

# **M**ontezuma

## **CASTLE**

**NATIONAL MONUMENT**

ARIZONA

# MONTEZUMA CASTLE

## National Monument

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

J. A. Krug, *Secretary*

National Park Service, Newton B. Drury, *Director*



*High in a cliff cavity stands Montezuma Castle, a prehistoric Indian dwelling so perfectly preserved that smoke black from ancient fires still covers its ceiling.*

Montezuma Castle National Monument, in the Verde Valley of central Arizona, protects one of the best preserved and most interesting cliff dwellings in the United States. Within the reserve, occupying portions of a limestone cliff which borders Beaver Creek for half a mile, are the ruins of several prehistoric Indian house clusters. Among them is the large structure called Montezuma Castle, which is about 90 percent intact and original.

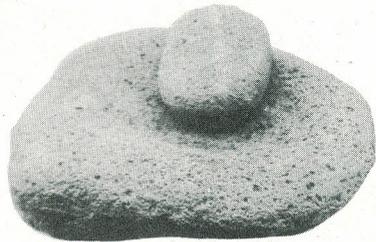
### *The Environment*

The Verde Valley of central Arizona is

bordered on the north and east by the great plateau of northeastern Arizona and on the southwest by the Black Range. Through the level floor of the valley winds the Verde River, fed by Beaver Creek and several other tributaries.

Long ago, before the Ice Age, this valley was dammed up at the outlet by a lava flow from the mountains of the Black Range. The impounded waters formed a large lake, 25 miles long and 13 miles wide. The streams which fed the lake deposited enormous quantities of limy mud on its bottom. Finally, before the close of the Pliocene Age, the lava

*Prehistoric grinding stones.*



*T-shaped doorway.*

dike broke, and the imprisoned waters escaped. Presently, the Verde River and its tributaries started cutting their channels through the dry lake bed, now converted into rock. In the two or three million years that have passed since then,

much of the limestone has been eroded away as the streams have broadened their valleys.

The present Verde Valley is a colorful area, combining the white of the limestone terraces, the dark shades of lava,

and the brilliant red of the ancient sandstone in Oak Creek Canyon. Much of the valley floor is indeed green (which is the meaning of the Spanish word "verde"); and the mountains enclosing it are forested and darker green.

### *The Early Inhabitants*

Scant archeological evidence so far available indicates human beings were living in the Verde Valley over a thousand years ago.

These were industrious, sedentary Indians who took up abode on the fertile river terraces and began farming. They lived a distinctly rural life, with no cities or large centers of population, in little villages of one-room houses.

These farmer folk probably lived in comparative peace in the valley until about the beginning of the eleventh century. After the year 1000, there was a gradual abandonment of the small houses and the beginning of great communal dwellings, or pueblos, compact structures in defensible locations on hilltops and in cliffs.

### *The Enemy Peoples*

The forerunners of the modern Yavapais, or perhaps of some of the Apaches, were possibly the principal cause of the farmers building fortified pueblos. Upon entering the Verde Valley, nomadic hunting Indians must have found it easy to harass the peaceful farmers. There is also the possibility of inter-pueblo strife.

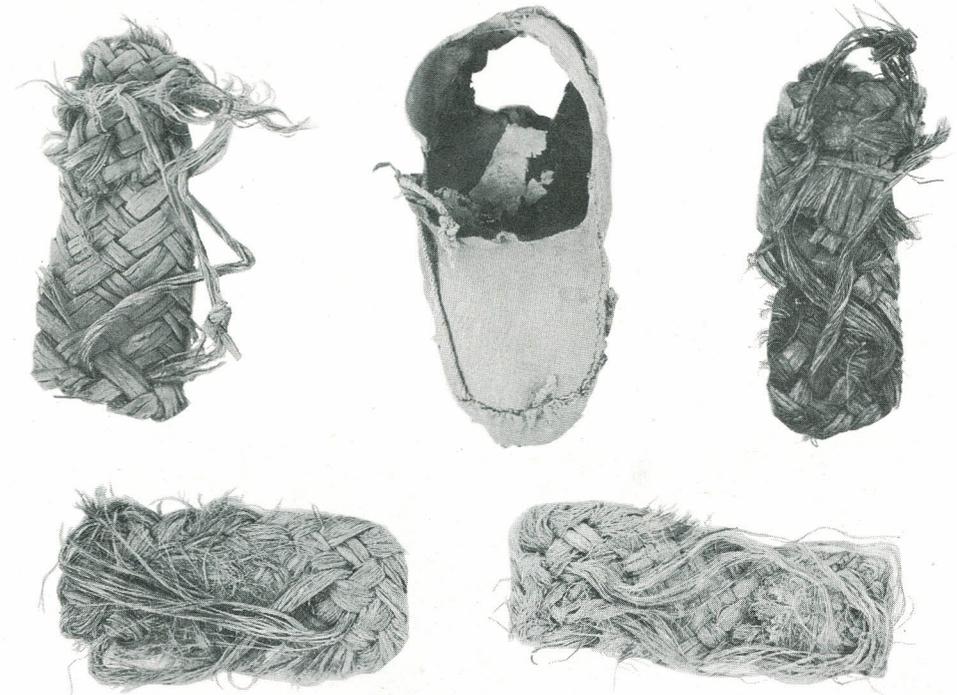
### *Beginnings of Montezuma Castle*

The majority of the farmer Indians, in concentrating into larger settlements, built their pueblos on the hilltops near their fields, for here were the most convenient sites. Of these hilltop locations, Tuzigoot National Monument, 2 miles east of Clarkdale, Ariz., provides an excellent example. Occasionally, a suitable location was found in a cliff.

