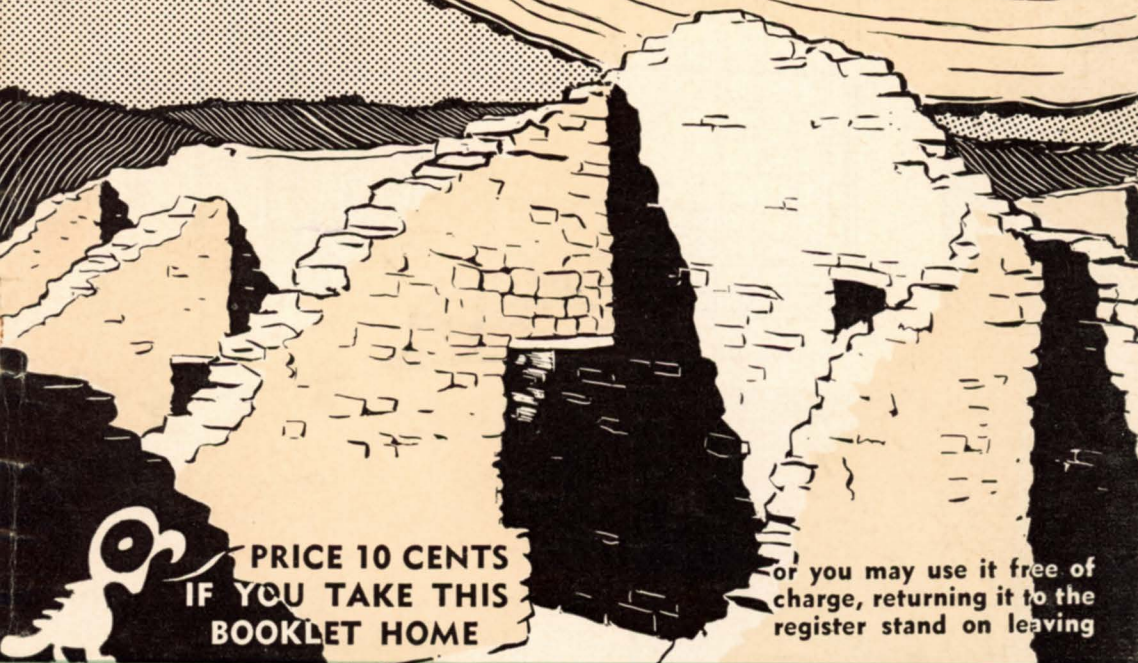



# AZTEC RUINS

NATIONAL MONUMENT

1121 A.D.

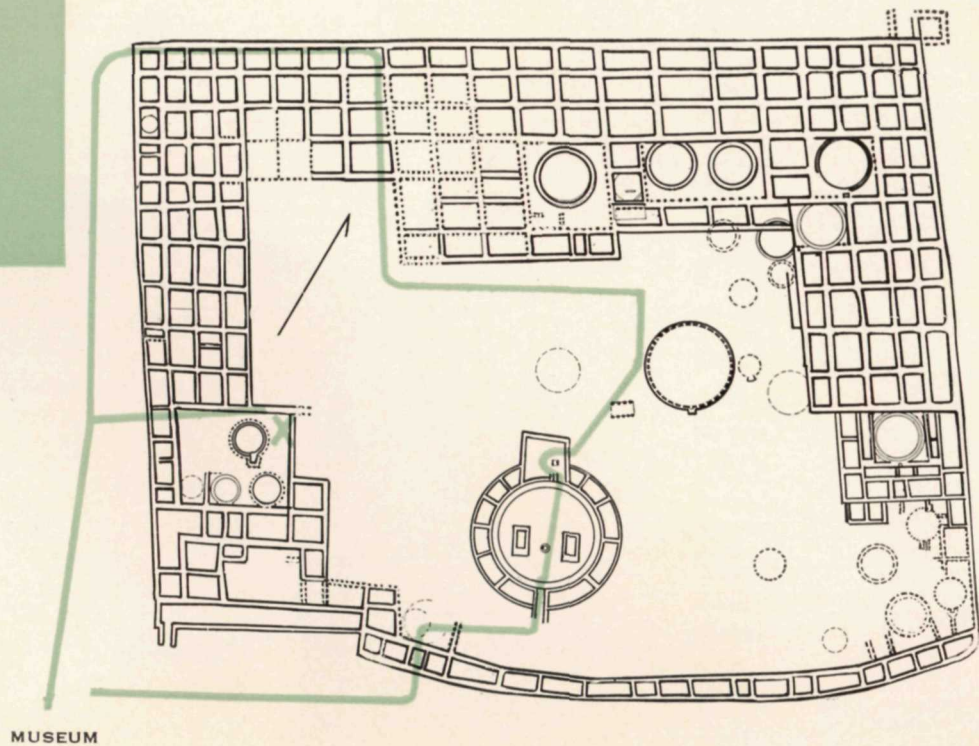
1106 A.D.



