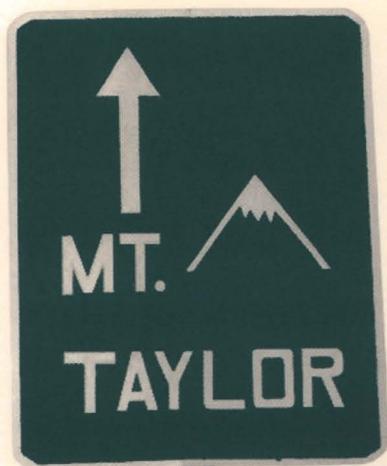


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# *Sacred and Secular Landscape Symbolism at Mount Taylor, New Mexico*

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Mountains are spiritually and culturally significant landscapes that evoke emotions ranging from awe and fear to reverence and wonder. Towering crags, violent storms, rare flora and fauna, snow-capped peaks, and serrated ridges all contribute to a mystical sense of the sublime. Throughout the world mountains symbolize the center of the cosmos, abodes of deities, temples, pristine wilderness, communal identity, and the fountain of life (Bernbaum 1997). American Indians have held the summits to be sacred for millennia, whereas Western thought has evolved from “mountain gloom to mountain glory” over the past three centuries (Nicolson 1997). Even within the predominantly secular society of the American Southwest, mountains are deeply symbolic, and the traditional sacred associations with some peaks are undiminished. An increasing awareness of the spiritual qualities of mountains and the landscape projection of their symbolic meaning creates a discourse in which secular and sacred ideals may clash, compete, or meld (Blake 1994). The discourse then becomes part of the shared understanding and definition of the Southwest as a regional construct (Riley 1994; Byrkit 1992). Ultimately, the sustained management of any mountain region hinges upon the recognition and understanding of symbolic beliefs (Ives and Messerli 1997).

Mount Taylor, a composite volcano in western New Mexico on the southeastern portion of the Colorado Plateau, is a signature landmark central to community identity. The seasonally snow-capped summit (elevation 11,301 feet above mean sea level) stands in marked contrast to the black lava flows of El Malpais (The Badlands; see figure 1). The mountain is sacred to at least four American Indian cultures—Navajo, Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni—and is named in at least nine languages: Spanish, English, Navajo, Apache, and five Pueblo Indian languages (Robinson 1994). Mount Taylor has been a key navigation promon-



*Figure 1. Mount Taylor and San Mateo Mountains, looking northeastward across the lava flows of El Malpais National Monument from New Mexico State Highway 53 in November 1994. (Photograph by the author)*

tory for American Indians, Spanish settlers, and all explorers, as well as for interstate highway motorists and modern-day adventurers following the footsteps of Coronado (Preston 1992). This sacred peak is an essential component to a system of cultural meaning at both a community and regional scale, sustaining people in physical and spiritual terms.

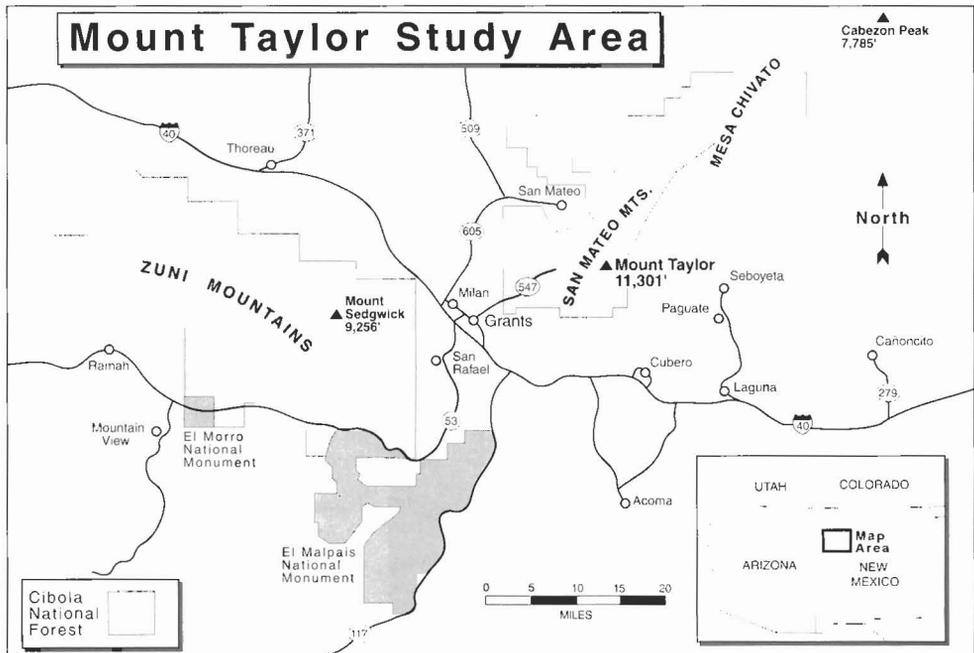
The chief symbolism of Mount Taylor emanates from a sanctity that is recounted in American Indian folklore. Lawrence Clark Powell (personal communication, 9 April 1994), notable Southwestern librarian, bibliographer, and author, suggests the meaning of a highly visible and sacred peak is clearly understood by approaching it from the four cardinal directions. Mount Taylor is best known as a sacred peak to the Navajo (also known as Diné, the People), who, along with Pueblo cultures, organize knowledge into a geographical domain of four cardinal directions. The prescribed sunwise order of these directions is east, south, west, north (Kelley and Francis 1994). Thus, this essay has a directional framework, starting with the view from the east. I first describe the physical and cultural setting of the massif and the surrounding area, followed by a discussion of the symbolism associated with the peak in various cultural and community contexts. The emphasis is on how the views and meaning of Mount Taylor change with cardinal di-

