

# Casa Grande

NATIONAL MONUMENT



ARIZONA

# Casa Grande

## NATIONAL MONUMENT

*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 a 4-story tower of packed earth, built 600 years ago by Indian farmers of the Gila Valley. 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, and is, 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 tributaries before the days of Spanish exploration.

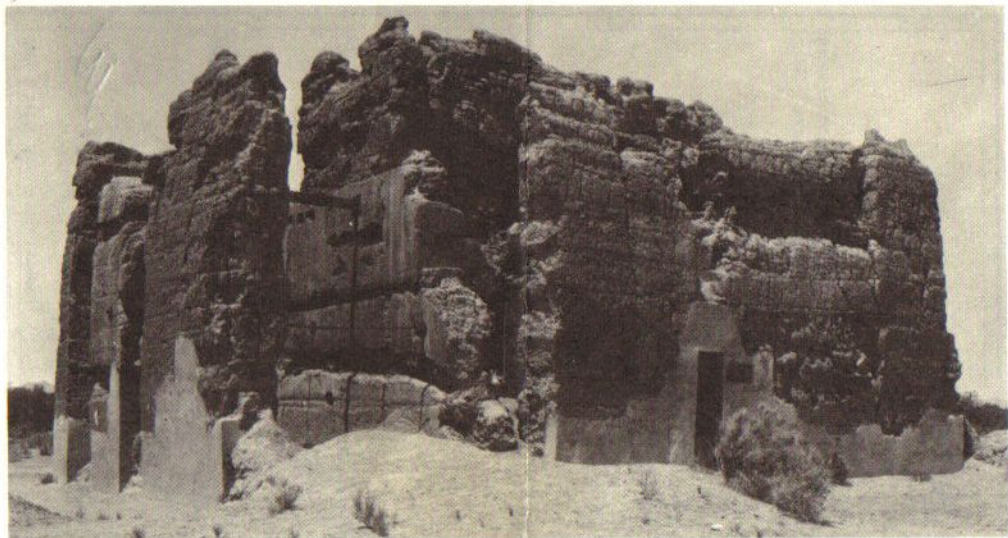
Archeologists believe that Indians began farming the Gila Valley not long after the beginning of the Christian era. Small-scale

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 brush and mud 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.

*The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.*



*The Casa Grande in 1902.*

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 about 15 miles. These canals represent the greatest achievements, in an economic sense, of the Hohokam.

In the northern part of the Southwest were different groups of Indians. These were the Pueblo people, who lived in villages scattered through the mountain valleys where they grew corn, beans, and pumpkins on small garden plots. Their villages consisted of stone houses of several rooms, sometimes built 3 or 4 stories high. In contrast to the Hohokam, they made pottery which was decorated with designs in red, black, or white, and buried their dead without cremation.

At about A. D. 1150, various groups of these Pueblo people were on the move, shifting from old homes to new locations. During this general shifting of populations, some of the families left the mountains and moved far south into the southern Arizona desert.

The newcomers arrived in small numbers at first, but the drift of Pueblo people into

the desert continued for many generations. By A. D. 1300, the culture of the original desert Indians, the Hohokam, was dominated by that of the Puebloans, though the two groups lived peacefully side by side and gradually merged into one. These late Gila Valley villages were quite different from those of earlier periods, mainly because the pueblo style of architecture—many-roomed structures—was adopted by most of the inhabitants. Also, during this late period, thick mud walls were built around villages as protection against raids by enemy groups; an occasional high building was erected to serve as a lookout or watchtower.

### *The Casa Grande*

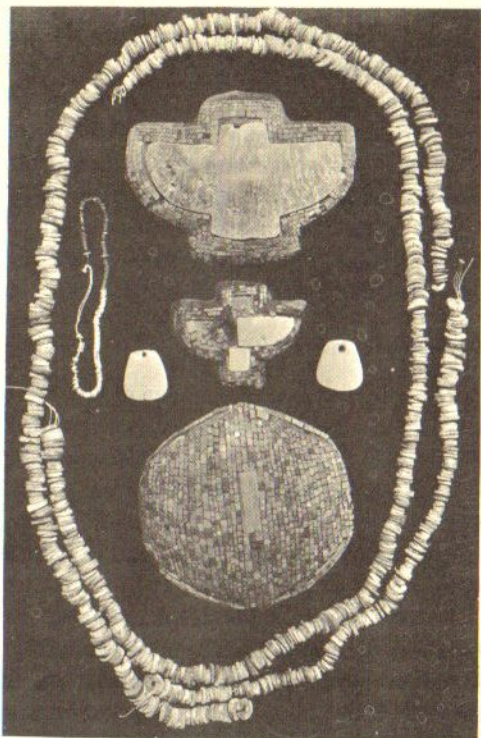
The Casa Grande was a Pueblo building. Its thick walls of unreinforced clay were constructed by a people accustomed to building structures of more than 1 story. This was not a Hohokam trait. It stands 4 stories high, dominating the village in which it was built and, from its upper levels, commanding 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 a clay 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 clay on the walls in courses averaging 25 inches high. Bricks were not made—the vertical cracks in the ruin are due to shrinkage. As soon as one course was built around the building and had dried, another was added.