 PRICE 10 CENTS  
IF YOU TAKE THIS  
BOOKLET HOME

or you may use it free of  
charge, returning it to the  
register stand on leaving

1 MILE NORTHWEST OF AZTEC, NEW MEXICO  
SOUTHWESTERN MONUMENTS ASSOCIATION



*Ground plan of Aztec Ruins, a three-story apartment house built more than 800 years ago.*

*(The green X is where you stand at STATION 1.)*

## Guide Booklet to Aztec Ruins Trail

Aztec Ruins National Monument, one of about 180 areas administered by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, was set aside for its historic and scientific values. This area belongs to you and is part of your heritage as an American citizen. The men in the uniform of the National Park Service are here to serve you and welcome the opportunity to make your stay more enjoyable.

*Keep America Beautiful*

### CONSERVATION — CAN A LAYMAN HELP?

If you are interested in the work of the National Park Service and in the cause of conservation in general, you can give active support by aligning yourself with one of the numerous conservation organizations, which act as spokesmen for those who wish our scenic heritage to be kept unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

Names and addresses of conservation organizations may be obtained from the ranger.

*Don't be a litterbug  
Use the trash cans along the trail*

## AZTEC RUINS TRAIL

Numbered markers along the trail refer to the numbered paragraphs on the following pages which describe features at each of these points. See the map on the front page for the trail route. Please stay on the trail.

**Station 1.** You now enter the ruins. To receive most enjoyment from the leaflet, please observe that the text in large type is very brief, for folks who are in a hurry. For more information, read also the text in small type.

*Help preserve these ruins.*

**Station 2.** When this ruin was discovered it looked like the mound about 200 yards ahead beyond the ruins at the orange marker. Under that brush-covered mound there are dozens of rooms, none of which have been excavated.

Circular rooms like the one near you, were kivas (kee-vahz). They were used for ceremonial and schooling purposes mostly by men and boys, and as meeting places for societies, somewhat like our fraternal orders.

*If you walk upon the wall  
Ancient stones are sure to fall.  
(And probably you, also.)*

*Please lift metal cover and see the map display.*

This pueblo, an apartment building of more than 500 rooms facing a central plaza, covered about as much space as a modern city block. Rooms were for housing, storage, and sometimes for burial purposes.

*Go back down steps and then to the right.*

**Station 3.** The band of green sandstones which is built into the wall (largely restored in this long section) may have been for decoration. Their source has not been discovered.

All the material for the walls was carried by man- or woman-power from quarries at least a mile distant. Notice that no sandstone formations are in sight in this vicinity.

The small openings in the wall, just above present ground level, are "windows" of the partially-buried outer rooms on the ground floor. The large timbers are recent replacements over ends of original logs which are second-story supports. They serve to protect the old timbers.

*Take nothing but pictures; leave nothing but footprints.*

**Station 4.** The curved wall in the corner of the second-story room is part of a kiva which was built late in the occupation of the pueblo.

Throughout the building you can watch for many indications of structural changes during the 175 years or more when people lived here from about 1106 to just before 1300 A. D.

Dr. Earl Morris, the famous archeologist who excavated this ruin, strongly believed the pueblo was built by people of the Chaco Canyon pattern of life, who later abandoned the town. After an interval, people with slightly different habits (like those of the builders of Mesa Verde, now a National Park, 100 miles northwest of here) reoccupied the site and remodeled the buildings in their own distinctive style. Chaco Canyon National Monument is 64 miles southeast of Aztec.

