



BLUFF UTAH

# A SHORT BLUFF VALLEY DEEP HISTORY

**THE PAGES OF BLUFF'S HUMAN HISTORY TURN BACK TO AT LEAST 11,000 YEARS AGO.**

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Ancient artifacts and rock art discovered in the vicinity of the Bluff Valley hark back to the days of mammoth hunters. The hunting-and-gathering mode of life held sway for about 8,500 years as small groups of people moved in and out of the region.

With the introduction of corn-based agriculture, the pace of social change dramatically quickened. Around A.D. 600, the first apparent farming community in the valley was established in the sand dunes on the west side of modern Bluff.

**A.D. 600**

These people lived in houses that dotted the terraces above and along the San Juan River. They grew corn, squash, and newly introduced beans. And they made the first real pottery, which made possible the cooking of beans. Archaeological investigation of this community has revealed such public facilities as a cemetery and a great kiva.

**A.D. 800'S**

In the A.D. 800's, the center of social gravity shifted to the base of the Twin Rocks. Twin Rocks is a striking rock formation on the east side of modern Bluff. People of this time period clustered together into blocks of rooms and pithouses. These villagers introduced red ware pottery, including a pottery type that archaeologists named for its first place of recognition: Bluff Black-on-Red. Little formal investigation of this site has occurred, however, A large portion of this ancient pueblo is now protected by local nonprofit organizations.



## A.D. 900'S

A century later, the pendulum of social importance swung to the south side of the river to a site known as Dance Plaza. A large rectangular room, or “dance plaza,” is the main feature on the site. Nearby, a pair of large boulders tower over the plaza. At the base of these enormous boulders, which are festooned with petroglyphs, are two large deeply pecked holes, perhaps representations of the Puebloan sipapu or place of emergence. Unexcavated, the site falls under the jurisdiction and protection of the Navajo Nation.

By the late 1000's, a powerful new cultural sensibility swept across the Mesa Verde region.

The Mesa Verde region includes the canyon-rich landscapes of southeastern Utah. Deriving from New Mexico, this “Chacoan Phenomenon” featured bold architectural elements: great houses, great kivas, and roads. Bluff Valley's social center was relocated to the north side of the river onto a hilltop that overlooks the entire valley. This new community center, the Bluff Great House site, included a multi-story masonry great house and an enormous subterranean great kiva. Archaeological research suggests that the site remained in use for about 200 years. The site itself was the southern terminus of an extensive network of great houses and prehistoric roads that stretched from the San Juan River to the foot of the Abajo Mountains in the north.



## LATE 1000'S

Figure 3. This reconstruction of the Bluff Great House shows the basic architectural layout of the structure.

## MID 1200'S

By the mid-1,200s, this great alliance had fallen apart, and the Puebloan people moved south to inhabit the landscapes of the Rio Grande, the Zuni Mountains, and the Hopi Mesas.