

Aztec Ruins

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

Visit Planner

Contrary to the name, Aztec Ruins National Monument has nothing to do with the Aztecs of central Mexico. Believing that the Aztecs had built the structures here, early Anglo settlers in the Animas valley misnamed the site Aztec. The name persisted, even though people archeologists call Anasazi lived here and in the surrounding region. Their descendants, the Pueblo people, live in parts of New Mexico and Arizona today.

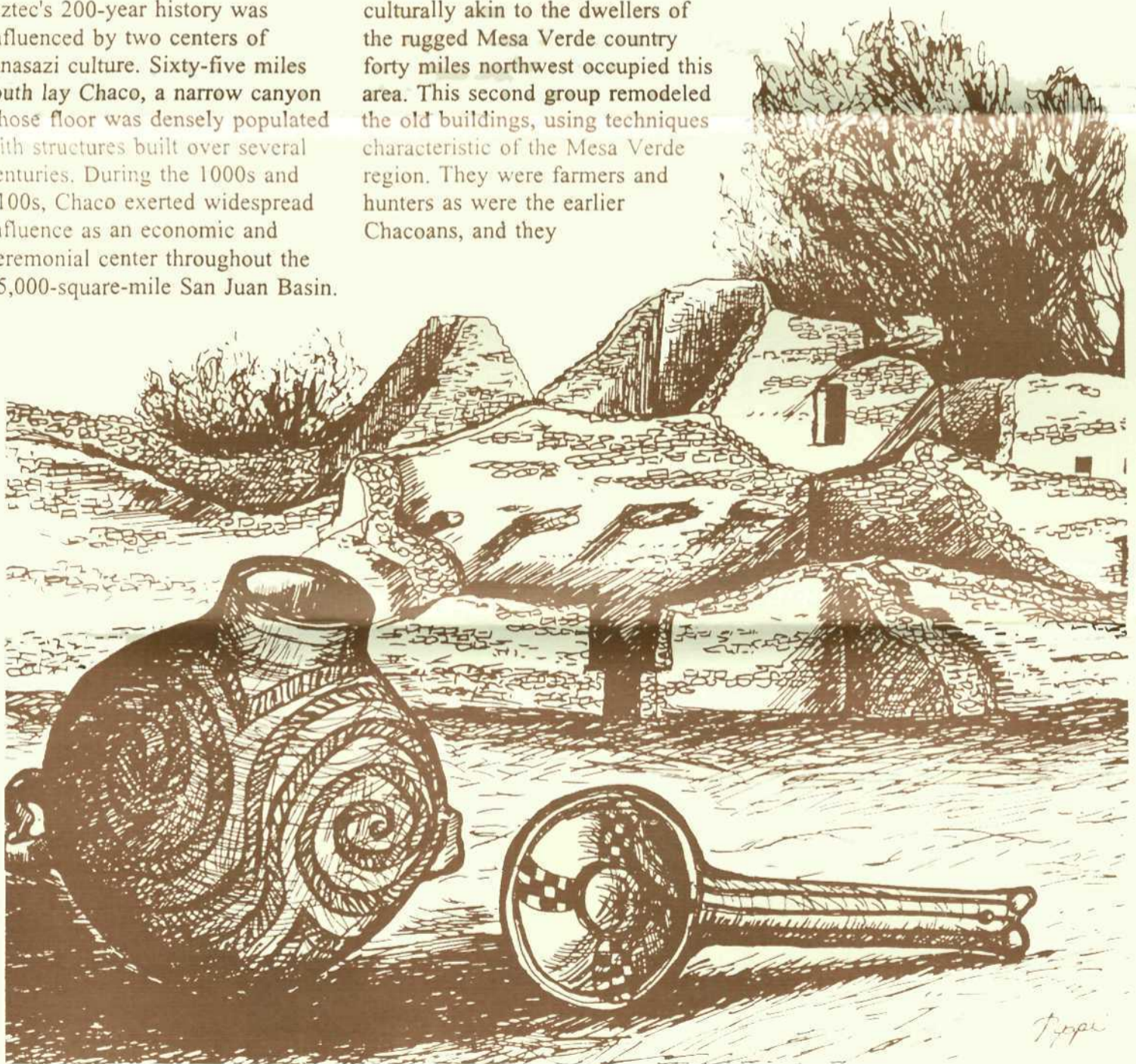
Aztec's 200-year history was influenced by two centers of Anasazi culture. Sixty-five miles south lay Chaco, a narrow canyon whose floor was densely populated with structures built over several centuries. During the 1000s and 1100s, Chaco exerted widespread influence as an economic and ceremonial center throughout the 25,000-square-mile San Juan Basin.

