



**M**ontezuma  
**C**astle  
NATIONAL MONUMENT  
A R I Z O N A

# MONTEZUMA CASTLE

## National Monument

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Douglas McKay, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, Conrad L. Wirth, *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 ceilings.*

**M**ONTEZUMA 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 monument, 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 Hills. 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 Hills. The impounded waters formed a large lake, 35 miles long and 18 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, imprisoned waters wore down the lava dike and 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 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 from southern Arizona 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, pole and brush houses.

These farmer folk probably lived in comparative peace in the valley until about the beginning of the twelfth century. After the year 1100, there was a gradual abandonment of the small houses and another group entered the valley from the north. This group began construction of great communal dwellings, or pueblos, which were compact structures in defensible locations on hilltops and in cliffs.

### THE ENEMY PEOPLES

The forerunners of the modern Yavapais 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 caused by an overcrowded condition after A. D. 1300, with too little farm land to go around.



*Montezuma Castle rises above the model which explains its history*

### **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. Tuzigoot National Monument, 2 miles east of Clarkdale, Ariz., provides an excellent example of these hilltop locations. Occasionally, a suitable location was found in a cliff.

It can be imagined with what enthusiasm a 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 twelfth-century building program. We find that in a quarter-mile strip of cliff there were two 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 CLASSIC PERIOD*

During the occupation of these dwellings, which lasted until close to A. D. 1400, a maximum of 200 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 Montezuma Castle and in the Verde Valley generally, consisted mainly of plain brown or red ware. 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. The absence of later Hopi pottery indicates that Montezuma Castle was abandoned by the fifteenth century.

### *ABANDONMENT*

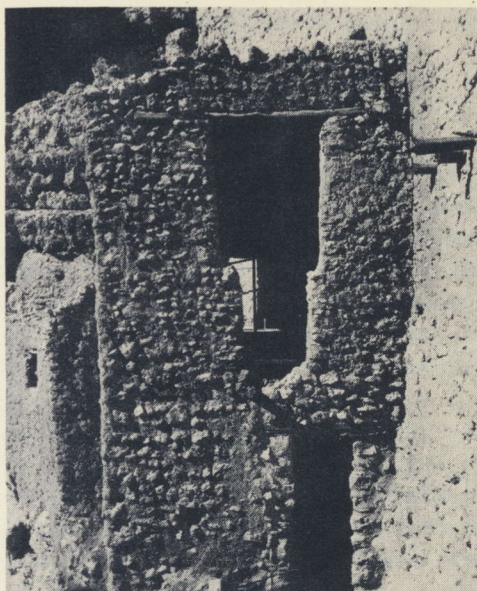
A disastrous fire destroyed the largest dwelling and forced its abandonment. Other troubles must have befallen the cliff dwellers, including the exhaustion of the soil by long continued intensive cultivation. Life in a crowded, poorly ventilated cliff tenement house, where the people knew nothing of disease germs or sanitation, might well have led to epidemics. It is probable that before long an excess of deaths over births caused a gradual reduction in population. Eventually, a discouraged remnant would have moved away.

A number 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.

### *MONTEZUMA WELL*

Another example of prehistoric Indian work can be seen at Montezuma Well, a detached portion of Montezuma Castle National Monument, 7 miles by road northeast of the Castle. This area contains a large limestone sink, half-filled with water which continually flows out at the rate of 1,500,000 gallons a day. The Indians, who constructed their small cliff dwellings and pueblos around this well, diverted the water into irrigation ditches which carried it to their farm lands below. These ditches are visible today because they were cemented up by the

*T-shaped doorway*





*Cliff dwelling at Montezuma Well*

lime content of the water which flowed through them. The story of the Indians at Montezuma Well is similar to that at Montezuma Castle.