rections, with a resulting interplay of secular and sacred symbolism. From the east, imprints on the landscape since Spanish colonial times now meld with the aesthetic values of Albuquerque urbanites. From the south, the people of Acoma and Laguna pueblos have long connected with the spiritual power of the mountain place, a theme expressed in the writings of Acoma native Simon Ortiz (1992) and Laguna native Leslie Marmon Silko (1977). From the west, the dominant use and symbolism associated with Mount Taylor emanates from Grants. From the north, Navajos regard the peak as the sacred blue mountain of the south.

### PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING

Mount Taylor is about fifteen miles northeast of Grants and sixty miles west of Albuquerque (figure 2). It is a graceful eroded composite volcano formed of alternating layers of lava and ash, with a horseshoe-shaped interior valley exhumed by erosion on the eastern side. The eruptions forming the forty-four-mile-long plateau crowned by Mount Taylor occurred from about four million to two million years ago (Chronic 1987). The northern half of the volcanic range, reaching to

*Figure 2. Mount Taylor study area in western New Mexico. (Cartography by Arizona State University, Department of Geography Cartographic Laboratory)*

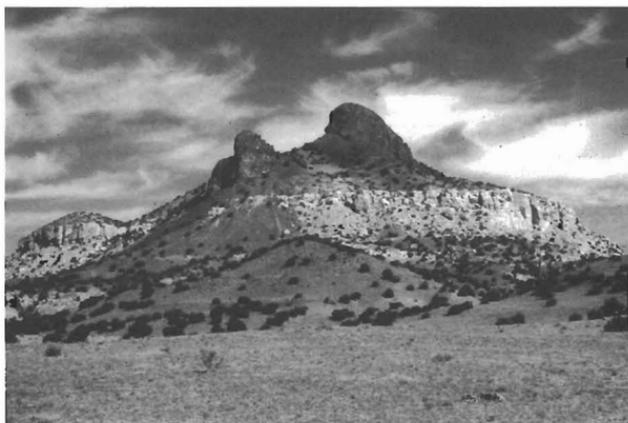


an elevation slightly more than nine thousand feet, is known both as Mesa Chivato (Mountain Goat) and the Cebolleta (Tender Onion) Mountains, and the higher southern half is named the San Mateo Mountains. The high points of the San Mateos, Mount Taylor and a subpeak one mile to the northeast named La Mosca (The Fly), are remnants of the eroded crater rim. Weathering has eroded the lava cap and softer underlying material at the edge of the sierra to expose nearly fifty volcanic necks, isolated columns of lava vents that cooled as the eruptions ceased (Ungnade 1972; see figure 3).

The highest elevations of the range are mostly public land administered by the Mount Taylor Ranger District of Cibola National Forest. A paved highway leads to two campgrounds and other recreation areas in the heart of the San Mateo Mountains, and a network of gravel roads covers the range. The summit of La Mosca is extensively developed as a fire lookout and electronic transmission site. About nine square miles near the summit of Mount Taylor is a restricted use area, closed to motor vehicle travel to mitigate erosion and avoid disturbance of American Indian religious sites (Cindy S. Clark, personal communication, 14 March 1995).

Grants was first settled in 1872 under the name Alamitos (Little Cottonwoods). The arrival of the Santa Fe Railway in 1881 created a coaling station at the spot and resulted in the settlement being renamed for the railroad-building Grant brothers (Writers' Program 1989). Logging in the San Mateo and Zuni Mountains was a major industry from the 1910s to 1930s, as was cattle and sheep raising from 1910 to 1950 (Peña 1997). The completion in 1929 of Bluewater Dam along the headwaters of Rio San Jose northwest of town caused the blooming of a major vegetable industry in the 1930s and 1940s, when the area became known as the Carrot Capital of the World. Tourism along U.S. Route 66 was an important economic focus of the community from the 1940s

to the 1960s, along with a uranium mining boom that began in 1950. In 1940 Grants had 800 residents; by 1960 the town



*Figure 3. Cerro Negro, a volcanic neck two miles east of Seboyeta, in August 1995. (Photograph by the author)*

had 15,000 and called itself the Uranium Capital of the World (Jackson 1977: 91). The boom caused the combined population of Grants and the neighboring town of Milan to swell to 27,000 in the 1970s. Cibola County was carved out from Valencia County at the tail end of the boom in 1981. Grants is the largest town and seat of Cibola County, and is the primary service center on Interstate 40 between Gallup and Albuquerque. Today Grants has about 8,700 residents and Milan has about 1,900 residents.

The area has significant ethnic diversity. A famous 1941 social science research project conducted in the vicinity of Ramah found distinctive lifeways of Mormons, Navajos, Texans, Spanish Americans, and a group representing the larger American and world society (Landgraf 1973). Cibola County is 34 percent Hispanic, 38 percent American Indian, and 27 percent non-Hispanic white, whereas Grants is 53 percent Hispanic, 7 percent American Indian, and 38 percent non-Hispanic white (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992).<sup>1</sup> The multiculturalism of the area is exemplified by official notices in the Grants biweekly newspaper, the *Cibola County Beacon*, appearing in Spanish and English; by the annual La Fiesta de Colores festival in Grants that celebrates the Spanish, Mexican, and Indian heritage of the region; and by the hazardous waste warning signs at a former refinery site northwest of Grants that are posted in Spanish, English, and Navajo.