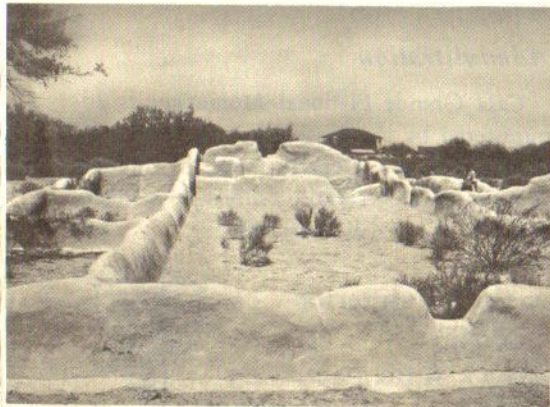
When the walls of the Casa Grande had reached a height of 7 feet above ground level (the height of 1 story), the builders filled the rooms with earth; they had no intention of living in or using those rooms. The building was then carried up 2 additional stories. Only the central room was built on up through the 4th story.

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



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

*Ruins of Clan House 1.*



the central room to 4-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 3-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, corncobs, and fragments of textiles—the ordinary remains to be found in prehistoric rooms.

The Casa Grande, probably built after A. D. 1300, was in use for a few generations only. By 1450, the large villages were no longer occupied. There is evidence that farmland surrounding the centers of population became waterlogged, because of cen-

turies of irrigation; this may have been a factor that led to abandonment.

As the people drifted away in search of new farmland, some may have moved southward into Mexico, others north to the Pueblo country, while a few remained in the Gila Valley. These latter, with probable additions from surrounding desert tribes, formed the ancestors of the present Pima Indians.

### *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 (1928), 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*

The monument is 2 miles north of Coolidge on State Route 87. 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.

### *About Your Visit*

In the museum near headquarters, you will see prehistoric objects which were used by people of the Casa Grande group and other communities in the vicinity.

Guide service to the ruins is maintained daily from 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. The guide fee is 25 cents for each adult. Indians are exempt from payment of the fee. There is no charge also for children under 12 years of age if accompanied by adults assuming responsibility for their safety and orderly conduct.

There is a picnic area with tables, shade, and water, but there are no facilities for camping. Overnight accommodations are available in Coolidge.

### *Mission 66*

Mission 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

### *Administration*

Casa Grande National Monument is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Coolidge, Ariz., is in immediate charge.



United States Department of the Interior  
FRED A. SEATON, *Secretary*  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, CONRAD L. WIRTH, *Director*

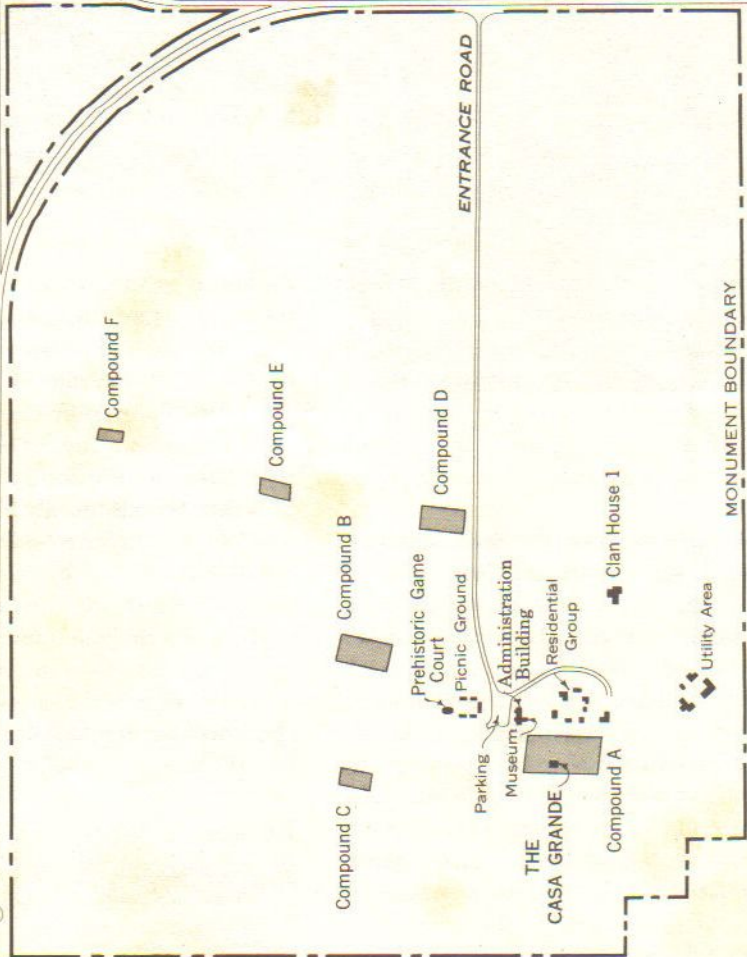


# CASA GRANDE NATIONAL MONUMENT ARIZONA

To Phoenix 56 Miles

To Florence 9 Miles

To Tucson 69 Miles - Coolidge 2 Miles



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