Other students feel that the Chaco Canyon-Mesa Verde country was occupied continuously by the same people who merely changed styles of living through the years. Evidence at this ruin, however, points to a definite abandonment and a later re-occupation, with considerable change in building style, pottery types, etc.

**Station 5.** Before entering this northwest corner room, please look down the long outside wall at your left. This rear wall is 360 feet long, and is not far off a straight line.

The west wall, along which you have been walking, is 278 feet long. This doorway is modern, placed to allow you easy access to the rooms. Eight hundred years ago you could have entered the pueblo easily at only one point, in the southwest corner of the pueblo. At that place you could reach the plaza, from which room entrances opened.

All doorways you go through in these first seven rooms are modern. The original doorways are to your right in each room.

*Please be careful on steps inside doorways.*

**Station 6.** Notice the three rectangular openings high in the walls? These are loosely termed "windows" but were too high to see through. They were for light and ventilation.

The low opening to the right looks more like a window as we think of them now, but it could be called a door. People who "watched their weight" could come through from the next room, and that was the only way this room could be entered.

**Station 7.** The ceiling of this room is entirely original. The heavy central timber is Pine, and probably came from about 12 miles north. The smaller poles are usually Cottonwood. The matting is split Juniper and Juniper bark, easily obtained nearby. Over the matting is a 6- to 8-inch layer of clay forming a floor for the room above.

*The decorative band of green sandstone in Aztec Ruins west wall.*



Notice the line of doorways to the south (right, as you enter), one after the other? They are all original. Entering through so many neighboring apartments led to very sociable living. You had to be on speaking terms with your neighbors!

*Doors are low — don't bump your head!*

**Station 8.** The person of the burial here was around 35 years old at the time of death, and was presumably a man. (You can't always tell the sex by the bones—but you usually can.) This burial, laid in a flexed position, was found outside the building, but since it is a very typical one, it was moved here undisturbed so you could see one in a protected and characteristic location.

The pottery was found unbroken in the same position in which you see it now. At least two pieces of pottery were found in most of the graves, and they may have been used to contain food and drink, a practice which is still followed by many primitive people.

**Station 9.** To the south are three open doors, and a fourth which is sealed.

In some cases, later users of the rooms buried their dead in them, and completely sealed all openings, both windows and doors. There were many places throughout the pueblo where townspeople sealed all openings to their living quarters, such as the last one you see here.

We think the reason for this is that during the great drought (1276 to 1299 A.D.) the town was abandoned. Evidently the residents expected to come back, so they locked their doors. When you leave your home today, you turn a key in the lock. Eight centuries ago the Indian here couldn't lock his house quite that easily!

*Step through into the next room south.*

**Station 10.** In the next room are pottery vessels and metates (may-TAH-tays) on the floor. With the nearly flat metates used in this district the upright slabs were necessary, to keep the corn meal from falling over the edges as it was being ground.



*Reduced doorway.*

Corn (maize) was the principal source of food. Wheat, which we know so well today, was introduced into the Southwest by Spaniards, long after this pueblo was abandoned.

*Please return to the room you just left to go to next station.*

**Station 11.** In 1881 when this long-sealed room was opened, the entire floor was covered with burials. Bodies were simply laid out on the floor, not buried at all, although they were flexed in the customary burial position. Baskets, pottery, and blanket offerings were with the bodies.

A total of more than 200 burials has been found in Aztec Ruins. Oddly enough, all these burials are from the later (Mesa Verde) period of occupation. We have been unable to find the graves for the early (Chaco) period,

or any evidence of cremation. Even at Chaco Canyon extremely few burials have been found, so it is much of a mystery to us today to know where they put their dead.

There were many burials of women and children here in the late period. Unusually high death rates among infants is often a pretty good indication that a dwindling population was disease-ridden. Long-occupied Indian pueblos, lacking modern sanitary facilities and knowledge of disease germs, were particularly unhealthy places in which to weather an epidemic. The drought-induced abandonment of this town undoubtedly found the people inadequately nourished and their babies more prone to disease than when food was ample.

**Station 12.** Across the closed door in the second room to the south you see what looks like a "Venetian" or bamboo blind, sewn together with Yucca fiber cord.