#### **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.

#### **FACILITIES**

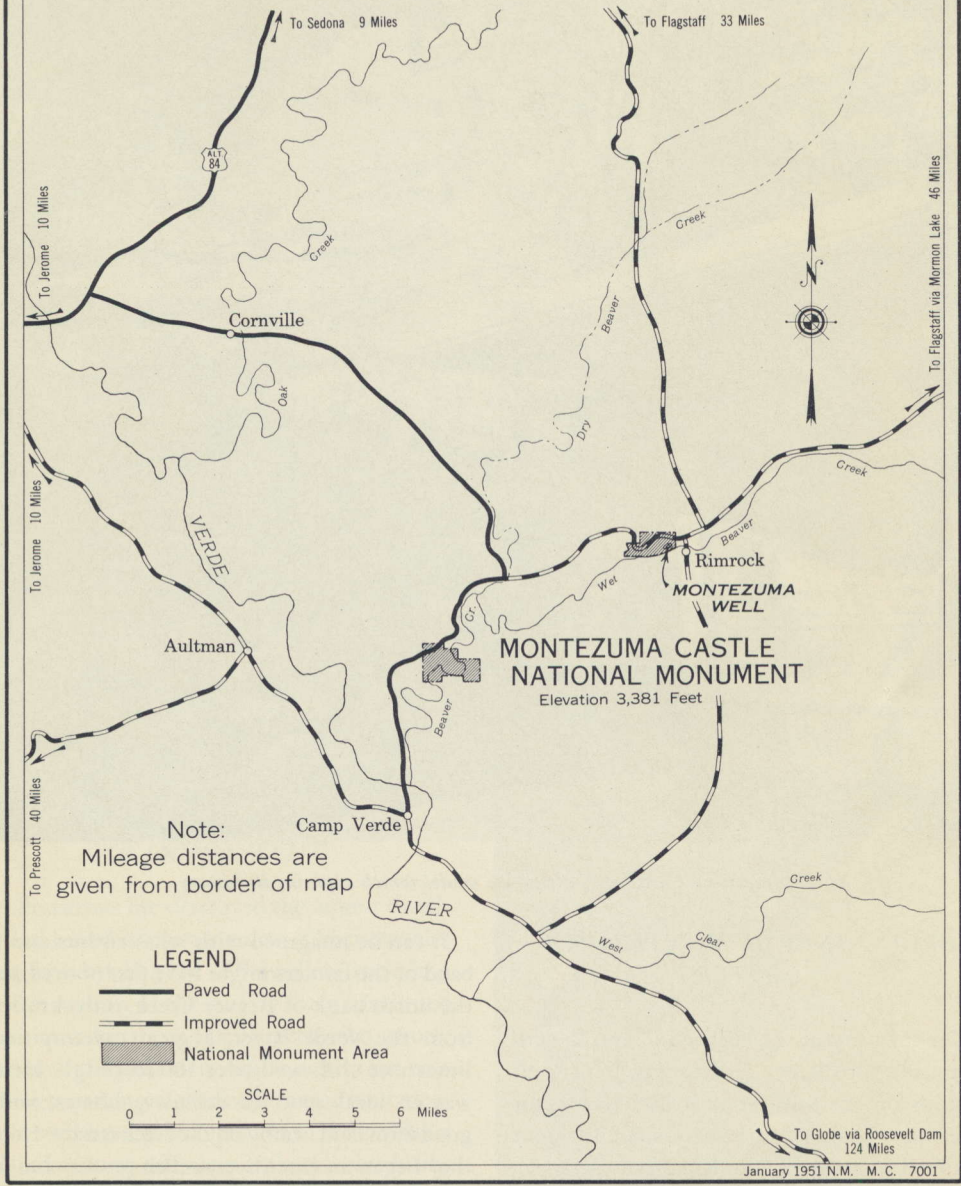
The National Park Service maintains free museums at both Montezuma Castle and Montezuma Well. Small picnic grounds are available within the areas. The monument is open every day of the year between the hours of 8 a. m. and 5 p. m.

#### **ADMINISTRATION**

Montezuma Castle National Monument was established by Presidential proclamation of December 8, 1906, and contains 783.09 acres of land. It is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. All communications should be addressed to the Superintendent, Montezuma Castle National Monument, Camp Verde, Ariz.

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## ARIZONA



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