

# AZTEC RUINS

## ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The national monument, on the outskirts of the small city of Aztec in northwestern New Mexico, is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

In the museum, you will see pottery, baskets, and other objects made by the Indians who lived here; exhibits that explain the architecture and describe the way these early people lived; and charts that show the relationship between these people and their contemporaries who lived in other parts of the Southwest.

A self-guiding trail leads through parts of the pueblo, its Great Kiva, and also to the nearby tri-wall Hubbard Ruin. Guided tours are provided for large groups upon request.

The Great Kiva was completely restored in 1934 by Earl H. Morris, of the American Museum of Natural History. When you enter this impressive ceremonial chamber, you will perhaps sense something of the emotions of the people who used it 800 years ago.

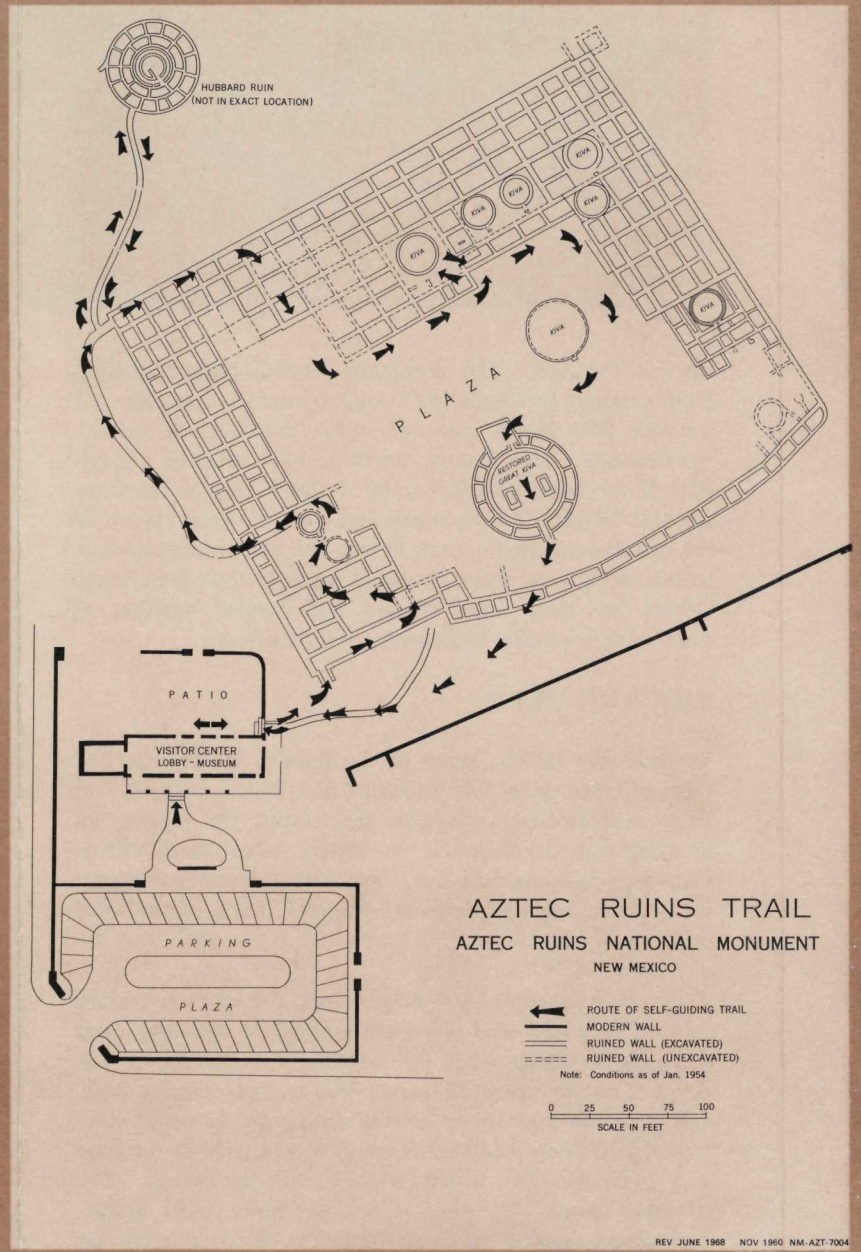
Food and lodging are not available in the monument but may be obtained in nearby communities. The city of Aztec maintains a campground near the monument.

