

Hundreds of people once lived in the pueblos here at Aztec. Then the walls stood intact, and flat adobe roofs covered the top rooms of these three- and four-story buildings.



Rediscovery and Excavation

In the year 1776, when our country declared its independence, New Mexico was still part of the Spanish Empire. The governor of New Mexico authorized an expedition from Santa Fe in the hope of finding an overland route to the Pacific Coast. Father Escalante, the priest who proposed this undertaking, was in charge. On a map produced by the expedition's cartographer, the ruins near the confluence of the Animas and San Juan Rivers are mentioned. This is the first known reference to ruins in this area, but we do not know definitely if Father Escalante actually saw what we call the Aztec Ruins.

Prof. J. S. Newberry, a geologist working with a Geological Survey expedition, saw the ruins in 1859. Then in 1878, Lewis Henry Morgan, often considered to be the father of American anthropology, visited here and 9 years later he published a description and ground plan of the ruins.

Settlers began moving into the Animas Valley in the 1870s and became interested in the ruins, constantly speculating about them. As noted, they incorrectly guessed that the Aztecs of Mexico had built the ruins—hence the name. During the 1880s, the long-sealed rooms were entered and explored, and whatever artifacts could be found were avidly collected. Unfortunately, much valuable information was lost in this manner.

In 1916, the American Museum of Natural History began to excavate the ruins under the direction of Earl H. Morris, a young archeologist who had grown up in nearby Farmington. By 1923, most of the work was completed; however, Morris returned to Aztec in 1933 and 1934 to supervise the stabilization and reconstruction of the great kiva. The small house that Morris had built nearby is a part of the visitor center today.

The Museum of Natural History purchased the ruins and surrounding land and donated these to the U.S. Government. On January 24, 1923, President Harding issued a proclamation creating Aztec Ruins National Monument.

About Your Visit

Aztec Ruins National Monument is located northwest of the city of Aztec, near the junction of U.S. 550 and N.M. 44. The park is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with longer hours during the summer months; it is closed Dec. 25 and Jan. 1.

We suggest that you stop first at the *visitor center*, where you may see pottery, baskets, and other items made by the Indians who lived here, as well as exhibits explaining their way of life. National Park Service personnel are here to answer questions and to help make your visit more enjoyable.

A self-guiding trail leads through the west pueblo, its great kiva, and the nearby Hubbard ruin, a tri-walled structure.

There is a small picnic ground here, but no camping facilities are provided. Food and lodging are available in nearby towns.

Aztec Ruins National Monument is a Designated Federal Entrance Fee Area. An entrance fee of \$1 per car is charged. Golden Age and Golden Eagle Passports are honored.



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Please Be Careful

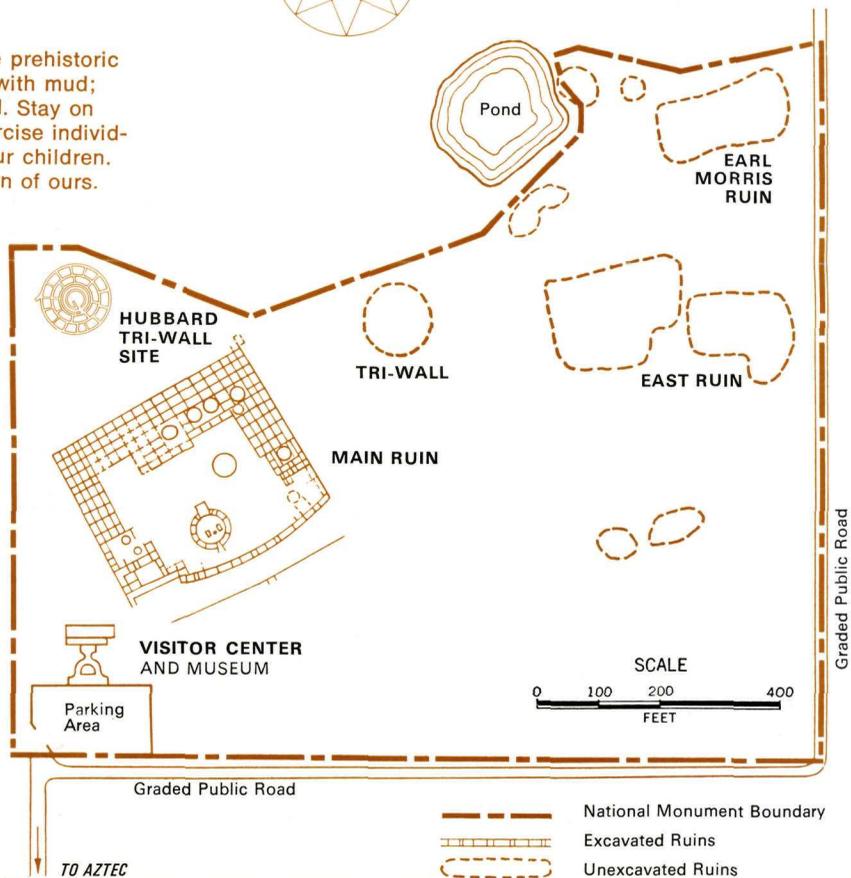
The 800-year-old walls of these prehistoric Indian ruins are held together with mud; they crumble easily if disturbed. Stay on the trails and remain alert. Exercise individual caution for yourself and your children. Your safety is a primary concern of ours.

