



# Places To Go, Things To Carry

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Man is not unique in nature with the need to carry items from place to place. But man has developed multiple ways to accomplish the task. Hunter-gatherer groups, who have few permanent possessions because of their nomadic lifestyle, nevertheless have always used an array of pouches, canteens, nets, sacks, carrying poles and slings. As man's culture becomes more complex, and people begin to acquire more and more goods, carrying containers became more important and more specialized. The Greeks used *amphora* to ship olive oil, the Sumerians sent inventory lists in sealed *bullae*, the British shipped tea to America in crates, and when a businessman goes to an appointment today, he takes along his attache case. People have always had *places to go, things to carry*.

This exhibit explores the various kinds of containers used by the Native Peoples of the Southwest to transport things from one place to another. Some are use-specific and others can be used to carry just about anything. Some containers are indigenous developments, while others are borrowed from the Europeans at the time of contact. Many are still used by the Native Peoples today.

## Burden Baskets

Burden baskets are found in most Southwestern Native American groups. Generally, they are cylindrical to cone-shaped, with a rigid opening. Often, there are attachments on the basket which allow it to be supported on the back by means of a tumpline or burden strap across the head of the carrier.

The Hopi and Zuni use similar burden baskets. These are made of wicker woven over two U-shaped base rods, with leather strap attachments for the tumpline. These baskets are most often used to gather peaches or other fruit.

The burden basket used by the Pima and the Tohono O'odham (Papago) is called a *kiaha*. It is made of cotton or yucca cordage netted over crossed support rods. A tumpline keeps the basket positioned on the carrier's back. The carrier uses an assisting pole to help her stand once the *kiaha* is loaded. This basket is used to carry everything from firewood to ceramic pots.

The Apache use a burden basket woven of willow or sumac. The basket has leather strips attached to the base and sides of the basket which have tin cones on the end. These make a tinkling sound as the carrier walks. These baskets are positioned with the help of a tumpline and are used to carry such things as food and firewood.

## Water Carriers

People have always had a daily need for water. If there is no plumbing, then water must be brought to the home or camp for drinking, cooking and washing. If people are travelling through an arid area with no water available, then water must be carried along for personal use.

An *olla* is a large ceramic water container used by most of the Pueblo Indians. The vessel typically has a high shoulder and a concave base. After it is filled, it is balanced on the head and carried back to the village.

Baskets can be used to carry water if they have been made water tight. The Apache water bottle or *tus* is woven of willow, cottonwood, or sumac. These bottles are wide-mouthed and have rounded bodies. The weaving is coarse and the finished basket is coated with a thick layer of ground leaves and pinon pitch. There are often two leather tabs worked into the wicker which allows for the attachment of a strap or tumpline to carry the filled *tus*.

The basketry water bottle associated with the Navajo is often actually woven by the Paiutes and is distinguished by its small size and constricted opening. The tabs are usually made of braided horsehair.

Canteens are used for carrying an individual supply of water. The simplest canteen is one made from a hollowed-out gourd. This

is done by cutting off the stem end to create the mouth, and then filling the gourd with pebbles or sand to clean it. The gourd is then shaken to loosen the seeds, emptied, and rinsed with water. A stopper is made of wood or corn cob. Sometimes, netting is wrapped around the gourd and a carrying strap is attached.

Ceramic canteens are found among many of the Pueblo groups. These canteens can have two shapes. The first is globular with one flat side. On either side a log is attached which allows a strap to be attached to the container. The opening is usually slightly off-center and quite small. A carved wooden plug or corn cob is used as a stopper. A second shape for ceramic canteens is a horizontal cylinder, with the mouth on the long surface. This type of water container is also closed by a wooden plug, corn cob, or rag. Twine can be wrapped around the cylinder at either end to form a carrying strap.

### **Saddles and Saddle Bags**

The horse and all horse equipment were introduced to Native Americans by Spaniards at the time of contact. Native Americans have modified this equipment to fit their own needs.

The Navajo saddle consists of a wooden frame with a high pommel (saddle horn) and high back frame. A leather cover is stretched over this frame and then decorated with metal buttons.

Saddle bags have also been modified. The Apache, for example, use a bag that is basically a long, flat, rectangular container with a slit on the upper surface. When loaded, they are placed over the horse behind the saddle and are held closed by the weight of the load. Apache saddle bags can be made of either cloth or leather.

### **Carrying Poles**

Transporting very heavy loads over a considerable distance can present a problem. One way to solve this is to use a carrying pole. With it, a load can be split into two equal parts, one suspended at each end of the pole. The pole can then be carried by one person by balancing it across the back of the neck, or over one shoulder. If two people are available, the load can be slung on a pole, and each carrier can shoulder one end. Finally, a single carrier could attach the load to one end of a carrying pole, and support it over one shoulder, using the shoulder as a fulcrum.

### **Personal Containers**

Personal containers include pouches, tool sheaths and medicine bags. Pouches come in a number of sizes and can be decorated in a variety of ways. The Navajo pouch is a dressed leather bag suspended on a long strap. It is often decorated with silver buttons. In contrast, the Apache use pouches that are simple drawstring bags made from buckskin. Apache pouches are decorated with either beadwork or painting, with a different design on each side. Pouches are used to hold a variety of personal items.

More specialized containers are those used to hold tools. The Apache used knife sheaths, frequently made of beaded buckskin. Apache women use a sheath to carry an awl, a universal tool most often used for basketmaking. Arrow quivers were made by most people.

### **Cradle Boards**

Probably the most precious cargo transported by people is a child. Today, car seats are used to protect small children while traveling. Native Americans used, and still use, a cradle board for the same purpose.

Cradle boards have some universal traits. Typically, there is a rigid frame with attachments or straps for securing the child, and a hood which shades the child's face. The child is swaddled (wrapped) into the cradle board, often with the arms and legs firmly secured. When not being carried, the board is propped up so that the child can see what is going on around him. Cradle boards can be hand held, strapped to the back, or placed on top of a loaded burden carrier.

In the Southwest, the Hopi still make cradle boards of willow wicker. The Apache baby carrier is today made of dyed canvas; in the past, it was made of buckskin. The Navajo cradle board is made of two strips of cedar board, held together with leather strips.

### **Suggested Reading**

Ferg, Alan (editor)

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Kissell, Mary Lois

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1971 *Navajo Material Culture*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Tanner, Clara Lee

1968 *Southwest Indian Crafts*. Tucson: University of Arizona.

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