

BASKETMAKER II DWELLINGS NEAR DURANGO, COLORADO

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On the basis of archaeological evidence, occupation of the Falls Creek Caves and the side-hill site, Ignacio 7:101¹ was culturally contemporaneous. There is strong probability that both caves and hillside were synchronously inhabited. But in view of the likelihood that culture changes were occurring relatively slowly at so early a level, it would not be surprising if dates from the two should show a difference of a century or two. Nor would it be cause for doubt or astonishment if occupation of one or both should be proved to have extended over a considerable length of time.

The culture represented, despite a few minor deviations, clearly falls into Basket Maker II of the Pecos classification. Ranking traits are: Absence of pottery, hafted axe and hammer; presence of atlatl, fur-string blankets, sandals and loin cloths, human hair cordage, twined bags, animal hair sashes, coiled basketry, rush matting, flexible cradle board, bone gaming pieces, tubular pipe, *olivella* shell, stone and juniper berry beads, extensive use of tanned hides, untailored, corn and squash or pumpkin as cultivated foods. Burial was at random — in rock crevices, abandoned storage cists and refuse.

The sites in question broaden the accepted picture of Basket Maker II culture by adding to it a definite style of domestic architecture. The roughly circular single-roomed dwellings were up to 25 feet or more in diameter. The mud plastered floors were shallow saucer-shaped, with a heating pit at or near center. Interior storage bins were many and of four kinds: large, deep, jug-shaped pot holes, slab-lined pits, slab-lined pits surmounted by above-floor mud domes, and mud domes entirely above floor level.

Walls were of wood-and-mud masonry. The upturn at the periphery of the floor ended against horizontal foot logs. Above these were laid, also in horizontal position, pieces of wood of any sort available, from thick twigs to slabs from lightning-riven pines, more or less overlapping and interlaced. Mud was used to fill all interstices and roughly to chink and point the surfaces. Presumably the encircling wall rose with an inward batter to what may be considered ceiling height. It supported a cribbed roof suggestive in plan of the kiva roofs of later times. Thus interior vertical roof supports, like those characteristic of Basket Maker III dwellings, were not needed. No walls were found standing to a height sufficient to reveal the shape and orientation of the entrances.

Should these Basket Maker II dwellings near Durango be regarded merely as a local phenomenon? Or do they exemplify a type that was in general use over the entire Basket Maker II domain? Results of future observation must be depended upon to provide a positive answer to these queries, but to the writer, the latter would seem the most probable alternative. Why, then, have examples not been found elsewhere? Most likely because, under average conditions, remains of them would be impossible to identify. On a level site, the excavation made to accommodate one of the saucer-shaped floors would have been around 15 inches deep. With the timber rotted away, the mud of walls and roof would have been about enough to refill the excavation, leaving neither mound nor pit to mark the spot. And even if the timber had burned, after 1600 years of erosion, action of frost and roots, and the burrowing of rodents, there would remain only bits of charcoal scattered through mixed earth, with little to suggest to

¹So designated by the Gladwin survey of the region.



Fig. 1. Floor 1a at site IGN 7:101.

what the timbers of which they were vestiges once pertained. Relatively deep burial of such a site would afford the only circumstances under which its features might remain distinguishable.

This requirement was fulfilled at the sites near Durango, particularly at 7:101. Aboriginal procedure there was as follows: A drift was cut into the steep talus and the earth removed was heaped on the slope in front until a terrace large enough to accommodate the projected dwelling had been provided. Fire destroyed the structures with great frequency. After such an event, the plan usually carried out was to sweep most of the debris of conflagration over the brink of the terrace, dig a little farther into the hill at a slightly higher level, spread the dug earth over the burned area, then build another dwelling on top of it. In one part of site 7:101 there were at least seven floors thus superposed. After final abandonment, rapid erosion of the very abrupt slope behind it quickly buried the site so that a gratifying number of its features were preserved until the time of excavation. It would seem justifiable to believe that inhabitation of the spot should be measured by centuries rather than by generations.

Floors 1, 2, and 3 were nearly at the same level in a row from 1 at the south to 3 at the north. Floor (room) 1a, outlined in the photograph, would appear to have been part of the last dwelling erected at 7:101. There were four older levels beneath it; and after the structure to which it pertained burned, there was no subsequent disturbance of the area it occupied. With latest construction for Floor 1a at shortly after A.D. 322, bark dates near A.D. 200 for Floors 2 and 3 occasion no surprise.