

# Mesa Verde

NATIONAL PARK • COLORADO

About 1,300 years ago, a group of Indians who lived in the Four Corners country picked Mesa Verde for their home. They lived and prospered on the mesa and in its canyons, but near the end of the 13th century, they abandoned their homes.

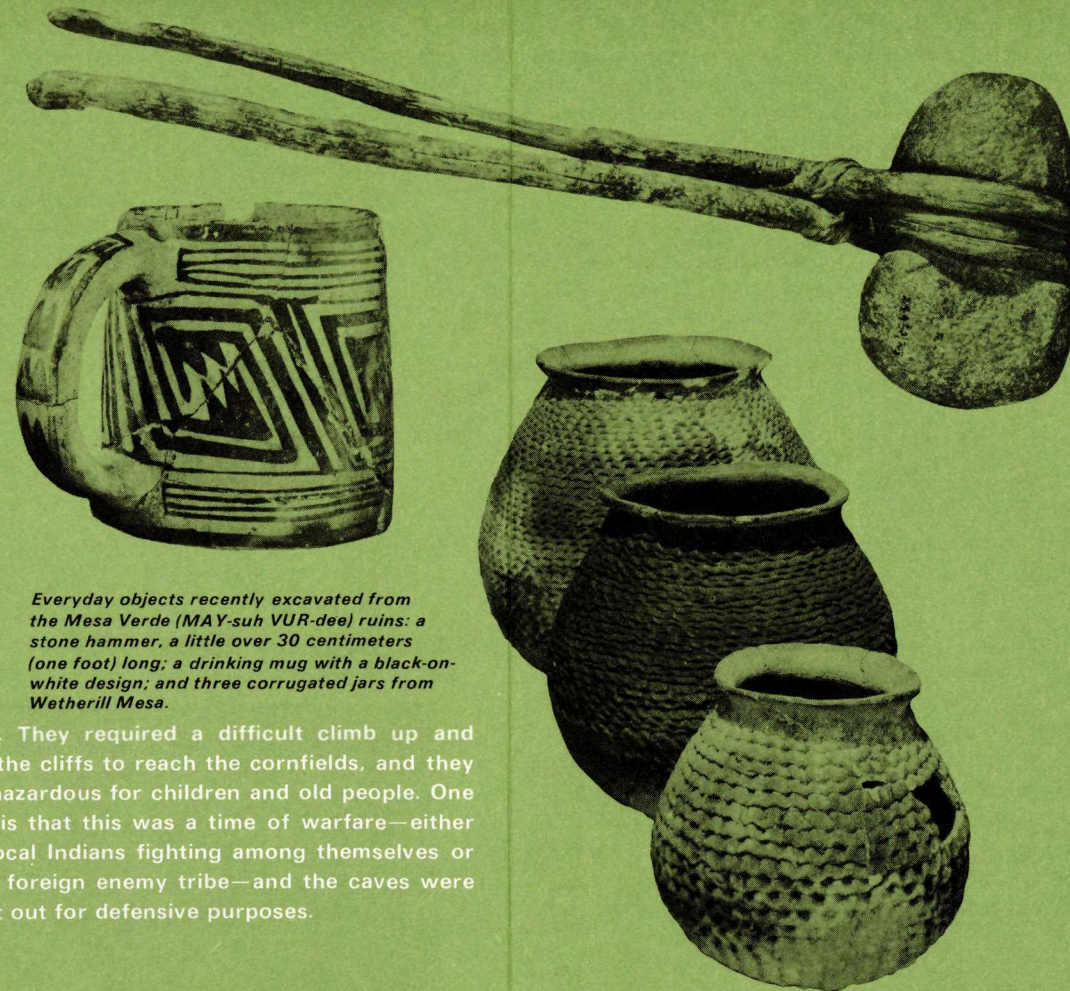
When these people departed, they left behind their villages and many of their personal possessions. Today these relics are preserved in Mesa Verde National Park which occupies part of a large plateau rising high above Montezuma and Mancos Valleys.