By the late 1000s, Aztec joined many other outlying settlements which exhibited Chacoan style architecture, ceramics, and connecting roads. Their residents participated in what archeologists call the Chacoan Phenomenon, an extensive social and economic system which reached far beyond the canyon walls at Chaco. With the collapse of this system in the mid 1100s, life changed at Aztec.

A few decades later, people culturally akin to the dwellers of the rugged Mesa Verde country forty miles northwest occupied this area. This second group remodeled the old buildings, using techniques characteristic of the Mesa Verde region. They were farmers and hunters as were the earlier Chacoans, and they

prospered for a few generations. But by 1300 they moved on, as did other inhabitants of the region. Today, the Pueblo people continue a rich culture influenced by their ancestors who once occupied this broad expanse.

Visitors can contemplate the lives of the former inhabitants while walking the trail through what was once the largest pueblo here, the West Ruin.



Activities

Visitor Center: The visitor center features exhibits and a 25-minute video entitled "Anasazi" which is shown several times daily. Books, postcards, slides, posters, replica pottery, and videos are for sale. A trail guide booklet is available to borrow or buy for \$1.00.

Self-Guiding Trail: A ¼ mile self-guiding trail winds through the West Ruin, the remains of a multi-story pueblo of about 400 rooms. The trail passes through several rooms with intact original roofs, as well as the reconstructed Great Kiva, a round semi-subterranean room once important for community activities. Rangers give interpretive talks in the Great Kiva daily throughout the summer.

Visitors should allow about 1 ½ hours to see the exhibits and movie, and to walk the trail. The monument is open from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend, and from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm the rest of the year. It is closed Christmas and New Year's Day.

Fees: The entrance fee is \$2.00 per person. Children under 17 enter free. Golden Eagle, Golden Age, and Golden Access Passports are honored and available at the information desk.

Services: A shaded picnic area with tables is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Food, gas, and lodging are available in nearby Aztec, and in Farmington, about 15 miles away. Campgrounds include Riverside Park, about one mile away; Navajo Lake State Park, 25 miles east; and several other commercial campgrounds within 20 miles.

Accessibility: A TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) is available. Callers should give adequate signals and allow sufficient hookup time (505) 334-6174 (Voice or TDD). The visitor center, restrooms, a picnic table, and portions of the trail are accessible to wheelchairs.

Weather: Summer temperatures are usually in the 80s and 90s. Afternoon thunderstorms are common during July and August. Fall is frequently pleasant, with mild daytime temperatures and crisp nights. Snow usually occurs by Thanksgiving, and falls through the winter. Winter daytime temperatures range from the 20s through 50s, with cold nights. Spring weather is the most variable, frequently with windy and mild or cold days. Annual precipitation is about 10 inches.

Take Pride and Be Safe

Ruin walls are fragile and crumble easily if walked upon. Please stay on the paved trail and off the walls. Artifacts, plants, and animals should be left undisturbed. No pets are allowed on the trail. Wear sturdy walking shoes. Be aware of low doorways, uneven surfaces, and ice or snow.

Location

Aztec Ruins National Monument is located on Ruins Road about ¾ mile north of U.S. Highway 550, just outside the town of Aztec, New Mexico.

For more information

Write or phone: Superintendent, Aztec Ruins National Monument, PO Box 640, Aztec, New Mexico 87410 (505) 334-6174 (Voice or TDD)

