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Cliff Dweller: Side Lights of the History of a Vanished Race

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THE CLIFF DWELLER

SIDE LIGHTS ON THE HISTORY OF A VANISHED RACE.

Their Relics Show What Kind of a People They Were. That They Were Overpowered and Conquered by Enemies, and There Certainty Ends and Conjecture Begins—The Collection Prepared for Exhibition at the World's Columbian Exposition.

Ref 1-22-93

A. F. Willmarth, chief of the state historical department of the World's Fair, has completed the finest collection of cliff-dweller relics ever made in Colorado. He is now assorting the collection and will send it on to Chicago within a month, where it will be placed as an exhibit at the fair.

The collection was got together last summer. Four men were employed in making it. Their explorations were confined to the canons and canyadas of the Mesa Verde, a large tableland lying in the Northern Ute reservation some dozen miles or so from the northern boundary of New Mexico. The work of the party was necessarily slow and laborious, owing to the almost inaccessible situation of the cliff houses, perched as they are like eagle's eyries high on the side of tremendous precipices, and to the fact that half the curios found had to be excavated from the dust and increment with which they have been buried in the lapse of centuries. More than fifty houses were entered more or less profitably. It was the first systematic collecting ever done in the Mesa

... canons which split... ateat into tongues and islands of precipitous rock are lined with the houses of the cliff-dwellers. So wild and shaggy with woods is the country that no one knew until three years ago that such ruins existed there. Since the day when the cliff-dwellers were a living race spruce and pine and pinon trees have found a foothold in the crevices and ledges of the walls. In a great many instances they have grown up in front of the dwellings and shut them from the casual view of any chance prospector or traveler in the valley. Some one with keen eyes at last discovered the ruins and it was not long thereafter that the region's richness in such dwellings was made known to the world.

APPROACHES TO THE CLIFF HOUSES.

The sides of the canons are sheer walls of yellow sandstone ranging in height from 500 to 1,000 feet. As a rule the dwellings stand 100 feet or so below the rim of the heights in a sheltered recess overhung by beetling masses of rock. In a great many instances it is impossible to climb to the houses from the bottom of the canon. Most of them have to be entered from the top of the cliffs. There are no defined roads or paths leading



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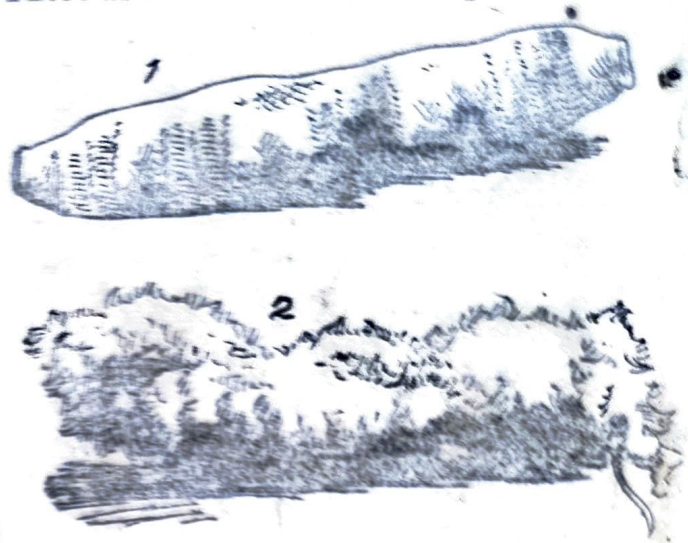
RUINS ON THE MESA.

The mesa is a plateau which, even in that tumultuous region of peculiar conformations, stands alone in striking singularity. It is situated like some mighty barrier tossed up by Titans between the Mancos and Montezuma valleys. Throughout its extent it is gashed and seamed by innumerable tortuous, deep canons and ravines. The uplands are crowded with black and tangled forests of pinons, with the boles of the trees serried in such close array that a man finds it difficult to pick a passage through them. Ruins of the houses of the mesa-dwellers are thick upon the plateau. Some of them, fairly well preserved, shoot towers of ma-

above the dense gloom of bosage. Most of them exposed to the elements have crumbled down, leaving only fragments of walls and mounds of debris to mark the place where they stood in the forgotten age, when the people who inhabited them gathered their harvests from the fields where the forests now grow. There are remains of large reservoirs here and there. The channels of irrigating ditches are to be plainly traced. Those old people were an agricultural people and warlike only to protect their homes. This is proven by the small quantity of war tools found and the fortress-like character of their buildings.

