



ARIZONA

High in a cliff cavity in the Verde Valley of central Arizona lies one of the most interesting and best preserved cliff dwellings in the United States. Within the monument, occupying part of the limestone cliff which borders Beaver Creek for one-half a mile, are several ruins, including Montezuma Castle, which is about 90 percent intact.

The castle has no connection with the Aztec emperor whose name it bears; it was named by early settlers who believed it had been built by Aztec refugees fleeing from Mexico at the time of the Spanish conquest.



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 uneven floor of the valley winds the Verde River, fed by Beaver Creek and several other tributaries.

Several million years ago the mouth of this valley was dammed by a lava flow from the nearby volcanic Black Hills. The impounded waters formed a lake 35 miles long and 18 miles wide. In it, streams feeding the lake deposited enormous quantities of limy mud. Perhaps by 2 million years ago, the overflow from the imprisoned waters had worn down the lava dam so that eventually the lake was drained. Subsequently, the Verde River and its tributaries cut channels through the now dry and hardened lime deposits of the old lake bed. Since then, much of the limestone bordering these streams has been eroded away, thus broadening their valleys.

The Early Inhabitants

Archeological evidence so far available indicates that humans were living in the Verde Valley more than a thousand years ago.

Industrious, sedentary Indians from southern Arizona settled on the fertile river terraces and began farming about A.D. 900. 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 farm folk probably lived in comparative peace in the valley until about the beginning of the 12th century. After 1100, another group of farming Indians entered the valley from the north. These people constructed communal dwellings, or pueblos, which after 1250 were converted into large compact defensible structures.

Beginnings of Montezuma Castle

The majority of these Indians concentrated into larger settlements for protection. They built pueblos on the hilltops near their fields, for here were the most convenient sites. Occasionally, a suitable location was found in a cliff.

It can be imagined with what enthusiasm a band of 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. In a quarter-mile strip of cliff, they built two distinct apartment houses. Growth during several generations made one of these villages a 5-story structure with 45 rooms. A hundred yards east is Montezuma Castle, a 5-story structure with 20 rooms.

The Classic Period

These dwellings were occupied until about 1400. As many as 200 persons might well have lived in 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 Hopi country to the north by trade with Indians of the Flagstaff area.

Abandonment

There were several related reasons for the abandonment of Montezuma Castle and other nearby pueblos. From about 700 to 1100, the original settlers of the Verde Valley lived in small groups on the desert flats and along the streambanks. Early in the 1100's they were joined by people from the Flagstaff region, 50 miles to the north, who built homes of stone and mud near streambanks and in cliffs.

For more than a century these people occupied the valley together, without apparent conflict. But in the following century recurring droughts, capped by a continuous drought between 1276-99, led to a further depopulation of the Flagstaff region. Many of them moved into the Verde Valley and joined the original settlers and the earlier migrants from their homeland.

Cliff dwelling at Montezuma Well.



By the late 1200's the valley was overpopulated. The combination of too many people and not enough farmland probably led to intertribe strife, which might in part have been responsible for the almost complete exodus from the valley. Montezuma Castle must have been completely abandoned by about 1450, for no trade pottery dating after that time has been found.

A number of cliff dwellers must have gone into northern Arizona to join the friendly Hopi, 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 part of Montezuma Castle National Monument, 7 miles by road northeast of the castle. This area contains a large limestone sink, half filled with water that 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 that carried it to their farmlands below. These ditches are visible today because they were cemented by the lime content of the water which flowed through them. The story of the Indians here is similar to that at Montezuma Castle.

About Your Visit

The map in this folder shows the routes by which you can reach Montezuma Castle National Monument. It also shows the location of other areas of the National Park System that are within easy driving distance of the monument. The monument is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Your first stop should be at the visitor center, for the exhibits there, describing the way of life of the people who built Montezuma Castle, will help you to understand the things you will see. At Montezuma Well you should first visit the small museum.

Limited picnic facilities are located in each of the two sections of the monument.

The small admission fee is waived for children under 12 years of age and for groups of elementary and high school children, regardless of age, and accompanying adults responsible for their conduct.

For more detailed information on the monument, purchase the 40-page illustrated Montezuma Castle Historical Handbook for 25 cents at the visitor center or from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Administration

Montezuma Castle National Monument, established on December 8, 1906, and containing about 842 acres in two sections, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

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.

