

Dine'tah - Hajiinei Overview - created December 21, 2025

As co-director of the Dine'tah-Hajiinei with the late William Ben Begay Tsosie, Jr., the following is a summary of the project. - Kent Tompkins

- Dine'tah-Hajiinei is known within traditional Dine' indigenous circles I have been affiliated with since 1978, as The Place of Emergence. Geographically it is located in northwest New Mexico, east of Farmington, NM. The area is comprised of approximately 300 defensive ruin sites and numerous petroglyphs and pictographs.
- Within the assorted documents are in-depth explanations of this sacred area, known to a variety of southwestern tribes, with the Dine' (aka Navajo) homeland essentially surrounding Dine'tah-Hajiinei.
- Initially in 1985, Will Tsosie invited me out to the area. Will was working within the Title IV Cultural Department within Chinle Unified School District. I was directing the Chinle Curriculum Center, as part of the Chinle Schools as well. After four visits to Dine'tah with Will, I started grasping the immensity and significance of the area, with a radius of approximately 40 miles. The first few visits left me a bit dizzy, disoriented and yet more attuned to the deeply spiritual essence of the area. I at this point was rather well initiated into Dine' traditional ceremony. I had arrived on the Dine' homeland in December 1978, and landed in Rough Rock, AZ amid a Traditional Medicine man and Woman School. I was then invited into that circle to document sacred sites, record stories, photograph select ceremonies, and deepen my understanding of an essentially incomprehensible multi-dimensional vast healing approach for the human. This knowledge extends beyond our solar system and galaxy. It extends beyond what is consider the central sun, that place where infinite knowledge resides, and also morphs continually into multi-universes. Suffice it to say, the western mind and it's linear style is not built to conceive of even 5% if you will of what wisdom resides within our Indigenous Wisdom Keepers.
- I had met Krista Elrick in Vail, CO, as we both taught photography for Colorado Mountain College. I recall showing her some of my recent work from the Rez, and she commented, "kinda dark." As in open up!
- I then called together as number of Dine' and Cheyenne healers and friends to perform a ceremony for my work. I brought in Ansel Adams' books to show participants a style or essence of image-making that I felt led to expand within myself. Ansel then invited me out to see him at his home in Carmel, CA. after I dropped him a note in the mail.
- From that time with Ansel my vision expanded, and he had knowledge of Dine'tah and the beginnings of a documentary project about the area. He then introduced me to Linda Connor, and I then started invited the gathering of indigenous and anglo artists, after realizing that Will and I needed a team over many years to do the documentary project justice.
- I will add that Will and I took nearly a year off from visiting Dine'tah. We were receiving mixed reviews from various Dine' circles whether we should even be documenting the area.

After we visited various Chapter House meetings, and Advisory Councils throughout the Rez, finally an elder was in the room in Chinle, clear in the back, half asleep, opened an eye, and said, "There's a prophecy story I know of and it's this. A young man standing in front will look this this one guy standing in front of me, and the other guy will look like the other guy standing in front of me. These two will bring Dine'tah to the people. So you better get to work!" So we did, and here we are some thirty-nine (39) years later. (1986-Dec 2025).

