

Pueblo Bonito, New Mexico

Richard Wetherill & The Hyde Exploring Expedition

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Richard Wetherill spent a considerable portion of his life in northwestern New Mexico, arriving there in the early 1880's and making a career out of exploring the surrounding area and trading with the Navajo Indians. Today, the most famous credit to Richard Wetherill's name is no doubt his discovery of the Mesa Verde ruins in southern Colorado on December 18, 1888. With this and other discoveries, Wetherill is considered to be the first to coin the term *Anasazi*, (meaning "ancient ones" in Navajo). Wetherill's additional archaeological credits include the discoveries of Kiet Seel ruin and Betatakin ruin, both of which are now a part of the Navajo National Monument in northeastern Arizona.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Richard Wetherill's exploring career, and certainly the most troublesome, were the ruins at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico. These ruins, which today have become a famous tourist attraction, had initially been discovered in 1849 by Lieutenant J.H. Simpson of the Corps of Topographical Engineers; nevertheless, Wetherill and his brothers were among the first to begin any type of excavations at the site. In 1895, having completed several years of successful digging at Mesa Verde, Wetherill set his sights on the ruins at Chaco Canyon. In doing so, he enlisted the aide of B. Talbot Hyde and his younger brother Frederick E. Hyde, Jr. Both of the Hyde Brothers were wealthy philanthropists from New York, and no doubt their financial status played heavily into Wetherill's desire to recruit their services. In turn, the Hyde Brothers consulted with Professor F.W. Putnam of Harvard University, who agreed to provide his services as scientific director of the Chaco Canyon excavations. The American Museum of Natural History was to receive the bulk of items recovered in the diggings. Officially formed in 1896, the Hyde Exploring Expedition, as it was called, began digging at Pueblo Bonito, the largest of the Chaco Canyon ruins; this continued until the summer of 1899.

Not surprisingly, a group of men belonging to the Santa Fe Archaeological Society got wind of the successful diggings, and, undoubtedly being unable to mentally cope with the fact that they personally were not involved in the excavations, petitioned the Secretary of the Interior and asked him to take steps towards preventing any further work by the Hyde Exploring Expedition. Consequently, the operations of Wetherill and the Hyde Brothers were put on hold pending the arrival of a special agent from the United States Land Office. It was not until April 1901 that an agent, S.J. Holsinger, arrived at Chaco Canyon; in his reports that followed, he seemed to acquit the Hyde Expedition of any wrongdoing in their excavations, noting that all diggings appeared to have been done with care, and that there was no evidence of artifacts being sold privately, as had been alleged by the Santa Fe Archaeological Society. Interestingly, even with these favorable reports, the Interior Department chose to permanently forbid the Hyde Exploring Expedition from any further work in the area. Furthermore, Richard Wetherill's homestead claim at Chaco Canyon was revoked (although he would later appeal this decision and emerge victorious). But for Wetherill and the Hyde Brothers, the damage had already been done. By 1907, when the Interior Department finally recognized Wetherill's right to the homestead claim at Pueblo Bonito, Theodore Roosevelt declared Chaco Canyon a National Monument, effectively bringing an end to any and all excavations there. Thus, the jealousy and avarice of the Santa Fe Archaeological Society seems to have won out.

In addition to their archaeological pursuits, the Hyde Exploring Expedition was heavily involved in trading with the Navajo Indians, especially after 1899 when their diggings were put on hold by the Interior Department. Richard Wetherill first decided to construct a trading post at Chaco Canyon in 1897, recognizing the necessity and potential profitability of such an establishment. The first trading post was built by Wetherill, along with his two brothers, Al and Clayton; the three men interchangeably clerked in the store. Richard considered the business venture to be of the utmost necessity; the \$110 per month that he accrued while working for the Hyde Brothers simply did not suffice to provide for his wife and children, who lived with him at Pueblo Bonito.

In 1901, the Hyde Brothers joined Wetherill as partners in his trading post, and made Navajo textiles their primary investment. With more than 100 Navajo Indians living there and working for the Hyde Expedition, it was not difficult to find customers for the trading post. Within a year, the Hyde & Wetherill trading post boasted a brisk business, selling thousands of dollars worth of Navajo blankets to wealthy easterners. They established Pueblo Bonito (called Putnam, New Mexico in honor of the Harvard professor who helped them) as their headquarters, and built branch stores at Thoreau, Ojo Alamo, Farmington, and Manuelito, with a wholesale store in Albuquerque. To build up the business, Fred Hyde used thousands of dollars of his own personal fortune, so much so in fact that he never entirely regained his investment. In fact, Fred Hyde's habits as a spendthrift threatened to bring about the bankruptcy of the trading empire.

Of the two brothers, Fred E. Hyde, Jr. was certainly the more interesting personage. Joe Schmedding, who worked as a clerk at the Pueblo Bonito Store for three years, recalled that "He [Fred Hyde] had the most popular habit of walking off without a word to anyone, disappearing without so much as a toothbrush in his pocket. He would just go away quietly in the moccasins and clothes he happened to be wearing at the time, walking down the canyon as though he would be back in an hour or two. He did this several times and for days we wouldn't hear from him until he turned up in Thoreau, or Grants, or Albuquerque. Once when he disappeared like this there wasn't a trace of him until we learned he was in London." The testimony of another observer concurred with this: "Fred Hyde used to roll up in his blankets by fires and sleep in the Navajo camps. He liked their singing. He was very quiet. He just liked to wander off alone and do as he pleased."

By 1902, B. Talbot Hyde, the older of the two brothers, had completely withdrawn from the trading operations, leaving his younger brother and Richard Wetherill to continue the business. Lacking the financial support of Talbot Hyde, the enterprise began to go downhill. Talbot made every effort to convince his brother to abandon the trading posts altogether, which he eventually did. By the summer of 1903, Fred Hyde had sold his remaining interests in Wetherill's trading posts to another trader from Farmington. Despite their separation in business, Fred Hyde and Richard Wetherill remained close friends until June 22, 1910. On that date, Richard Wetherill was murdered about half a mile from his ranch house by a group of 5 or 6 Navajos, with his helpless wife looking on from the door of the house.



A token bearing the words "Hyde - & - Wetherill - Putnam, N.M." is known, but the condition of the only known example is so incredibly bad that it is not even worth including a photograph. Owing to this, the only token currently known from this unique chapter in history is that of F.E. Hyde, Jr. from Putnam, New Mexico.