

Fact Sheet 2021

Aztec Ruins
National Monument

Chaco Culture
National Historical Park



Superintendent: Denise Robertson

Important Dates:

- March 11, 1907- Chaco Canyon National Monument was established by Theodore Roosevelt through Presidential Proclamation No. 740 (35 Stat. 2119).
- January 24, 1923- Aztec Ruins National Monument was established by Warren Harding through Presidential Proclamation No. 1650 (42 Stat. 2295).
- December 19, 1980 (P.L. 96-550, 94 Stat. 3227) - Abolishment of Chaco Canyon National Monument and Establishment of Chaco Culture National Historical Park to consist of approximately 33,980 acres and thirty-three outlying archeological protection sites totaling 8,779 acres. The Act provided no authority to include outlying sites within the park boundary, though recognizes the interconnections between the park and its 50,000-square mile area of influence.
- 1987- Both parks were designated as a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site.
- 1988- Aztec Ruins NM was increased to 317.8 acres
- 2013- Chaco Culture NHP was designated an International Dark Sky Park

Basic Information: Aztec Ruins National Monument protects an exceptionally well-preserved 12th century Ancestral Pueblo great house community, including the only reconstructed kiva in the Southwest.

Chaco Canyon contains 13 major prehistoric sites and hundreds of smaller ones built by Ancestral Pueblo people between 850-1250. There are four outlier sites outside of the canyon, two of which are open to the public. Key archaeological sites include Pueblo Bonito, Chetro Ketl, and Casa Rinconada.

Acres: Aztec Ruins NM encompasses 318 acres within the city of Aztec. Chaco Culture NHP extends over 34,000 acres and contains some 4,000 recorded archeological sites.

Visitation: In 2020 the parks hosted 50,604 visitors.

Base Budget: \$3,393,700 (October 1, 2020- September 30, 2021)

Staffing:

- Permanent: 39 (Varies)
- Seasonal and Term: 19 (Varies)
- Volunteers: 44 total volunteers contributed 4,378 hours.

Entrance Fee (Chaco Only):

- Vehicle Entrance Fee: \$25 for seven days.
- Motorcycle Entrance Fee: \$20 for seven days.
- Individual Entrance Fee: \$15

Camping (Chaco Only): Gallo Campground has 33 individual campsites, one of which is designated as handicapped accessible. There are also two group campsites. Each campsite has a picnic table and a fire grate. Restroom facilities with flushable toilets are available on site. There are no showers, hookups, or convenience stores or food services. There are no cell phone services.

Wildlife: Sitting near the Animas River riparian ecosystem, Aztec Ruins NM has a variety of reptiles/amphibians (11), birds (58), and mammals (12) inhabit the park. The park also has documented 105 plant species including 19 exotic species.

Chaco Culture National Historical Park is located at an elevation between 6040 ft and 6860 ft and represents an “island” of protected biodiversity within the San Juan Basin. The 34,000-acre preserve is comprised of four habitats: pinyon-juniper woodland (Chacra Mesa), mesa top grasslands, canyon floor, and riparian (Chaco Wash). There are approximately 130 species of bird in the canyon along with a variety of mammals and reptiles.

Backcountry Hiking (Chaco Only): The Park has five backcountry hiking trails totaling roughly 22 miles.

Annual Precipitation: Chaco Culture NHP, 8.5 inches. Aztec Ruins NM, 11 inches.

Points of Interest:

Aztec Ruins NM

Aztec West Self-Guided Trail: Explore the ancestral Pueblo "Great House" that was the social, economic, and political center of the region after Chaco. Along the way discover skillful stone masonry, remarkably well-preserved wood roofing, and original mortar in some walls.

Old Spanish National Historic Trail to Downtown Aztec: The Old Spanish Trail was the first recorded trade caravan from Santa Fe, NM all the way to Los Angeles, CA. The first journey was led by Antonio Armijo in 1829. Today you can follow the nationally designated trail from the picnic area, over the bridge across the Animas River, and into historic downtown Aztec.

Heritage Garden and Native Plants Walk: The Heritage Garden and the Native Plants Walk are both inside the picnic area. Traditional crops like corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and gourds are grown by park staff and volunteers. Take a quick stroll and see the wild plants that people in the Southwest have relied on for thousands of years.

Chaco Culture NHP

Pueblo Bonito: Pueblo Bonito is the oldest and largest building in Chaco Canyon. Excavations of this structure uncovered large amounts of turquoise, macaw skeletons, and cacao lined ceramic vessels.

Penasco Blanco Trail- This 7.5-mile roundtrip trail takes hikers to the remains of three different great houses, a petroglyph trail, and the famous supernova pictograph.

Casa Rinconada- The largest Great Kiva in the canyon is known for its solstice and equinox alignments that are still observed during the park's annual sunrise programs.

Interesting Facts:

- The night sky programs provided at Aztec and Chaco continue the traditions of the Ancestral Puebloans, who were astronomers themselves and incorporated celestial movements into the orientations of their buildings.
- The buildings in Chaco Canyon were the largest in what would become the United States until the mid-1800s.
- There is a pictograph at Chaco that many people believe depicts the supernova of 1054 and a petroglyph that might depict the total solar eclipse of 1097.
- 19 tribes from New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas, trace their ancestry to Aztec Ruins NM and Chaco Culture NHP.
- Earl Morris, the 1920s archaeologist and historian at Aztec Ruins is thought by some to be the inspiration for the Indiana Jones character.
- The Aztec West Great House contains solstice architectural alignments that are viewed each year during park special events.
- Aztec got its name because early Spanish explorers commonly used the term "Aztec" when naming ancient sites that they encountered.

Websites:

Aztec Ruins National Monument- www.nps.gov/azru

Chaco Culture National Historical Park- www.nps.gov/chcu

Chaco Research Archive- <http://www.chacoarchive.org/cra/>

