

Report back from travels afar,

Since I was a kid, I'd always heard about the Four Corners area, the Dine', Hopi and the Pueblo resistance. I had also heard about Los Alamos National Laboratories (LANL), Peabody Coal, Uranium mining and the whole area being known as a national energy sacrifice zone. When you talk to the general public though, there's not a feel for this knowledge or story. Part of this journey is building on that lack of understanding and part of it is building around the idea of bringing together native resistance and nuclear abolition as they both happen.

The purpose of the journey was simple: Nuclear Abolitionists would meet in Albuquerque and spend a week meeting local people, the land and tour uranium sites and facilities sites. This was to build relationships/strategy, power, capacity and narrative that connects us (mainly frontline bi-poc and working class) around nuclear, energy and climate issues, as well as, power building to push back against this and other false solutions to climate change. Folks included, group and tribal leaders, community and cultural people, and nonhuman relatives include the land, air and water as places/beings to develop relationships with as well. I was to capture experience and develop a story with the intent to relay them back to Michigan folks and broader, with the hopes of widening and expanding education, awareness and relationships in the movement. Especially around frontline nuclear energy and uranium mining.

We planned on touching down in Albuquerque and our travels should take us throughout the state and into Arizona as well. Areas would include Espinola. Los Alamos, Pueblo Lands, Mt. Taylor and Pinon, AZ. This pretty much has been generations in the making but also generated from the past few years working as CRAFT's Community Organizer and the pathway that it has been a part of. This has included national coalition building around Jemez and Environmental Justice Principles and high level radioactive waste issues intersecting with reactor issues. Which is where I would meet the fine folks who would be a part of this story and report, Leona Morgan, Dine' nuclear abolitionist and Jenn Galler, Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. We planned to gather around the ideas stated at the beginning.

We didn't really know exactly how this would all go down, the more we talked the more it became clear that there was more than just meeting in person and developing relationship and strategy for the work and future, we needed to experience the story as it related to the land and indigenous people of it. This led to the idea to meet and talk to other indigenous people who are doing the work and are living the life impacted on the frontlines. This was so valuable for this antinuclear work; it's so common to hear about technical stuff and policy while actual earthly experience is pushed aside or completely ignored.

It began with us all meeting on the evening of our arrival to Albuquerque in late September. The days would be packed and there would be much distance to travel, I totalled 1400 miles in 5 days of driving on the rental vehicle. The 1st day we traveled north from Albuquerque to Espanola and met with Beata Tsosie, Leona's contact, she was very knowledgeable and had a calming, strong presence. She not only shared the story of how the United States government Department of Energy (DOE) kicked Pueblos out of the area now known as Los Alamos, and

how it was done by force under “eminent domain” for “national security” and nuclear weapons and energy testing. She also shared the history of invaders in the area going back to the Spanish and did us one more solid by giving the oral history of times before that. She showed us some of the solutions they are using to take care of the land, be good stewards and also to fight back against this continuous attack. We were told to go to the area known as Bandelier National Monument where you can see the ancient homes of the people in one place and see the government nuclear testing facilities in another. We were not to give power to the desecration, but to give power to the spirit of the land and people. We did, and acknowledged the land on the way down into the canyon and were approached by law enforcement before we got back to the road to our vehicle, we got by but it was for real the opposing forces at play. On the way back to Albuquerque that night we met with some youth from Tew Women United who shared more perspective and experience with us.

As if ya wouldn't believe that was all in a heavy day, the next would move with similar mannerism. We would travel to the Churchrock Red Water Pond Road Community. Home of respectful Dine' people and the largest uranium spill to ever happen. We would meet folks who literally experienced it. The levels of radiation were and are so bad that people were no longer able to harvest materials for hogans, clothes and medicines. Not having plants, water, air and sheep available lead to dependence on materials supplied by outside sources and western medicines to address sickness from the impacts. This isn't hundreds of years ago and by the way ya hear the folks in the community tell it, ya still need to wear a mask when its windy to keep from inhaling radioactive particles in the dirt. One elder gave many accounts of things as a child up to her current age that had to do with it. As a child she didn't know, as an adult when she worked in the mines she didn't know. No one ever said that the uranium was harmful, she has lymphoma now, she has been able to beat it back.

The next day would take us to Acoma Pueblo lands to meet with Petuuche Gilbert, an elder of Acoma. He would share with us the magic, stories and shrines of Acoma Pueblo, from valley to mountain top, from past and present to future. That, and a whole lotta story about the history of the uranium boom and the settler boom. After all, it was this area of his people that was impacted by mining and famous uranium boomtown Grants New Mexico. So much that would be shared with us. Hope was not lost as the culture and awareness is ever present and the spirit is strong. This would be proven by Petuuche as he shared details of each place we crossed paths with. Many of which he and his family and community had direct ties to, whether it was pilgrimages to these sacred shrine sites historically and currently or working in the uranium mines, he knew both. Talk about heavy and enlightening!

The journey wouldn't end there and I am working on more of it and in more detail for the next blog. Haha don't mean to leave y'all hanging but running out of 2 page room for the insert.

Wado,

Jesse Deer In Water  
CRAFT Community Organizer