

Craig Childs

House of Rain: Tracking a Vanished Civilization Across the American Southwest (2007)

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As Varien outlined the way in which people once moved, I placed my hand on my side window, feeling the outside temperature through the glass, the cold winter night racing by. We were driving so fast that we cut open ceaseless frames of the Anasazi world. Such a strange way to move, I thought. It is no wonder that we have difficulty imagining the mechanics of Anasazi migration, that a number of researchers resist the notion that these people had the ability to move their entire cultural system from place to place like a shell game. **Whole schools of archaeologists have believed that migration was not something that happened here. This widely felt resistance arose, I think, from the advent of the automobile.** The land had become inaccessible when asphalt highways were strung across this region. Entire pieces of the Southwest turned blank as cars were sent on long detours around mountain ranges and canyons. Walking is out of the question. The tone of this conceit can still be heard among certain scholars who speak as though places such as Chaco and southwest Colorado were so far apart that groups of people living in them were carrying on wholly separate lives, only distantly aware of each other.

**It is only a couple of hundred miles, though, from Chaco to southwest Colorado, a long distance to drivers who sail along a highway that renders the surrounding land untouchable. Walking a couple of hundred miles is a different experience entirely, shorter in a way,** filled with a heightened recognition as each landmark takes hours or days to reach. As you walk, over the days landmarks such as Sleeping Ute Mountain and Mesa Verde acquire personality, their faces slowly changing on the horizon. You discover that Chaco is merely a front porch to the house of southwest Colorado. This may have been the actual center of the Anasazi world.

I kept looking into the dark, my mind tricking my eyes into seeing waves of people passing through nine hundred years ago, families loaded with their most crucial belongings, caravans trekking through gaps and along washes. They marched past with domestic dogs drifting out ahead and behind to keep an eye on things, barking suddenly at the sight of other people: other processions of cousins and uncles, nobles in macaw robes exiled from Chaco, and also people who must have looked not familiar at all, the darting lope of hunters and scouts from other tribes. Everyone was coming back to Colorado (112-113).