



South side of the north part of the ruins.

Related Areas

A number of other Southwestern areas in the National Park System are set aside to protect prehistoric structures. These include Mesa Verde National Park, Colo., and the following National Monuments: Bandelier, Chaco Canyon, and Gila Cliff Dwellings, N. Mex.; Canyon de Chelly, Casa Grande, Montezuma Castle, Navajo, Tonto, Tuzigoot, Walnut Canyon, and Wupatki, Ariz.

Administration

AZTEC RUINS NATIONAL MONUMENT, established on January 24, 1923, and containing 27 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

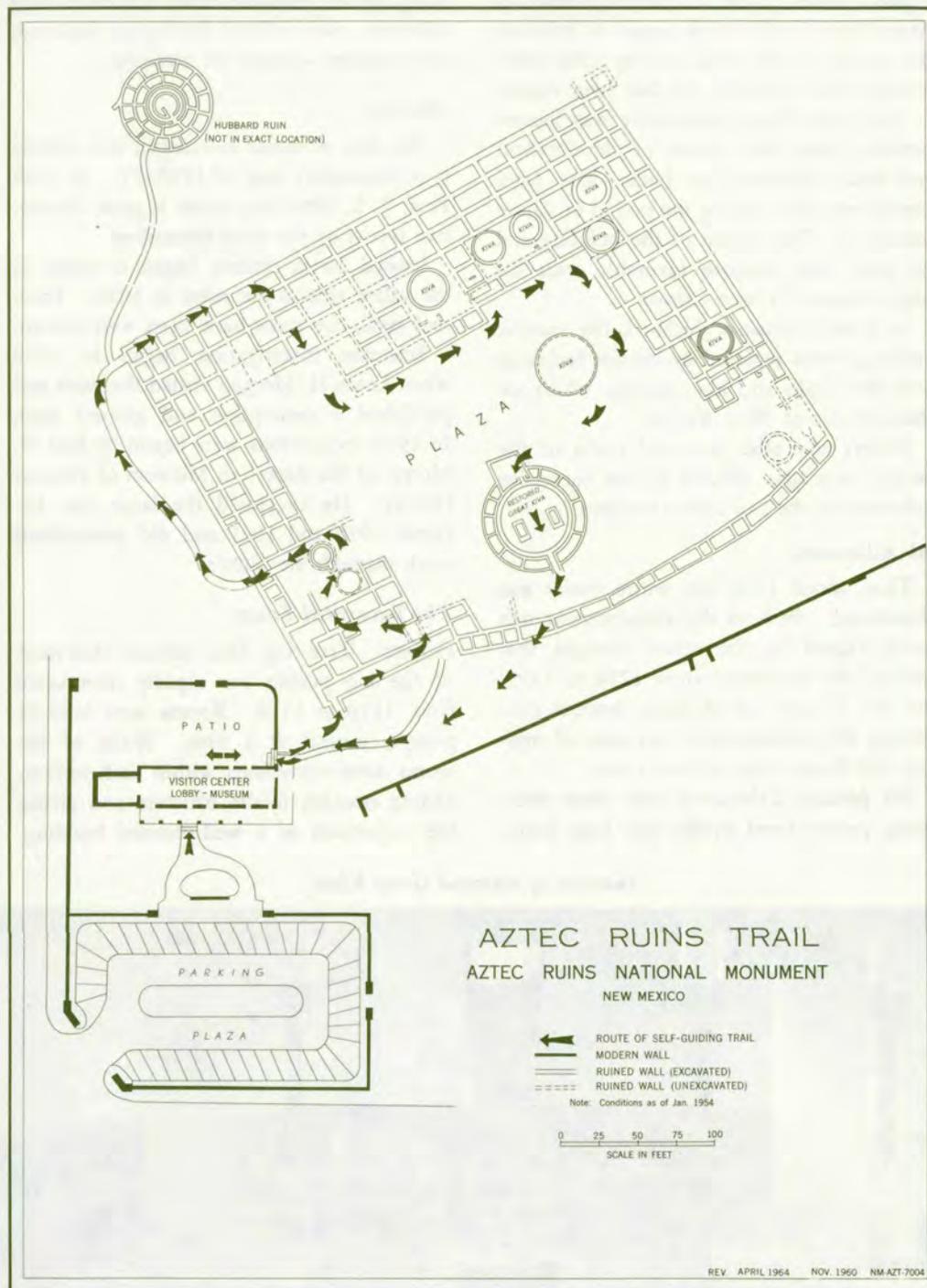
The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of the people.

A superintendent, whose address is Route 1, Box 101, Aztec, N. Mex., 87410, is in immediate charge of the monument.

