

THE HOPI WAY

by Cam Kenstler

If you were asked what the oldest continuously inhabited town in the United States was, what might be your answer? Charleston, South Carolina? New York City? St. Augustine, Florida? Perhaps these are good answers for the oldest European settlement in the US, but there is a town far older than these inhabited by a very different people.



Grand Canyon, Arizona, steep-sided canyon carved by the Colorado River, Native American Indians settled in canyon caves, Hopi & Yavapai.

"BACK ON THE RESERVATION, WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY RUNNING WATER, SO YOU'D GO BELOW THE CANYON AND THEN OUT THE SIDE OF THE CANYON WATER WOULD COME (A SPRING). AND WE WOULD GO DOWN AND FILL UP OUR BUCKETS WITH WATER AND CARRY THEM ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE MESA"

They are a people of the high desert, of red rocks, baking sun, high plateaus, little rain. A people of tradition and ceremony, hardiness and resilience, peace and order. They are the Hopi tribe of what is now Northern Arizona. One of their towns, Oraibi, nestled among the rocky plateaus, is about 1000 years old and has been lived in since its founding. From this we see that a unique people must have lived there, a people very stable and orderly in their ways, who did not migrate all over the land depending on the seasons like most indigenous tribes of North America.

The Hopi people are a tribe of the Northeast Arizona desert who have lived for ages in small villages (or pueblos) on top of or at the foot of several mesas (or flat-topped plateaus) spread throughout their lands. Their culture is quite unique and distinctive when compared to the tribes that surround them, in fact, their very name is intended to distinguish themselves from other people; the translation for the word "Hopi" varies, but it seems to mean something like "righteous, polite, well-behaved, adhering to the Hopi Way."

Their culture and agriculture are not merely functional or utilitarian, they parallel as integral parts of their religion. Even the most seemingly mundane activities are governed by age-old protocol and supplemented by symbolic traditions. Though their situation and way of life has undergone much change over the past couple hundred years, many of the old ways still live on with these people.