

# **C**asa Grande

**NATIONAL MONUMENT**

**A R I Z O N A**

# CASA GRANDE

## NATIONAL MONUMENT



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Douglas McKay, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

*The Casa Grande, ancient watchtower-apartment house, dominates the ruins of walled villages whose Indian inhabitants 600 years ago irrigated and farmed Arizona's desert valleys.*

The Casa Grande, from which this national monument takes its name, is an adobe tower, four stories high, built by Indian farmers of the Gila Valley 600 years ago. It is the only surviving example of such a structure. Within the boundaries of the monument are village sites established many centuries before by earlier comers who carried on irrigated farming in what was then, as it is now, a very arid region.

### THE PREHISTORIC INDIANS OF THE GILA VALLEY

During the past 60 years, by excavation and study of the ruins of southern Arizona, archeologists have pieced together an amazing story of the early human occupation of this region. Each year's work adds a little knowledge of the Indians who lived along the Gila River and its

*The National Park System, of which Casa Grande National Monument is a unit, is dedicated to the conservation of America's scenic, scientific, and historic heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.*



tributaries before the days of Spanish exploration.

Archeologists believe that Indians began farming the Gila Valley not long after the beginning of the Christian era. Small-scale irrigation must have been practiced in those early days, for there is nothing to indicate that Arizona's climate has changed materially during the past 2,000 years. The knowledge of farming methods probably came from Indians who lived farther south, in Mexico.

Today, we call these Indians the Hohokam. This is a term used by the modern Pima Indians and means The Ancient Ones. The culture of the Hohokam was distinguished by several features, of which the most important are:

1. They lived in single-roomed houses of wattle-and-daub construction. The houses were similar in appearance to modern Pima and Papago homes, with floors

excavated a little below ground level.

2. Crops were maize (corn), beans, pumpkins, and cotton.

3. The dead were cremated.

4. The Hohokam were proficient in carving shell and stone.

5. The common decorated pottery was of a buff color with designs applied with red paint.

About A. D. 700, the Hohokam started digging large irrigation canals; some became 25 feet wide and 15 feet deep. The canals were lengthened gradually through the years until some reached total lengths of 20 to 25 miles. These canals represent the greatest achievements, in an economic sense, of the Hohokam.

During the thirteenth century apparently an enemy of the Hohokam appeared. At that time, at any rate, the Hohokam began to build high adobe walls around their villages, creating defensive sites which we call compounds. They were still living in compounds at the beginning of the fourteenth century when an alien group of Indians came out of the mountains to the north and moved in with the desert dwellers. These were Pueblo Indians, similar to the modern Zuni who

*Museum and Administration Building*

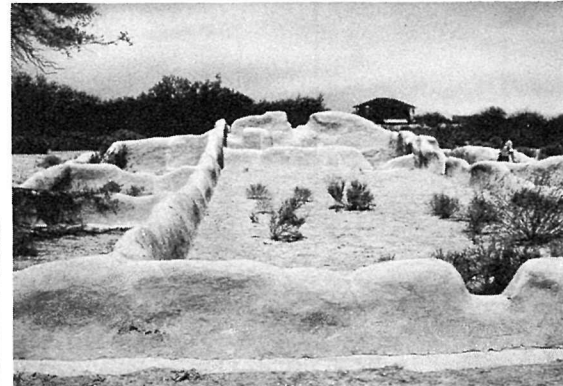


live south of Gallup, N. Mex. They were farmers, like the Hohokam, but Pueblo farming was usually dry farming; irrigation, when used, was on a small scale.

Also, the Pueblos lived in masonry houses of many rooms which sometimes were built three and four stories high. These large villages were usually constructed on a hill, ridge, or in a cave for protection. The dead were interred without cremation, and the pottery was decorated with elaborate designs in red, black, and white.