It can be imagined with what enthusiasm a persecuted band of the farmers might have first noticed, on the north bank of Beaver Creek, only 4 miles from the Verde River, a great cavern-pitted limestone cliff, well over 100 feet high. Here was an ideal spot for defensive homes, with good farm land nearby on the creek terrace. Here they began an extensive eleventh century building program.

Rock and mud-walled houses, with timbered mud-covering ceilings, were built in several spots along this cliff, and from time to time more families came from the river flats to add similar dwellings. At length we find that in a quarter-mile strip of cliff there were three distinct apartment houses. Growth during several generations made one of these villages a 6-story structure, with 45 rooms. A hundred yards east was a 5-story structure with 20 rooms, which was destined, centuries later, to be inaccurately called Montezuma Castle.

The Castle is situated, with its foundation, nearly 50 feet above the cliff base, and is 40 feet high. Its remarkable state of preservation is due chiefly to the great



*Sandals of leather and yucca fibre displayed in monument museum.*

shelving overhang of rock which has protected it from rains.

### *The Classic Period*

During the occupation of these dwellings, which lasted until close to 1400 A. D., a maximum of 300 persons may well have occupied the several house clusters. The Castle could have accommodated 12 or 15 families, possibly 50 people. These cliff dwellers lived through the peak period of Pueblo culture, producing stone implements, excellent turquoise and shell jewelry, cotton cloth, some of it elaborately decorated, sturdily constructed baskets, and many other objects.

The pottery made locally, at Monte-

zuma Castle and in the Verde Valley generally, consisted mainly of plain brown or red ware, and rough gray ware, plain or with rather crude decorations in black paint. The prehistoric people of the Verde, although apparently highly talented along certain other lines, seem never to have developed a really ornamental painted pottery of their own. Instead, they acquired decorated pottery from the north by trade with the Flagstaff area and the Hopi country.

This is fortunate in one way, for the period of much of this trade pottery is well known, while few tree-ring dates have been ascertained for the prehistoric ruins of the Verde Valley. Various types of black-on-white ware are found, which are known to have been made in the

Flagstaff region, ranging in time from before 1000 to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and following these, types of black-on-yellow and polychrome (black decorations with white borders) known to have been made in the fourteenth century. The absence of later Hopi pottery indicates that Montezuma Castle was abandoned by the fifteenth century.

*Visitors on guided trip through the Castle.*



### *Abandonment*

A disastrous fire caused destruction and abandonment of the largest dwelling. Other troubles must have befallen the cliff dwellers. The cliff houses were not safe against prolonged sieges. Life in a crowded, poorly ventilated cliff tenement house, where the people knew nothing of disease germs or sanitation, might

have led to epidemics. It is probable that before long an excess of deaths over births caused a gradual reduction in population. Exhaustion of the soil, by long continued intensive cultivation, may have been the most important factor of all. Eventually, a discouraged remnant would have moved away.

A good many of the cliff dwellers must have gone into northern Arizona to join the friendly Hopis, with whom they had long established trade relations. Modern Hopi traditions still indicate some ancestral origins in the Verde Valley. Many cultural traits of the Hopis are strikingly similar to those of the Verde Valley cliff dwellers, as well as to those of many other Pueblo groups scattered through northern Arizona in prehistoric times.

### *How to Reach Montezuma Castle*

Montezuma Castle is 5 miles north of Camp Verde, 60 miles south of Flagstaff, and 65 miles east of Prescott. It may be reached by State Route 89, from Flagstaff through beautiful Oak Creek Canyon, then via Sedona or Cornville, or the same State route from Prescott through Jerome, Clarkdale, and Cottonwood, via Cornville or Camp Verde. Good graveled roads lead from the south from Roosevelt Dam via Pine, Payson, and Camp Verde, and from Phoenix by State Route 69 via Mayer, Humboldt, and Camp Verde. Another scenic route, closed in winter, is from Flagstaff via Mormon and Stoneman Lakes.



*View from lower balcony.*

### *Administration*

Montezuma Castle National Monument is a part of the National Park System and is administered by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. All communications should be addressed to the Custodian, Montezuma Castle National Monument, Camp Verde, Ariz.

Guide trips are provided hourly from 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. every day in the year. A round trip requires about an hour. A guide fee of 25 cents for adults is charged visitors going through the Castle. The museum and grounds are free. The National Park Service maintains a small picnic and camping area.