Administration

Aztec Ruins National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box U, Aztec, NM 87410, is in immediate charge.

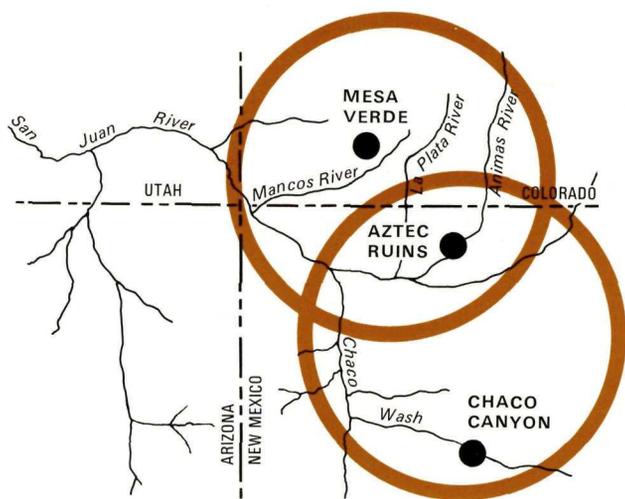
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

aztec ruins

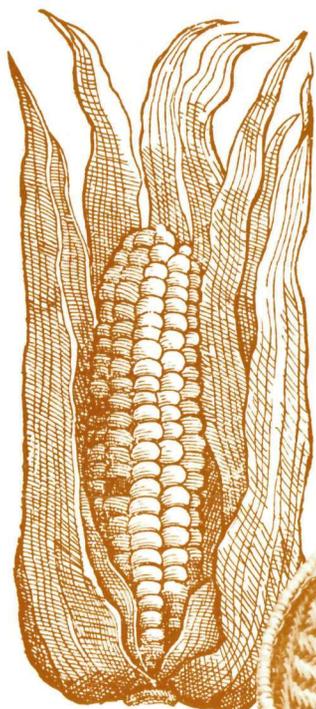


Just what caused movements of people and ideas within the San Juan River drainage is not clear. But move they did, and here at Aztec you can find evidence of the influx of people from Chaco Canyon and later from Mesa Verde.

Strange as it may seem, Aztec Ruins National Monument has nothing to do with the Aztecs of ancient Mexico. A century ago, early pioneer settlers in the Animas River Valley speculated about the large ruins they found here and incorrectly guessed that the Aztecs had built them. They gave the name "Aztec" to both the ruins and to the town they founded. If not the Aztecs, who then built this ancient community?

A.D. 100 Those Who Came Before

Hundreds of years ago, small bands of Indians roamed this area, hunting game and gathering wild plant food. But early in the Christian era, their way of life began to change as groups to the south introduced the concept of planting and raising crops. At first they planted corn; later beans and squash. As their skills and dependency on farming increased, they began to settle in one place, building permanent homes in pits dug into the ground. These people wove many excellent baskets, and today we refer to them as the "Basketmakers."



Ground corn was the staple food of the Basketmakers and early Pueblo Indians. The corn was dried until the kernels were hard so that it could be stored for later use. When needed, dry kernels were pounded into cornmeal on a flat stone, called a metate, using a smaller stone, a mano, that fitted easily in the hand. The meal could then be cooked several ways. One was to moisten it, shape it into cakes, and then press them on hot stones to bake.

