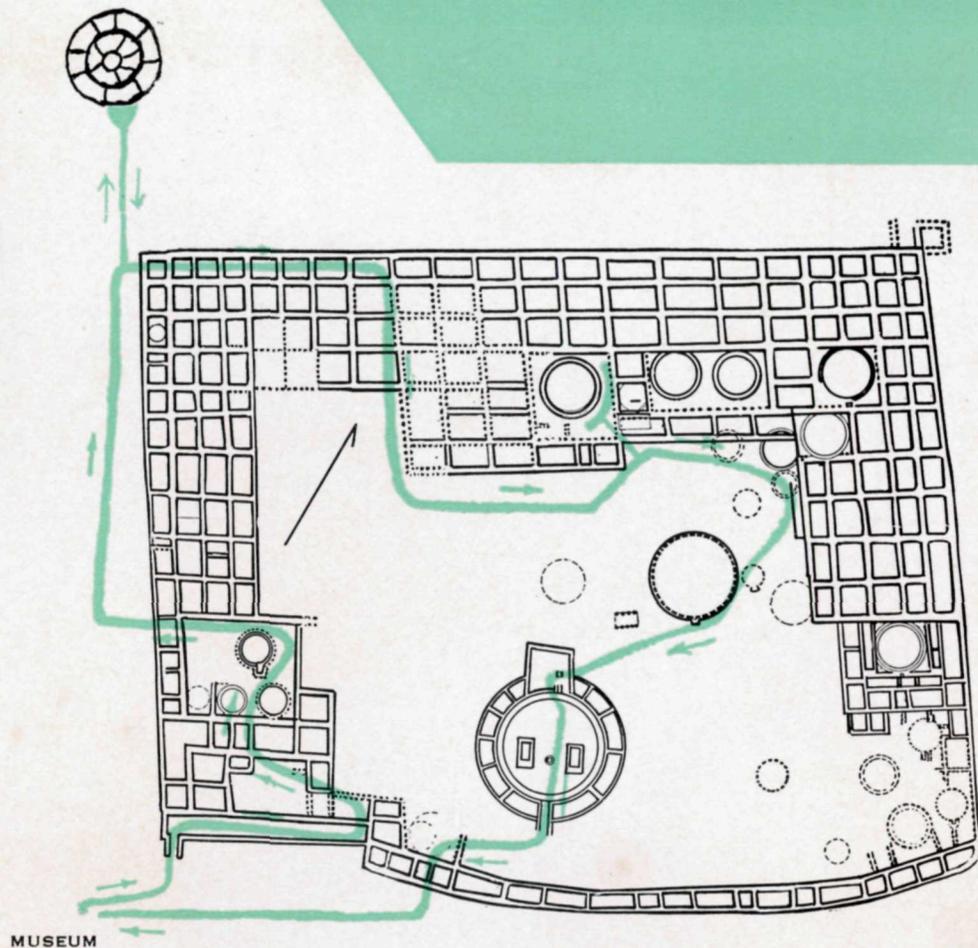


# AZTEC RUINS



AZTEC RUINS NATIONAL MONUMENT  
NEW MEXICO

10 cents if you take this booklet home



MUSEUM

*Ground plan of Aztec Ruins, a three-story apartment house built more than 800 years ago.*

## Aztec Ruins Trail Guide

Aztec Ruins National Monument, one of more than 225 areas administered by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, was set aside for its historic and scientific values. This area belongs to you and is part of your heritage as an American citizen. The men in the uniform of the National Park Service are here to serve you and welcome the opportunity to make your visit more enjoyable.

*Keep America Beautiful*

### HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Numbered markers along the trail refer to numbered paragraphs on the following pages which describe features at each of these points. See map on opposite page for the trail route.

**Station 1.** Aztec Indians *did not* live here. They lived in Mexico. The name Aztec was erroneously applied by early European settlers. Pueblo Indians *did* live here. You are now entering the pueblo through the only original entranceway. The ancient inhabitants also walked along this long corridor, climbed over the first story roof, and then down into the plaza by way of ladders.

*Help Preserve These Ruins—Stay on the Trail*



**Station 2.** This large pueblo, 3 stories high in some places, was an apartment building of about 500 rooms, facing a central plaza. Rooms were roofed, of course, and used for housing and storage. Maximum population was around 450 people, and occupation was from about A.D. 1100 until A.D. 1300. During this period, two different groups of pueblo farming people built and lived here at different times.