## ADMINISTRATION

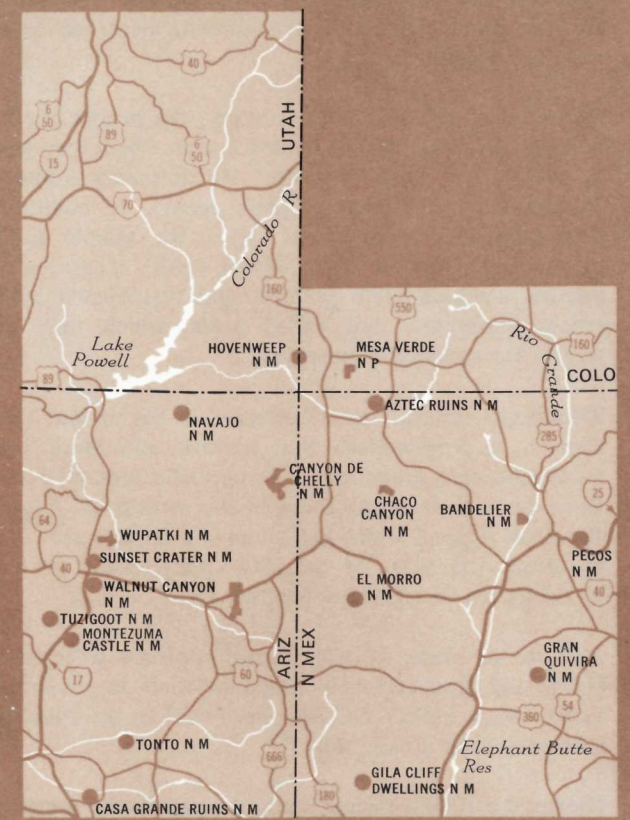
Aztec Ruins National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Route 1, Box 101, Aztec Ruins, N. Mex. 87410, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