Most of the land bordering the national forest to the east, north, and northwest of Mount Taylor is part of Spanish land grants dating from the 1760s; privately owned ranch land and coal mines are also north of the forest. To the south and southeast of the peak are parts of the Acoma and Laguna Reservations. Portions of the Navajo Reservation are farther away to the northwest, west, southeast, and east of Mount Taylor.<sup>2</sup> The combination of physical and cultural features in

1. Non-Hispanic whites, many of whom are descendants of northern, central, and eastern Europeans, are often called Anglos in Southwestern writing (e.g., Meinig 1971). The Anglo ethnonym is usually a misnomer, but it also permeates regional vernacular usage. In the Southwest, Hispanic primarily refers to either Mexican Americans (also called Chicanos) or Spanish Americans (also called Hispanos). Many distinct tribal cultures fall under the American Indian label. In Cibola County, the Laguna people are the most populous American Indian group, followed by the Acoma and the Navajo.

2. The main portion of the Navajo Reservation is located north-northwest of Mount Taylor. The eastern and southern fringes of the reservation land within New Mexico are called the checkerboard because of the alternating pattern of private, state, federal, and Navajo blocks of land. Three relatively small bands of the Navajo Nation occupy reservations in other directions from Mount Taylor. Westward are the Ramah Navajo, southward are the Alamo Navajo, and eastward are the Cañoncito Navajo (Goodman 1982).

the Mount Taylor area places the peak in the “Most Southwestern” category in a recent effort to systematically define the Southwest (Larkin, Huber, and Huber 1998).

#### LOOMING OVER THE WESTERN RIM

Mount Taylor looming over the western rim—like the greatest mountain in the world.

—Edward Abbey, *Confessions of a Barbarian*

From across the wide expanses west of Albuquerque the San Mateo Mountains present a symmetrical profile, rising above dark basalt mesas to the highest point between the Jemez Mountains of north-central New Mexico and the White Mountains of eastern Arizona. The mountain is visible from higher points in and between Santa Fe and Albuquerque. Sunset offers perhaps the most memorable and distinct view of Mount Taylor from the east, with the graceful curves of the mountain beckoning in silhouette. The pleasure of looking west to Mount Taylor—the sharpness of the sunset fire glowing behind a range of soothing, rounded peaks—resonates with the increasing aesthetic appreciation of mountains in the twentieth century (Van Dyke 1992).

Spanish missionaries, bent upon converting Navajos, came to the eastern flanks of this dominant peak in the mid-eighteenth century. At that time both Mount Taylor and the mission were known by the name Cebolleta (Julyan 1996). The mission was quickly abandoned when the Navajos left, then Spanish sheep and cattle ranchers from the Rio Grande Valley moved into the area over the next few decades and settled on land grants containing springs (Robinson 1994). Some time after 1800, the spelling of the settlement was changed to Seboyeta and the southern half of the mountain range became known as San Mateo. Over the next seventy years new Spanish-American settlements near the sierra were founded, including Cubero, San Mateo, and San Rafael (Nostrand 1992).

Elsewhere in the American Southwest it has been found that non-Hispanic white toponyms are secular and commemorative, Spanish and Mexican toponyms are religious, and American Indian toponyms are descriptive (Griffith 1992: 28). Today the name San Mateo still pertains to the range, but in 1849 during the afterglow of Zachary Taylor’s Mexican-American War exploits, Lt. James H. Simpson of the U.S. Army topographical engineers viewed the peak (McNitt 1964: 140):

we caught sight, for the first time, of one of the finest mountain peaks I have seen in this country. This peak, I have, in honor of the President of the United States, called Mount Taylor. Erecting itself high above the plain below, an object of vision at remote distance, standing within the domain which has been so recently the theater of his sagacity and prowess, it exists, not inappropriately, an ever-enduring monument to his patriotism and integrity.

Mount Taylor is not only the best known mountain place name in the area, it is also the only commemorative mountain name (table 1). The Spanish perception of the heights as significant landscape features is evident in the preponderance of Spanish mountain names. The majority of these names, however, are not religious, they are descriptive (of visual form or relative location) and associative (associated with something else, such as plants, animals, weather, or mining). Keresan place names rarely appear on maps, but they “exist in people’s hearts and souls and history and oral tradition, and in their love” (Ortiz 1992: 338). Although many mountain names worldwide are transferred from other features such as rivers or towns (Julyan 1984), transfer names account for less than one-fourth of all mountain toponyms in the Mount Taylor area. In this area, the look of a mountain, followed by what is found there, is most important in name symbolism.

The historic migration of Spanish settlers from the Rio Grande Valley into the Mount Taylor district set the tone for how the mountain would be perceived from the east, yet other symbolic westward views exist. As the Navajo walked in 1868 toward the Four Corners area

Table 1. Mount Taylor–Area Mountain Place Name Typology

Type	Example	Language			
		Spanish (n = 21)	English (n = 14)	Keresan (n = 2)	Total (n = 37)
Descriptive	Cerro Colorado	8 (38%)	4 (29%)	—	12 (32%)
Associative	Cerro Aguila	7 (33%)	4 (29%)	—	11 (30%)
Transfer	Scama Mesa	4 (19%)	3 (21%)	2 (100%)	9 (24%)
Incident	Attack Hill	—	2 (14%)	—	2 (5%)
Religious	San Mateo Mts.	2 (10%)	—	—	2 (5%)
Commemorative	Mount Taylor	—	1 (7%)	—	1 (3%)

Source: Mountainous landform names were categorized from the nine USGS 7.5-minute topographic maps surrounding Mount Taylor, roughly a 540-square-mile area. Typology developed from Stewart (1945) and Julyan (1984). Some names were categorized using Julyan (1996). Keresan is the language of the Acoma and Laguna Pueblos.