America's Natural Resources

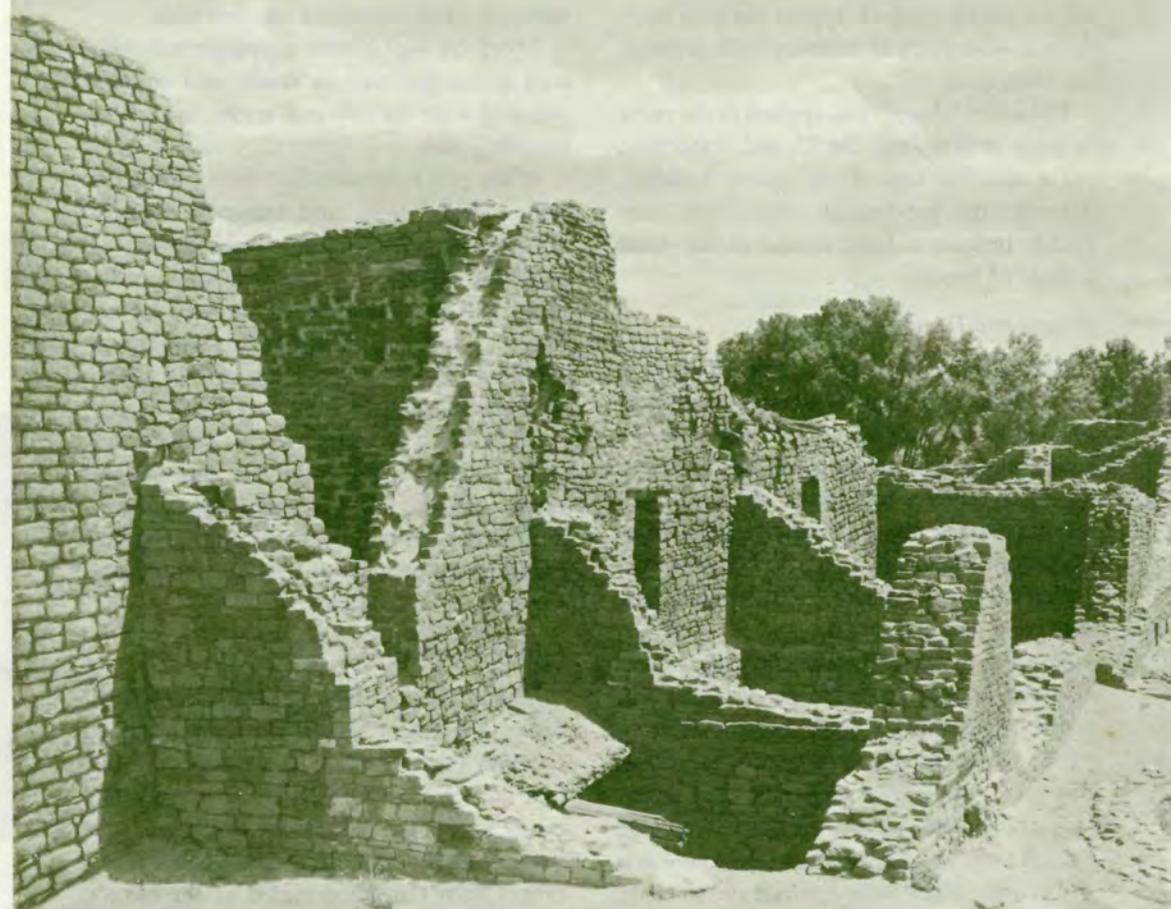
Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.



AZTEC RUINS

NATIONAL MONUMENT • NEW MEXICO



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



AZTEC RUINS

NATIONAL MONUMENT

Spectacular ruins embodying the architecture and building techniques of two groups of Pueblo Indians

In this National Monument are preserved the ruins of one of the largest pre-Spanish villages in the Southwest. The biggest ruin was once a 3-story building of 500 rooms. It was excavated by the American Museum of Natural History and furnishes an excellent example of classical pueblo construction. There are also ruins of several unexcavated smaller pueblos, which appear today as large mounds with parts of masonry wall protruding from them.

The name "Aztec" was applied to the ruins by early settlers from the United States who had a mistaken idea of the ancient builders. Actually, the pre-Spanish inhabitants were Pueblo Indians and not related to the Aztec Indians of Mexico.

Where and How They Lived

The eastern drainage of the San Juan River, from its sources in Colorado and New Mexico to its great bends in Utah, forms a geographical area where prehistoric Pueblo Indians reached a high stage of civilization. We cannot tell when the Indians first practiced agriculture, but by A.D. 600 they had settled in small villages in this area where they grew corn and squash.

The small villages grew into larger communities, and by 1100 the people's arts and crafts had reached a high level of achievement. They developed tools of stone, bone, and wood with which they built large stone-masonry houses, made decorated pottery, farmed by irrigation, and practiced other arts and crafts. They wove intricate cotton cloth,

probably from cotton imported from the south. And they began raising beans at this time.