Archeologists who studied the relics have named the earliest people to live at Mesa Verde Basketmakers in recognition of their impressive skill in that craft. They also made pottery, but at this stage in their history, the pottery lacked the quality of their baskets. At first these people lived in pithouses, dwellings dug into the ground so that the walls of the pit were the walls of the house. They clustered their pithouses to form small villages, usually on the mesa top, but occasionally in the caves of the cliffs. Crops of beans, corn, and squash were grown in the rich, red, wind-blown soil of the mesa tops. Dogs and turkeys were their only domesticated animals. The turkeys seem to have been raised more for their feathers which were woven into blankets for the cold winter months than for food.

For many years the Basketmakers prospered on the mesa. By the middle of the eighth century their descendants whom we know as Pueblo Indians had begun building houses above ground. They set poles upright in the ground to form the outline of a house, then wove sticks among the poles. They made the roof the same way, and added a thick coating of mud to weatherproof both walls and roof. The houses were built one against another, in a long curving row. Frequently, they built one or two deep pithouses in front of the crescent-shaped rowhouses. Perhaps these were the beginnings of the underground religious rooms—kivas—of later times.

Before the year 1000, stone masonry began to replace the pole-and-mud construction. Sturdy, compact apartment-like buildings were built, and by the 12th century they were exceptionally well made. Some stood as high as 3 stories and contained more than 50 rooms. Often the rooms were built around courtyards that contained several kivas.

Near the end of the 12th century something caused the Mesa Verde people to make another great change in their lives for they began to abandon their houses on the mesa tops and move down into the caves in the cliffs. There they built the cliff dwellings we find today. Why did they make this drastic move? The caves were uncomfortable places to live—hot in summer, cold in



Everyday objects recently excavated from the Mesa Verde (MAY-suh VUR-dee) ruins: a stone hammer, a little over 30 centimeters (one foot) long; a drinking mug with a black-on-white design; and three corrugated jars from Wetherill Mesa.

winter. They required a difficult climb up and down the cliffs to reach the cornfields, and they were hazardous for children and old people. One guess is that this was a time of warfare—either with local Indians fighting among themselves or with a foreign enemy tribe—and the caves were sought out for defensive purposes.

## REGULATIONS

The Federal Antiquities Act of 1906 prohibits the appropriation, injury, destruction, or removal from place of any object of antiquity, or the excavation, injury, or destruction of any ruin on Federal land. In accordance with these provisions, you are informed that entering a cliff dwelling without a park ranger present will result in a citation and fine. Feeding, capturing, or teasing wildlife and picking, cutting, or damaging any wildflower or other native shrub or tree is also prohibited. It's fun to see the different types of wildlife and plants that can be found in the park, but remember to LOOK only. We solicit your help in preserving the park.

Firearms are prohibited; they must be cased, broken down, or otherwise packed while in the park.

Fires caused by carelessly thrown cigarettes can burn the park's natural vegetation. It would not recover in our lifetime. In periods of extreme fire danger, smoking is prohibited in moving vehicles and along trails.

Don't litter; use the trash containers in the park. Pets must be physically restrained at all times; they are not allowed in public buildings or on trails. Motor vehicles are allowed only on roadways, turnouts, or parking areas. Report all accidents to the nearest park ranger as soon as possible.

At any rate this period of living in cliff dwellings lasted less than 100 years and before the close of the 13th century the cliff dwellers left Mesa Verde forever. What caused the abandonment remains a mystery. Perhaps the people tired of strife. Perhaps they left because of drought. We know that the 13th century, particularly the last half, was a time of repeated drought and successive crop failure.

We think that when the cliff dwellers left here they traveled to the south and southeast—down to the valley of the Rio Grande and its tributaries. They may have joined existing villages of Pueblo Indians, or they may have established villages of their own. Perhaps both. Whatever happened, it seems likely that some of the Pueblo Indians in central New Mexico are at least partly descended from the cliff dwellers.

After the Indians left, the cliff dwellings lay silent for centuries. The Spaniards came into the area in the mid-18th century, but did not find the ruins. The name, which means "green tableland," surely dates from the time of their explorations. Not until 1874 was Two-Story Cliff House discovered. But it was still 14 years before the many canyons of the mesa began to be explored. In 1906 the area became a national park and the period of scientific excavation began.

