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An old Indian saying goes, "Give us good roads and we'll take care of our other problems."

While more than roads are needed to meet the many problems of the Indian people, a vigorous road-building program is doing much to improve the living conditions on the Navajo Reservation, largest and most heavily populated in the country, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Before 1950, the vast interior of the Navajo Reservation, which is roughly equivalent to the size of West Virginia, was virtually devoid of roads.

Indeed, the roads were so bad that one steep hill between Gallup and Ganado earned the Navajo name, "The Place Where the Mexicans Cry." The Navajo locals started calling it that when they witnessed a group of Mexican teamsters literally break down and cry from frustration when they couldn't push their wagons out of the mud. They were on the way to deliver supplies to the Ganado Trading Post.

In the intervening 15 years, some 600 miles of paved highways have been constructed. Good roads are beginning to crisscross the reservation where once there were only wagon trails. Hogans and trading posts, which were once far removed from the outside world, now have paved highways running by the back door.

Many Navajo families have moved from interior reaches of the reservation up to the highway. Good roads have enabled them to get to the hospital when they need a doctor.

The location of BIA boarding schools has been one of the determining factors in the location of new roads on the reservation. For example, a 39-mile stretch of paved highway from Navajo Route 8 westward to Pinon, in almost the geographical center of the reservation, serves seven schools. All-weather roads have contributed materially to increased enrollment of Navajo children in reservation schools.

A thousand miles of bus routes still need to be built to serve the present 69 boarding and day schools and 15 public schools on the reservation.

Roads are being built into some of the deepest recesses of the reservation although some areas--such as Black Mountain and Navajo Mountain--are still far removed from outside influences.

One benefit to the Navajo people from the road-building program has been the boom in tourists, who are coming to the reservation in increasing numbers to see some of this country's most scenic views.

On Navajo Route 1 (also called Arizona #64) which traverses the reservation from Tuba City to Shiprock, a count made last summer showed that 1,500 cars traveled the highway in a single day. Before this 185-mile stretch was completed, about three years ago, nearly all of the traffic was local.

Some of the attractions along this route, which tourists may visit by driving only a few miles off the main highway, are the Four Corners Monument, Monument Valley and the Indian ruins at Betatakin.

In the planning stage is a route intersecting Navajo Route 1 to Page, Ariz. When this road is built, an all-weather highway will link two major recreation areas--Glen Canyon Dam on the Utah-Arizona border and Navajo Dam in northern New Mexico.

When U.S. 64 is completed across northern New Mexico and tied in with Navajo Route 1, a large section of the country, containing many major tourist attractions, will be open to the public.

Two major arteries are being constructed north-south across the reservation-- Navajo Route 12 and 8. Ultimately, there will be a scenic 141-mile highway running by the base of the Chuska Range, one of the most beautiful areas of the reservation. Two other manmade lakes--Red Lake and Tsaile Lake--also border this route.

The Long Range Navajo-Hopi Rehabilitation Act of 1950, which appropriated $20 million for road construction, and the Anderson-Udall bill of 1957, an amendment to that act, which appropriated another $20 million, have made possible construction of Navajo Routes #1 and #3, the major arteries of the reservation.

Some secondary road construction on the reservation was financed in the early 1950's by the Atomic Energy Commission to reach rich uranium deposits at Cove, Arizona; Mexican Hat to Monument Valley and Teec Nos Pos to Monument Valley. The BIA has also cooperated with State Governments and oil companies in building roads and bridges in the oil fields near Aneth, Utah, and near Farmington, New Mexico.