- I started inviting various artists in. Krista assisted in talking to others. Krista and I both know Lawrence McFarland from our time in Vail at CMC and SummerVail Art Institute, where he was a visiting artist. He in turn recommended Rick Dingus to join the team, which he did.
- Krista then invited me down to secure funding from the AZ Commission on the Arts. Chinle Schools provided vehicles, supplies, food, a darkroom I had built etc.
- Local indigenous artists that completed our project team included, Rudy Begay. Rudy was our Dine' artist and illustrator within the Curriculum Center I was directing in Chinle. Alfred Nelson, our video artist with the Curriculum Center provided footage and a final video that joined the eventual traveling exhibition. Lastly, Tsosie Tsinajinnie, my neighbor and buddy in Rough Rock, provided rock sculpting pieces. Tsosie at the age of nineteen was called the Sculptor of the century by R.C. Gorman.
- Initially before we journeyed to Dine'tah the first time, Annie Kahn provided a sweat lodge ceremony at her home near Lukachukai, AZ. Here, we entered into the Spirit world if you will. We laid down any differences, and we honored those from off Rez to immerse themselves in the sacredness of Dine'tah. Those concerned if they would be worthy or up to the task at hand, discovered that Dine'tah had called them in because of who they were on a soul level. Thus Dine'tah Holy Ones had already photographed them, and authorized them to make images of the Holy Ones and their sacred place of emergence.
- As a team we visited the area during every season of the year over a five year period. We needed to visit each season because only certain panels, areas and accompanied stories are to be revealed during specific seasons. We always camped as a team regardless of 10 degree winter chill or 100 plus temperatures and knots in the dead of summer when we couldn't dial up a breeze.
- We always traveled together, not allowing any gaps in our spiritual container to create a tear in our unified efforts. We also had a Medicine Woman or Man with us. Every time we traveled into Dine'tah, upon leaving, either a gentle female rain or a thunderous lightening filled male rain would always come and wash away our tracked. Every Time! Annie Kahn, Will's aunt was our predominate Medicine person to travel with us. Medicine people are traditionally referred to as Hatalii, which loosely translates as singers who perform traditional healing ceremonies and blessing rites intended to protect and cure the body, mind, and spirit.
- The essence of Dine'tah-Hajiinei. This depends on who one might ask, yet in my experience within indigenous traditional Dine' circles, this area is:
- A place of emergence as previously referenced. More specifically, the Ancient Ones had twenty-eight masked dances they held and had used for generations. There came a time when they got too big for their now good, too powerful and had turned to ways that misrepresented Creator. Thus they were ordered to give all of their masked dances and ceremonial ways away. Thus the Dine', Apache, (both peoples were essentially from the same Athabaskan lineage then), Tewa and various Puebloan tribes gathered for several generations there to

exchange the dances and ceremonies. The various rock art panels and ruin structures explain the essence of the masked dances and structures one sees today in the healing dances (Yeibichai and Mountain Way or Fire Dance) witnessed in the nine day, nine night ceremonies on Dine' land. Additionally, one sees these dances, throughout Apache Country as Crown Dancers, or the various dances in Tewa country around Taos, not to mention throughout Zuni and other Puebloan communities throughout New Mexico.

- Will and I never entertained approaching this project from a western anthropological or archeological perspective, thus we followed a Dine' Traditional path.
- In the 1920's Earl Morris came through Dine'tah as an archeologist and gathered an abundance of medicine bundles, baskets, blankets, clothing, tools and so forth from the hundreds of ruin sites. Approximately 40% of this collection resides with the anthropology department at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Another large collection rests in a museum in New York. The remaining collections fell into private hands from my understanding.
- Will and I spent a week in Boulder in the early 1990's to view, photograph and take medicine bundles outside to feed them sunlight, corn pollen and prayers. That CU collection remains there, and I am in the process of finding a secure home for this collection. There is no place on the Dine' Rez that can offer a secure location, thus perhaps the Navajo Nation as Arbiter can assist in securing that location as part of housing this collection of images, negatives, articles, postcards and so forth.
- After as a team of artists and Medicine People completed documentation of the Dine'tah region, Lawrence McFarland came back out to Chinle. Lawrence and I then spent a few weeks in an adjacent region, still considered the Dine'tah region. Specifically it was the Largo Canyon Ranch, which had fallen into private hands. The Navajo Nation was considering purchasing it back into their possession. Melvin Bighumb, a Tribal Councilman traveled with us occasionally to show us specific regions he wanted to feature to the Navajo Nation Council. After Lawrence and I finished our documentation, our images, along with Annie Kahn's negotiations with the Council, the Tribe purchased Largo Canyon Ranch. The ranch remains in the Navajo Nation's hands.
- The highly successful traveling exhibition was funded by The Arizona Commission on the Arts funded. This collection of 50 images, narratives and sculptures traveled for three years throughout the country. The prayerful goal was for all ages of viewers to enter the exhibition space and have an experience of entering a sacred site energetically as if entering Dine'tah itself. Each image was accompanied by a narrative written by Will Tsosie, my co-director. These narratives were written from a traditional, allegorical perspective. Within these narratives and images was a medicine if you will, to allow the viewer's soul to journey into a place of integration, harmony, Beauty and peace within. This was the intention throughout the entire Dine'tah project, for each artist, participant to continually find themselves and their lives, families, generational members to come to have a way of the Blessingway. Here resides such peace and calm, surrounded by protection. Here resides Beauty in front, behind, under, over, surrounding, within and throughout themselves, their families and as stated, those young ones yet to arrive on this planet. This is also known as Hozho'. Lyla June Johnson, a Dine' artist, singer and gifted leader has a song on Spotify and [Youtube](#) entitled Hozho'.

