Old Trails Museum

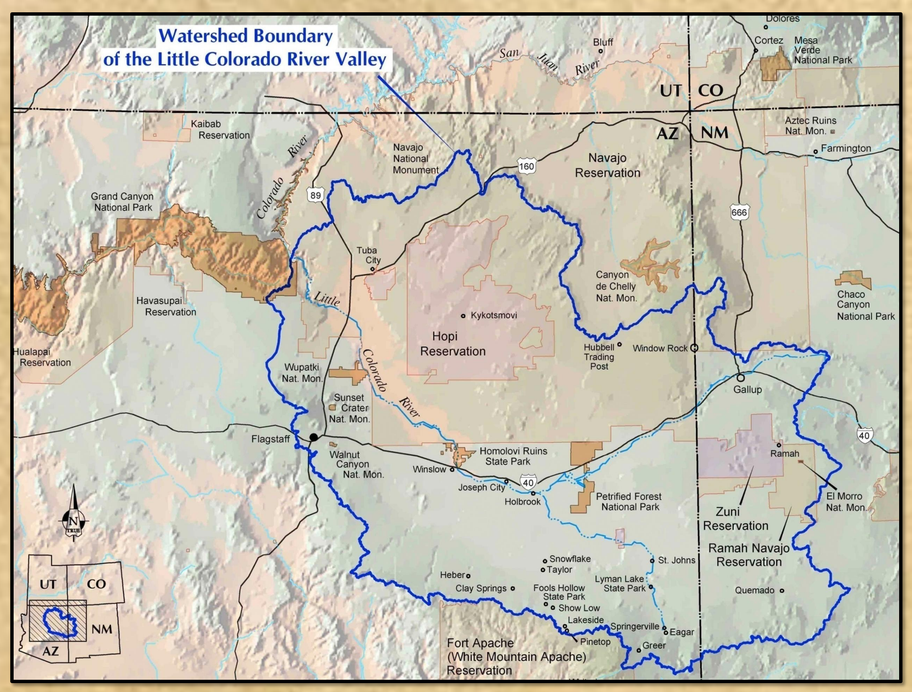
Journeys To Winslow

PANEL 1

The First Peoples of the Southwestern Colorado Plateau

Winslow sits almost 5,000 feet above sea level on the southwestern Colorado Plateau and within the watershed of the Little Colorado River, a tributary of the mighty Colorado. The Winslow area has long been at a crossroads of commercial and cultural exchange. People have traveled area trails, roads, railways, highways, and airways for trade, religious freedom, economic opportunity, and adventure. The city's rich journey stories connect it with the Southwest and the nation as a whole in diverse and unexpected ways.

Long before the railroad arrived, the Little Colorado and its tributaries sustained the ancestors of the Hopi and Navajo peoples. In more recent times, members of both nations have continually migrated between their tribal lands and Winslow for trade, employment, education, and public services. This map of the Little Colorado River watershed and their tribal lands was provided by Archaeology Southwest.



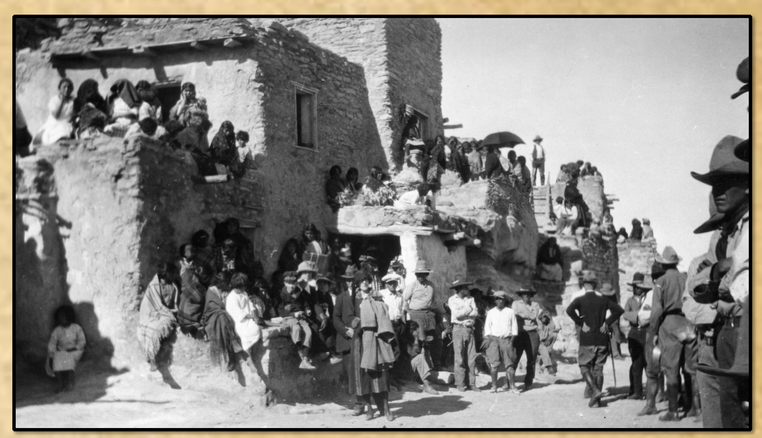
The Hopi People

Ancestral Puebloans, ancestors of the Hopi people, inhabited the area from A.D. 200 through 1600. The Homol'ovi villages just northeast of present-day Winslow were at peak activity in the 1300s. Inhabitants mastered techniques for growing corn in the high desert, which they traded for pottery with the Pueblo villages on the mesas to the north. They likely migrated there along the Palatkwapi Trail at the end of the 14th century. The land they left behind now constitutes Homolovi State Park. In 1882, the federal government established the Hopi Reservation on those northern mesas, which are a one-hour drive from Winslow.

Homol'ovi IV, occupied from about 1250 to 1280, consisted of 150 rooms constructed from local sandstone. (Illustration by Douglas Gann; courtesy of Archaeology Southwest)

Spanish Explorers on the Palatkwapi Trail by Joseph Cruz Rodriguez depicts the first non-natives to see the Hopi villages to the north in the 1540s. The Spanish introduced new crops, horses, and sheep to the Colorado Plateau and beyond, but neither Spain nor Mexico ever gained control of the southwestern portion of the plateau.

Seen here in 1903, the Hopi village of Walpi is located atop the western end of First Mesa, about 70 miles from Winslow.

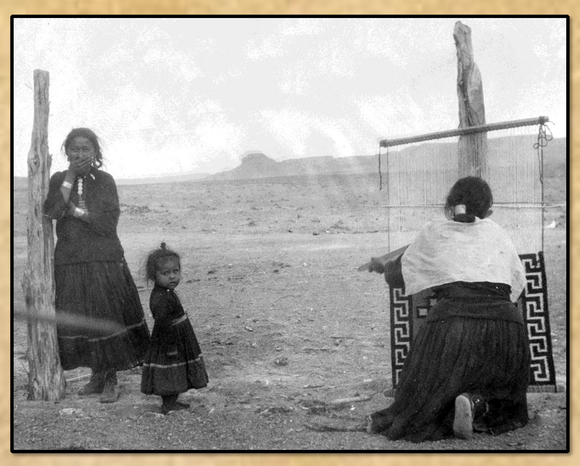


Tourists join Hopi residents to witness a ceremonial dance at Walpi in 1924.

Tourists caravan from Winslow to Hopiland to observe ceremonial dances in 1951.

The Navajo People

The Athabaskans, hunter-gatherer ancestors of the Navajo people, likely came to the area from northern Canada in the 1400s. By the 1700s Navajos, or Diné (The People), were building wooden homes called hogans, growing crops, tending sheep, and trading with others on the Colorado Plateau. In the winter of 1864, the federal government forced nearly 9,000 Navajos on the "Long Walk" to desolate Fort Sumner at Bosque Redondo, New Mexico Territory. Over 2,500 died from starvation and exposure, and more died from deplorable conditions at the fort. In 1868, the survivors returned from their imprisonment to the newly established Navajo Reservation, created from a small portion of their original lands. They stopped at Fort Defiance along the way to pick up thousands of sheep and goats provided by the federal government for resettlement. The Navajo Nation, which borders Winslow to the north, is now the largest tribal entity in the United States in both area and population.



A woman, child, and weaver from the Navajo village of Dilkon pose for a photo in 1927. Dilkon is 36 miles from Winslow, which the Navajo called Béésh Sinil (the "Place of Steel Rails").

The federal government provided thousands of sheep and goats for resettlement to the survivors of the "Long Walk." Navajos are expert sheepherders, like these two shearing sheep in a "Frashers Fotos" postcard from 1932.

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