Such mats were used for doors, to stop drafts, and conserve warmth and privacy. Indian housewives sometimes put down similar ones to cover parts of dusty floors. In this case someone wanted to reduce greatly the size of the doorway, and, after erecting a framework of small poles, placed the mat above to hold mud plaster, much as we use metal lath.

*Please examine the glass-covered display which shows this. A photograph is shown on this page.*



*Please follow arrows to the next station.*

**Station 13.** This room was left partially unexcavated to show what archeologists have to do to clear out a room. By careful observation you can see the collapsed first- and second-story roofs, along with wall stones and windblown fill dirt.

The timber down by the path next to the doorway you passed through is from the first-story roof; some of the pieces fitted in the round beam sockets you see in the wall. The top layer of wood is from the second-story roof, and it was found a little above the high standing wall to be seen here. In between are some of the building stones which tumbled down from surrounding walls. Over all this were 3 to 4 feet of windblown fill, extending up the wall as far as the weathered stones which you can see.

When excavating the rooms, archeologists dig the upper windblown material and fallen rocks with ordinary picks and shovels, and then with trowels and whisk brooms they painstakingly scrape and brush away the remaining soil a little at a time. They carefully screen it, and in so doing found more than 65,000 beads in this ruin. Samples of these can be seen in the museum.

**Station 14.** Notice how the building stones high in the east wall have weathered?

Just as in a sandstone cliff, weather eats most deeply into soft layers, leaving the harder parts to form protruding edges.

Did anyone tell you the Indians were lazy? If so, it is interesting to speculate on how many modern Americans would:

- a. Walk 1 to 4 miles to the stone quarry.
- b. Quarry stones to make several thousand building blocks.
- c. Shape all the stones so as to present one smooth face.
- d. Do all the work with stone mallets and hammers.
- e. Carry all on one's back, on foot, to the building site.
- f. Cut the timbers with a stone axe and carry them many miles.

(I'd probably live in a tent!)

**Station 15.** T-shaped doorways are also found in ruins in many other parts of the Southwest. They are quite characteristic in Mesa Verde, but are not common in Chaco Canyon.

Notice the walls of this room. The back one is a fine example of the Chaco Canyon type of masonry, with courses of different thicknesses giving an ornamental effect. The back wall is the oldest, but cruder work shows in others.

Generally, we find that the later stone work and pottery was inferior in workmanship and quality to the earlier. This may indicate the Mesa Verde people were inferior craftsmen, or it could mean that as civilization here declined, the arts and crafts degenerated.

**Station 16.** Here is a plastered and painted section of the wall of a room. Although many of the houses were so decorated, this is the most easily visible portion.

The plaster is a light-colored mud, and the red is iron oxide (ferric oxide) painted over the mud. As for pictures—well, the Indians had doodlers too, young and old.

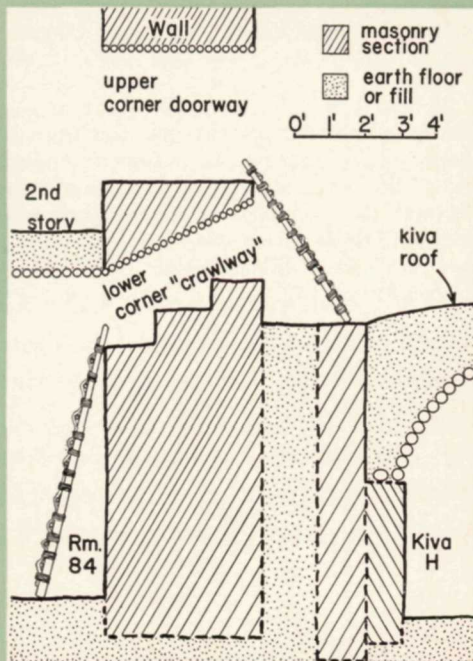
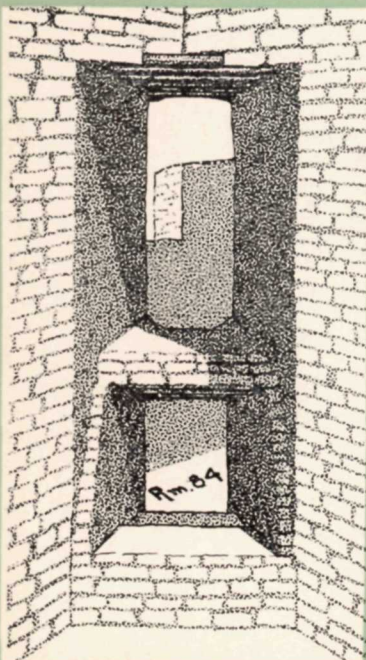
**Station 17.** On the bottom of the page is a drawing of the corner doorway seen from this station.