The original builders were Chaco type people, who apparently left, for reasons unknown, about A.D. 1130. After a long vacancy the pueblo was reoccupied by a group of Mesa Verde type people, who remodeled parts of the town after their own traditions. The keyhole-shaped rooms called kivas, which you see here, are fine examples of these traditions. Kivas were primarily religious chambers.

The principal crops of both groups were corn, beans and squash. They obtained water from the Animas River, which is about 500 yards beyond the ruins.

Archeological evidence indicates this part of the country was occupied continuously, from at least the beginning of the Christian era, by culturally related peoples. Large ruins such as this one represent the peak of their cultural development.

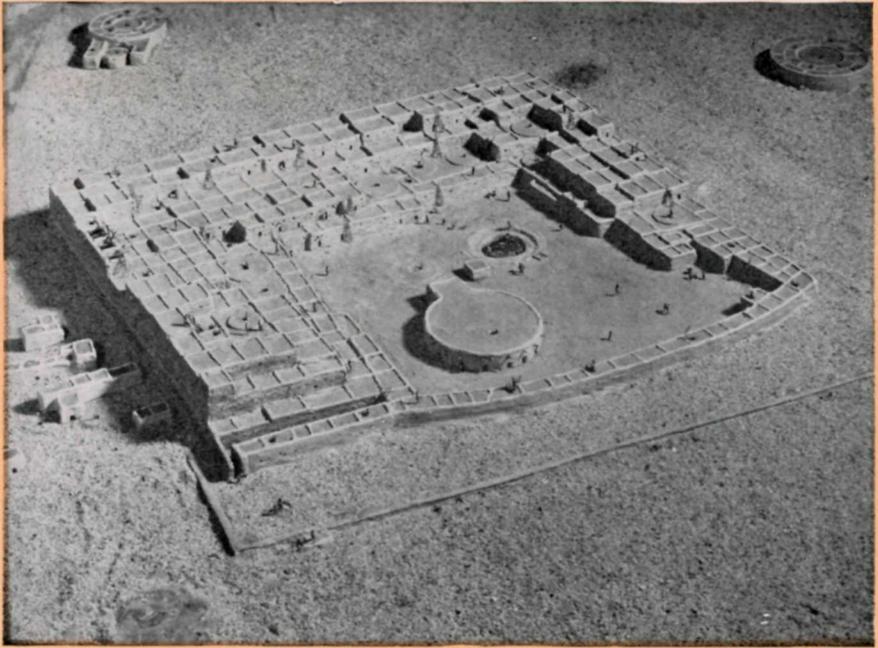
### *Do Not Climb On The Wall*

**Station 3.** The band of green sandstones which is built into the wall (largely restored in this long section) may have been for decoration. This west wall is 278 feet long.

All the material for the walls was carried by hand from quarries at least a mile distant. Notice that no sandstone formations are in sight in the vicinity.

The small openings in the wall, just above the present ground level, were used for ventilation and light for the outer ground floor rooms, now partially buried. The large timbers are modern replacements covering ends of original first story roof supports, to protect the old timbers.

*Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints*



*Scale Model, showing Aztec as it probably appeared when in use.*

**Station 4.** Before taking the trail to the Hubbard Ruin, look down the long outside wall at your right. This rear wall is 360 feet long, and not far from a straight line.

Information about the Hubbard Ruin will be found at the exhibits along the trail.

**Station 5.** At this point you will enter the northwest corner of the pueblo. This doorway is modern, to allow easy access to the rooms.

*Please be careful—steps and low door ahead*

**Station 6.** The opening to the right looks more like a window as we think of them now, but it was a small door, or crawlway. People who “watched their weight” could come through from the next room, as that was the only way this room could be entered.

*Litterbugs are not welcome anywhere.*

**Station 7.** The ceiling of this room is entirely original. The heavy central timbers are pine, and probably came from about 20 miles north. The smaller poles are usually cottonwood. The matting is split juniper and juniper bark, easily obtained nearby. Over the matting is a 6 to 8 inch layer of clay, forming a floor for the room above.

The small rectangular openings high in the walls were for light and ventilation. Notice here also how small bits of stone were used to fill the spaces between larger stones.

**Station 8.** To the south are three open doors, and a fourth which is sealed. In some cases, later users of the rooms buried their dead in them, and completely sealed all openings, both ventilators and doors. There were many places throughout the pueblo where townspeople sealed all openings to their living quarters, such as the last one you see here.

