

## Old Salt Mother

Sixty miles south of Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico, there sits a shallow saline lake that is also the mother of the Zuni people. She is *Ma'l Oyattsik'i*, sometimes translated as "Old Lady Salt" or "Salt Woman." The Zuni people consider this body of water a sacred being, and it is a revered site for other First Nations peoples, including neighboring Navajo and Apache tribes.

Today the Old Salt Mother is still a pilgrimage destination for several First Nations peoples. Their ancient trails traverse the land nearby, and indigenous men still make the journey to the lakeshore to pay Salt Mother respect in traditional religious ceremonies, ritually bathe themselves, and collect her sacred flesh. Salt from the lake is ceremonially harvested and used for religious rituals and cooking in the daily life of the Zuni people.

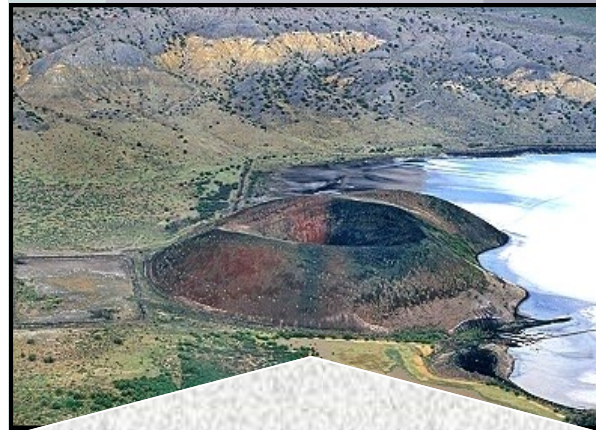


## Zuni Salt Lake



### Directions:

Zuni Salt Lake is a rare high desert lake, and a classic maar. It is located in Catron County, about 60 miles south of the Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico, USA.



## Zuni Salt Lake Old Salt Mother



Above is an aerial photo of Zuni Salt Lake maar, which is a volcanic crater that is produced by explosion in an area of low relief, is generally more or less circular, and often contains a lake, pond, or marsh.

Below is a recent photograph of the Old Zuni Mission in New Mexico.



## Zuni Creation Story

The Zuni Creation Story is intricately tied to the Zuni Pueblo and Zuni Salt Lake.

The oral tradition speaks of how at the beginning of time ancestors emerged into the Fourth (modern) World from a location in the Grand Canyon and eventually found their way to Halonna:wa the Middle Place (present day Zuni Pueblo).

Archaeologists have discovered evidence that the ancestors of the Zuni have roamed this area for over ten thousand years.

In recent years, the Zuni were successful in blocking a major coal-mining project that would have seriously damaged the sacred Zuni Salt Lake, the home of Salt Mother.



## Zuni, NM Pueblo



*Zuni Pueblo, NM - Edward S. Curtis, 1903*

Sixty miles south of the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico lies the Zuni Salt Lake, home of the Zuni's Salt Mother deity. When water evaporates in the summer, it leaves a layer of salt on the lake bottom, which is harvested by pilgrims, including medicine men coming from Zuni and other neighboring tribes.

The Zuni Pueblo is the largest of the 19 New Mexico pueblos, with more than 700 square miles and a population of over 10,000. It also features the Hawikuh ruins, abandoned during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, as well as craftsmen shops, and multiple events throughout the year. Zuni Pueblo is on the Zuni Indian Reservation, two miles north of Zuni, New Mexico, on NM 53.

## Zuni Salt Lake

For centuries, the Pueblo people of the Southwest, including the Zuni, Acoma, Laguna, Hopi and Taos pueblos, have made annual pilgrimages to Zuni Salt Lake to harvest salt, for both culinary and ceremonial purposes.