The main supply of food came from tilling the fields near the towns. No doubt the people used the same land that is being farmed today. Irrigation ditches carried water from the Animas River to their fields. The ditches were dug with stone and wooden tools.

The food supply was supplemented with wild plants gathered in season and animals obtained with the bow and arrow, snare, and throwing stick.

When you remember that these people cut stones, felled trees, and transported heavy loads, without benefit of metal, wheels, or beasts of burden, you can better appreciate their skills and the immensity of their labors. Consider, for example, the sweat and toil that went into building the main pueblo. The sandstone had to be transported from quarries from 1 to 4 miles away. Timbers for roofs were brought from the surrounding areas. Under these circumstances, achievement depended on manpower and ingenuity. Building and maintaining such a community was a major undertaking.

Cultural Influences

One of the San Juan Basin's cultural high points was reached at Chaco Canyon, about 65 miles south of Aztec. For some years before and after 1100, Chaco Canyon was the center of trade and ideas for this area.

During the last half of the 1100's, however, Chaco Canyon declined as the basin's

cultural center. The progressive pueblos of Mesa Verde to the north began to influence the people of this area, and by 1200 Mesa Verde ideas dominated the San Juan region.

The Aztec Ruins community was located between these two centers of development and was influenced by both. The large pueblo was built during the period of Chaco influence. The pattern of the building and its great size compare favorably with the major towns of Chaco Canyon.

As Chaco influence declined, the massive buildings were replaced by smaller buildings with thin walls and low ceilings, which are characteristic of Mesa Verde.

Pottery and other arts and crafts of the people were also affected by the successive influences of the two cultural centers.

Abandonment

Then about 1300 the entire basin was abandoned. Perhaps the abandonment was partly caused by the severe drought that parched the Southwest from 1276 to 1299. But this is only one of many theories concerning the abandonment—an aura of mystery still haunts these ancient cities.

For perhaps a thousand years these interesting people lived in the San Juan Basin.

Long before Europeans even suspected their existence, their culture developed, flowered, and vanished—except for these ruins.

History

The first reference to ruins in this vicinity is on Escalante's map of 1776-77. In 1859 Prof. J. S. Newberry wrote a good descriptive report on the ruins themselves.

United States citizens began to settle in the valley around the ruins in 1876. From that time, the ruins have been well known.

Scientific investigation began in 1878 when Lewis H. Morgan visited the ruins and published a description and ground plan. In 1916, excavations were begun by Earl H. Morris of the American Museum of Natural History. He excavated the large ruin between 1916 and 1921 and did intermittent work through the 1920's.

The Excavated Town

HOMES. Tree-ring dates indicate that most of the big pueblo was rapidly constructed from 1110 to 1114. Rooms were built in groups, several at a time. Walls of the rooms were continuous within each section, adding strength to the structure and giving the impression of a well-planned building.

Interior of restored Great Kiva.



West wall of large ruin showing unique stripe of colored rock.

Around the plaza, the house was 1-story high and terraced up to 3 stories or more on the north side.

The south side of the plaza was enclosed by a 1-story row of rooms, 1 room in depth, curved outward. As the lowest part of the building was on the south side, the plaza received a maximum amount of sunlight. When completed, the building looked somewhat like a rectangular amphitheater. There were over 500 rooms built for housing and for storage. Rooms averaged 10 by 12 feet, with ceilings 9 feet high.

Rear rooms were reached through those in front, for there were no hallways.

KIVAS. Pueblo Indians of this area built separate rooms, known as kivas, for ceremonial purposes. The kivas built during the main construction period (Chaco influence) were large circular rooms, built either underground or in the main block of the house. Kivas built or remodeled in later years conformed to the Mesa Verde architectural style and were smaller and keyhole shaped.

GREAT KIVA. During the period of Chaco influence, a very large circular building was constructed in the plaza. The center room of

this structure has an inside diameter of 48 feet. Its features differ from those of the small kivas and establish it as a Great Kiva like those of Chaco. This structure was completely restored in 1934 by Earl H. Morris who had excavated it for the American Museum of Natural History. These Great Kivas represent the peak of religious architecture among the Pueblos. They are not used by modern Pueblo Indians.

About Your Visit

All-weather roads from the north, east, and west on U.S. 550 and from the south and east on N. Mex. 44 lead to the monument. Commercial air connections can be made at Farmington, 14 miles to the west. There is bus service from Aztec and Farmington. Overnight facilities are not available at the monument.

You can visit the monument from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. all year. The admission fee is waived for children under 16 years of age and bona fide educational groups and persons in charge of such groups. The museum and self-guiding tour will help you to understand the ruin. Guided tours are provided for large groups upon request.