

Judy DeHose and Julee DeHose, Ndee bini' bida'ilzaahi (Pictures of Apache land)

These past eight weeks we worked with ten high school students and five college students as interns with Phil Endfield, a science teacher at the Cibecue Community School. In 1979, leaders from our community asked Keith Basso, a world-renowned anthropologist, to help record and map over 250 Apache place names in a 20-mile radius around the community. The purpose of the project was to record the names and stories of places that had taught our ancestors how to live right, so that one day the younger generations would also be able to learn from these places.

In 2004, leaders at the Cibecue Community School worked with Jonathan Long, an ecologist, to plan a new project for high school and college students to revisit places that were known to be important water sources. The purpose of this project was for the students to examine how the places had changed and what those changes meant for the community. We took these students back in history, their history in Cibecue. We revisited sixteen of the sites for which we had pictures that were taken in the late 1950s, early 1960s, and late 1970s. The students were challenged not only to review the pictures but also to gather information on the wetlands in order to evaluate the changes that took place.

They learned the indicators of wetlands. They learned how to find coordinates of places, test soils, measure water quality, identify plants and classify rocks in the Cibecue area. These students visited places that they never knew existed in their own backyard. They learned about the stories behind the places and the Apache names. They walked their land, they touched, felt and smelled the soil. They drank the waters at the sacred sites with a true understanding of why their ancestors held these places and the water so sacred. Then they went into the community and interviewed the elders. They did not have to look far because they had grandparents and extended family members who were only too willing to share their knowledge. The elders talked about the old days of hauling water, planting corn and using sacred places. Through the interviews, we learned why they love the land. Now the students know these places, they say the names in Apache, and they want this work to continue for the benefit of future generations. One goal is for students to plan restoration for places that have been damaged. We will be presenting a video and a poster that will highlight the Ndee bini' bida'ilzaahi Project