We think the reason for this is that during the great drought (A.D. 1276 to A.D. 1299) the town was abandoned. Evidently the residents expected to come back, so they locked their doors. When you leave your home today you turn a key in the lock. Eight centuries ago the Indian here could not lock his house quite that easily!

**Station 9.** This man was about 35 years old when he died, and his grave was found outside the ruin. The burial was moved, undisturbed, to this spot, so that you could see it in a protected and characteristic location. The pottery was found in the same position you now see.

When this long-sealed room was opened in 1881, it contained thirteen burials.



*The decorative band of green sandstone in Aztec Ruins west wall.*

The bodies were found lying on the floor, in the customary flexed position.

A total of over 200 burials has been found in the ruin. Strangely, only 6 are from the first (Chaco) period of occupation, the rest being from the second (Mesa Verde) period.

The Mesa Verde period burials included those of many women and children, indicating that the dwindling population was disease-ridden due to poor sanitary conditions.

**Station 10.** Across the closed door to the right you see what looks like a “Venetian” or bamboo blind, of willows sewn together with yucca fibre cord. Such mats were used as door coverings, burial mats, and in the construction of some ceilings. In this case someone wanted to reduce greatly the size of the doorway, and after erecting a framework of small poles, placed the mat above to hold mud plaster, much as we use lath. (See photograph, top of next page).



*Reduced doorway.*

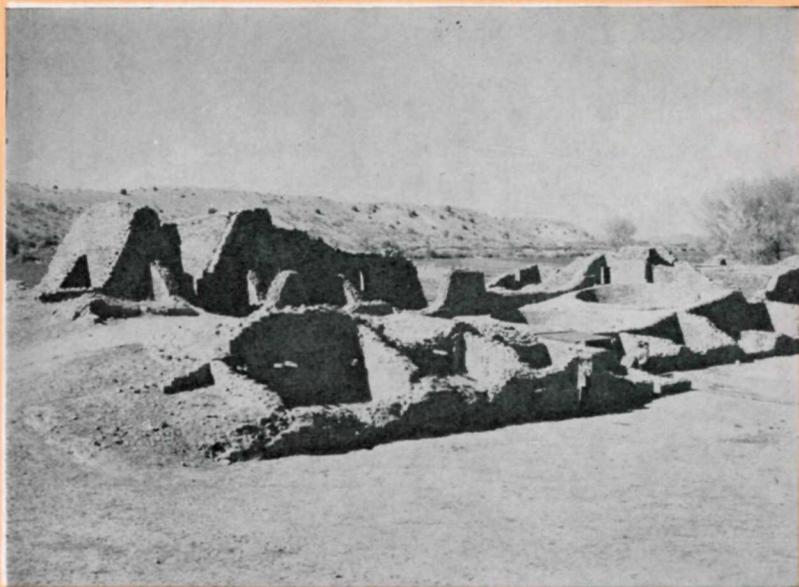
**Station 11.** This room has been left partially unexcavated, so you may see how rooms looked before they were cleared.

By careful observation you can see the collapsed roof of this room, the fallen building stones, and the wind-blown dirt that has drifted in through the centuries. A small section of the large timber has been sawed off and used for studies to determine the age of the ruin.

Excavation is a slow and exacting process, for the archeologist is very much like a detective, and must be constantly alert for evidence which will

tell him about the people whom he studies. In order not to destroy, or overlook any evidence, material such as you see now must be removed slowly, and carefully. When artifacts such as pottery, are found, they are uncovered carefully, and their locations noted exactly. Through careful excavation archeologists are able to learn a great deal about past civilizations.

**Station 12.** You are now about to enter the central plaza. The rooms through which you just passed were primarily for sleeping and storage. The plaza was the center of life for these people. When weather permitted, most of their everyday activities were carried on in the plaza and on the surrounding rooftops. On these days you could have observed many different activities. You would have seen groups of women grinding corn, making pottery or basketry, cooking, replastering, and carrying water. The men might have



*North portion of Aztec Ruins as seen from inside the plaza.*

been seen fashioning jewelry or stone implements, dressing game, or shaping new building blocks. Everywhere, certainly, one would have seen playing children and their puppies.

**Station 13.** The Mesa Verde people added an extra row of rooms facing the plaza. The outer wall contains a T-shaped doorway, characteristic of Mesa Verde architecture.

