

ADMINISTRATION

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The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the natural, recreational, and historical heritage of the United States for the benefit, enjoyment, and inspiration of the people of this and future generations.

A superintendent, whose address is Coolidge, Ariz. 85228, is in immediate charge of the monument.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

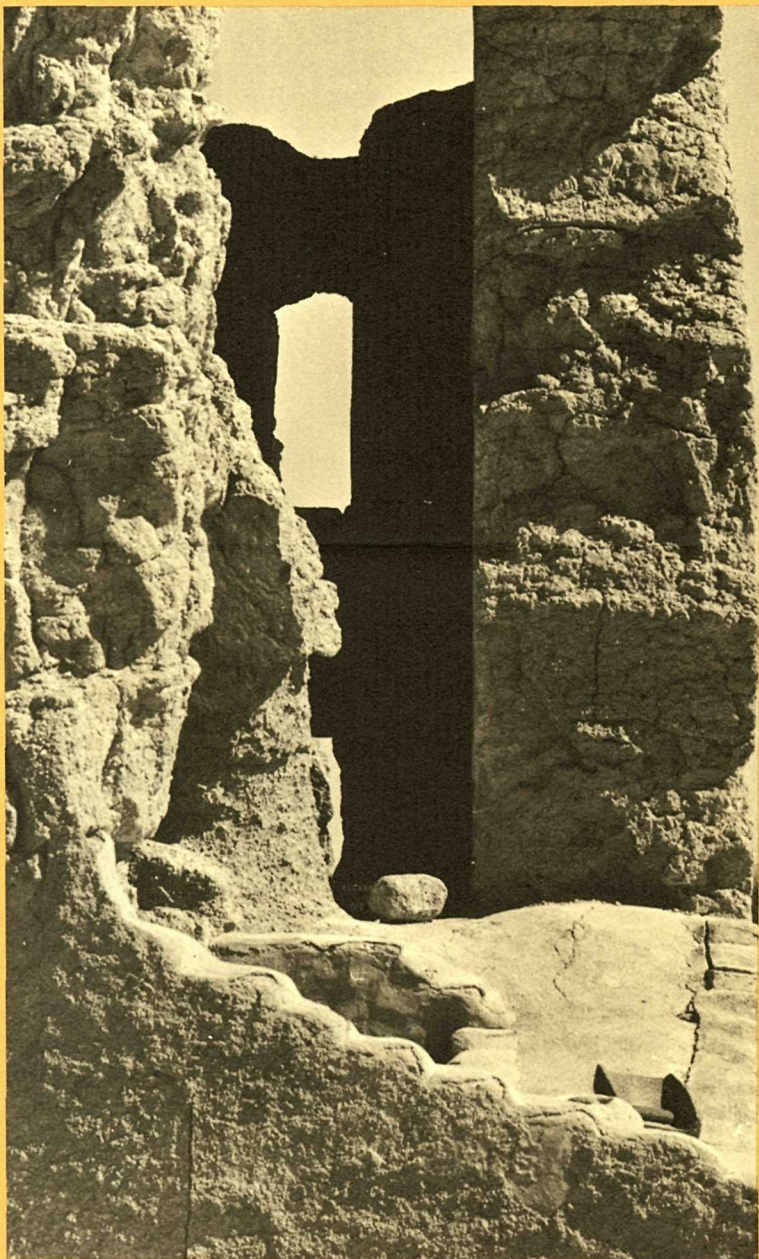
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U.S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



CASA GRANDE RUINS



The Casa Grande, a unique four-story structure of coursed caliche-earth construction, was built approximately 600 years ago by Indian farmers of the Gila Valley. Within the monument are many more ruined villages of these prehistoric Indians.

THE PREHISTORIC INDIANS OF THE GILA VALLEY

Indians began farming the Gila Valley more than 2,000 years ago. Their knowledge of farming techniques came from Indians who lived farther to the south, in Mexico. Today, we call the prehistoric Indian farmers of the Gila Valley the Hohokam. This is a modern Pima Indian term that means "those who have gone" or "the ancient ones."

The culture of the Hohokam is distinguished by several characteristics. The most important of these is that they lived in small scattered villages of separated single-room houses constructed of mud and brush. They cremated their dead; they were proficient in carving shell and stone; and their distinctive pottery was buff-colored with designs applied in red paint. Probably their greatest achievement was the development of an irrigation system in the Gila Valley, with more than 200 miles of canals ranging from 2 to 4 feet wide and averaging about 2 feet deep. Crops included cotton, corn, beans, and squash.

They were also influenced in other ways than agriculture by the higher cultures in Mexico, as is apparent in the occurrence of ball courts, platform mounds on which small mud-and-wood temples were built, pottery vessel forms and designs, copper bells, and items of decoration. The ball courts, found as far north as Wupatki National Monument near Flagstaff, may bring visions of excited throngs cheering for their home teams. It is not known how the game was played.

About A.D. 1150 in the northern part of the Southwest, a different group of Indian farmers, the Pueblo people, were on the move, shifting from their old homes to new locations. During this shifting, their distinctive three-colored red, black, and white pottery, their custom of extended burial, and other ideas spread to the Hohokam. At the village containing the Casa Grande, extended burials were introduced about 1150; polychrome pottery, at about 1250 or 1300.