A great drought of 23 years' duration (1276-99) caused widespread population changes throughout northern Arizona and New Mexico, and it was probably this upheaval that caused some of the Pueblos to travel south into the desert. Apparently, they moved into Hohokam villages, and the evidence is that this joint occupation of Hohokam towns was a peaceful one insofar as the principals were concerned. The continued presence of an enemy group, or groups, who raided the farming villages, is indicated by the defensive walls around the settlements and by the construction of lookouts or watch-towers.

*Ruins of Clan House 1.*



### THE CASA GRANDE

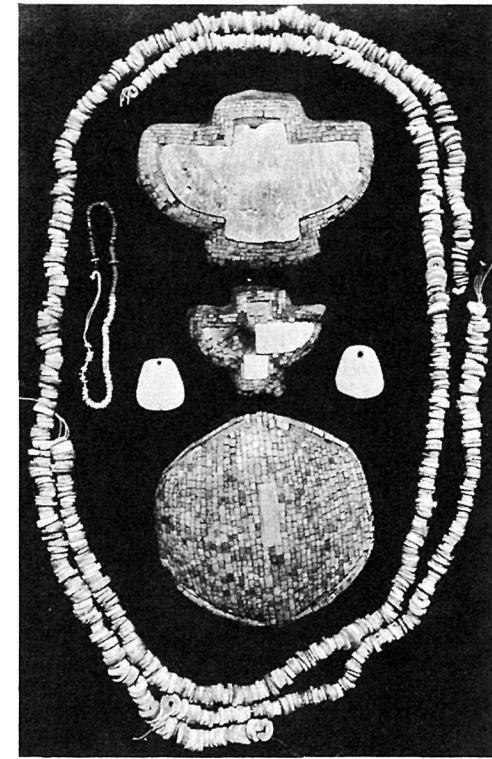
The Casa Grande was a Pueblo building. Its thick walls of unreinforced adobe were constructed by a people accustomed to building structures of more than one story, which the Hohokam were not. It stands four stories high, dominating the village in which it was built and, from its upper levels, commanding a wide view over the desert.

The use for which the Casa Grande was built is obvious from certain details of its construction. The builders started with a group of three narrow rooms built side by side, with a long room across each end. Thirty-inch trenches were dug in the ground for the foundations.

The material was an adobe of high lime content which is found several feet beneath the surface of the desert; the name for this is "caliche." The prehistoric method of building was to pile up the adobe on the walls in courses averaging 25 inches high. Bricks were not made; vertical cracks in the ruin are due to shrinkage. As soon as one course was built around the building another was added.

When the walls of the Casa Grande had reached a height of 7 feet above ground level (the height of one story), the builders filled the rooms with earth; they had no intention of living in or using those rooms. The building was then carried up two additional stories. Only the central room was built on up through the fourth story.

The Pueblo Indians, accustomed to building with masonry, were apparently afraid of adobe as a building material and yet wanted to construct a high tower. By filling in the first story of the building and carrying only the central room to four-



*Jewelry found at Casa Grande. The mosaic pieces are built of wood, shell, and turquoise.*

story height they put an effective brace on the important inner walls. In other words, they built an artificial 7-foot hill, then constructed a three-story house on it.

In addition to its use as a tower, the Casa Grande served as an apartment house. Its 11 large rooms probably accommodated as many families. Early excavations of the Casa Grande ruin recovered ordinary cooking and storage vessels, sleeping mats, corn cobs, and fragments of textiles—the ordinary remains to be found in prehistoric rooms.

The Casa Grande was in use for only a short time. It was probably built about 1350. By 1450 both Hohokam and Pueblo Indians had abandoned the Gila Valley. Just why these groups of Indians left their

villages for other regions is not known, but there is evidence which indicates that the land became so waterlogged, because of centuries of irrigation, that it would no longer produce crops.

Some of the Pueblos involved probably moved northeast to the modern Zuni country, south of Gallup, N. Mex.; others, southeast into Chihuahua, Mexico. The travels of the Hohokam have not been traced so well, but it seems likely they moved south into the Papago country.

