

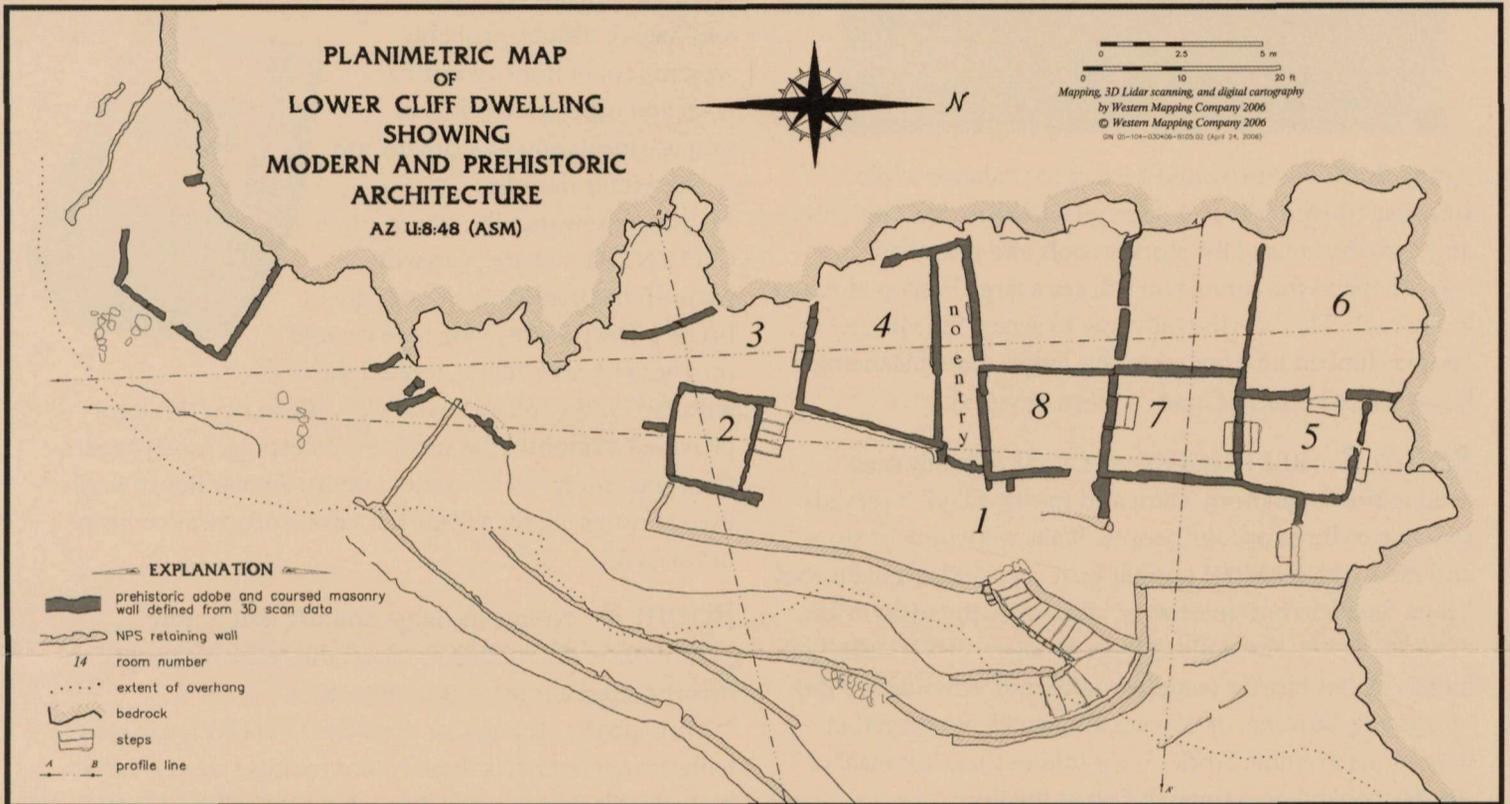
The Lower Cliff Dwelling

Tonto National Monument
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



A thousand years ago, the vast area of the American Southwest became a melting pot of cultures. From this, a large population, perhaps several thousand people, settled in Tonto Basin. Their villages once dotted the landscape, displaying identifiable characteristics such as architecture and pottery.

