

Why I Am Drawn to Shoot Anasazi Country...

"The moon had risen above the cliff behind her. Out on the packed sand of the wash bottom the shadows of the walker made a strange elongated shape. Sometimes it suggested a heron, sometimes one of those stick figure forms of an Anasazi pictograph. An animated pictograph, its arms moved rhythmically as the moon shadow drifted across the sand. Sometimes, when the goat trail bent and put the walkers profile against the moon, the shadow became Kokopelli himself. The backpack formed the spirit's grotesque hump, the walking stick Kokopelli's crooked flute. Seen from above, the shadow would have made a Navajo believe that the great Yei northern clans call Watersprinkler had taken visible form. If an Anasazi had risen from his thousand year grave in the trash heap under the cliff ruins here, he would have seen the Humpbacked Flute Player, the rowdy God of Fertility of his lost people. But the shadow was only the shape of Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal blocking out the light of an October moon..."

"The moon lit only a part of the wall and the slanting light made it difficult to see, but she stopped to inspect it. In this light, the tapered, huge shouldered shape of the mystic Anasazi shaman lost its color and became merely a dark form. Above it a clutter of shapes danced, stick figures, abstractions: the inevitable Kokopelli, his humped shape bent, his flute pointed almost to the ground; a heron flying; a heron standing; the zigzag band of pigment representing a snake. Then she noticed the horse..."

"Where ever you found him - and you found him everywhere these vanished people carved and painted their spirits into cliffs of the Southwest, Kokopelli looked about the same. His humpbacked figure was supported by stick logs. Stick arms held a straight line to his tiny round head, making him seem to be playing a clarinet. The flute might be pointed down, or ahead. Otherwise there was little variation in how he was depicted. Except here. Here Kokopelli was lying on his back, flute pointed skyward. 'At last,' he had said. 'You have found Kokopelli's home. This is where he sleeps.'..."

from A Thief of Time, Tony Hillerman, as depicted in Hillerman Country, page 108, 1991.



They could see the snowcapped top of Mount Taylor looming over Grants, New Mexico, about 80 miles to the east, perched on one of relatively few outcrops of basalt in what Ship Rock climbers call Rappel Gulley. On the way up, it was the launching point for the final hard climb to the summit, a slightly tilted but flat surface of basalt about the size of a desk-top and 1721 feet above the prairie below. If you were going down, it was where you began a shorter but even harder almost vertical climb to reach the slope that led you downward with a fair chance of not killing yourself.

Whiteside slid along the wall, getting closer. He was moving slowly along the cliff, body almost perfectly vertical, toes holding his way on perhaps an inch of sloping stone, his fingers finding the cracks, crevices, and rough spots that would keep him balanced if the wind gusted. He was doing the traverse perfectly. Beautiful to watch. Even the body was perfect for the purpose. Just bone, skin, and muscle, without an ounce of surplus weight, moving like an insect against the cracked basalt wall.

And 1000 feet below them - no, a quarter of a mile below him lay "the surface of the world." Almost directly below, two Navajos on horseback were riding along the base of the monolith - tiny figures that put the risk of what Whiteside was doing into terrifying perspective. If he slipped, Whiteside would die, but not for a while. It would take time for a body to drop 600 feet, then bounce from an outcrop, and fall again, and bounce and fall, until it finally rested among the boulders at the bottom of this strange old volcanic core.

It was late afternoon, but the autumn sun was far North and the shadow of Ship Rock already stretched southeastward for miles across the tan prairie. Winter would soon end the climbing season. The sun was already so low it reflected only from the very tip of Mount Taylor. Eighty miles away early snows already packed the higher peaks in Colorado's San Juan's. Not a cloud anywhere. The sky was a deep dry-country blue; the air was cool and, a rarity at this altitude, utterly still.

The silence was so absolute one could hear the faint sibilance of Whiteside's soft rubber shoe sole as he shifted a foot along the stone. A couple of hundred feet below them, a red-tailed hawk drifted along, riding an updraft of air along the cliff face.

Whiteside moved, and stopped, and looked down.

"There's more honeycomb breccia under the overhang," he said. "Lots of little erosion cavities. It looks like some pretty good cracking where you can see basalt." He shifted again. "A pretty good shelf down about _"

Silence. Then, Whiteside said, "I think I see a helmet."