DISTINCT FROM THE CLIFF-DWELLERS.

That they were a race or tribe entirely distinct from the cliff-dwellers is gathered from the different shape of the skulls. The skull of the cliff-dweller is artificially flattened behind; that of the mesa-dweller is as nature formed it. Whether the two peoples lived in the region during the same period there is no way of knowing. Whether they tilled the same lands in peace or were bloody and constant feud is a mystery as mutable as the past, voiceless as the skulls found upon the mesa, silent as the ruins of the cliff-dwellers.



1—Woven yucca pillow filled with corn-bassets. 2—Mummy of child wrapped in feather cloth.

to them, and the attempt to descend to them is an undertaking full of danger. You must foot it gingerly along gullies worn in the cliffs, climb down funnels and flumes that water has washed out, steal along benches, and mance along ledges scarcely six inches wide, keeping your back to the mountain, when the slightest jar of the nice equipoise of the body would hurl you through fathoms of emptiness to death on the rocks below.

The difficulty that must be overcome before the dwellings can be reached gives some inadequate idea of the prodigious amount of labor it must have cost those ancient people to build their homes, and of the toil with which their daily life was fraught. For the rock in their houses was quarried only in small part from the cliffs. Most of it was brought from the mesa or the valley, stone by stone, and used in the erection of piles, which, though of rude construction, were of a stately and imposing size.

A COMMUNAL PALACE.

The cliff palace, the ruins of which Mr. Willmarth's party explored, was, in its integrity, 425 feet long, 80 feet high, 80 feet broad, contained 127 rooms on the ground floor and accommodations for 1,000 persons. Then it must be taken into consideration

products of the fields and the daily supply had to be carried to the houses, springs welled from the mountain, and no vegetation sprung into life in the sheltered ledges.

But what is more to be wondered at than the ceaseless drudgery of the cliff-dwellers and their patience in overcoming almost insurmountable obstacles, is the daring and pertinacity of those unknown enemies who stormed the steep and slaughtered the tribes in their all but impregnable strongholds.

Who the cliff-dwellers were no one knows; no one will ever know with certainty. Comparative philologists have created a language for the Aryans, a race that history never knew, and have described their customs and manner of living. All the research so far has

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Portion of a Pictograph in Cliff Dwelling.

those dwellers of the cliffs, or of the time in which they flourished. They have passed away, leaving no records from which their history may be deciphered, and no traditions regarding them linger among the modern Indians.

THE REMAINING RECORDS.

The outlandish ideographs which they painted upon the precipices and which might throw some light upon their history cannot be interpreted. They remain undimmed, blazoned upon the rock in red and black and white—the thoughts of cliff-dwellers transmuted into pigment. But their meaning is as dark as the centuries that saw that vanished civilization, as those after ages that swept it away forever.

The cliff tribes have left behind the ruins of their houses, their domestic tools, their implements of war, the products of their looms and of their labors, the pipes that their wise men smoked in council, the chaplets of beads that their women wore. Such silent letters of inarticulate articles alone

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But such a story could never be told in detail. Most of it is mere conjecture and a blind groping from uncertain hypotheses to more uncertain conclusions. There is no date upon which to base even a guess at the period of time when the cliff-dwellers inhabited their peculiar abodes. Where they came from cannot be known.

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A LOST HISTORY.

When they disappeared and how is an enigma. Whether they were cut off to a man by their enemies, or whether they were driven to other and distant homes is equally problematical. Some consider them the earliest development of human life on the globe. Others do not look upon them as a very ancient race. Indeed, certain antiquarians regard them merely as the forefathers of the Southern tribes of pueblo-building Indians, who to some extent carry out their customs and manner of living to-day.

Without doubt, however, they were a very ancient people. Their primitive ways of life and the implements and utensils which they used prove this much. There are, too, other evidences of it. For instance, Mr. Willmarth has in his collection a section of a spruce tree which was found growing upon the ruins of one of the houses. It contains nearly 300 rings, and according to arboriculturists, each ring appearing in the heart of a tree stands for a year in the tree's existence. The house upon which the tree grew must have been centuries in crumbling to decay, for in this climate, and sheltered as it was by the cliff's projecting wall from storm and wind, the process of dissolution must have been exceedingly slow.