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### Ш Sky City Ш

For Mother's Day we decided to take a trip to what many consider the mother pueblo, at least the oldest one, though the title is disputed. On the basis of tree rings in timbers, archeologists have set the date of the founding of Acoma to about the twelfth century. But the inhabitants of Sky City, as it is called, claim their village is much, much older.

We drove through the badlands west of Albuquerque under a strangely overcast sky that promised rain any minute but held out all day. Taking State Highway 23, we entered a magical landscape of buttes and hoodoos. Suddenly Enchanted Mesa loomed into sight, with Acoma like a fortress just beyond it.

The following weekend marked the grand opening of Acoma's new cultural center. We found the parking lot already half full and the center bustling with activity. Without a guide, visitors are not allowed beyond a certain point. For \$10 a head, you can ride up in an airport-style van and be taken through the sights of the pueblo by a local guide. Ours was friendly, well spoken, and well informed, and possessed of a deadpan wit.

She pointed out a small hole in the adobe wall of the kiva complex. "That's where they would warn those inside if any Spaniards were around, so the men could stop their ceremonies until they passed and not get caught," she explained. "Later on, it became the women's intercom," she continued. "Whenever they needed a man (which was not often), they would yell through the hole." Kivas were only for men, of course, and she joked that today there was a widescreen TV inside and the place was jammed on Super Sunday.

The guide first took us to the mission church of San Esteban. Without cracking a smile, she looked over at a decrepit confessional booth. "It's not used anymore," she said, "because our people ran out of sins." She speaks of ancient Franciscan priests as though they died yesterday, and the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 as a recent event. Huge paintings presented by various kings of Spain looked

new. Nineteenth century lithographs of the Stations of the Cross were neither wrinkled nor faded, even though they were not protected by glass.

The village is divided into six zones. During tourist season, there are tables set up outside the battered walls of houses, and it is here that artisans display intricate painted bowls and other wares. One man sold motivational lithographs, including an Escher-like optical illusion of the sky and sun. "You can see it as mostly black or mostly white," he said. This artist took credit cards, which are useful since a souvenir pot the size of a pincushion can cost \$40. Others said they would take a personal check, however.

Everywhere there were people about, children running, babies being admired, old men on benches in the shade. It was apparent that the townspeople were the product of a huge gene pool. Some had classic European faces, others Asiatic features, still others more of an almost African look.

The story goes that there were two boys who came down from Enchanted Mesa, the basalt tower left by a million-year-old volcano opposite Acoma. They yelled "Ha'aku-u-u" until they heard an echo. They knew then that where the echo originated was the promised site where they should settle. Ha'aku is the name of Acoma in the Keresan language spoken there. It is said to mean "the intended place." Like many Indian names, however, the word cannot be analyzed.

Could it be from a foreign language? That is actually the case of the tribal name "Cherokee," which is Greek. Anthropologists have long noticed puzzling elements of Greek religion in Puebloan ceremonies, though none has been crazy enough to suggest a real connection between the two.

We raised the question with our traveling companions: Could Ha'aku be related to the Greek words Echo and *aku* ("listen, hear," as in "acoustics")?

But what would ancient Greeks be doing over here? Maybe the same thing as ancient Arabs? Or ancient Egyptians? Or ancient Libyans? Or ancient Hebrews? Traces of all have been detected in the Southwest.

Go to Acoma and judge for yourself. The place is literally out of this world.



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