The inner wall, originally facing the plaza, is of Chaco construction and a good example of their fine stone work.

**Station 14.** Here is a plastered and painted section of the wall of a room. Although many of the rooms were so decorated, this is the most accessible example.

The plaster is clay. The red band is iron oxide, and the white band is probably powdered gypsum. As for the pictures—the Indians had doodlers too, young and old!

The steps directly in front of you lead to Station 15.

**Station 15.** This kiva is pure Chaco style, with no indication of remodeling by Mesa Verde people, such as appears in all other kivas originally constructed by Chaco people in this pueblo.

The wall and bench of this kiva are typical Chaco banded masonry, as are the walls of the room to your left.

**Station 16.** To add new rooms in this section, the ancient builders filled in this abandoned kiva, building a wall on top. Centuries later, archeologists had to remove the wall to excavate the kiva. Afterward, it was again filled, and the wall re-laid, on timbers, so you can see both features today.

**Station 17.** This large kiva peculiarly combines Chaco and Mesa Verde types. Firepit and ventilator are typical Chaco, with roof supports (short stone columns on the lower bench) typical Mesa Verde style. The kiva was apparently built by the first (Chaco) people, and later re-roofed by the second (Mesa Verde). The Mesa Verde roof was built of heavy timbers. (See the easel exhibit).

**Station 18.** This great kiva was accurately reconstructed on original foundations in 1934, under direction of Dr. Earl H. Morris. This is called the altar room. The raised block near the center had remnants of a white circle on it, and may have been an altar. Three burned timbers were found at the back, and may have supported a back drop for the altar.

The main entrance was across the chamber at the south. Fourteen small rooms encircle the main chamber, and all are similar to the one opening off the altar room. Each had an outside entrance, and one into the main room. The vertical slots in the wall below the entrances probably contained built-in ladders. The small rooms were possibly for storage and dressing rooms for the representatives of the various religious societies that used the kiva.

To see other features, let's go down into the main chamber.

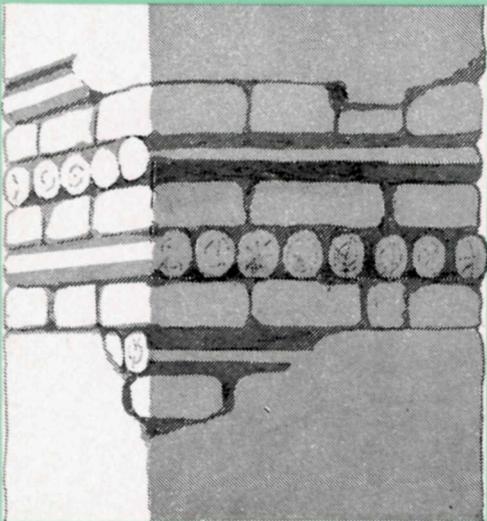
*Watch your step! Please use **Hand Rail**.*



*The Great Kiva after excavation and before it was restored.*

**Station 19.** The masonry and pole columns which supported the roof were built so that they would not spread or buckle under the tremendous weight of the roof—*see sketch below.* (The original roof weighed between 90 and 95 tons.) The great stone disks were found underneath the columns, and served as footings for them. There probably was an opening in the ceiling above the central firepit to allow escape of

smoke. The purpose of the large vaults on either side of the firepit is not definitely known. However, similar pits are found in present day kivas, and are used in connection with certain feats of magic which take place during rituals. It is also possible that they served as foot drums, or for sweat baths.





*Development of Great Kivas.* Great Kivas apparently developed in the Chaco Canyon area. They were not an outgrowth of the smaller clan kivas, but developed right along with them. Although kivas are still used today, the use of Great Kivas died out in the 13th Century.

*Function of Great Kivas.* The Great Kiva was probably a large ceremonial building for use by the entire pueblo, and connected with the various clans and important societies of the pueblo. Although it would have been impossible for all the people of the town to go inside at once, secret parts of the ceremonies would have been performed there, with public portions taking place in the central plaza where the entire population could watch.

*Please leave kiva by way of the stairs nearest the firepit*

**Station 20.** From this point you can see the partially restored arc-shaped line of rooms which closed in the plaza on the south. The walls of this section were constructed from round river stones, instead of the dressed sandstone found in the rest of the ruin.

