

Walnut Canyon

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Monument
Arizona



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Clockwise from top: Sinagua cliff home in north-facing wall; Kaibab limestone layers resting on Coconino sandstone; boxelders and Arizona black walnut on canyon floor; black-and-white bowl obtained in trade; locally produced redware olla.



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The People Without Water

Dwellings sheltered by overhanging cliffs were home to Walnut Canyon's only permanent inhabitants more than 800 years ago. Inside the canyon and throughout the pine forests on its rims, these people made their living by farming, hunting deer and small game, gathering an assortment of useful plants, and trading. The people are today known as Sinagua—Spanish for “without water”—a tribute to their ability to turn a relatively dry region into a homeland.

These people were not the first to encounter Walnut Canyon and its abundance of plants and animals. Artifacts show that Archaic peoples, who traveled throughout the Southwest thousands of years ago, probably occupied the canyon seasonally. These nomads were long gone by the time their Sinagua successors appeared in the rugged volcanic terrain northeast of present-day Flagstaff more than 1,400 years ago. Perhaps these newcomers migrated from elsewhere, or perhaps they broke away from a local group and developed a distinct way of life. Like earlier inhabitants, they were probably attracted by the region's abundant plants and animals. But they were also farmers.

They built one-room pithouses near their fields, where they employed dry-farming techniques to grow corn and other crops. Archeologists once thought that debris from the eruption of nearby Sunset Crater sometime between 1040 and 1100 made the land more fertile, attracting many more people to the San Francisco volcanic field and bringing change to Sinagua life. Recent findings discredit this theory. Among the more likely influences were increased rainfall, new water-conserving farming practices, trade, and a general population increase in the Southwest. This period after the eruption, when Sinagua culture flourished, is marked by a change in architecture from the pithouse style. The large, above-ground villages at Wupatki and Elden Pueblo and

Walnut Canyon's cliff dwellings, built between 1125 and 1250, date from this period. The canyon builders took advantage of natural recesses in the limestone walls. Over millions of years, flowing water eroded the softer rock layers, creating shallow caves.

These were also the years of the Sinagua culture's greatest geographical extent. Settlements ranged from the eastern slopes of the San Francisco Peaks northeast to the Little Colorado River and south to the Verde River valley. Trade items found in Sinagua dwellings include turquoise from the Santa Fe area, seashell ornaments from the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of California, and macaw feathers from Mexico. These goods may have been acquired by intermediaries who arranged trade between other groups of people.

The cliff dwellings were occupied for little more than 100 years. Why these people left is not clear. By 1250 they moved to new villages a few miles southeast along Anderson Mesa. It is generally believed that they were eventually assimilated into Hopi culture. The Hopi today call their ancestors the Hisatsinom (“people of long ago”). Their tradition suggests that these early migrations were part of a religious quest to have all clans come together.

Sinagua homes remained largely undisturbed until the 19th century. In the 1880s the railroad brought souvenir hunters to the ancient dwellings. Theft and destruction prompted local efforts to preserve the canyon and soon drew national support. In 1915 Walnut Canyon was declared a national monument. Hundreds of years have passed since Sinagua voices and laughter could be heard. Today, as you explore the trails, imagine the canyon alive with people carrying food and water, greeting one another, and building their cliffside homes.

Sinagua people arrive in San Francisco volcanic region northeast of Flagstaff.

Sunset Crater is created in several volcanic eruptions; Sinagua life begins to change.

Sinagua depart Flagstaff area for new villages to the south.

Antonio De Espéjo opens Spanish exploration of northern Arizona.

Walnut Canyon becomes a popular destination for souvenir hunters.

600

1040

1100

1250

1400

1583

1880s

1915

Start of cliff dwelling construction in Walnut Canyon.

Sinagua probably assimilated into Hopi culture.

Walnut Canyon is proclaimed a national monument.

Planning Your Visit

Hours and Facilities There is an entrance fee. The park is open daily except December 25. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; hours may be extended in summer. Note: The Island Trail closes one hour earlier. This part of Arizona is on Mountain Standard Time year-round.

The visitor center has an information desk, exhibits, a bookstore, and a panoramic view of the canyon. Two paved foot trails begin at the visitor center. The Island Trail, a 0.9-mile loop, passes 25 of the cliff dwelling rooms and takes you through different plantlife zones (see map on the other side of this brochure). There are sheer drops and a 185-foot climb (240 steps) back to the canyon rim. The 0.7-mile Rim Trail overlooks the canyon and passes the ruins of rimtop structures. The park has a picnic area. Campgrounds, lodging, and restaurants can be found nearby.

For a Safe Visit Elevation at the canyon rim is nearly 7,000 feet; be careful when attempting strenuous activity such as climbing stairs. • Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. • Picnics are permitted only in designated areas. Open fires are not allowed. • Stay on the trails when hiking; off-trail hiking is not allowed. • Pets are not permitted in the visitor center or on trails. • **All plants, animals, and archeological objects within the park are protected by federal laws. There are substantial fines for damage or removal of these resources.**

Location Walnut Canyon National Monument is 10 miles east of downtown Flagstaff. From I-40, take exit 204 and follow the entrance road.



For More Information

Walnut Canyon, Wupatki, and Sunset Crater Volcano national monuments are administered as the Flagstaff Area National Monuments from a headquarters in Flagstaff, Ariz.

Flagstaff Area National Monuments
6400 N. Highway 89
Flagstaff, AZ 86004
928-526-1157

Walnut Canyon National Monument
928-526-3367
www.nps.gov/waca

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