"What?"

"My God!" Whiteside said. "There's a skull in it."

The Fallen Man, Tony Hillerman, 1996



My Love for the Anasazi

In truth, I began to love our Anasazi heritage through the many vivid tales Tony Hillerman has written about the Southwest. When I first found Hillerman, he'd already won the Edgar Award for 1974. Far away in Washington state, I could but dimly remember trekking the Four Corners during a time at Los Alamos. Nor did I recall some of David Muench's classic Anasazi images. Finally free to pursue my dreams, some as they formed, I later began shooting Anasazi country.

Since then, I've enjoyed the privilege of taking numerous cassette tapes of Hillerman's books into the land he loves so much, driving the back trails, hiking and photographing wild country. So I'm a true Hillerman devotee; first reading, then listening to his fascinating multi-faceted interpretations of Anasazi country.

One raw May afternoon, I finally found a secluded nook high on the cliff side above where the Colorado and Green meet, a place revered by the Anasazi. The peace, the quiet, the fulfilling view ~ it was a just start of quite an enchanting day. Something in the air infused me; perhaps it was even the spirit of Kokopelli.

Within the next six months, this reverence, almost like reception of the Holy Ghost, blossomed. Of four photographs I took that day, all became award winners ~ in one form or another.

But it's not just Hillerman's words, nor evocative images Worthy of Merit ~ it's something deeper. It's the awareness that a people built their lives around a place of precarious food production, unsteady water resources, but inordinately indelible beauty and deep peace. It's the fulfillment of trekking ancient lonely Anasazi trails; it's capturing the delicacy of such indelible beauty for others:

It's become a heart's quest...

"From the open land, pure air, and clean water in this heart-breaking beautiful American Southwest, we're slowly inclining to the Indian belief nature is not inanimate, but imbued with one common life force: the living water, living earth, mountains, trees, plants, animals, and man. All are born of Mother Earth. All are bound together in an indivisible unity of both biological and spiritual ecology.

"For many years, our art, which like all art is dictated by unconscious drives, is changing from abstract to representational forms. We had lost contact the fecund earth which is appearing again with all its human derivatives and meanings. If landscapes, pictographs, and petroglyphs crudely pecked and painted by ancient Indians of the American Southwest are indeed such symbols, so too must be many examples of modern photography when they attain the dimension of high art. They achieve this truism, not by the mechanical perfection a camera, but by the eye which directs it, the mind which selects its focus, and the unconscious which perceives the essence of the subject. David Muench is a great photographer. So we need not question why during our technical age, his photographic art is devoted to interpretive depictions of the great Southwest."

Preface by Frank Waters, Anasazi, Ancient People of the Rock, Muench and Pike, 1974.

My ancient flyleaf of Muench's classic Anasazi anthology contains the simple inscription, "Dear Mother, a way of taking you to places of my country. Merry Christmas, 1978, Love, Richard!"

Anasazi Search

"In this on corner of the Colorado Plateau you might guess the Anasazi were hiding from something. Their ruins are scattered up Butler wash, Cottonwood Creek, Mule Canyon, and Chinle wash. They preferred alcoves facing southwest, where the overhanging cliff shaded them from the summer sun but admitted the low, slanting sunlight of winter. They also seem to prefer hard to see, hard-to-reach sites.

"A few years ago I wanted to find such a place as part of the setting for a novel I intended to write. While the plot was nebulous, I planned to have two pot hunters collide in this isolated ruin - one intending to dig up its burials to advance his reputation as scientist, the other looking for artifacts to sell to feed his family. One would kill the other - my story would pivot on this undetected crime.

"Why not simply invent the scene, just as pot hunters and plot were invented? For some reason my imagination does not stretch that far. It's willing to produce imaginary

people during imaginary deeds only as long as their feet are planted on real landscapes. Or perhaps this is just a rationalization - an excuse I've developed to get away from word processor and into places I enjoy. Whatever the real motives, it's my habit to visit the places where I want my fictional events to occur, to stand in the dust, breathe the air, consider the sounds and smells, watch the light change when the Sun goes down, notice the trap-door spider emerge from her hole for her twilight hunt and bats collecting insects before the moon rises, and listen to the pair of coyotes in coyote conversation on the mesa behind me. Most of it never reaches the page, some of it is modified to fit, but I seem to need such memories when I write a scene."