900 Small Villages Develop

Late in the 10th century, descendants of the Basketmakers began building their homes entirely above ground, grouping the rooms into small villages or "pueblos," the Spanish word for village. Archeologists have named these people Pueblo Indians. But the Navajos, who came to this area only a few centuries ago, call all of these early people Anasazi—the Ancient Ones.

As time went by, two major centers of Anasazi culture developed in this region—one at Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico, and the other at Mesa Verde in southwestern Colorado. As we shall see, Aztec Ruins, lying between these two locales, shows evidence of influence from both.

1100 A Community Arises . . .

In the early 1100s, another type of community began to develop here among the many small scattered one-storied farm pueblos along the Animas River. The people built one large multistoried pueblo, 110 meters (360 feet) long and 84 meters (275 feet) wide. Perhaps as many as 450 persons lived in this 500-room structure, which is now known as Aztec Ruins.

The architecture of the pueblo shows quite clearly that these people were related to the people of Chaco Canyon. Expert masons laid fine walls of shaped sandstone, building an "E"-shaped structure surrounding a plaza. The pueblo is not only large, but has a unity of design that indicates a pre-planned project, characteristic of those built by the Indians at Chaco Canyon. This relationship to Chaco Canyon is also revealed in the pottery and other items that the people made and used here.

A large circular building dominated the plaza. This great kiva represented the center of religious life for the community, and here the people held important ceremonies to ensure the well-being of their village. The great kiva was reconstructed in 1933-34 on partially standing walls. When you enter this building, try to sense the emotions of the people who used it 800 years ago.

1200 But Is Abandoned . . .

Sometime before the end of the 12th century, the very same century in which the large pueblo at Aztec was constructed, the people left it in search of new homes. Perhaps a shift in the rainfall pattern or in the course of the Animas River made farming difficult. Perhaps strong social ties with the people of Chaco Canyon led the people of Aztec to join them in the search for farmland where they could make a living more easily.

Whatever the cause, the pueblo was left silent and deserted for years.

1225 Then Reoccupied . . .

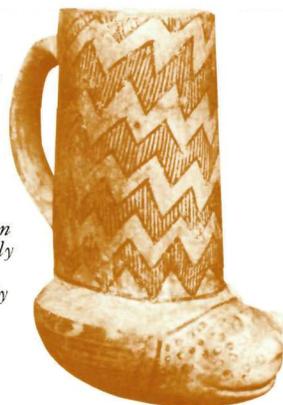
By 1225, Aztec had been reoccupied by people whose culture resembled that of the Indians of Mesa Verde. Perhaps environmental or population pressures caused some of the people from Mesa Verde to leave that area in search of a new place to live.

Not only did these newcomers reoccupy the Aztec pueblo, repairing and remodeling it to suit their needs, but they built another large pueblo immediately to the east. They also built two tri-walled structures—kivas surrounded by two concentric rows of rooms. These interesting buildings probably were for ceremonial purposes.

1300 And Deserted Again

During the last quarter of the 1200s, great unrest developed in the Anasazi world. No doubt the great drought that occurred from 1276 to 1299 contributed to the upheaval, but certainly other factors played a part, too. People left their homes in Mesa Verde and other areas, never to return. The people of Aztec moved to the Rio Grande or other places, and in some of these, Pueblo Indians still carry on the traditions that the Anasazi started over a thousand years ago. But this was the last time that anyone called the pueblo here at Aztec their home.

Pottery found in the ruins helps archeologists determine that two different cultures influenced occupation here at Aztec. For example, this tall cup with its hachured pattern of thin lines surrounded by heavier lines is characteristic of Chaco Canyon culture. The fact that the early Pueblo Indians took the time to paint the cup so beautifully also tells us that art was an important part of their lives.



It took a tremendous amount of labor to build these walls. All of the stones had to be carried here from several kilometers away, then shaped by hand with just another stone for a tool. As the floors and walls were added above ground, the builders probably hauled the stones up on ladders like this one. Ladders were also used by the Pueblo Indians simply to get from floor to floor. This is one of six found in the ruins.



The water jug and cup reflect craftsmanship from Mesa Verde—the lines in the design are more solid than the Chaco Canyon hachured patterns. Not quite so obvious is the difference in dyes. Mineral dye was used on Chaco-like pottery and vegetable dye on Mesa Verde-type.