Around CE 1250, some Tonto Basin people began building in the caves. The Lower Cliff Dwelling was one of those villages. Protected from the elements for the past 700 years, it now provides a rare opportunity to visit and explore part of the southwest's prehistoric past.



The first Europeans to explore this cliff dwelling found a large, well-preserved structure, much larger than we see today. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, vandals and relic hunters inflicted considerable damage on these ancient structures. By 1907, the need for protection prompted President Theodore Roosevelt to declare the Tonto Cliff Dwellings a national monument, giving jurisdiction to the U.S. Forest Service.

In 1933, Tonto National Monument was transferred to the National Park Service. Stabilization of the ruins and archeological research followed, revealing clues as to who the occupants may have been.

Today, you can visit the dwelling and experience what life may have been like many centuries ago. The Lower Cliff Dwelling is more than just stones, sticks, and mortar. It is the well-preserved remains of a 700-year-old village—a place where people were born and played, worked and died.

A section of the Lower Cliff Dwelling has been closed to reduce visitor impact. To keep this area open for yourself and future visitors, we must protect it. Please do not touch, sit, or lean on the fragile walls.

Room 1: This wide-open space was once the site of many two-story structures. Had you been here 700 years ago, you would be standing in someone's house. The

homes that once stood here were less protected than those in the back of the cave and have eroded away.

While occupied, their flat roofs may have been a place where women ground corn, wove cotton, and watched children as they ran and played. Nearby, the old ones of the village, crippled from injury or arthritis, warmed themselves on sunny days. In their mid to late forties, they would enjoy the sounds of their grandchildren for only a few more years.

Room 2: The feature in front of you is the remains of a two-story structure. Resisting erosion over the centuries, these walls reveal several interesting features.

Do you see the small hole in the second-story wall?

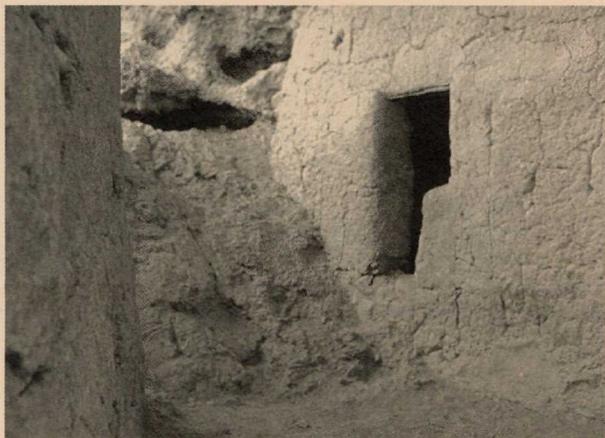


Through it, one could watch the original ladder entry as people entered and exited the village.

Note the holes high up in the right wall. They mark where

the second-story roof once rested. Above them, an extension of the wall formed a “parapet.” Parapets may have served a defensive purpose or were intended to keep children from falling off the roof as they ran and played.

Room 3: Go up the stone steps and turn left. In this short hallway, you will see a small room to your right with a half-T doorway (NO ENTRY). The half-T prevented



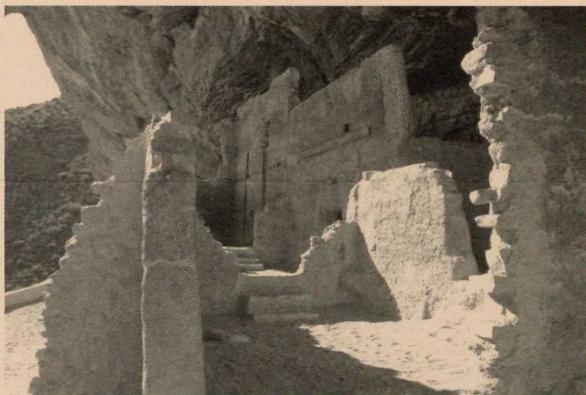
strong drafts and provided a ledge for balance while stooping to enter the room. Small and crowded, this room may have been used for storing tools and weapons.