*Please raise metal cover.*

**Station 18.** This large kiva is a peculiar combination of Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde types (*See easel exhibit.*)

South of the center of the floor is a stone-lined firepit. The subfloor ventilator shaft, Chacoan in type, is visible south of the fireplace, but not connected with it. It went horizontally under the bottom of the south wall and turned upward to form a vertical shaft which rose to the surface of the ground.

*The corner doorway provided a short cut to a nearby room.*



Mesa Verde-type pilasters (the short stone columns against the walls) supported the roof timbers. The National Park Service put a few roof timbers in place on the north side so you can visualize the old method of crossing the logs to build a dome-shaped roof which, over the center of the kiva, was about as high as the outer wall. A hatchway in the roof allowed one to descend by ladder to the floor at the side of the fireplace.

The ventilator shaft provided descending cool, fresh air to keep the fire going, and the ceiling opening allowed smoke to escape upward. Though none was found here, there was a deflector, consisting of a low stone-and-mud wall, or sometimes a slab of stone on edge, which rose between the fireplace and the near end of the ventilator shaft. The deflector broke the force of the current of air so it wouldn't make the fire burn too fiercely or scatter the smoke.

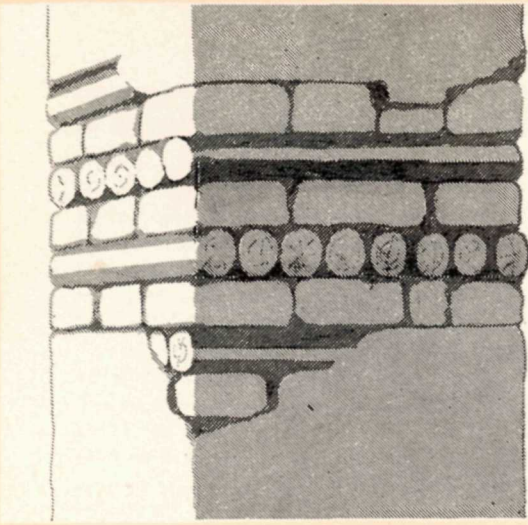
**Station 19.** The use of this isolated room is unknown. Excavations revealed evidence of burned material from the ceiling which had been supported by one central stringer. *Please enter the doorway into the Great Kiva.*

**Station 20.** This is a Great Kiva, a type which was most common in Chaco Canyon. After excavation, this Great Kiva was accurately reconstructed in 1934, under the direction of Mr. Morris, on the original outlines and foundations.

We are standing in what is called an alcove room. The raised block near the center must have been some kind of altar. It was found built to the size that we see it now, and on top were remnants of a white circle, perhaps a sun symbol. Three burned timbers were found at the back, but no signs of ceremonial sacrifice. The timbers may have risen to a greater height, with a facing attached to form a backdrop for the altar.

Kivas of this type differed in several respects from the smaller ones. The roof was supported by internal columns as seen here, and was nearly flat. No doubt there was a hole in the roof to serve as a smoke vent, but not an entrance. The Indians had a doorway where we entered, and there were 14 other ways to reach the inside. Fourteen small rooms encircle the large one. They are all about like the room which opens off the altar room. Each has an outside door and an inner door with a built-in ladder leading down to the floor of the main room. It is doubtful that the rooms were dwellings, but perhaps representatives from lesser kivas used them as robing rooms and for the storage of paraphernalia worn in the ceremonies. To examine further details, let's go down into the kiva chamber.

—WATCH YOUR STEP—



*Were pole layers  
to prevent col-  
umns from split-  
ing or shearing?*

**Station 21.** Here, by the central firepit, you can look all about the kiva. The great stone disks were found below the floor level as bases for vertical timbers which originally supported the roof. In prehistoric times the roof was rebuilt and the posts replaced by square columns such as we see now.

