

1912 Trip to Oraibi by Mule and Horse

Gail Gardner speaks: Back in 1912,¹ Mr. R. E. Morrison was a prominent attorney here, and he had got a mule team from an old timer named Kim Fell who had a fine pair of mules. The wagon we had was what they called a mountain wagon. It had a top on it, a canvas top, and there were side curtains you could roll down in case it rained. We had this mule team but we had four saddle horses along. Mr. Morrison's son rode a saddle horse, and I rode my horse, and Chester Crawford was along and he rode a horse. The girls would take turns riding the extra horse, and they would ride in the wagon the rest of the time.

We left Prescott fairly early and our first day was the longest trip of all, about 42 miles from Prescott to Camp Verde.

[The fifth] night we got into Oraibi. At Oraibi, Mr. Morrison had rented an Indian house. They had gone back to their original homes in the village and rented this house to us. It was a nice house, just one of the Agency houses. It was just immaculate! Those women had sure kept it up nice. We stayed in that all during the Snake Dance.

I had a little black mare that was very gentle and I kept her in Oraibi and the only trouble was horse feed for that mare. Hay was three dollars and a half a bale, and rolled barley

¹ In other interviews, Gail establishes the year as 1914 or '15, after he had returned from college at Dartmouth.

was five dollars for a seventy pound sack. So it was a little expensive to keep a horse there. But the rest of our stock were out in this pasture that was just fenced five miles on one side, five miles on the front, and five miles on the other, and kingdom come on the other side. No fence at all!

There was no water in [the pasture] except the well. My job was to go over there every day and haul up water for our livestock. There was lots of other [Indian] stock in there. My job was to see that our horses and mules got water and keep some of that Indian stock away while I was watering my stock.

I remember going over to water the stock one morning. These Hopi Indians have always been great runners and this Indian was a-trottin' along ahead of me goin' to his field and I was a-horseback. I just did well to keep him in sight. He was sure makin' time! Those Hopis were pretty much trained runners. They'd run out to cultivate their field and then run back at night. It'd be maybe four miles or five miles.

We saw one Snake Dance at Oraibi and then we went over to Hotevilla and saw a Flute Dance, where the Indian goes down in the spring, under water, and then comes back up with these emblems of water. He'd go out of sight and then come out, hold his breath and then come up with a jug of water. They'd take the jug to their field. That was sacred water and helped the fields grow better.

There's three mesas there: there's Oraibi Mesa, and Middle Mesa, and there's three villages there, Mishongnovi, Shipaulovi, and Shungopovi. And then there's the Walpi Mesa which is at the other end of the Hopi

Reservation. Walpi is a high mesa and there was a little town at the foot of that mesa that they called Polacca. We went to all three mesas and saw a Snake Dance at Oraibi and a Snake Dance at Hotevilla and this Flute Dance, I guess that was at Shungopovi.

Now, Walpi, that's the smallest. They just have a very little dance plaza. I never enjoyed those dances that I saw at Walpi much. The plaza's too small. But that middle mesa, at Sichemovi, Shipaulovi, and Shungopovi there's larger plazas. Oraibi's a real good sized dance plaza. But Walpi's a little bit of a dance plaza and the dancers at Walpi appeared to be crowded. But at the other mesas they weren't at all.

I remember them getting ready for that Flute Dance. They dressed the women, the squaws, right out there while you were watching them. They had a bunch of broom-weed tied together and the men would brush the girls' hair with the stems of that.

The Snake Dance lasted just about as long as one of our [Smoki] dances. There were two Kivas. You'd hear the Antelopes in one Kiva and the Snakes in another Kiva; they'd be chanting in there. Then they'd come out when it was time for the Snake Dance. They had the tromp boards; Sipapau they called the tromp board. Our dance is very much like it. In fact it's patterned after it, just practically the same thing. I think there would be about twelve or fourteen [dancers]. Of course, always there were the gatherers, just the way we have the gatherers.

We would see 'em bitten by rattlesnakes. [We] would see one bitten on the hand, well he'd just lick it and just go on and dance.

Didn't seem to bother 'em any. One man was struck in the face but he just wiped off his face and went on dancin'. It's never known, whether they draw the fangs out of those rattlesnakes or not. Of course, any snake — you know our bull snakes have teeth. And in our dances sometimes a bull snake will bite you and draw blood.

When we were camping at Oraibi, I'd just unsaddle my horse and my saddle and spurs and bridle and everything, and the Hopis might come along, and they'd pick up your stuff and look at it, but you never had to bother about the Hopis stealin' something. But what the Navajos had been doing, somebody'd camp and they'd get in and run off their livestock and then come around and tell them their livestock had strayed and "for \$25 we'll get your horses and mules back for you!" Well, so when we camped in the Navajo country at Tall Cheko or Little Burro Springs, why I just took my bed out and rolled it down right where our horses were staked.

I've been up there several times [since]. Our Hopi girl that lived with us made the benches for us right at the end of the Antelope Line! "This is for MY people!" she said.

Everybody at Hotevilla knew that Louise had lived with us, and we thought a lot of Louise, and we really got the red carpet treatment. That was nice! Everybody'd smile at us, you know, they knew who we were. I didn't feel like an outsider. They just looked like they were so glad to see us that we'd come up to see the Snake Dance.

