

JICARILLA APACHES



Throughout time, the Jicarilla Apache tribe of Native Americans traveled as a nomadic people south from Canada through the Rocky Mountains, and as far as Mexico, migrating with the seasons and animals. For many thousands of years the Jicarilla people lived throughout Southern Colorado and New Mexico, honoring their important relationship to the earth and its plants, creatures, sacred rivers and mountains. Their reverence for ecology is shown through prayer and ceremony around the four directions and seasons of Mother Earth.

There are many sacred places for the Jicarilla Apache throughout southern Colorado, including Pikes Peak, Cave of the Winds, the Great Sand Dunes, Mount Blanca, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and the San Juan Mountains, where the Rio Grande begins.



Ancestral Homelands



The Jicarilla Apache Honor the Water

Water is sacred to the Jicarilla, from the clouds that bring rain, to the snow that falls in the mountains creating icy spring flows, to the life-giving presence of rivers, lakes, and streams. In the Jicarilla creation story, “Born of Water” is a major deity who made the world a safe place for human habitation and established the four sacred rivers – The Rio Grande and the Arkansas, Canadian, and Pecos Rivers – to create the ancestral homelands of the Jicarilla Apache.



The Jicarilla Apache Honor the Earth

For centuries, and continuing today, the Jicarilla Apache harvested clay from the earth to make pots for utilitarian use and ceremony. The pottery is made from clay containing naturally occurring mica which is dug from the mountains of their ancestral homelands. Mica is a mineral which makes the clay naturally shiny. The Jicarilla people offer prayers of gratitude to the Earth for the gift and use of the clay. They carefully remove twigs and stones and clean the earth before forming the clay into ornamental and functional pots, vases and vessels. The pottery is stacked and then fired over an open flame.



The Jicarilla Apache are also known for their accomplished basketry. Each fall, willow and sumac branches are gathered near rivers to be woven into strong baskets. Basket weavers thank the earth for use of the materials and harvest with efficiency to protect the plants. Each basket design honors the elements and the traditions of the Jicarilla Apache people.



Today, tribal members of the Jicarilla Apache Nation in northern New Mexico continue to steward natural resources and honor their relationship to the earth, including managing some of the premiere fish and wildlife programs on the continent. Many herbs, berries, and plants, including yucca, sage, and rabbitbrush are harvested for food and medicinal purposes.