## FOR YOUR SAFETY

Visits to cliff dwellings, whether on a ranger-guided tour or a self-guided walk, tend to be quite strenuous. Often the climbing of steps and ladders is required. Adequate footwear, such as hiking boots or sturdy shoes, is recommended for these trips. Strenuous activity at the high elevations of the park may adversely affect those persons who experience heart or respiratory ailments. You may wish to reconsider climbing into and out of the cliff dwellings. With the exception of Balcony House, all major cliff dwellings can be viewed from overlooks on the canyon rims.

Parents should be especially alert for their children's safety when nearing the canyon rim cliff areas. Please do not throw rocks or other objects, for other visitors may be below.

Bicycle riding is encouraged along the park roads and motorists should be on the lookout for bicycles on the narrow roads. Extend to them the same courtesies you would any other vehicle.

While every effort is made to provide for your safety, you must remain alert and cautious. Your safety and your children's safety are of primary concern to us.

## SERVICE AND ACCOMMODATIONS

From mid-May to mid-October accommodations and other services are available. Maximum interpretive services begin in mid-June and last until Labor Day. From mid-October to mid-May most concession services are closed. Snack items, beverages, film, and postcards can be bought at Chapin Mesa. The museum and Ruins Road are open. Tours of Spruce Tree House are conducted all year long when trail and weather conditions permit.

In summer, daytime temperatures are comfortably warm with highs ranging from 29° C (85° F) to 38° C (100° F). Evening temperatures are cool with lows ranging from 13° C (55° F) to 18° C (65° F). Winter highs range from 4° C (40° F) to 10° C (50° F) with lows of -32° C (-25° F) to -10° C (15° F). Snow covered ground is predominant. Elevations vary from nearly 2,200 meters (7,000 feet) at the park entrance and the Chapin Mesa area to more than 2,600 meters (8,500 feet) at Park Point; Morfield campground is 2,380 meters (7,800 feet) and Far View Lodge is 2,452 meters (8,080 feet).

For detailed information on services at Chapin and Wetherill Mesas, Morfield, Far View, and Park Point see the reverse side.

## HOW TO REACH THE PARK

The park entrance is midway between Cortez and Mancos on U.S. 160. It is 34 kilometers (21 miles) from the entrance to the museum and the Chapin Mesa ruins area. The Morfield campground is 6 kilometers (4 miles) from the entrance. The Far View Visitor Center is 25 kilometers (15 miles) away. The narrow mountainous road has sharp curves and steep grades. A limited number of turnouts are provided for emergency parking or to allow for picture taking along the way. For your safety, do not park on the roadway.

Depending on traffic and weather conditions, allow at least 45 minutes to make this drive. Park roads are generally designed as scenic drives with reduced speed limits. Average speed limit in the park is 55 kilometers per hour (35 miles).

There are scheduled flights to Cortez and Durango. The nearest railroads are at Grand Junction, Colo., and Gallup, N.Mex., with bus service to Cortez from those points. Buses run to Mesa Verde National Park from Cortez mid-May to mid-October. All nearby cities have rent-a-car service.

## ADMINISTRATION

Mesa Verde National Park was established in 1906 and contains about 21,000 hectares (52,000 acres). It is administered for the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, by a superintendent. His address is Mesa Verde National Park, CO 81330.

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.

National Park Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## HOW TO SEE THE PARK

To get the most out of your visit, we urge you first to go to either the Far View Visitor Center (open only in the summer 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.) or to the Chapin Mesa Museum (open 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. in summer and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. the rest of the year). At each location uniformed personnel will help you plan your visit and answer any questions you may have. Exhibits illustrate the arts and crafts of the ancient peoples and of the Indians now living in the Four Corners region.

Throughout the park the museums, roadside and trailside exhibits, self-guided and guided trips and campfire programs (in the summer only) will help to give you a glimpse into the lives of the pre-Columbian inhabitants. Nowhere else in the United States is the sequence of their architectural development so accessible as along the Ruins Road. Today the ruins are stabilized.



**MORFIELD**

Morfield campground, open virtually all year for tents and trailers, has restrooms and single and group campsites. Reservations cannot be made. When the campground is closed due to snow in the winter months, camping is permitted in the Chapin Mesa picnic area. Camping is allowed only in established campsites which should not be left unattended for more than 24 hours, and is limited to 7 days. Each campsite contains a table, benches, and woodburning and charcoal-burning grills for which fuel can be bought at the store. The natural environment at Mesa Verde is very fragile; therefore, the gathering of firewood or injury to trees or shrubs is prohibited. There are no utility hook-ups, but the campground has a disposal station for dumping trailer holding tanks. Groceries, gifts, souvenirs, carry-out food, a gasoline station, showers, and laundry facilities are also available. All services and facilities are closed during the winter months.