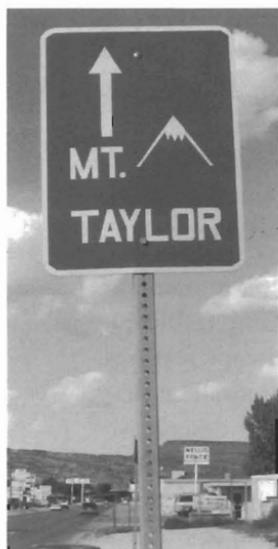


Figure 4. Sign in Grants directing visitors to the Mount Taylor recreation area in August 1997. (Photograph by the author)

from their Bosque Redondo prison along the Pecos River, the sight of sacred Mount Taylor evoked overpowering emotions; the mountain, a symbol of home, caused tribal elders to fall to their knees and weep (Preston 1992: 370). The twentieth-century view from Albuquerque is also important to the peak's meaning, as evidenced by its mention in the works of Rudolfo Anaya (1996). Ernie Pyle, the Pulitzer Prize-winning World War II news correspondent, chose to live in Albuquerque in part because Mount Taylor "is like a framed picture in our front window" (Simmons 1982: 369). The Forest Service encourages greater use of Mount Taylor by residents of Albuquerque in hopes of relieving the recreation pressure on the Jemez and Sandia Mountains. In this recent effort to promote recreation, the Forest Service and the chamber of commerce urge the state highway department to place directional signs pointing the way to Mount Taylor at the Interstate 40 exits and throughout Grants (figure 4).

#### GUARDING THE PUEBLO GODS

Mount Taylor towering dark blue with the last twilight. 'They [ranchers] only fool themselves when they think it is theirs. The deeds and papers don't mean anything. It is the people who belong to the mountain.'

—Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Mount Taylor commands the north and northwestern skyline in views from the pueblos of Acoma and Laguna, often appearing as a "dark blue misted mother mountain" (Ortiz 1992: 308). The range is a towering, ever-present juxtaposition against the blocky stone and adobe structures of the pueblos (figure 5). Well-worn trails historically led from Acoma and Laguna to Mount Taylor, since it contained the closest source of timber and still holds hidden places of prayer and ritual (Sedgwick 1963). A point of local pride is that the massive vigas (roof beams) of the seventeenth-century missions of San Esteban del Rey at Acoma and San Jose de Laguna were carried more than twenty miles from the San Mateo Mountains. The peak's identity in Acoma



*Figure 5. Laguna Pueblo and San Mateo Mountains, looking northwest from Interstate 40 scenic overlook in August 1997. (Photograph by the author)*

culture is reflected in a recent tourist brochure issued by the tribe, with a cover photo looking northward past the ancient village to snowy Mount Taylor and a sketch map with an exaggerated blue Mount Taylor dominating the north. Acoma tourist billboards also feature the southern profile of the San Mateo Mountains (figure 6).

In addition to symbolizing a scarce resource, Mount Taylor also represents the triumph of good over evil in Pueblo oral tradition. Specific places nearly always are central to Pueblo narratives (Silko 1990). The meaning of place names and its clarification in the oral traditions associated with these places imbue the culture with wisdom (Basso 1996). According to one story, Mount Taylor was once the home of two terri-



*Figure 6. Billboard directing travelers to Sky City on the Acoma Pueblo Reservation in August 1997. The south slopes of the San Mateo Mountains are in the upper right of the sign. (Photograph by the author)*

ble monsters: Chaveyo, a weather spirit who jingled a metal whip and threw lightning, and Big Elk, who slew people with his horns and devoured them. The War Twins killed the monsters and rescued the Puebloan cultures by turning the lightning against the wicked spirits. Mount Taylor thus provides moral and material symbolic structure to the world of the Acoma, Laguna, Zuni, and Hopi (Tyler 1975).

Mount Taylor protects the home of the Pueblo gods, but the Pueblo people also guard the secrets of their sacred mountain beliefs. Pueblo Indians use Mount Taylor to gather ceremonial and medicinal herbs, but according to a Laguna Pueblo native, the people are reluctant to speak of the names and symbolism attached to the peak (Brian Montoya, personal communication, 14 August 1995). The Acoma willingly share their traditional name for Mount Taylor: Kaweshtima (Snowy Peak). Some Laguna religious leaders, on the other hand, want their words for the mountain kept private (Wilbur O. Lockwood, personal communication, 22 September 1995), but Mount Taylor is integral in *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko (1977: 87) as "Tse-pi'na, the woman veiled in clouds." Disruption of pilgrimage and removal of ritual objects from shrines are concerns for Pueblo cultures (Fox 1994). In compliance with federal statutes requiring preservation of Native American cultural sites, the Cibola National Forest managers attempt to consider the locations of Pueblo shrines in their evaluations of prospective land uses, but the information is carefully guarded, even from other American Indians such as the Navajo (Arno Wilson, personal communication, 14 August 1995b).