THE CASA GRANDE

The Casa Grande is not a typical Hohokam building; instead it appears to be similar to structures found in Mexico. Its thick walls are built of unreinforced coursed caliche-earth, a desert soil with a high lime content. The four-story building must have dominated the village in which it was built. Its upper levels command a wide view of the surrounding desert.

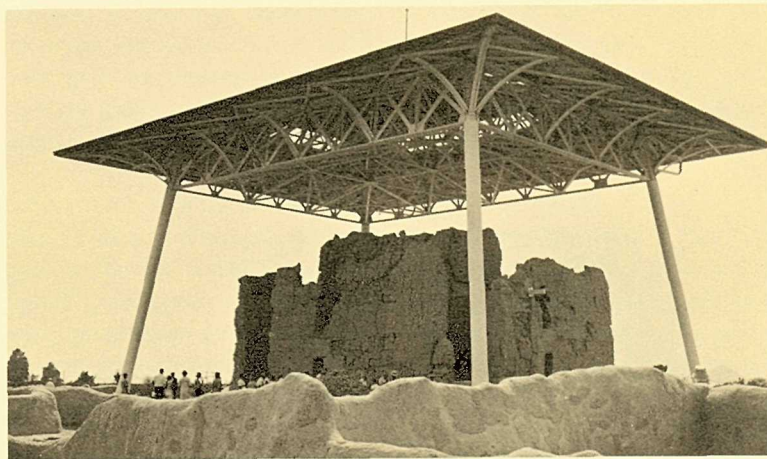
Obviously, the structure was built to last. The floor plan: three narrow rooms, side by side, with a long room across each end. The foundation of the building was started in trenches about 4 feet deep. In keeping with the method of the time, the caliche was formed by hand in courses some 25 inches high. Bricks were not made; this illusion, given by the vertical cracks in the ruin, is due to shrinkage. As soon as one course was built and dried, another was added to it until the desired height for the wall was attained. When the walls of the Casa Grande reached the height of about 5 feet above ground level, walled areas were filled with earth. There is no evidence that these were ever used as rooms. The building was then carried up two additional stories. Only the central room was completed to the fourth-story level. A parapet was constructed around the roof.

How was the Casa Grande used? Apartment house? Storage area? Fortress? Ceremonial building? It might well have served all these purposes. Suggesting its use as an apartment house, early excavations of the ruin recovered cooking and storage vessels, sleeping mats, corncocks, and fragments of textiles—the remains to be expected in prehistoric living quarters.

The Casa Grande, probably built about 1350, was in use for only a few generations. By 1450, this particular type village in the Gila Valley was abandoned, perhaps because lateral erosion by the river cut out canal heads in the 1300's and 1400's and caused the people to farm the lower terrace areas. This might have led to the relocation of villages closer to the river. Pressure from enemies might have been still another factor leading to the abandonment of this area, although there is little evidence of warfare. It appears that the people abandoned their old villages and sought new areas to farm and inhabit, because large villages survived into historic times in the Gila Valley. Their culture indicates that they probably were the ancestors of the present Pima Indians.

THE RUINS IN HISTORIC TIMES

The first European expedition to explore parts of the Southwest was that led by Coronado, who followed the river valleys northward from Mexico to the east of the ruins in 1540. Discovery of the Casa Grande was left to a time 150 years later when, in 1694, Father Kino, a Jesuit priest, became the first European to see the ruins and record his visit. Father Kino gave the building the Spanish name by which it is known today—Casa Grande (Big House). Father Kino reported in his journals that the building was in ruin. Following Father Kino's discovery, the site was visited and used as a landmark throughout the Spanish, Mexican, and American periods in Southwestern history.



Excavation of the ruins began in 1891 when Cosmos Mindeleff, for the Smithsonian Institution, cleared out the fill and stabilized the Casa Grande. Other excavations have been conducted in the Casa Grande group of ruins by the Smithsonian Institution (1906-8), the Southwest Museum (1928), the Los Angeles County Museum (1930), and the National Park Service at various times. Six prehistoric villages within the monument boundaries have been partially excavated; several others remain untouched.

In 1889, Congress authorized the President to reserve lands embracing the Casa Grande Ruin; this was accomplished by Executive order of President Harrison in 1892. In 1918, the area was placed under the administration of the National Park Service and designated a National Monument.

YOUR VISIT TO THE MONUMENT

The monument is about 1 mile north of Coolidge on Ariz. 87, almost halfway between Phoenix and Tucson. Coolidge is on the main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad and has bus connections with Tucson and Phoenix, where airline transportation is available.

The monument is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The most comfortable weather for visiting it occurs between late October and early June.

Your first stop at Casa Grande Ruins will be at the visitor center, where you will be able to see a representative collection of artifacts that were made and used by the Hohokam. And here you will find National Park Service personnel who can answer your questions and interpret the ruins.

You can take a conducted tour of the ruins and also follow the self-guiding trail, using a leaflet which describes points of interest.

There is a lunch area with tables, water, and shade, but overnight use and camping are not permitted. Food and lodging are available in Coolidge and other nearby towns.