**Station 21.** You have now finished your visit to the old pueblo. After seeing it, you might enjoy speculating on how many modern Americans would:

Walk 1 to 4 miles to the stone quarry.

Quarry stones to make several thousand building blocks.

Shape all the stones so as to present one smooth face.

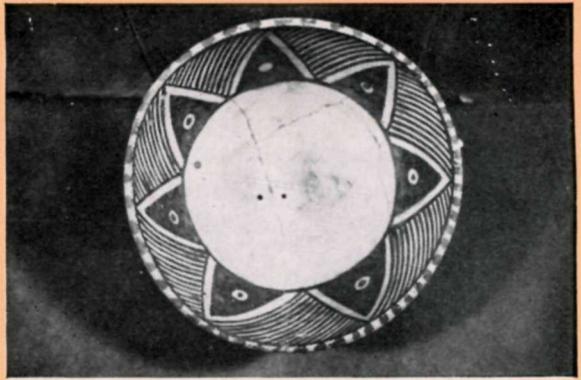
Do all the work with stone mallets and hammers.

Carry all on one's back, to the building site.

Cut the timbers with a stone axe, and carry them many miles.

(We'd probably live in a tent!)

*Bowl of Mesa Verde  
type.*



*Mesa Verde-style  
mugs.*

### *The Pueblo Story*

The people who lived here 800 years ago were really not too different from you or me. They had the same feelings that we experience, with moments of happiness, sorrow, hope, and fear just as much a part of their lives.

These people were deeply religious, with almost every act of their daily lives influenced by the super-natural powers which ruled their universe. That they were industrious, and had a wonderful spirit of cooperation, is clear after you have seen the great building here. Without a high degree of organization, such a building would have been impossible. And yet there is no evidence of any kind of class structure. Apparently everyone enjoyed equal rights.

The story of these people goes back, roughly, to the beginning of the Christian era. About this time the idea of agriculture spread from the south (probably Mexico) to the roving hunters who then lived in this region, and the nomadic people began to settle down where water was available, such as here in the Animas Valley. There is evidence that people farmed in this area hundreds of years before construction of the great pueblo.

It seems these early farmers learned the advantages of working with their neighbors, and began to cluster into small communities, which gradually grew into larger and more complex villages.

Prosperity, brought by farming, gave the people a little leisure time which as hunters they had not known. Arts and crafts, religion, and social organization developed to a high degree, and by about A.D. 1100 a flourishing farming culture was beginning to reach its peak. At that time the large pueblos such as this one were built.

Around A.D. 1200 a succession of drier than normal years forecast the eventual disaster which would befall these people. At first there was little concern, as there had been dry periods before. But with more and more dry years and crop failures many people became alarmed, and left in search of a better climate. Many others stayed, hoping conditions would change. Then in A.D. 1276 started the great 24 year drought, which was to practically wipe out pueblo culture here.

The people who remained when the drought came were not only weakened physically from famine and disease, and possibly by raids from other desperate pueblos, but spiritually as well, as the gods no longer answered their pleas for rain. Finally faced with starvation, the last few stragglers left shortly before 1300. Some of the survivors went into Arizona, others went south and east into the Rio Grande Valley.

The Pueblo culture never fully recovered. Today there are less than thirty pueblos in existence, with only a fraction of the population which existed before A.D. 1276. Although greatly reduced in numbers, the pueblo people still display the pride and dignity traditional to their centuries old way of life.

Now that you have seen the ruins, we suggest that you take a drink from the water fountain in the visitor center, and then relax for a while in the lobby.

Less than 100 miles by road to the northwest is Mesa Verde National Park, combining the ruins of hundreds of mesa top and cliff dwellings with beautiful natural scenery.

Chaco Canyon National Monument, about 65 miles south, with over a dozen large ruins having no equal north of central Mexico, was in many ways the prehistoric culture center of the Southwest.

At greater distances are other fascinating archeological National Monuments, including Bandelier, Navajo, and Canyon de Chelly, about which you can obtain more information at any Park or Monument.

## CONSERVATION — YOU CAN HELP

If you are interested in the work of the National Park Service, and in the cause of conservation in general, you can give active expression of this interest, and lend support by alining yourself with one of the numerous conservation organizations which act as spokesmen for those who wish our scenic and historic heritage to be kept unimpaired “for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Names and addresses of conservation organizations may be obtained at the Information Desk.

This booklet is published in cooperation with the  
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