food and supplies in return for peaceful settlement (Cortés [1799] 1989, 30, 57; Griffen [1988] 1998, 23–27). Attracted to the predictability of resources dispensed to band members through this policy, some Chiricahua settled around presidios such as the one at Janos, Chihuahua, founded in 1690 (Griffen [1988] 1998, 100) (see Figure 4). The Spanish peace settlements did not completely pacify the Chiricahua, however, and accounts reveal that some band members continued to slip away from these rancherias to perform religious ceremonies in mountains, harvest yucca, visit relatives, or raid Spanish settlements to procure livestock (Griffen [1988] 1998, 74–75).

Chiricahua raiding during and after this era was never, it seems, completely understood (Opler 1941, 332–336). Although raids were certainly a means of preparing young men to be warriors and to gather resources from enemy settlements, they also had an important social function. Because the Chiricahua were a matrilocality—one in which a married man became part of his wife’s family—a dowry was expected as part of the change in household (Opler 1941, 162–163). Raiding was one means of securing sufficient resources—often livestock that could be traded at exchange locations—to satisfy the social contract. Chiricahua raids also resulted in captives, typically young boys and girls, who would then be raised among the Apache, a process common to many Athapaskan tribes (Brooks 2002). Captured youth worked both ways, however, and it was not unusual for Spaniards to take Apache captives, whom they called criados (from the Spanish verb criar, to raise). Criados were an important servant class in colonial Sonora, but, unlike servants who could be sold, criados were indentured for life (Jacoby 2008, 54).
Another development that impacted borderland geography in the Spanish era was the function of the settlement at Janos, which emerged as the principal exchange location for Chiricahua booty procured through raiding. At Janos, barter for stolen property resulted in a black market unofficially sanctioned by Spanish authorities (Griffen [1988] 1998, 80). Borderland Chiricahua geography was a triangular zone that linked Janos, on the east, to several towns in Sonora, and, having crossed the Sierra Madre near Fronteras, to the Chiricahua Mountains in Arizona, the homeland refuge at the apex of the district in the north (see Figures 2 and 4). Janos thus became a central place in the resource-exchange pattern developed by the Chiricahua Apache, who moved between mountain habitats in present-day Arizona and New Mexico into present-day Sonora and Chihuahua to raid, then returned north via Janos, where goods were bartered.

The transition to Mexican political authority in the early 1800s brought changes to Chiricahua Apache geography in the borderland. With newly independent Mexico unable to sustain the peace-settlement policy and resource-distribution system that the Spanish had introduced, Chiricahua Apache began to disperse from rancherias around the former presidios, return to their mountain sanctuaries, and resume their raids on settlements (Thrapp 1974, 17; Griffen [1988] 1998, 119, 123; Sweeney 1991, 18). Raiding led to violent enmity between Mexicans and the Chiricahua. The state of Sonora institutionalized so-called proyectos de guerra (scalp laws) in 1835, and the state of Chihuahua followed suit in 1837. The horrors of historic encounters with Mexicans would haunt Chiricahua Apache into the twentieth century, leading some tribal descendants to imagine that violence would be the inevitable outcome of any association with Mexico or Mexicans (Hayes and Hayes 1991; Jastrzembski 1995; Hayes and Delgadillo 2003).

A significant shift occurred during this period when Santa Rita del Cobre, in present-day New Mexico, replaced Janos, Chihuahua, as the exchange location for Chiricahua plunder accumulated from the resumed raiding (see Figure 4). Santa Rita, founded circa 1803–1804, was the site of early copper mining during colonial times and emerged during the Mexican era as an isolated northern black-market site (Griffen [1988] 1998, 120). Illicit trade allowed Chiricahua and other Apache to exchange their stolen livestock from raids in Sonora and Chihuahua for the food, guns, and whiskey increasingly vended by American middlemen who were operating in Mexican territory in the Santa Rita district (Sweeney 1991, 21).

