

# Montezuma Castle

*National Monument* • ARIZONA



# Montezuma Castle

## NATIONAL MONUMENT

High in a cliff cavity stands Montezuma Castle, a prehistoric Indian dwelling so perfectly preserved that ceiling timbers in many of the rooms are still intact.

**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, be-

fore 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 12th century. After 1100, another group entered the valley from the north. These people constructed communal dwellings, or pueblos, which after A. D. 1250 were converted into large compact defensible structures.

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people.



*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. This was an ideal spot for a dwelling site, with good farmland nearby on the creek terrace. Here they began building rooms to accommodate their needs. 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 about 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.

### *Abandonment*

The absence of trade pottery dating after 1450 at Montezuma Castle indicates that these dwellings were abandoned in the early 1400's. The cause for abandonment resulted from a series of events. A century of recurring drought conditions, climaxed by a continuous drought from 1276 to 1299, resulted in many population shifts.

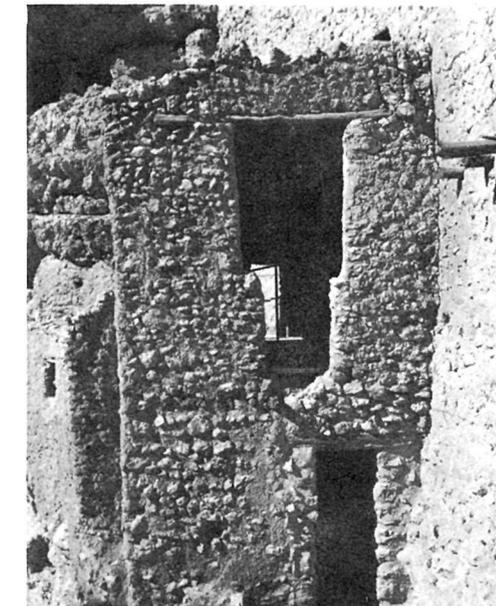
The Flagstaff area underwent depopulation in the 1200's and it is thought many of these people moved into the Verde Valley, which during this period showed an increase in population. At the same time, those farmers of the valley who were dry farming in the desert flats moved to the banks of the spring-fed streams where irrigation was being practiced by others in the small acreage available along the streams. This combination of a small farming acreage and a concentration of population may have led to inter-pueblo strife, and in turn to a gradual exodus from the valley.

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.

### *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 farmlands below. These ditches are visible today because they were cemented up by the lime content of the water which flowed through them. The story of the Indians at Montezuma Well is similar to that at Montezuma Castle.

### *T-shaped doorway*





Cliff Dwelling at Montezuma Well

**How To Reach the Monument**

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 U. S. 89 Alternate from Flagstaff via Oak Creek Canyon and Sedona, or by the same highway from Prescott through Jerome, Clarkdale, and Cottonwood, then on a State road through Cornville. It may also be reached by State Routes 69 and 79 from Phoenix, 95 miles to the south, through Camp Verde. Another approach from the south is the graveled road from Roosevelt Dam, via Payson, Pine, and Camp Verde.

you understand the area and its history. The monument is open daily from 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. There are very limited picnic facilities in both sections.

The admission fee of 25 cents is waived for children under 12 years of age, or groups of school children 18 years of age or under, when accompanied by adults assuming responsibility for their safety and orderly conduct.