Tony Hillerman, writing about creating A Thief of Time, Hillerman Country, 1991.

A Thief of Time became a PBS Special in the early 21st Century.

Anasazi Moonrise

Like Muench and Hillerman, I may need to visit the same site several times to get just the right digital combination of color, light, and composition. At home, there's usually something these pictures 'say' which lets me name them - both from my emotional response and indelible memories. So, I am much like Hillerman, searching for his 'real' setting of *Thief of Time* _or_ my Anasazi digital treasures.

I love Moonrise; perhaps this scene might follow an Anasazi Moonrise...

There is something deeply gratifying about joining the Anasazi at night. What makes the night exceptional, in their eyes and mine, is my presence among them, not the lapsing of time.

It's worth standing out in a soft snowfall just to savor the anticlimax of midnight, just to acknowledge that out of tens of millions of species on this planet, only one celebrates not time's passing, but the peaceful way it has deliberately chosen to mark the passage of time in peace, harmony, and beauty.

It's not that time can be stopped nor that our night doesn't show its passage. Stars are wheeling around Polaris; piñons that frame the ancient pueblo are laying down another cellular increment of needles. Turkeys stir in their poultry yard. A juniper sheds its snow. In the kiva, a faint, solitary drum beat wafts from beside a warm fire, echoing of nearby canyon walls. No two nights are ever the same.

I always wonder what it would be like to belong to a species — just for a while — that isn't so busy indexing its life, but lives wholly just within the single long strand of its being. I will only get the very faintest glimmering, tonight, of what such an ancient life held. I know *_when I stand amidst ancient Anasazi heritage tonight under a full moon_* I will feel a change once midnight has come.

Some deep need will have temporarily dimmed, yet not vanished; I will walk back to car, cell phone, and Internet....

Anasazi Adventures

It is in this spirit I invite you to share Anasazi Adventures with me.

Let's make this tour a digital connoisseur's learning delight. Let's capture provocative images at Magic Hour. Let's walk where ancient man has gone before, with opportunity, with an abiding desire to leave our passing pristine, and, with the clear quest to learn about the ancient ones and *Think like an Anasazi*.

Between shooting sessions, we can discuss many aspects of digital photography. We can argue HDR capture techniques. We can discuss HDR workflow techniques; the wisdom of further Lightroom 3 and CS5 postprocessing. We can talk about the shortest ways to process those hundreds or thousands of images you'll take home. We can chat about how to shoot in such a way images you capture and process can be considered

Worthy of Merit...

Anasazi Pleasure (above) won Honorable Mention at New Mexico State Fair, 2007.

Ship Rock won Landscapes, New Mexico Magazine, 2009, 2nd Place, Scenics, New Mexico State Fair, 2009, and Juried Entry, 1st Annual New Mexico Photographic Art Show, 2009

And we, like our ancient Anasazi, can live in peace, harmony, and beauty!

Organization

Anasazi Adventures Tours is laid out in three segments on the website using drop-down menus.

First, we have Tours. We talk about the Anasazi in general, we cover their habitats, and we talk some specifics about when, where, and how to shoot their country.

Since we want to principally shoot HDR at Magic Hour, we then talk about Full Range HDR Workflow. We want to show rudiments of the effort required to create an award-winning HDR image.

Finally, we include a number of award-winning images as Fine Art Landscapes. We've developed a simple mat style to highlight the ever changing panoply of images.

Joe Bridwell

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Anasazi as a Term

Most of my adult life has taken place near the Four Corners. From earliest memory, the word *Anasazi* has been applied to the ancient ones, those marvelous people who, through their gifts and culture, built the enduring architectural heritage we now tend to think of as *Mesa Verde* and *Chaco Canyon*.

Recently, the word *Anasazi* is being replaced by *ancestral Pueblo*. This is true of National Park System, Bureau of Land Management, and other organizations.

I would like to continue to use *Anasazi*; I mean no disrespect to either living or dead. Neither, I think, did either David Muench or Tony Hillerman when they captured or penned these immortal tomes.