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which created the initial boundary between the United States and Mexico in 1848, made the United States responsible for Apache incursions into Mexico, including raids of towns in present-day Arizona south of the Gila River, which was then part of Sonora (Thrapp 1967, 7; Jacoby 2008, 63). The 1854 Gadsden Purchase—called the “Treaty of Mesilla” in Mexico—abrogated that provision and permitted the U.S. military to pursue hostile Apaches across the boundary as long as U.S. commanders advised the nearest Mexican military or civilian authority, restricted movement to within approximately 5–10 miles of a
Chiricahua Apache homeland

settlement, and retreated once natives were captured or their trail was lost (Bourke 1883, cited in Thrapp 1967, 275).

Chiricahua Apache had developed a very efficient strategy of raiding Sonoran towns and then taking flight to remote parts of the Sierra Madre (Bourke [1886] 1987). Under its leader, Juh, the nédnaí band developed permanent camps high in these rugged mountains, making it difficult for U.S. cavalry to pursue them. Geronimo, the bedonkohe leader frequently retreated to the Sierra Madre when U.S. military authorities were chasing him, but on two separate occasions U.S. expeditionary forces followed him into a stronghold; and in 1886 they finally persuaded the celebrated Apache leader to surrender (Thrapp 1992, 2–3; Roberts 1993; Hatfield 1998).

By the 1860s the primary exchange location for Chiricahua Apache plunder had shifted from Santa Rita to Cañada Alamosa, New Mexico, which became known to the Chiricahua as kegotoi (dilapidated houses), in reference, perhaps, to the earliest adobe structures surrounding the site, founded in 1856. Today it is the hamlet of Monticello (Sweeney 1991, 256; Julyan 1998, 233) (see Figure 4). Given Cañada Alamosa’s strategic, isolated, and defensible canyon location, its historic importance to the cíhéne, and its proximity to Ojo Caliente—the warm springs after which Anglos named this band—a black market flourished here during this era (E. Ball 1970, 29–30; Thrapp 1974, 101).

The success of illicit exchange at Cañada Alamosa is reported as the impetus to establish reservations for the Chiricahua at Tularosa and Warm Springs (Ojo Caliente) in New Mexico and also in southeastern Arizona (Opler 1941, 2–3; Thrapp 1974, 148–172) (see Figure 4). The largest Chiricahua Reservation was established in Arizona—encompassing most of today’s Cochise County—in 1872 but closed in 1876 because the U.S. military recognized that its border with Mexico would facilitate continued Chiricahua raiding into Sonora and Chihuahua (uswd 1872; Cole 1988). From 1876 until Victorio’s death at the hands of Mexicans at Tres Castillos in Chihuahua in 1880 and Geronimo’s surrender to U.S. military at Skeleton Canyon in Arizona in 1886, the U.S. government made repeated efforts to convince Chiricahua bands to settle at the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona (Roberts 1993, 273–298) (see Figure 4). Although some Chiricahua complied with these requests for short periods, they despised the San Carlos location. Part of this was certainly their distrust of the San Carlos Apache, who were Western Apache but not Chiricahua. However, as Kaywaykla related, San Carlos was rejected because “it is a place of death. Few people endure the summer. . . . There was nothing but cactus, rattlesnakes, heat, rocks, and insects” (E. Ball 1970, 28). Significantly, although mountains are nearby, the San Carlos site is not a mountain habitat.

Legacies, Pilgrimages, and Reconnections

Following Geronimo’s surrender in 1886, the U.S. government uprooted the Chiricahua Apache from their borderland homeland. Some 388 Chiricahua became prisoners of war and were transported first to Fort Marion, in Saint Augustine, Florida,
then to Mount Vernon Barracks, in Mobile, Alabama, and ultimately to Fort Sill, in Lawton, Oklahoma. There they remained, on the Comanche and Kiowa Reservation (Roberts 1993; Stockel 1993). Only the nédnaí, who had fled to the Sierra Madre in Mexico, remained in their traditional homeland, but by the early decades of the twentieth century few, if any, survivors were reported (Mee’d 1993; Goodwin and Goodwin 2000). In 1913, 187 Chiricahua, released from prisoner of war status, relocated from Fort Sill to join the Mescalero Apache at their reservation in New Mexico; 92 other Chiricahua chose to remain in Oklahoma (Goodwin and Shearer [1988] 2007; Henderson 1991). To this day the Chiricahua have no official homeland, reservation, or nation territory of their own, and the only officially recognized Chiricahua are part of the Fort Sill, Oklahoma, group (Frantz 1999).