### MODERN HISTORY

The earliest written account of the Casa Grande was by the Jesuit missionary, Father Kino, who visited the site in 1694 and gave it the name by which it is still known—Casa Grande (Big House). The building was already in ruins at the time of Father Kino's visit.

In 1891, Cosmos Mindeleff excavated the Casa Grande for the Smithsonian Institution. Other excavations have been carried on at the Casa Grande group of ruins by the Smithsonian Institution (1906-8), the Southwest Museum (1929), and the Los Angeles County Museum (1930). Six prehistoric villages within the boundaries of the monument have been partially excavated; at least two other villages remain untouched.

In 1889, Congress authorized the President to reserve lands embracing the Casa Grande ruin. These lands were actually reserved through Executive order in 1892, and in 1918 the area was designated a national monument. It contains 472.50 acres.

### HOW TO REACH THE MONUMENT

Casa Grande National Monument is located on Arizona State Highway 87, 2 miles north of Coolidge. It is almost halfway between Phoenix and Tucson: 56 miles from Phoenix; 69 from Tucson. Coolidge is on a main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad and has good bus connections with Tucson and Phoenix.

### FACILITIES FOR VISITORS

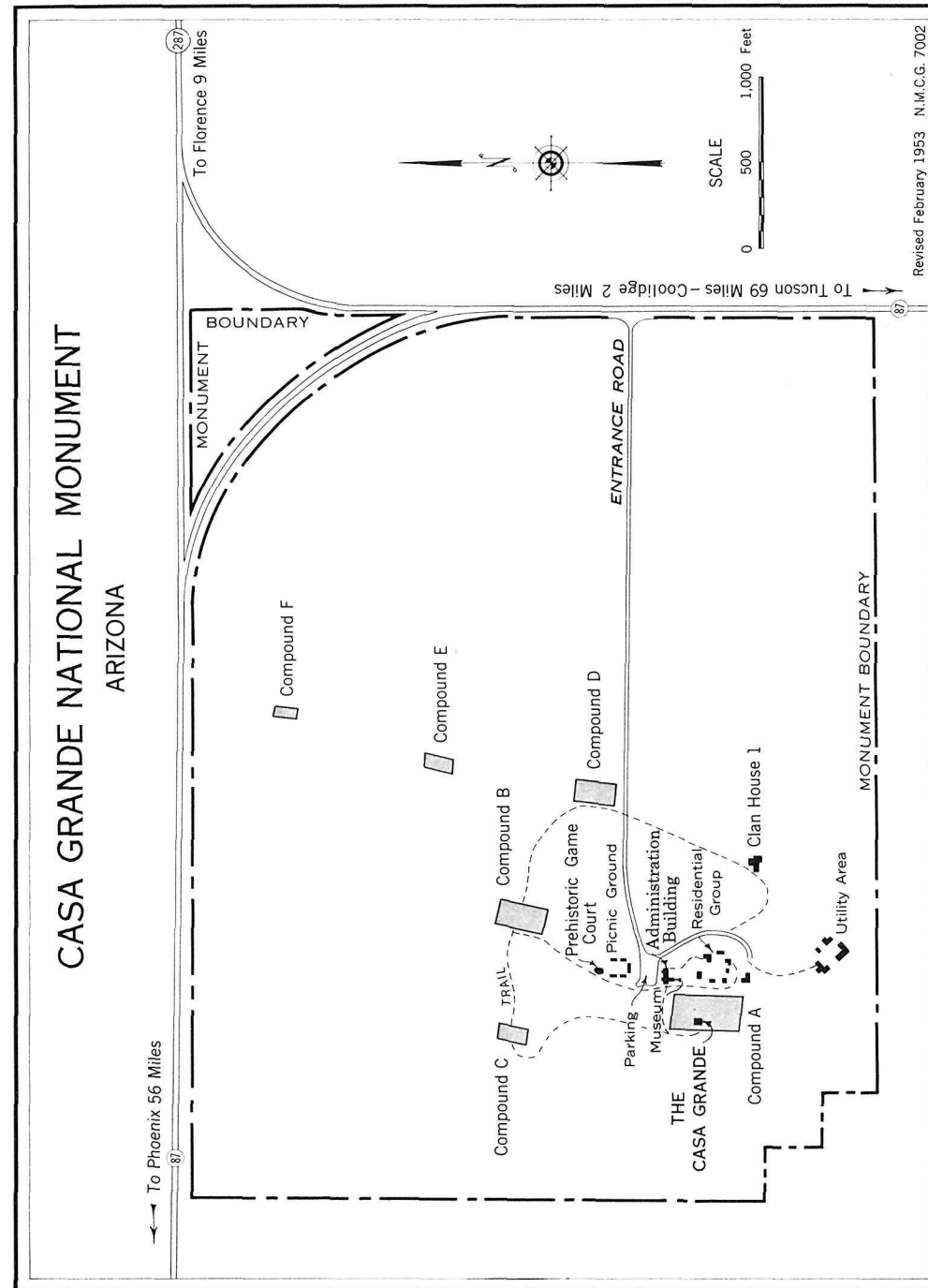
A museum exhibit is maintained in the headquarters area, in which prehistoric artifacts from the Casa Grande group and other ruins of the vicinity are displayed. There is a picnic ground with tables, shade, and water.