Campfire programs are conducted each evening from early June to September. These programs deal with the pre-Columbian and modern Indians of the Southwest and with the archeology, history, and natural history of the area.

Check at the ranger station for the location of hiking trails. To protect the fragile, irreplaceable ruins, HIKING IS RESTRICTED within Mesa Verde National Park.

During the summer nondenominational religious services are held each Sunday morning and evening at the Morfield campfire circle. Catholic Mass is held each Sunday morning at Morefield Village.

**PARK POINT**

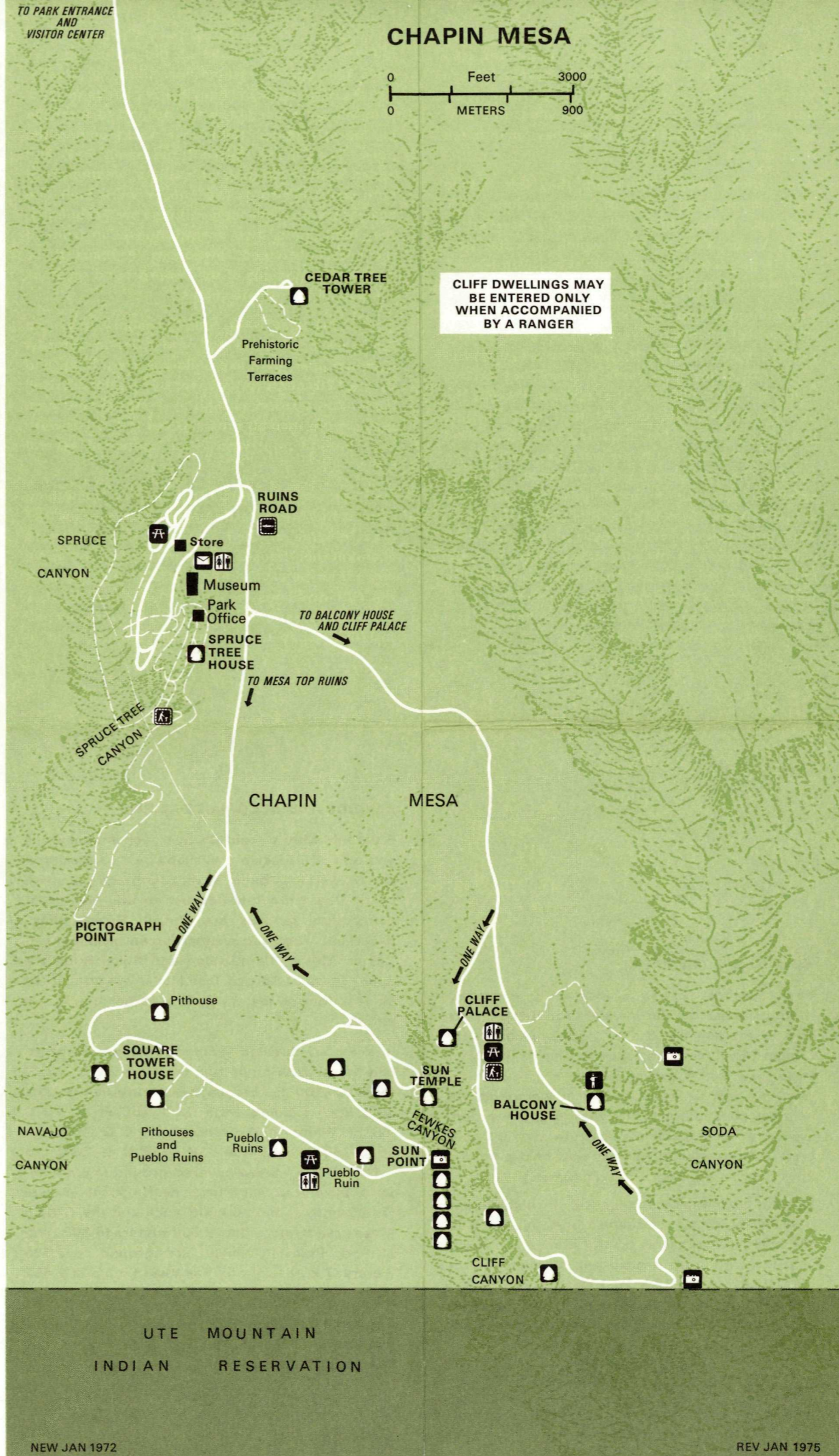
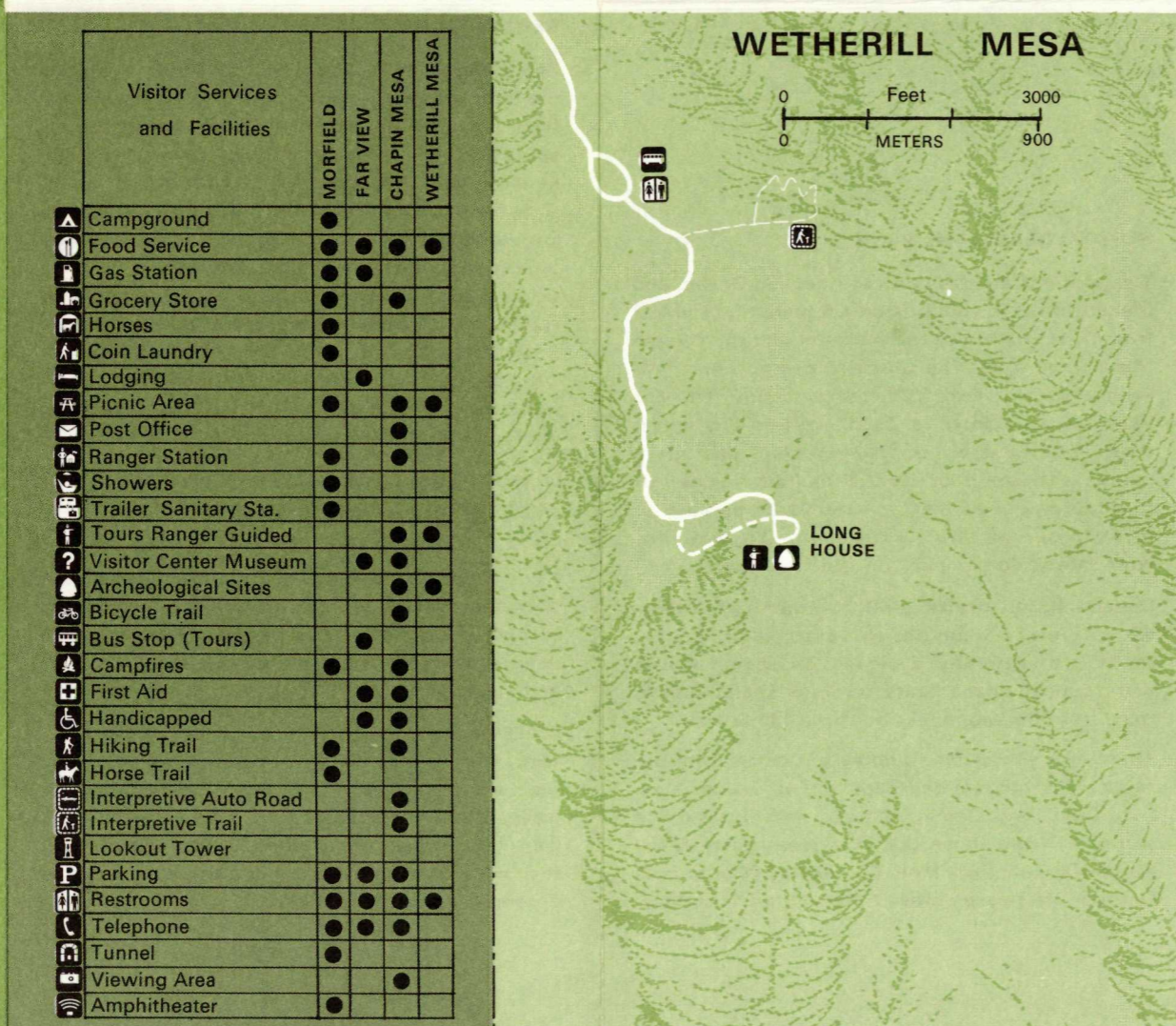