Nevertheless, the legacy of the Chiricahua Apache persists in the borderland Southwest through names on the land. Some fourteen toponyms on maps of the United States and Mexico represent their traditional homeland (see Figure 1). Three of these are mountains or peaks named after the great cíhéne Chief Victorio: two of them in New Mexico and one in West Texas. Three are places named for the legendary cokanén chief Cochise: Cochise Head, a mountaintop in the Chiricahua Range; Cochise Stronghold, in the Dragoon Mountains; and Cochise County in Arizona. Two others are mountain names: Chiricahua, in Arizona; and Mangus, after the great Chiricahua Chief Mangas Coloradas, in New Mexico (see Figures 1 and 2). Clearly, these toponyms are celebratory or associational place-names (Stewart 1945), and they constitute a small fraction of all names that must have been part of historic Chiricahua geography as defined by the Apache themselves. Researchers have corroborated that, for the Western Apache, native place-naming was a form of identification with both actual land and places that remained part of oral wisdom, not simply locations on a map (Basso 1996; Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2006, 220).

A second legacy results from an association with public land that was once a historic refuge for the Chiricahua. Cochise Stronghold, situated amid the rocks of the Dragoon Mountains, is also the 1874 burial site—precise location unknown—of Cochise (see Figures 1 and 2). In 1934 the Progressive Pioneers Club of the Cochise County Historical and Archeological Society dedicated Cochise Stronghold as a historic site, and in 1970 it became part of the Coronado National Forest.

In 1988 a private landholder donated a small parcel of land within Cochise Stronghold to the Fort Sill Apache Tribe (Negri 1989; FSAT 2010). Richard Shaw, whose family once owned a 170-acre parcel in the stronghold, transferred the last 4 acres of the private parcel to the Chiricahua, telling Mildred Imach Cleghorn, then chairwoman of the Fort Sill Chiricahua and Warm Springs Apache Tribe, “My family has owned this land for nearly 80 years. I’ve been saving it for you. It’s about time I gave it back” (Negri 1989). Today exhibits at the public campground in the stronghold share some of the history of the Chiricahua Apache in the area.

Perhaps the deepest reconnection to the Chiricahua ancestral homeland is that experienced by its descendants and by a select cohort of friends and invited
guests: pilgrimages by Chiricahua to sites of significance to their heritage. The first of these was the Centennial Chiricahua Apache / U.S. Cessation of Hostilities celebration, convened on 4–7 September 1986 and sponsored by the Arizona Historical Society and the National Park Service in cooperation with the Chiricahua Apache Tribe of Mescalero and the Chiricahua Apache Tribe of Fort Sill (Hayes and Hayes 1991, 125). The special event took place at Bowie and at Fort Bowie National Historic Site (see Figure 4); it included dances, tours, lectures, living history programs, and a proclamation by then Governor of Arizona Bruce Babbitt officially welcoming Chiricahua Apache back to Arizona (Van Orden 2010).

As part of the centennial, groups of Chiricahua were able to return to Skeleton Canyon in the Peloncillo Mountains along the Arizona–New Mexico border to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Geronimo’s surrender (Goodwin and Shearer [1988] 2007) (see Figures 1 and 2). The ceremonial site, located on public land via private land access, features a cairn (cann n.d., n.p.); and in 1934 the city of Douglas, Arizona, with federal support, erected a formal Geronimo Surrender Monument along U.S. Highway 80 west of Skeleton Canyon between the Chiricahua and Peloncillo Mountains, near the hamlet of Apache, Arizona (wpa 1940, 375–376).

A second pilgrimage was the 1988 expedition into the Sierra Madre of Chihuahua by Chiricahuas resident at Mescalero Reservation and Fort Sill (see Figures 2 and 4). Thirty-six Apaches—children, adults, and seniors—and six historians and guides participated in this pilgrimage. The expedition retraced the route that the Chiricahua Apache leader Loco in 1882 took as his small raiding group retreated from Arizona across the Peloncillo Mountains to New Mexico and then into northern Chihuahua and the Sierra Madre. The purposes of the pilgrimage were to connect to places in Mexico deemed important to the history of the ancestors of the Chiricahua and to perform gan dances in the sacred mountain stronghold. Neil Goodwin, son of the ethnohistorian Grenville Goodwin, accompanied the group and filmed parts of the journey (Figure 5). Goodwin would later publish his own account of his father’s 1930s exploration into the Sierra Madre to search for the last surviving Chiricahua among those who had retreated to the mountains in generations past (Goodwin and Goodwin 2000).