- This body of work, per wisdom keeper requests, was returned to the Chinle Curriculum Center, as part of the Chinle Unified School District in Chinle, AZ.
- There was a permanent collection of 50 images and a sculpture piece by Tsosie Tsinajinnie that was installed within the cultural center at Navajo College in Tsaile, AZ. This collection and installation was coordinated with Mr. Harry Walters, the Director of the Cultural Center in Tsaile. Within the body of notes, are Mr. Walters' perspective on Dine'tah and various art pieces. After a few years, unfortunately, this entire collection of works, fell into private hands, thus disappeared without a trace. These things happen, and I have not investigated the topic since.
- Will Tsosie and I went on a brief speaking tour by invitation. We spoke at a National Society of Photographic Educators (SPE) conference in Santa Fe in 1990, and also at Anderson Ranch in Snowmass, CO. The questions we received frequently on our tour was, "How did you get Lawrence, Linda Mark, and Rick especially together on the same project? Our answer was simple. We allowed Spirit to lead, and the project over the five years developed its own voice. We then as directors, followed its guidance, while facilitating in concert with the project's direction. Seldom does one experience such a project or assignment that has at this core indigenous roots woven with Beauty, Harmony, Divine Intelligence and Integration. This one continues with those ingredients, so that all participants, their families, there generations to come continue receiving blessings beyond western mind comprehension.
- Another component of this project consisted of my connecting with Tony Hillerman, the now deceased author, who was highly respected for his writings of stories based throughout Dine' country. Within those discussions, evolved contact with James Watt, the Secretary of the Interior under Ronald Reagan's administration. Mr. Watt assisted in marking Dine'tah as a National Historical Site. This provided some legal consequences for those who vandalized the rock art, ruin sites and the removal of artifacts. Currently, now throughout Dine'tah the sites are designated as historical sites. Additionally, a high school friend, Mr. John Silence, was the lead FBI agent in charge of lost or stolen artifacts throughout the western United States. This assisted in at least adding a layer protection and monitoring of vandalized and stolen artifacts from what essentially remains an indigenous church within a very grand landscape.
- UPDATE: As of May 2024, A group of us gathered in Chinle, AZ. Liz Allen, Krista Elrick, Renee Dennison, myself, Jaya Marr (my partner), Jay Canode (a filmmaker friend from Paonia), Montana (Dine' medicine apprentice), Anderson Hoskie (Dine' Medicine Man, and Harrison Jim Dine' Medicine Man). We viewed materials from the traveling exhibition at the Federal Programs office within the Chinle Unified Schools. Some of the materials were missing, some remained on the walls on display. Sophie Shortie was instrumental in locating many of the materials that had been filed. She knew of our project, while others within the District were unfamiliar with the depth and extent of the project.
- As a group, I had arranged for a ceremony at Liz Tsosie's hogan on the south rim of Canyon De Chelly. Liz was quite familiar with our project back in the day, and a dear friend. We gathered at Liz's, and Anderson Hoskie led us through ceremony to prepare us before traveling to Dine'tah that same day.

- Once returning to Dine'tah, Crow Canyon specifically, my good friend Jay Canode filmed Anderson, Harrison and Montana on location. Anderson's stories of select panels were captured on film. This trip opened up a new chapter this on-going project.
- Each participant also received ceremonial attention through individual Dine' traditional diagnosis and ceremony on-site. Grace, Lawrence's wife also was administered healing while she remained at home in Austin. We also honored Lawrence, his soul's journey, and his multi-layered contributions to the Dine'tah project.
- Jay and I are creating a documentary film, stemming from my desire to expand beyond Dine'tah into sacred sites world-wide. Within this film, I foresee interviewing healers such as Naturopathic healers, First Nation Blackfoot Wisdom Keepers, and those who bring such highly evolved healing abilities to the human. I have already interviewed Dr. Nasha Winters, a Naturopathic Oncologist, Misha Jirnov-Russian healer, Dr. Sidney Brown, Blackfoot and Psychologist, Dr. Debora Pace, also Blackfoot Psychologist in Last Stand, Alberta. There are others. I also envision putting cameras in indigenous kids' hands to assist in filming, editing. This cross-pollination of cultures is vital within my vision for this documentary. Jay and I are finishing a trailer as of December 2025, before seeking sufficient funding.

That's enough for now...

Signed: Kent Tompkins, Co Director

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Also here for cut/paste:

<https://www.kentart.com/dinetah>. - Updated info....