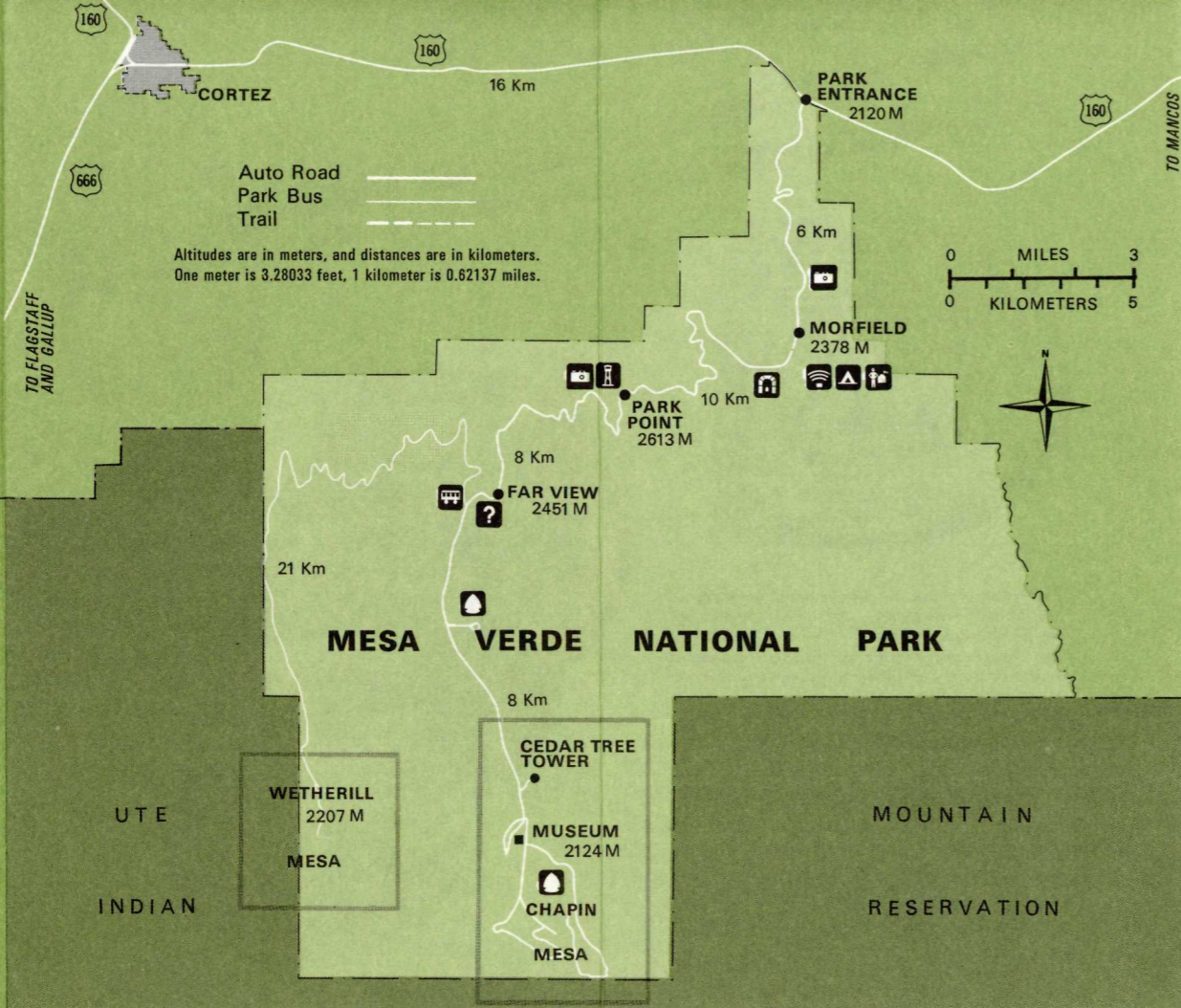
Located halfway between the entrance and Chapin Mesa, Park Point offers superb views of the entire Four Corners region. The park fire lookout station is here. The ranger will be pleased to answer questions when he is not involved with his duties. There are no visitor facilities at Park Point.