Although Pueblo religious symbolism is rarely visible in the landscape, an expression of Pueblo sacred beliefs is manifest on Mount Taylor, although it is unsigned and appears innocuous at first glance. At the exact summit is a hole about six feet across and at least as deep. When I approached the pit thousands of flying ants swarmed over me, preventing a descent into it, but I saw that it is not the result of natural processes, such as erosion or frost heaving. An explanation for the pit lies in the integral nature of underground chambers in Pueblo beliefs. The Acoma believe the Rainmaker of the North lives on the mountain, the Laguna believe the mountaintop holds the secrets of rain, and during a drought the Zuni make a pilgrimage to a hole on the peak called Shiwanna Gacheti (Lightning Home) (Robinson 1994).

## A DIAMOND IN THE SKY

Mount Taylor is always a pleasure to the eye because of its form, but it is also extremely visible; from almost any available viewpoint it has a huge sector of the horizon all to itself, and that horizon line is usually the flat top of a regulation mesa, so this is also a classic case of the Southwest's baseline iconography.

—Peter Reyner Banham, *Scenes in America Deserta*

The first European to see Mount Taylor was Coronado in 1541, and his view was from the west. The ancient Zuni-Acoma Trail and the routes of Spanish explorers, conquerors, and missionaries led past El Morro (The Headland). Today, however, most people first view the mountain from the west at mile marker 43 along Interstate 40, about twenty miles east of Gallup. The first glimpse is framed by red sandstone bluffs north of the highway and the piñon-juniper foothills of the Zuni Mountains to the south. Other images compete for the traveler's attention; the bright yellow billboards of the Indian Village curio shop proclaim "Leather Purses . . . Indian Jewelry . . . Visit an Authentic Hogan!" The full massif of La Mosca and Mount Taylor is apparent upon cresting the Continental Divide four miles west of Thoreau, but the grandest view of Mount Taylor from the west is from the high ponderosa pine forests in the Zuni Mountains. In the eastward vista from Mount Sedgwick the traffic along the interstate highway and railroad looks like strung-out ant trails bending around massive mountains. The grassy southwestern slopes of Mount Taylor take snow and sunlight with geometrical elegance, inspiring one resident of Grants to call the peak "a diamond in the sky."

To many residents of Grants the San Mateo Mountains represent a community resource embodying the conservation ethic, efficient use to provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The locals engage in multiple uses that are believed to be renewable: gathering firewood, piñon nuts, rocks, and flagstone; collecting spring water; cutting fence posts and Christmas trees; scenic driving; picnicking; camping; scouting activities; photography; snowmobiling; and cross-country skiing. Within the boundaries of the Mount Taylor Ranger District there is no sheep grazing, cattle grazing is permitted in the summer, some small-scale perlite mining occurs on patented land, and timber sales have fallen to a fraction of their former levels because of concern

over lost habitat for the Mexican spotted owl. Most outsiders come to the mountain for spiritual renewal in the form of hiking, cross-country skiing, wildlife viewing, and other non-motorized recreation activities. Some locals and visitors also enjoy hunting black bear, elk, turkey, deer, and the rare barbary sheep (Mark Catron and Cindy S. Clark, personal communication, 14 March 1995).

The dominant land use of Mount Taylor is recreation, and the signature event is the Mount Taylor Winter Quadrathlon, held every February since 1984. Contestants race from Grants (elev. 6,420') to the top of the mountain by bicycle, foot, cross-country skis, and finally snowshoes. The route is reversed back to town, and the fastest entrants cover the forty-plus miles in less than four hours (Parent 1992). More than five hundred contestants enter the race annually, making the mountain a symbol of the ultimate winter recreation challenge in the American West (Peña 1997). The Forest Service permits the intense land use because it requires few permanent facilities, and the protective blanket of snow lessens damage to the fragile alpine zone (Mark Catron, personal communication, 14 March 1995).

The rising importance of recreation in the image of Mount Taylor is reflected in recent changes to the City of Grants logo that represent the uranium bust and the mountain boom (figure 7). In 1994, an icon of a uranium mine headframe was removed and replaced with symbols of the winter quadrathlon and new Coyote del Malpais public golf course. The logo is regularly featured in advertisements placed by the city in the *Cibola County Beacon* and on welcome signs.

Most of the Mount Taylor icons visible in the landscape are understandably located in the Grants vicinity. Sign icons are strongly influ-



*Figure 7. Welcome sign in Grants in August 1997 featuring the city logo of Mount Taylor, the winter quadrathlon, sailing on Bluewater Reservoir, and golf at Coyote del Malpais. (Photograph by the author)*

Figure 8. Sign in Grants in March 1995 featuring the icon of Mount Taylor as viewed from the west-southwest. (Photograph by the author)

enced by landscape elements, and in turn they project an idealized landscape (figure 8). A typology of signs with mountain names and/or icons based on who places them and what symbols are depicted reveals the significance of the real landscape in the idealistic image and what elements of society control one of the most visible forms of symbolic representations.

