

Power, Prayers, and Protection: Comb Ridge as a Case Study in Navajo
Thought
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Comb Ridge, a one hundred mile monolith in southeastern Utah, represents a variety of important cultural symbols to the Navajo people living in the region. Among the symbols associated with this rock formation are: snakes, lightning, arrowheads, wind and Holy Wind, bears, and witchcraft as well as blessings. The land serves as a mnemonic device that teaches of ceremonial lore specific to various chantways. The article concludes having made the following points: (1) While local knowledge may vary or emphasize different aspects from a broader regional insight, they are intertwined and supportive. (2) Interpretation of Navajo sacred geography is dependent upon the teachings and ceremonial knowledge of the individual. (3) Familiarity with one set of teachings does not exclude other possibilities, but instead may often fortify and support their inclusion. (4) Interconnectedness of symbols on both a local and regional level strengthens their power. (5) All symbols discussed in this article are polysemic and multivocal. (6) Each symbol had a male or female counterpart that shared similar powers and functions. (7) Their powers are neutral, being capable of supporting good or evil, protection or aggression, depending on how the power is used. (8) Classification of objects in Navajo thought may be done through either function or qualities, in this case, by movement. (9) Only those who understand the meaning and inherent power of the object has the ability to safely use that power. (10) All symbols are highly viable in today's world, providing protection and healing for those who understand their meaning and receive assistance from those who control the power.

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