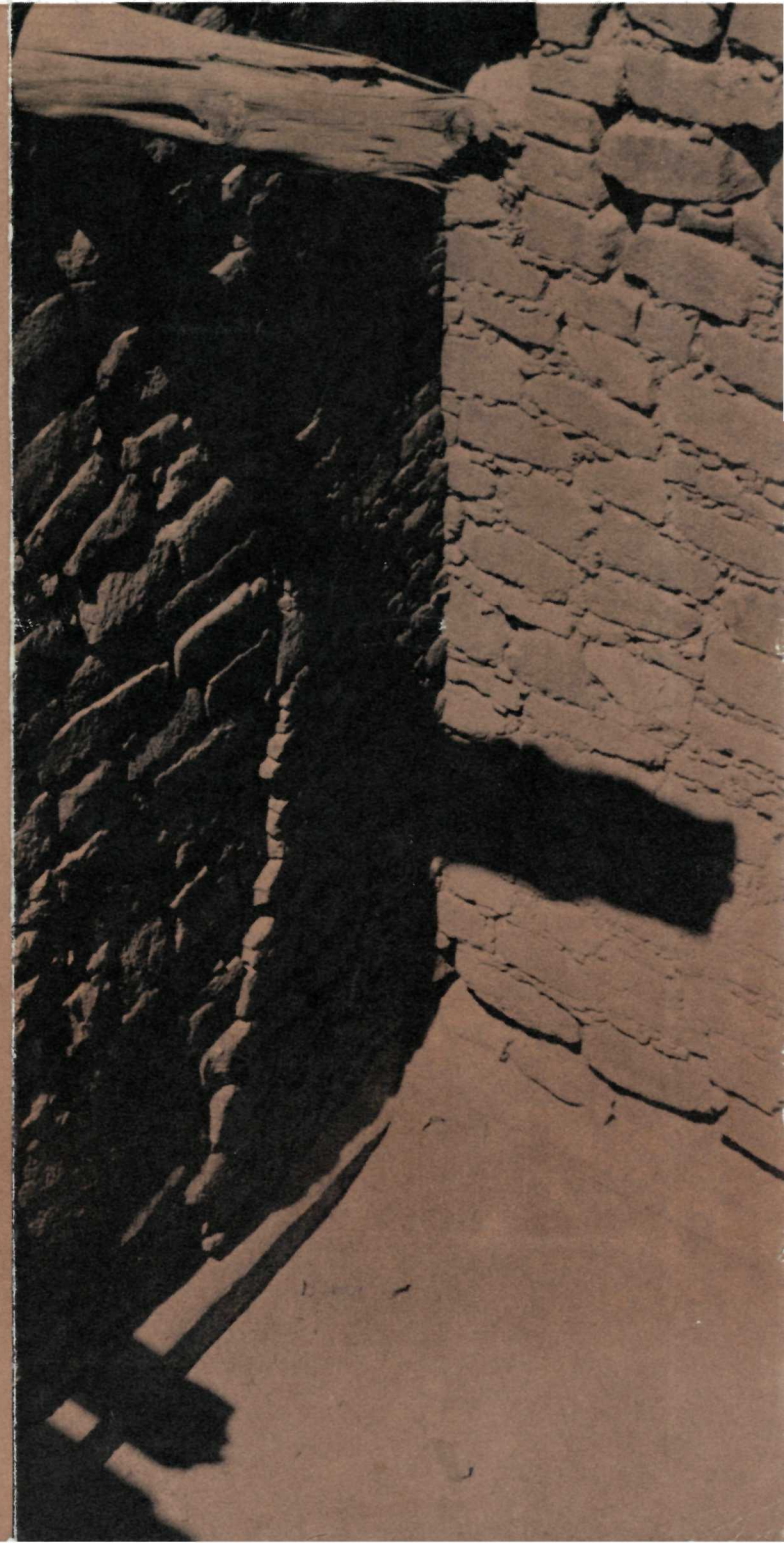
U.S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR  
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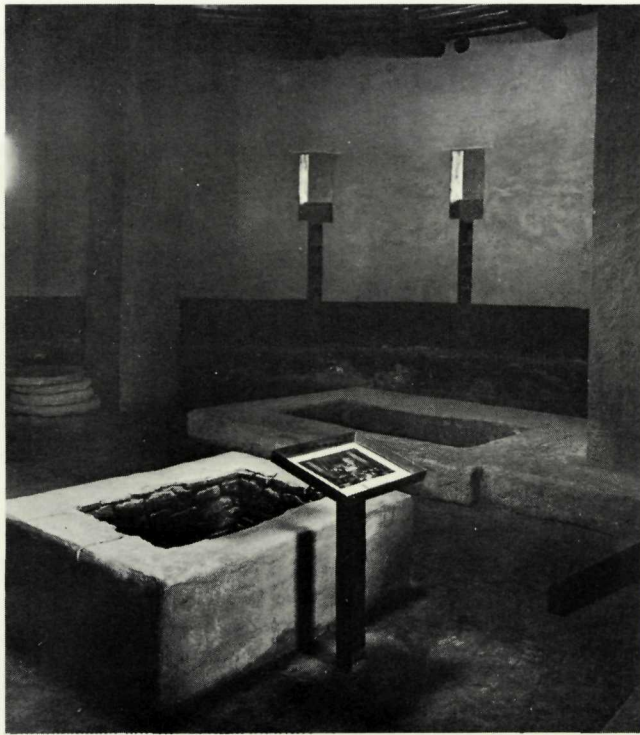
SOUTHWEST REGION



SOUTHWEST ARCHEOLOGICAL AREAS







## AZTEC RUINS

### NATIONAL MONUMENT / NEW MEXICO

*Expertly laid masonry walls, original ceiling timbers that are still sound after 800 years, and unexcavated mounds mark the site of this large pre-Columbian community, which was erroneously called "Aztec" by early pioneer settlers. Ancestors of present-day Pueblo Indians of Arizona and New Mexico, not related to the Aztec Indians of Mexico, built these structures.*

#### FOREFATHERS OF THE BUILDERS

About 2,000 years ago, small bands of Indians occupied parts of the Four Corners area, gathering wild plant food, raising corn and squash, hunting game with a dart-throwing stick, making implements of stone and wood and bone, and weaving baskets and sandals. The abundance of their excellent basketry prompted archeologists to call them the Basketmakers.