Guide service to the ruins is maintained daily from 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. The guide fee is 30 cents, including tax, for each adult. For persons who desire to visit Casa Grande often there is a yearly ticket, nontransferable, for 60 cents, including tax. Indians are exempt from payment of the guide fee, and children under 12 years of age, accompanied by adults who will assume responsibility for their conduct, are also admitted free. There is no charge in the museum or for the use of the picnic area.

### ADMINISTRATION

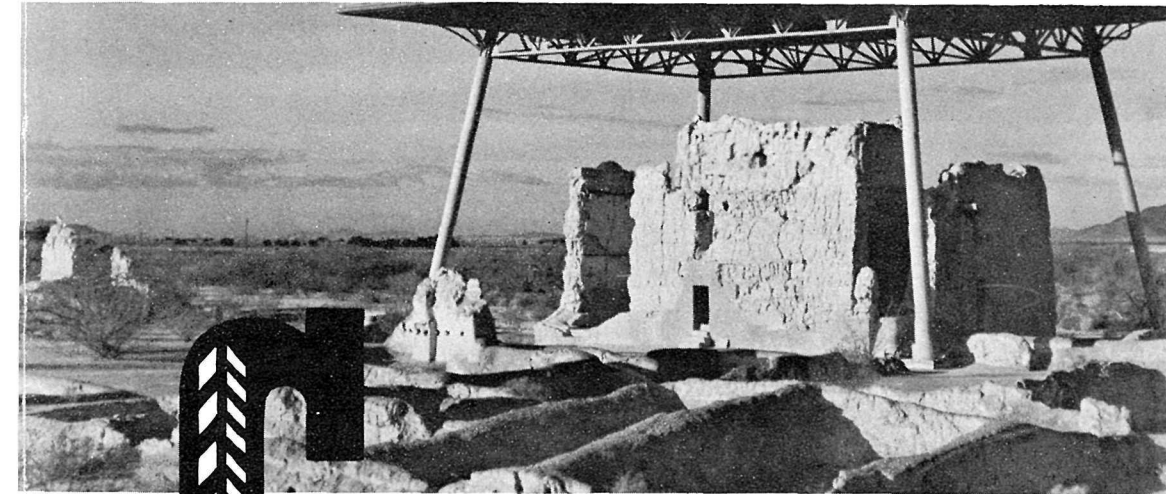
Casa Grande National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

Requests for information regarding the monument should be addressed to the Superintendent, Casa Grande National Monument, Coolidge, Ariz.



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