Mount Taylor names and icons dominate local mountain signs and public murals, manifesting this summit as a peak of identity (table 2). Even the Coyote del Malpais sign shows Mount Taylor rather than El Malpais. The Grants/Cibola County Chamber of Commerce and local governments combine to place more than twice as many mountain signs as the next leading establishment type, lending official legitimacy to the recreation symbolism. Roughly one-half of the mountain icons feature snow, corresponding to the number of months that snow may fall on Mount Taylor. Of the signs with Mount Taylor names and icons,

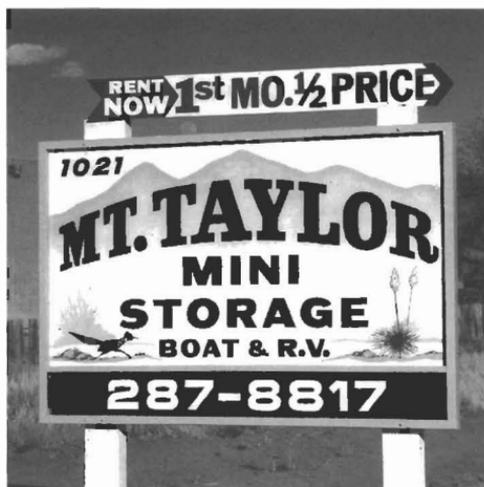


Table 2. Mount Taylor–Area Mountain Sign Typology

Establishment Placing Sign	Mount Taylor Names & Icons (n = 34)	Other Mountain Names & Icons (n = 19)	Total (n = 53)
Government & Chamber of Commerce	15 (44%)	5 (26%)	20 (38%)
Retail	6 (18%)	3 (16%)	9 (17%)
Service	5 (15%)	2 (11%)	7 (13%)
School & Church	4 (12%)	3 (16%)	7 (13%)
Real Estate & Construction	2 (6%)	3 (16%)	5 (9%)
Other	2 (6%)	3 (16%)	5 (9%)

Source: Field observation of all signs (46) and public murals (7) with mountain names and/or icons in the Mount Taylor area shown on Figure 2. Number and percentage is shown for each establishment type. "Other" column includes all mountainous names and icons unrelated to Mount Taylor.

fifteen of the thirty-four (44 percent) feature icons alone, meaning the peak's form by itself is instantly recognizable.

Most of the "other" names and icons shown in table 2 relate to generic mesas, but since Grants is bordered on the east and northwest by mesas, these icons are clear attempts to connect with the local landscape. Even though the Zuni Mountains are no farther from Grants-Milan than the San Mateo Mountains, the Zuni Mountains are used in the names of only two businesses. The relative lack of symbolic projection for the Zuni Mountains is partly a function of their lower elevation and lack of long-range visibility, less distinctive form, and poorer vehicular access.

Six of the seven mountain murals in the area depict Mount Taylor, and three of these were done by Gallup artist Michael Lewis (figure 9). Two of these are inside elementary school cafeterias and the third is along a major Grants thoroughfare. The trademarks of the Lewis murals are the border with tiles painted by local schoolchildren and the use of Mount Taylor as an exaggerated background landmark. The use of Mount Taylor as the signature landform on area murals shows the peak is an integral part of community identity, symbolizing the landscape of home. Even if the mural foreground is an exotic scene, the Mount Taylor landscape fills the background. Lewis's use of Mount Taylor as a signature icon and the visibility of his work make him an example of a

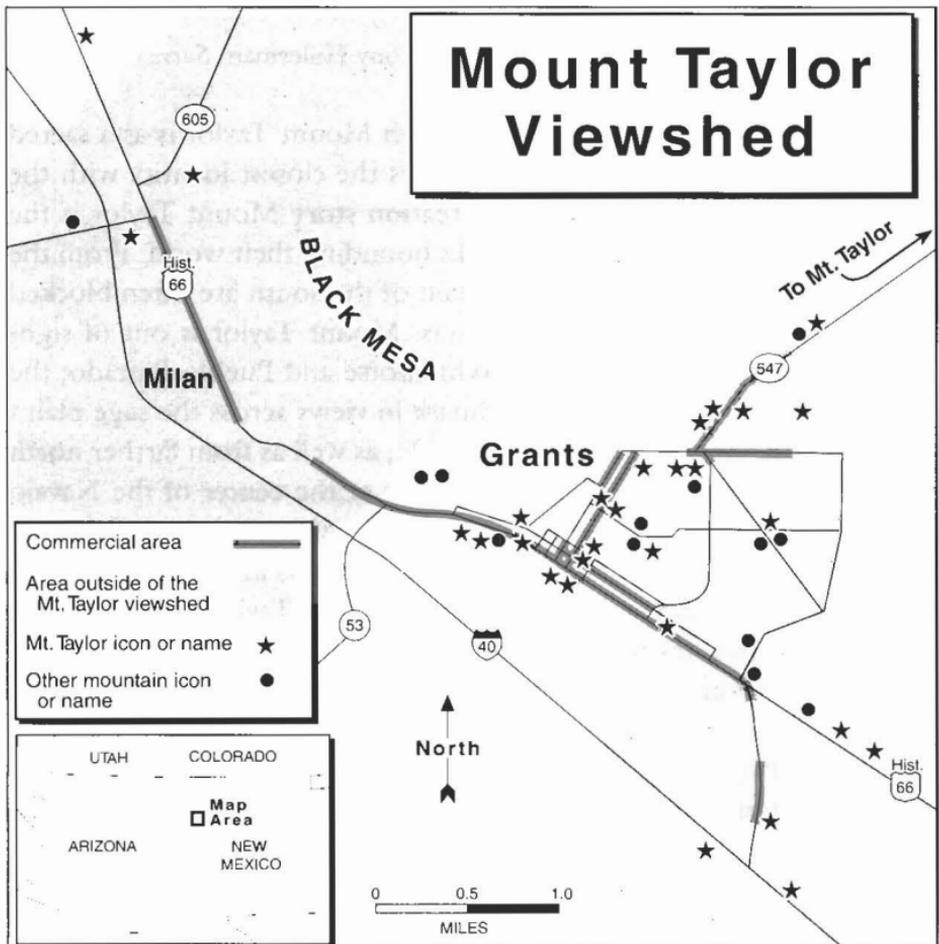
*Figure 9. Exterior mural in Grants in November 1995 painted by Michael Lewis and local schoolchildren. Although the foreground is intended to represent Hispanic heritage with a Spanish Mediterranean village, the background is Mount Taylor. (Photograph by the author)*