It is interesting to note that the columns were built in such a manner that they couldn't split or spread. (*See drawing above.*)

Did someone have a question about the small box-like holes in the columns? Those holes were put there when the reconstruction was done in 1934, for at that time it was thought this building might some day serve as the museum. Electrical outlets were installed.

The purpose of the large vaults or pits on either side of the firepit is not definitely known. There is evidence that they were covered with wooden slabs (something like planks) on which, in some of the ceremonies, the Indians would dance, using them as foot drums.

#### *Development of Great Kivas.*

Great Kivas, as distinguished from ordinary kivas, occur over a large area of the Southwest, but were most highly developed by the Pueblo Indians who lived in the Chaco Canyon region.

Usually a Great Kiva is larger than the others and has a side entrance (the ceiling opening in the original kiva here may have been bigger, and was not an entrance). It has four roof supports, usually resting on great stone disks at the base. Great Kivas range in diameter from 40 to 70 feet, or more. This one has an inside diameter of 48 feet.

We consider Great Kivas to be a specialized type developed right along with the lesser kivas, and not as an outgrowth of the latter. Generally the lesser kivas are thought of as a development out of the earlier, primitive circular pit houses, in which disease-curing rituals and rain ceremonies were held. It may well be that the Great Kivas also come from the time of the pit house, but were specialized ceremonial chambers.

### *Functions of Great Kivas*

In function, the men of the various social and fraternal groups in the pueblo would have their individual lesser kivas to serve as lodge halls, club rooms, places to worship, cure sickness and dance for rain. They also would work here at weaving and other arts and crafts. Women are believed to have entered the kivas on special occasions.

By contrast, the Great Kiva would be the large ceremonial house, or temple, for use of the entire pueblo, and probably associated with the major men's societies. Although it would have been impossible for all the people of the pueblo to go inside the Great Kiva at one time, secret portions of the ceremonies would have been performed inside, with public parts ending in the open plaza where the entire populace could watch or take part in the rituals.

Although kivas are still used by Pueblos of today, the use of Great Kivas like this one apparently died out in the early 18th century.

*Please leave the Kiva through the south entrance, and up the stairs.*

**Station 22.** Here, a few feet south of the Great Kiva, you can see the partially restored line of rooms which formed the south side of the pueblo.

Notice the use of cobblestones from the river less than a half mile away. Inferior building stones because of their shape, many of these had fallen and have been re-set in new mortar.

*The great Kiva after excavation and before it was restored.*



**Station 23.** If you refer to your map of the pueblo (beginning of this booklet) you can see where you are crossing over ruined walls as you leave the pueblo.

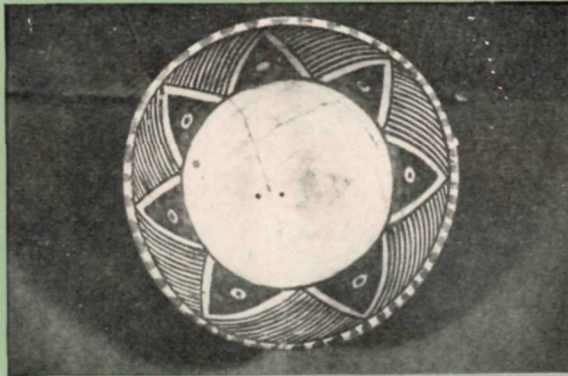
**Station 24.** Here, again, with reference to your map, you can see the original entrance to the pueblo. It probably went in through this opening, then to the right into the long corridor and then up on the first-story roof and down into the plaza, by use of ladders.

You have now finished your visit to the old pueblo. From here, we suggest you take a drink at our water fountain (turned off in winter) to the south of the trail, from where you can enter either the museum or the parking area.

*The National Park Service invites you to come again!*

PLEASE RETURN THIS BOOKLET BEFORE  
YOU GO, OR YOU CAN PURCHASE IT BY  
DROPPING 10 CENTS IN THE  
COIN-SLOTTED BOX.

*Bowl of Mesa Verde  
type.*



*Mesa Verde-style  
mugs.*

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