Just beyond the room, you will see a large V-shaped notch in the rock. This was the only way to access the village. People climbed up a ladder to this ledge, often balancing heavy water vessels or loads of corn or wood.

Room 4: (RESTRICTED ACCESS) A family once lived in this large room. Dark and smoke-filled, it served as home to three or four people. Walls were built of stone and mud with a central upright post supporting a main roof beam. Smaller roof poles were laid across the main beam, connecting it to the walls. A layer of saguaro ribs and a few inches of clay mortar completed the roof. After a hard day of hunting, farming, or playing, the family would gather here in the evening. Stories were told as their last meal of the day cooked on a small fire pit in the floor.

Through the door in the far wall we can see a hallway that connected this room to others in the village. *To see this area, please retrace your steps to Room 1, then go to the north end of the village.*

Room 5: From here you can see several well-preserved rooms, as well as remnants of some two-story construction. Seven or eight families may have lived in this part of the village.



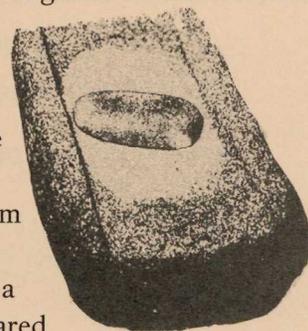
Courtesy of Lavoie, NPS volunteer

Room 6: Go up the steps to your right. This large open room probably functioned as a community workplace and village square.

Note the two circular mortar holes in the rock bench. Here women would gather to grind seeds and prepare meals while visiting with their neighbors and discussing current events. The recesses in the back were good places to store goods. Villagers could also assemble here to discuss village matters, trade goods and ideas, and take part in group activities.

Like Pueblo people of today, the Lower Cliff Dwelling occupants may have had a deeply rooted religion, woven through all phases of daily life. This room could have been used for religious functions attended by 30 or more people

Room 7: You are again standing in somebody’s home. Notice the mano and metate (grinding stone and basin). Adults, probably women, spent hours grinding corn and other seeds used to prepare meals and to store for use in the winter months.



Look closely into the closed room (NO ENTRY). Inside, you will see parts of the original clay floor and a fire pit. The people living here cleared the room of cave debris, leveled the floor with dirt, and covered it with clay. When dry, this floor provided a smooth, flat surface for sleeping, food preparation, and storage of household items. Similar floors were used throughout the village but have worn away or been destroyed.

Room 8: Notice the large boulder that is now part of the wall. Too big to move, the residents simply incorporated it into their architecture.

Through the rectangular door (NO ENTRY), you see the hallway that connects these rooms to those we saw earlier. Note the blackened walls throughout the village. Homes were often smoke-filled and stuffy. Those that lived here accepted these conditions, welcoming a warm fire during the cold winter months.

Look inside the attached room (NO ENTRY) and imagine living in this small, dark space. Also, notice the hatchway used to reach the roof above.

Adults were about 5’ to 5’6” (152 to 167 cm) tall, and had to stoop to go through these doorways. However, the smaller the doorway, the less heat lost. Inside, the occupants would sit or sleep on beds of fur or grass.

This cliff dwelling was occupied and maintained for nearly 100 years. Its occupants traded with neighboring nations, traveled, prospered, and grew in number.

But events not clearly understood began to affect their world. Shortly before Columbus came to America, certainly by CE 1450, the people of Tonto Basin were gone. Leaving their homes to the wind, sun, and time, they migrated from this valley, searching for new land and a new beginning.

Interesting exhibits about Salado life—their farming, hunting, clothing, and crafts—can be found in the visitor center. We invite you to enjoy them.

If you do not care to keep this brochure or want to share it with someone else, please return it to the visitor center. Thank you.

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