The development of this area is part of MISSION 66, a 10-year program to develop and staff the areas of the National Park System so that they can be used and enjoyed by both present and future generations.

A superintendent, whose address is Camp Verde, Ariz. 86322, is in immediate charge.

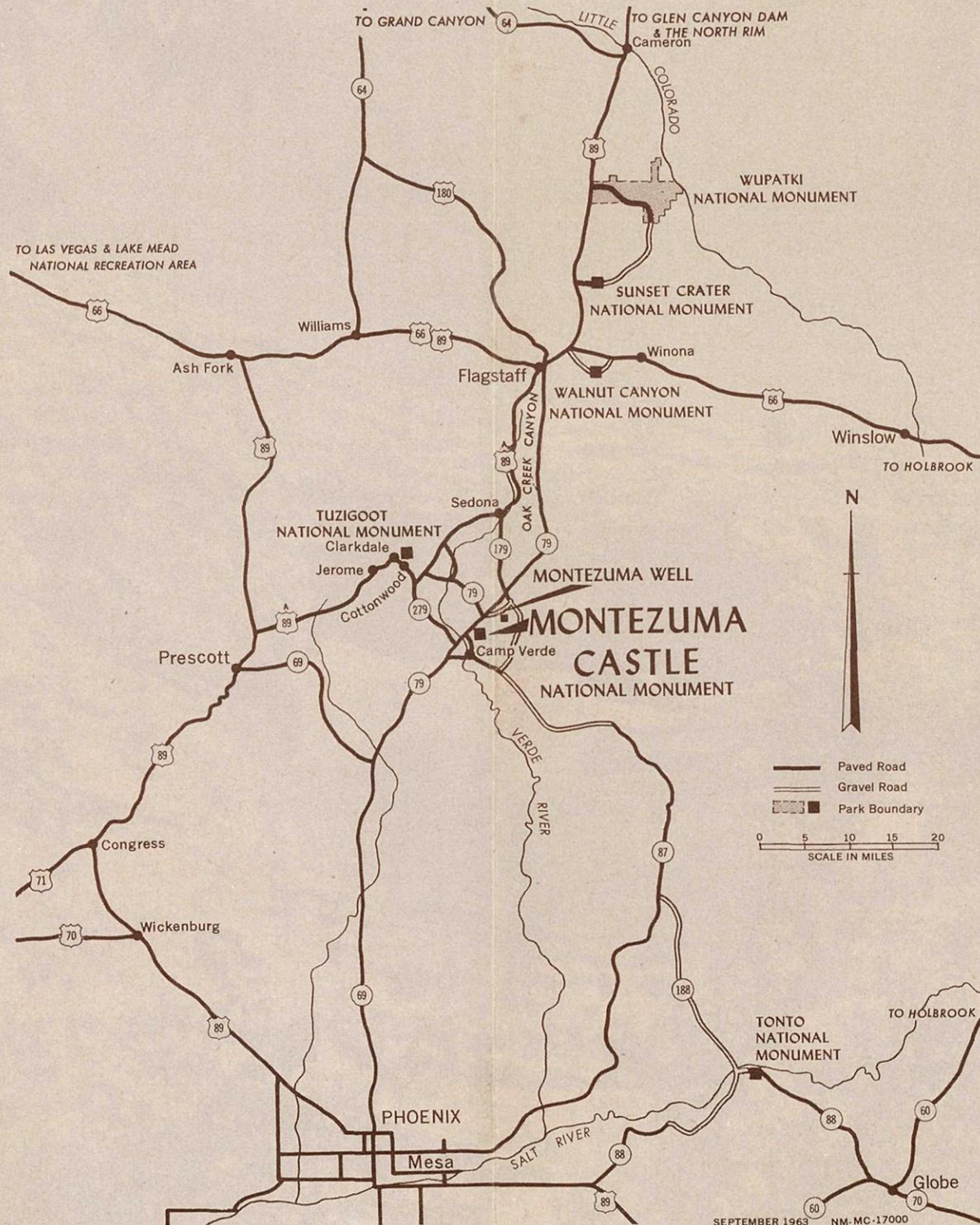
America's Natural Resources

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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