**FAR VIEW**

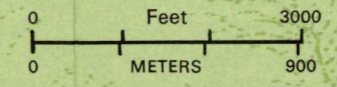
The visitor center contains displays of contemporary Indian arts and crafts. Free tickets for ranger-guided tours to Wetherill Mesa and Balcony House on Chapin Mesa are given out here. Gasoline and wrecker services are provided at the service station. Concessioner-operated commercial bus tours of Chapin Mesa and the free tours of Wetherill Mesa leave from this point.

Lodging is available from mid-May to mid-October. From June 1 to Labor Day it is advisable to make reservations with the Mesa Verde Co., P.O. Box 277, Mancos, CO 81328. Call toll free (out-of-state) 800-525-6421; (Colorado only) 800-332-5797.

Meals and snacks are served at the Far View Lodge restaurant during normal meal hours and continuously throughout the day at the cafeteria. A gift shop specializing in American Indian handicrafts is located in the cafeteria building.



**CHAPIN MESA**



CLIFF DWELLINGS MAY BE ENTERED ONLY WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY A RANGER

**CHAPIN MESA**

The park superintendent and his staff have their headquarters at Chapin Mesa. The U.S. Post Office there operates all year. Emergency first aid is provided at the chief ranger's office or at any ranger station.

The archeological museum contains displays of artifacts found in the Indian ruins of Mesa Verde. Dioramas and exhibits explain the life-style of the people who lived here centuries ago.

The Spruce Tree Store, open from early spring through fall provides meals, snacks, groceries, gifts and souvenirs. Bicycles can be rented at Chapin Mesa.

In the summer park rangers conduct guided tours through several of the cliff dwellings. Check at the museum or visitor center for the current schedule. During the winter months tours are conducted to Spruce Tree House only, weather and trail conditions permitting. Two short hiking trails lead into Spruce Tree Canyon. Visitors must register at the chief ranger's office before using either of these trails. Two 10-kilometer (6-mile), self-guiding loops of the Ruins Road are open from 8 a.m. to sunset. Many cliff dwellings can be viewed from canyon rim vantage points along both loops. On the west loop, exhibits at 5 stops explain the development of the Pueblo culture from the Basketmakers through the classic period of the cliff dwellings.

A picnic area is located in the museum area. Picnic sites with restrooms are on each of the Ruins Road loops. Camping is permitted at the picnic area in winter only when Morfield campground is closed.

**WETHERILL MESA**

Private vehicles are prohibited on the Wetherill Mesa Road. The area is open only in the summer with access by bus. Reservations are required and tickets can be picked up at the Far View Visitor Center. Box lunches, cold drinks, and snack items can be bought from the concessioner. The 19-kilometer (12-mile) bus ride offers excellent views of the surrounding area. The ruins sites are reached by minibus and trail. Park rangers conduct tours of Long House ruin. Other ruins may be open to the public in the future. Please check the schedule at the visitor center.

**WE'RE JOINING THE METRIC WORLD**

The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become acquainted with the metric system and to make interpretation more meaningful for park visitors from other nations.

KILOMETERS	METERS									
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0	0	6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54
10	6.2	6.8	7.5	8.1	8.7	9.3	9.9	10.6	11.2	11.8
20	12.4	13	13.7	14.3	14.9	15.5	16.2	16.8	17.4	18
30	18.6	19.3	19.9	20.6	21.1	21.7	22.4	23	23.6	24.2
40	24.9	25.5	26.1	26.7	27.3	28	28.6	29.2	29.8	30.4
50	31.1	31.7	32.3	32.9	33.5	34.2	34.8	35.4	36	36.7
60	37.3	37.9	38.5	39.1	39.8	40.4	41	41.6	42.3	42.9
70	43.5	44.1	44.7	45.4	46	46.6	47.2	47.8	48.5	49.1
80	49.7	50.3	51	51.6	52.2	52.8	53.4	54.1	54.7	55.3
90	55.9	56.5	57.2	57.8	58.4	59	59.7	60.3	60.9	61.5
100	62.1	62.7	63.3	63.9	64.5	65.1	65.7	66.3	66.9	67.5

USE THIS TABLE TO CONVERT KILOMETERS TO METERS. READ ACROSS AND DOWN. FOR EXAMPLE, 24 KILOMETERS EQUALS 24,000 METERS.