“landscape author,” in that he makes a major contribution to the idealization of Mount Taylor in the local landscape (Samuels 1979). Mount Taylor further symbolizes home as the background icon on Grants street banners in the 1998 “Mainstreet” campaign promoting Route 66 heritage and on the chamber of commerce exterior mural of community images that faces Route 66.

Although the sign typology gives a sense of what landscapes are symbolized, it lacks the spatial component of landscape symbolism. In the Southwest many mountain symbols are in commercial districts, but I also test how the projection of mountain names and icons correlates with a mountain viewshed, the area from which the feature is seen (the unshaded area on figure 10). Black Mesa blocks the northeasterly view from Milan, and Horace Mesa hides Mount Taylor from the eastern third of Grants. In addition to commercial mountain symbols, the mountain symbols on figure 10 are usually for directional sign icons,

Figure 10. Mount Taylor viewshed and locations of mountainous names or icons visible in the Grants and Milan landscape. (Cartography by Arizona State University, Department of Geography Cartographic Laboratory)



street names, housing development names, or elementary school names. Seventy-four percent of the mountain icons and names within the viewshed are of Mount Taylor, whereas 60 percent of the mountain symbols outside the viewshed are of Mount Taylor. The difference in the percentages would likely be greater if there were another local dominating mountain, or if a longer distance had to be traveled to move into the viewshed.

Another way to assess the importance of a mountain view in mountain symbolism is to consider its impact on housing prices. A view of Mount Taylor is a desirable selling point for a house, but since a mountain view is a plentiful commodity in Grants, housing prices are unaffected by a view alone (Jonnie Head, personal communication, 16 August 1995).

#### TURQUOISE MOUNTAIN

Above the mesa stood the serene blue shape of Tsodzil [sic], the Turquoise Mountain which First Man had built as one of the four sacred corner posts of Navajo Country.

—Tony Hillerman, *Sacred Clowns*

The deepest symbolism associated with Mount Taylor is as a sacred peak, and the culture that visibly projects the closest identity with the peak is the Navajo. In the Navajo creation story Mount Taylor is the southernmost of the four sacred peaks bounding their world. From the north the views of the sacred mountain of the south are often blocked by successive east-west trending mesas. Mount Taylor is out of sight from the Navajo communities of Whitehorse and Pueblo Pintado; the massif is, however, a southern landmark in views across the sage plains from Hosphah and the Continental Divide, as well as from farther north on Gobernador Knob, a sacred mountain at the center of the Navajo world. The oil pumpjacks and tanks of the southern portion of the San Juan Oil and Gas Field rival the distant mountains as points of relief in the illimitable landscape. From the north Mount Taylor presents a mosaic of forest patches rather than the triangular grassy face seen from the south and west, and the long northeasterly extension of Mesa Chivato is most apparent from this direction.

Sacred Navajo places have a special power to make holy spirits accessible to mortals and bring together the Navajo origin legends, ways of

life, and the correct pursuit of those ways. In the Navajo origin story First Man and First Woman built the sacred mountains with earth they had brought with them from similar mountains in the Underworld. The mountains made were Sis Naajini in the east (Blanca Peak, Colorado), Tsoodzil in the south (Mount Taylor), Dook'oo'sliid in the west (San Francisco Peaks, Arizona), and Dibé Nitsaa in the north (Hesperus Peak, Colorado). In the middle of the land two more mountains were built: Dzil Ná'oodilii (Huerfano Mountain, New Mexico) and Ch'óol'í'í (Governador Knob, New Mexico) (Reid 1991).<sup>3</sup> Most Navajo names are compressed descriptions, thus the name itself conveys knowledge about these sacred places (Kelley and Francis 1994).

In Navajo tradition Mount Taylor is fastened to the earth with a great stone knife and adorned with turquoise, dark mist, deer, beaver, chipmunk, and mountain lion. On the summit the gods placed a turquoise bowl containing two bluebird eggs. The peak is inhabited by the deities Boy Who Carries One Turquoise and Girl Who Carries One Grain of Corn (Wyman 1967). Ceremonially, Mount Taylor is most often known as Dootl'izhii Dziil (Turquoise Mountain) (Wilson 1995). The volcanic necks around Mount Taylor are the heads of monsters killed by the twin sons of Changing Woman: Monster Slayer and Born For Water. Big Monster, the most feared of all supernatural beings and the prototype of all monsters, lived at some hot springs near Mount Taylor, where he was killed by the twins. His decapitated head is the nearby massive volcanic neck called Cabezon (Head) Peak, and his blood is the dried lava flows of El Malpais (Reichard 1963). Today the principal Navajo use of Mount Taylor is for gathering herbs for ceremonies. According to a member of the Navajo Nation, medicine men also visit Mount Taylor to gather the mountain soil used in prayer bundles and Blessingway ceremonies (Marcella Hale, personal communication, 16 August 1995).