As generation followed generation, their culture evolved through contact with other groups and with some applica-



tion of their own ingenuity. By the late A.D. 400's, they were living in pithouses, which were partly underground, and were making pottery. By the 700's they had adopted the bow and arrow and were growing beans as well as corn and squash.

In the latter part of the 8th century, the people began to build small villages of flat-roofed houses which they joined in rows. The name "Pueblo," which means village in Spanish, has been given to these people. In addition to developing new architectural styles, the Pueblo Indians of this early period wove cotton cloth, created a distinctive black-on-white pottery, and constructed subterranean chambers, now called kivas, which were used largely for ceremonial purposes.

Two major cultural centers emerged in the region: Chaco Canyon, in northwestern New Mexico, and Mesa Verde, in southwestern Colorado. The nomadic Indians between these centers, including those in the vicinity of Aztec on the lower Animas River, had adopted a farming way of life by about A.D. 600. By the 1000's they looked especially to the Chaco Canyon area for their ideas.

And so the Aztec people farmed, pursued a variety of crafts, and practiced their religious beliefs in public ceremonies or in kivas. The artifacts found in the ruins bear witness to their artistic skills.

During the 1000's, people far to the east in the upper San Juan drainage abandoned their homes because of a chang-



ing environment. The dominant rainfall pattern shifted from summer to winter and brought summer droughts and summer flash floods that cut away farm terraces on the streambanks. This change seems to have affected a large part of the Southwest that is on the west side of the Continental Divide. To the south and west of Aztec, some of the people remained in their homes and constructed devices to hold soil, store water, or divert water to their farmlands. Others left their small villages and banded together at sites more favorable to conservation practices.

#### THE BUILDERS

By the early 1100's, many of the Indians in the scattered farm villages along the Animas River had congregated in large multistoried structures that faced on plazas, an architectural development borrowed from their Chaco Canyon neighbors. At this time, Great Kivas came into use, dominating the plaza and perhaps much of the local ceremonial life.

This concentration of people provided the labor necessary to construct soil- and water-conserving devices and huge masonry dwellings such as Aztec. One pueblo of the Aztec complex covers 2 acres, stands three stories high, and contains 500 rooms averaging 10 by 12 feet. This terraced, U-shaped pueblo is seven rooms wide at the base and four and five rooms wide across the wings. The structure is not only massive but has unity in its design. Tree-ring evidence indicates that most of the pueblo was built between 1111 and 1115.

Shortly after the pueblo was completed, by the middle of the 1100's, Aztec and possibly other nearby large pueblos were abandoned, many of the people moving east of the Continental Divide. Increased use of water-conserving devices suggests that the probable cause was an increase in aridity that affected croplands. Perhaps some of the people of Aztec moved northwest to the Mesa Verde area, where rainfall was sufficient for raising crops.

Almost a century of sharp fluctuations in rainfall west of the Continental Divide began in 1215. These climatic variations also affected the Mesa Verde area. This may have caused some of the Indians to relocate their homes there and others to move out of the region. Some of the migrants moved south, including, perhaps, descendants of those who had abandoned Aztec in the middle 1100's.

By 1225, Aztec and the Chaco Canyon villages were reoccupied by people whose culture resembled that of the people of the Mesa Verde region. At Aztec, they reused the east pueblo, and in the west pueblo they reoccupied many rooms; they built a row of rooms across the open end of the plaza and added rooms around the exterior of the Great Kiva.

During the long drought of 1276-99, Aztec and the Chaco Canyon villages were abandoned once more. Mesa Verde was also abandoned about this time. Archeologists believe that many of these groups moved to the Rio Grande and some to the San Jose, where their descendants are to be found today.