From the interview accounts of the 1988 pilgrimage into the Sierra Madre, one begins to understand how Chiricahua attachment to place has survived through more than a century of detachment from the tribe’s homeland. The pilgrimage to Mexico visited two important locations “that are historically, religiously and emotionally significant” to the Chiricahua and that “figure prominently in stories that have been handed down from Apache grandparents and great-grandparents to their descendants” (Hayes and Delgadillo 2003, i). Cañon de los Embudos, or Embudos Canyon, in the western foothills of the Sonoran Sierra Madre (see Figure 1), was the site where the Chiricahua leaders Geronimo, Naiche, and Chihuahua agreed to terms before final surrender to U.S. General George Crook in March 1886. The second location, Cañon de los Embudos, or Embudos Canyon, in the western foothills of the Sonoran Sierra Madre (see Figure 1), was the site where the Chiricahua leaders Geronimo, Naiche, and Chihuahua agreed to terms before final surrender to U.S. General George Crook in March 1886.
1886. Visiting this site stirred up mixed emotions among the Chiricahua who participated in Sierra Madre Revisited in 1988. Nevertheless, at Embudos native members of the group were able to stand on the same ground on which their tribal ancestors had stood and had been photographed in 1886 by Tombstone, Arizona, photographer C. S. Fly, images that are some of the most widely recognized historical views of the Chiricahua Apache (Van Orden 1989).

Corral de los Indios, high in Chihuahua’s Sierra de Azul, was the stronghold of nédnaí Chiricahua leader Juh and was believed to be a sacred refuge of the Apache who recognize this summit as the mythical mountain that survived an ancient destructive flood (Opler [1942] 1994, 1–2; Hayes and Degaldillo 2003, iii, 77, 86). Former Chairwoman Clegborn (1910–1997), born a prisoner of war at Fort Sill, was one of the 1988 pilgrims to the Sierra Madre. Here she reflects on the stories told to her as a child about Mexico and the importance of mountain environments to her ancestors:

We always wondered about Mexico, what kind of land it was. And going there was something I always wanted to do. I’d seen pictures of Embudos Canyon. I’ve heard stories. An opportunity to go there where it happened was one of the treasures I have today, just being able to at least see the land where we came from. I knew there were mountains and I knew there were trees, just from the way my uncle told us the stories. We had a mental picture, at least I did. . . . I can understand why they longed for that country. I can understand that now. All I saw was desert before, because we’d gone to San Carlos and I knew why they didn’t like that. That was horrible country. It still is for that matter. To leave the country that they came from and go to San Carlos, that’s just like night and day. (Hayes and Delgadillo 2003, 171–172)

Ruey Darrow, a graduate of the University of Oklahoma and a descendant of Chief Mangas Coloradas, was also on the Sierra Madre pilgrimage. Like many on this journey, she had participated in the 1986 Centennial but with mixed feelings about that event because it was, in her words, “like someone taking the scab off old wounds” (Hayes and Delgadillo 2003, 177). The 1988 Sierra Madre pilgrimage, by comparison, was a spiritual release, a coming home.

I went on the Embudos trip to visit my father’s home. I grew up hearing about the area. It was as familiar as my backyard. There was a nostalgic feeling seeing the canyon . . . the comparison to old photographs. Again, I grew up with those pictures. That time also belonged to me. The terrain, the vegetation were all as I knew it would be. . . . The high country of the Sierra Madre has a mystical quality, the culmination of spiritual familiarity which I had felt since we started the trip. I loved walking through the camp, feeling the trees, savoring the quietness. A part of me had come home. (Hayes and Delgadillo 2003, 177)

