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July 2024

Park Honors Indian Request to Avoid 'Anasazi' in Book Store

Aspen Daily News

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Park honors Indian request to avoid 'Anasazi' in book store

From The Associated Press

DURANGO — A group of archaeologists is accusing officials at Mesa Verde National Park of censoring books containing the term “Anasazi,” a term widely used for the ancestral American Indians of the Four Corners region.

The Pecos Conference, an informal group of regional archaeologists, says books are being left out of park bookstores because they do not simply refer to ancestral Puebloans, the term preferred by regional tribes.

“The objection is not specific to any particular term, but that books are being censored on the basis of titles rather than content,” said David Breternitz, a retired archaeologist in Dove Creek.

Tessy Shirakawa, a spokeswoman at Mesa Verde, said all publications considered for sale in the bookstore, as well as exhibits and educational materials, go through an extensive review. Final approval comes from park Superintendent Larry Weise.

The park works with the wishes of the 24 tribes whose culture and heritage are represented at Mesa Verde, Shirakawa said.

“Whether one word or another is used is not the issue,” she told the Durango Herald. “It’s not a matter of censorship — it’s actually respect. Out of respect to tribal members, we honor their requests about what’s appropriate and inappropriate to present to the public.”

The word Anasazi is thought to be of Navajo origin. There never was an Anasazi tribe, and many modern Pueblo people dislike the term. The word is understood to mean “ancient enemy,” though some think it means simply non-Navajo or “the others.”

“Anasazi is not a word that Puebloans consider their own,” said LouAnn Jacobson, manager of the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores. “It’s been a topic of discussion (using the term Anasazi), but our position has been that we have other, much bigger and more important issues to address.”

Jacobson said the center has responded to requests from tribal consultants to remove or modify exhibits or information. “We have to balance tribal concerns and what helps us convey certain information or messages to the public,” she said.

Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office in Arizona, said the tribe led the protest against use of the term “Anasazi” because of its meaning.

“In Hopi culture, to call another person an enemy is not proper — it is against Hopi ethics to call anyone an enemy we feel it’s a derogatory term,” he said.