The symbolic ties between the Navajo and Mount Taylor are expressed on the Navajo Nation seal (figure 11). Each of the four sacred directional peaks is represented on the seal, with the top of the seal oriented to the east, so Mount Taylor is on the right side. The seal has

3. Each of these mountains has Navajo descriptive and ceremonial names; these are the descriptive names. Throughout the rest of this essay the names in parentheses after place names are translations, but in this paragraph the parenthetical places are the earthly manifestations of the sacred mountains, based upon a consensus from numerous sources. As noted by Charlotte Frisbie (1992: 476), "perceptions of the components of Navajo religion are variable and diverse."



*Figure 11. Navajo Nation seal on exterior wall of the Ramah Navajo Reservation police station in August 1995. The four sacred directional mountains and associated colors are, clockwise from the top: Blanca Peak, Colorado (east, white), Mount Taylor, New Mexico (south, blue), San Francisco Peaks, Arizona (west, yellow), and Hesperus Peak, Colorado (north, black). (Photograph by the author)*

great visibility throughout and beyond Navajoland, as it is seen on police badges, government vehicles, chapter house and welcome signs, the Navajo flag, government literature, and the headquarters in Window Rock, Arizona. Even though the same mountains are always on the seal there is a distance decay in the depth of meaning as one moves farther away from a sacred eminence; Mount Taylor is more symbolic for Navajos living close to the peak on the Ramah and Cañoncito Reservations (Wilson 1995).

### SACREDNESS AND SECULARITY

Relationships to places are lived most often in the company of other people, and it is on these communal occasions—when places are sensed together—that native views of the physical world become accessible to strangers.

—Keith H. Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places”

Sacredness and secularity are interwoven through the projected symbolism of Mount Taylor. From the east Mount Taylor has represented good springs and ranchlands for Spanish settlement, a commemorative point, an aesthetic landmark, and a recreational escape offering spiritual renewal. From the south Mount Taylor is a symbolic landmark of valuable wood, ceremonial plants, sacred spirits, and secret shrines. From the west the mountain is a symbol of home, renewable resources, recreation challenge, and is also the vernacular and official peak of community identity for Grants. From the north Mount Taylor symbolizes one of the most powerful locales in the Navajo worldview—a place of holy soil and plants, an abode of deities, and a mountain that keeps the people strong.

The differing images of a sacred and secular mountain are epitomized in a comparison of government logos in the Mount Taylor area. Mountains are elemental to the worldview of the Acoma and Laguna, but they are absent on official logos. Their beliefs regarding mountains are guarded cultural attributes. The Village of Milan seal features a carrot, the Cibola County logo features the county outline, the zia symbol, and a bison, but the City of Grants logo projects a recreation identity with Mount Taylor. The directional orientation and symbolic blue color of sacred Mount Taylor are generalized into the Navajo seal and then projected to a wide audience through government artifacts.

Land use and the spoken names of the mountain also reflect how secular and sacred values have mingled. In casual conversation, the peak is always called Mount Taylor, even among American Indians, indicating the strong acceptance of this name. Some younger Navajos say the mountain is less important to their generation than to their elders, but they still instantly identify with the name *Tsoodzil*. The traditional name for the sacred peak will continue to be recognized as part of the culture, even as the mountain increasingly becomes identified solely by its secular commemorative name (Marcella Hale, personal communication, 15 August 1995). Conversely, the symbolism of Mount Taylor as a sacred place is increasingly projected by the Navajo and Acoma, and even in the Grants business landscape through business names, such as the Turquoise Mountain Emporium. Furthermore, Cibola National Forest policy results in a continuing imprint of Pueblo and Navajo beliefs onto the management landscape.

Although the winter quadrathalon is the defining land use of Mount Taylor in the eyes of many Grants residents, what is common among all the secular representations is a sense of respect and a bonding with home. Sustainability and spiritual renewal apply to most uses of Mount Taylor, and an appreciation for aesthetic qualities is a key component in the business icons of the peak. The secular symbolism is, however, subordinate to the power of the sacred peak identity projected by folklore, land use, and the Navajo seal. For example, ski area proposals for Mount Taylor have surfaced every few years since the 1960s but are currently dormant. If a ski-area proposal is renewed it will run into the same stiff opposition that plagued plans to expand the Santa Fe Ski Area (Manning 1996). The Forest Service requirement to consider the religious significance of land to Native Americans and the perception of Mount Taylor as a place of secular spiritual renewal through low-impact recreation will combine to challenge strongly any land uses rep-

resenting the development ethic. Mount Taylor is the residence of deities and is itself a deity (McPherson 1992); human disturbances of its natural state interfere with the healing power of the mountain and restoration of harmony to the lives of the Navajo (Michaelson 1995).

The sacred aspects of Mount Taylor combine with its status as a significant landmark to give all cultures, including non-Indians, a greater proprietary feel for the mountain. With only one theme of meaning the mountain would have far less symbolic power. Mount Taylor has been transformed into a cultural landscape of distinct symbols with differing degrees of meaning, including a traveler's landmark, icon of home, community resource, recreation challenge, spiritual destination, and sacred peak. Local people of all backgrounds and communities are aware the peak is sacred to American Indians, and they have incorporated this inherent respect into their secular representations of Mount Taylor as a peak of community identity. The interweaving of Mount Taylor's symbolism can be thought of as a sort of palimpsest, with layers upon layers of meaning, and the sacred beliefs most prominently written into the landscape. ❖

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