Reclaiming the Homeland

Beyond the efforts described above to reconnect with a traditional homeland through pilgrimage, the Chiricahua Apache from Fort Sill—including descendants of the Warm Springs Chiricahua band of Apache who surrendered in Arizona in
1886 and were ultimately sent to Oklahoma—recently created a foothold in southern New Mexico outside Deming (near the Victorio Mountains; see Figure 1). In 1998 the Chiricahua Apache from Fort Sill acquired from the Schoeppner Family Trust in Luna County some 30 acres of undeveloped land immediately north of Interstate 10 and known as “Akela Flats.” The tribe asked the Bureau of Indian Affairs to take the land into trust, and in July 2001 the bureau issued a trust acquisition approval letter that stated, in part:

The acquisition was in the best interest of the Fort Sill Apache of Oklahoma thereby promoting tribal self-determination and land for reestablishment of the Tribe’s land base in New Mexico. The Tribe stated the purposes for which this land will be used are for a land base to reestablish its presence in its aboriginal and former reservation territories in New Mexico. (NIGC 2008, 3)

Notwithstanding that stated purpose, in 2008 the Fort Sill Apache Tribe proposed opening a casino at Akela Flats (NIGC 2009b). That initiative led the state of New Mexico and the National Indian Gaming Commission to object (SFMN 2008; NIGC 2009a). The commission referred to its first ruling from 2008; namely, that the Akela Flats site did not qualify for gaming. The reasons given in that ruling were that too few enrolled tribal members were residents of New Mexico and that

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Fig. 5—In 1888 a Chiricahua pilgrimage party revisited heritage sites in the Sierra Madre of Mexico. Strategic locations were arrived at by comparisons in the field with C. S. Fly’s 1886 photographs. (Photograph by Karen Hayes; reproduced courtesy of the photographer and of the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, #78432f2_99)
the tribe had not been able to establish a government presence in the state, a necessary precondition for a gaming permit on tribal land.

The actions taken by the Tribe establish that it is exercising its governmental power from the State of Oklahoma and that, at best, its governmental presence in New Mexico is limited. Therefore, the Tribe has not established that it has a “major governmental presence” in New Mexico, or, as noted above, that its population center is located in New Mexico. (NIGC 2008, 13)

The tribe challenged this ruling; and in 2011 it won the right to establish a 30-acre reservation near Akela Flats. A gaming center at this location is a goal of the tribe. Construction of a casino is uncertain because it requires approval from the National Indian Gaming Commission and the New Mexico governor and state legislature (AJ 2011). In the meantime, the tribe has built a highway diner that sells food and tobacco products and exhibits a small display of information about the historic Chiricahua Apache presence in the region. The site is advertised on billboards along the interstate as the “Apache Homeland.”

Although the Chiricahua were displaced from a homeland, held as prisoners of war, and forced to adapt to alien environments until their incorporation into the Mescalero Reservation generations later, physical disconnection from their territory has not been forgotten; it lives on in the stories told about the homeland by one generation to the next.

What persists for the Chiricahua Apache are the land and places that hold wisdom about the peoples within their own identity narratives. This can be seen in the Chiricahua Apache desire to reconnect after generations of absence from places of heritage in the borderland region, including efforts to stake a claim to a nascent homeland along an interstate highway in southern New Mexico. Their desire to reclaim an association with places and a region beyond land as a material resource has become a powerful cultural symbol for the Chiricahua. Places, therefore, become part of the memory of a past that shapes a consciousness in the present and thereby validates that past for people, like the Chiricahua Apache, who have been neglected by the past that we have created about them.

Notes

1. The Fort Sill Apache Tribe is the federally recognized Native American tribe of Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache from Oklahoma (FSAT 2010). The Chiricahua Apache Nde Nation declared its independence in 2008, and its Web site supports reclamation of traditional Chiricahua territory utilizing historic and contemporary maps to illustrate the Chiricahua Apache homeland (CANN n.d., n.p.).

2. A description of this expedition along with photographs is located in the archives of the Arizona Historical Society (AHS 1988), and a separate recounting with selected photographs from the expedition was later published (Hayes and Hayes 1991). An unpublished typescript narrative written and edited by Karen Hayes includes twenty-four interviews with Chiricahua Apache who participated in the Sierra Madre pilgrimage (Hayes and Delgadillo 2003).

References


USWD [U.S. War Department]. 1872. *Map of Chiricahua Indian Reservation in Arizona.* U.S. War Department, Office of Indian Affairs, Maps and Charts, Record Group 75, Archives and Records Collection 630539, Map Number 392.