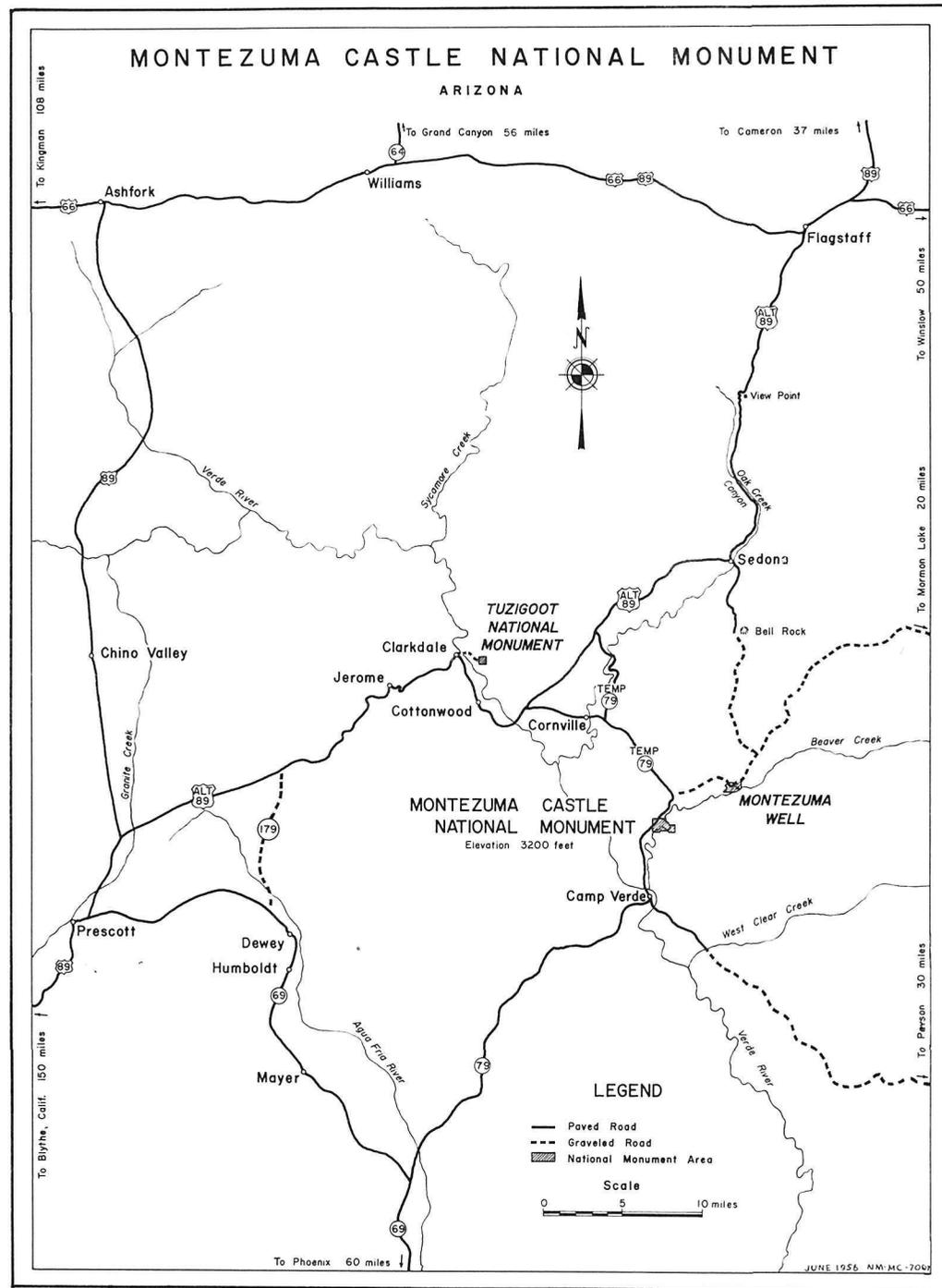
**Administration**

Montezuma Castle National Monument is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. It was established by Presidential proclamation in 1906 and contains 783 acres.

A superintendent, whose address is Camp Verde, Ariz., is in immediate charge.

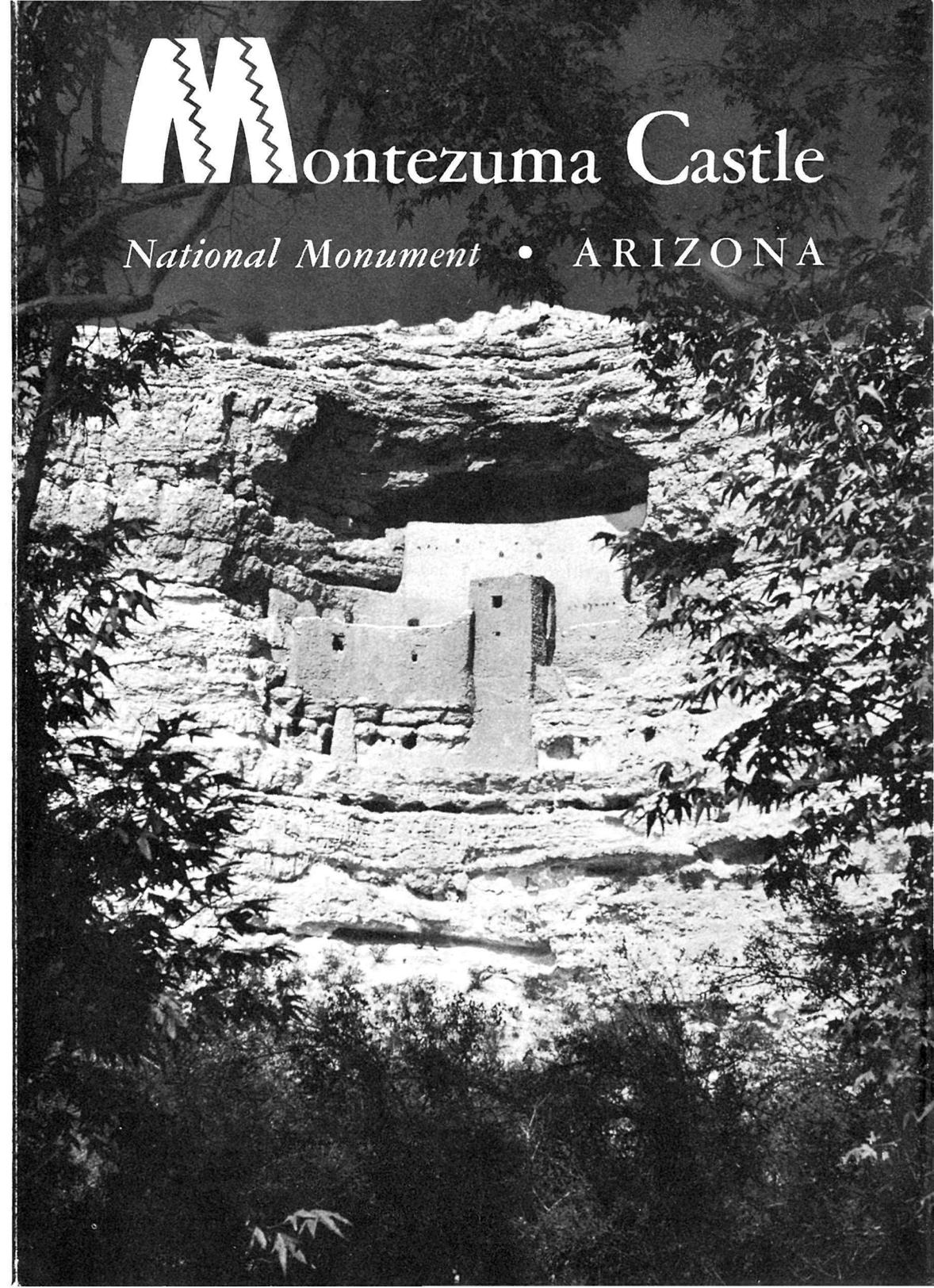
**About Your Visit**

You will find small museums at both Montezuma Castle and Montezuma Well, to help



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fred A. Seaton, Secretary

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, Conrad L. Wirth, Director



Cover: The Castle