

## YOUR VISIT TO THE MONUMENT

The monument is about 1 mile north of Coolidge on Ariz. 87, almost halfway between Tucson and Phoenix. Coolidge has bus connections with Tucson and Phoenix, where scheduled airline service is available.

The monument is open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. The most comfortable time for visiting is between early October and late May.

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.

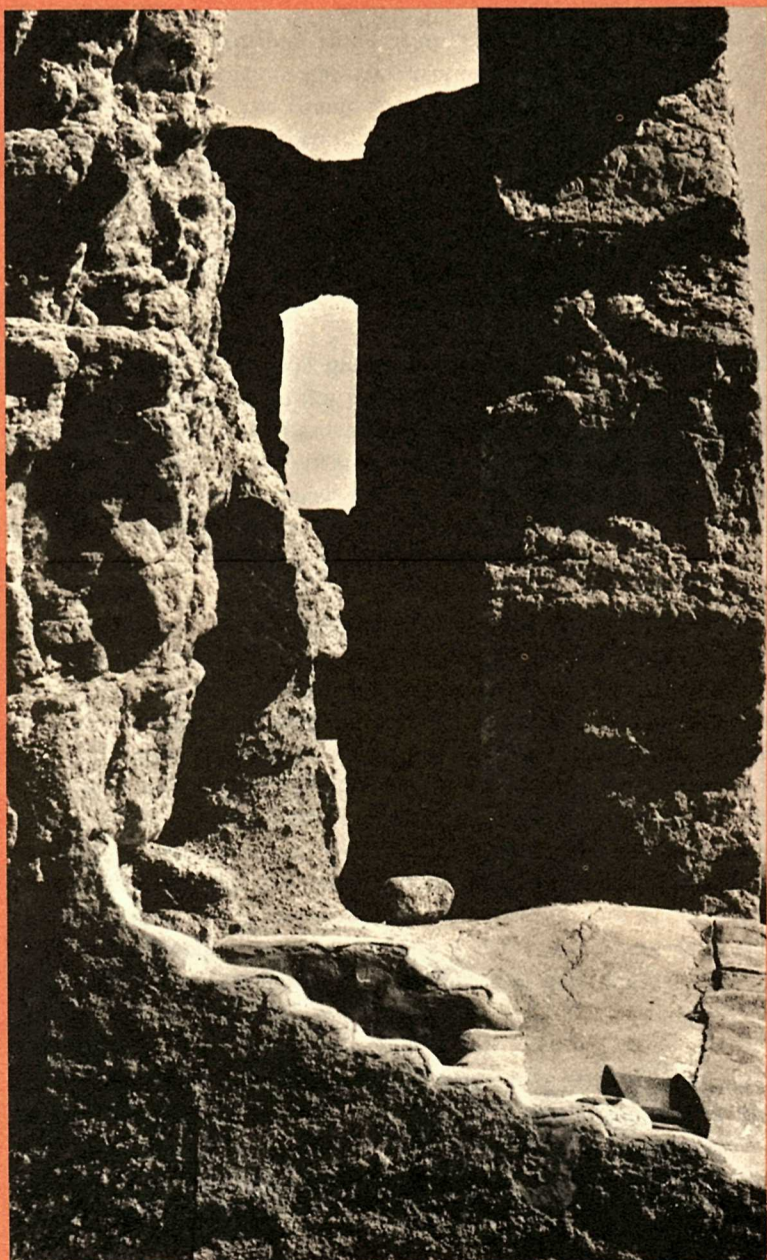
You may follow the self-guiding trail to the ruins, and you may wish to use the trail guide leaflet that describes points of interest.

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.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

GPO 1981 341 609/27  
Revised 1981

# CASA GRANDE RUINS



Casa Grande is the most prominent—and most perplexing—structure of this prehistoric Indian village. Whether it was a ceremonial building, an ancient astronomical observatory or something else, we do not know. This four-story earthen building, constructed approximately 600 years ago by primitive Indian farmers of the Gila Valley, is nearly as much a mystery today as when it was discovered by European explorers in the 17th century.

## 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.

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 Salt and Gila Valleys, with more than 600 miles of canals ranging from 2 to 6 feet wide and about 3 feet deep. Crops included cotton, corn, beans, and squash.

They were also influenced in many ways by the higher cultures in Mexico, as is apparent in the presence of ball courts, platform mounds on which small mud-and-wood structures were built, pottery vessel forms and designs, copper bells, and items of decoration. Ball courts found as far north as Wupatki National Monument near Flagstaff indicate that the game and attendant ceremonies were adopted by other southwestern people. It is not known how the game was played.

Between A.D. 1150 and 1300, new ideas reached the Hohokam from Pueblo farmers to the north and northwest. Whether these people actually moved in and lived among the Hohokam, as some archeologists think, is not known. But some of their traits, such as a distinctive red, black and white pottery, their method of burial (not cremation), and other ideas spread to the Hohokam area.

## 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 dominated the village in which it was built.

Obviously, the structure was built to last. The floor plan consists of 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 about 2 feet 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. The interior of Casa Grande was filled with earth to a height of about 5 feet, so that the floor of the first story was 5 feet above ground level. The building was then carried up two additional stories. Only the central room has three stories. The sides of the building formed a low wall around the edge of the roof.

How was Casa Grande used? For years archeologists have pondered the purpose of Casa Grande, and a number of theories have been proposed. Recent studies suggest that some of the wall openings in the upper stories of Casa Grande may have been used for astronomical observations. While we do not know if the building was erected solely for that purpose, it is likely that Casa Grande was a special building with a special function.

Casa Grande, probably built about 1350, was in use for only a few generations. By 1450 this type of village in the Gila Valley was abandoned for reasons that are not fully understood. Perhaps a change in the weather pattern affected their complex irrigation system. Pressure from enemies probably was not a factor, since there is little evidence of warfare. The people abandoned their old villages, perhaps to seek farmland closer to the river. Cultural similarities indicate that the Pima Indians, presently living nearby, may be the descendants of the Hohokam.

## THE RUINS IN HISTORIC TIMES

The first European expedition to explore parts of the Southwest was led by Coronado, who followed river valleys northward from Mexico to the east of the ruins and beyond in 1540. The Casa Grande was visited in 1694 by Eusebio Kino, a Jesuit priest who was led to the site by Indians and who was the first to record the site's existence. Father Kino gave the building the Spanish name by which it is now known—Casa Grande (Big House)—and recorded in his journal that the building was then in ruins. After his visit, the site became a landmark and was so used during the Spanish, Mexican, and American periods of Southwest history.

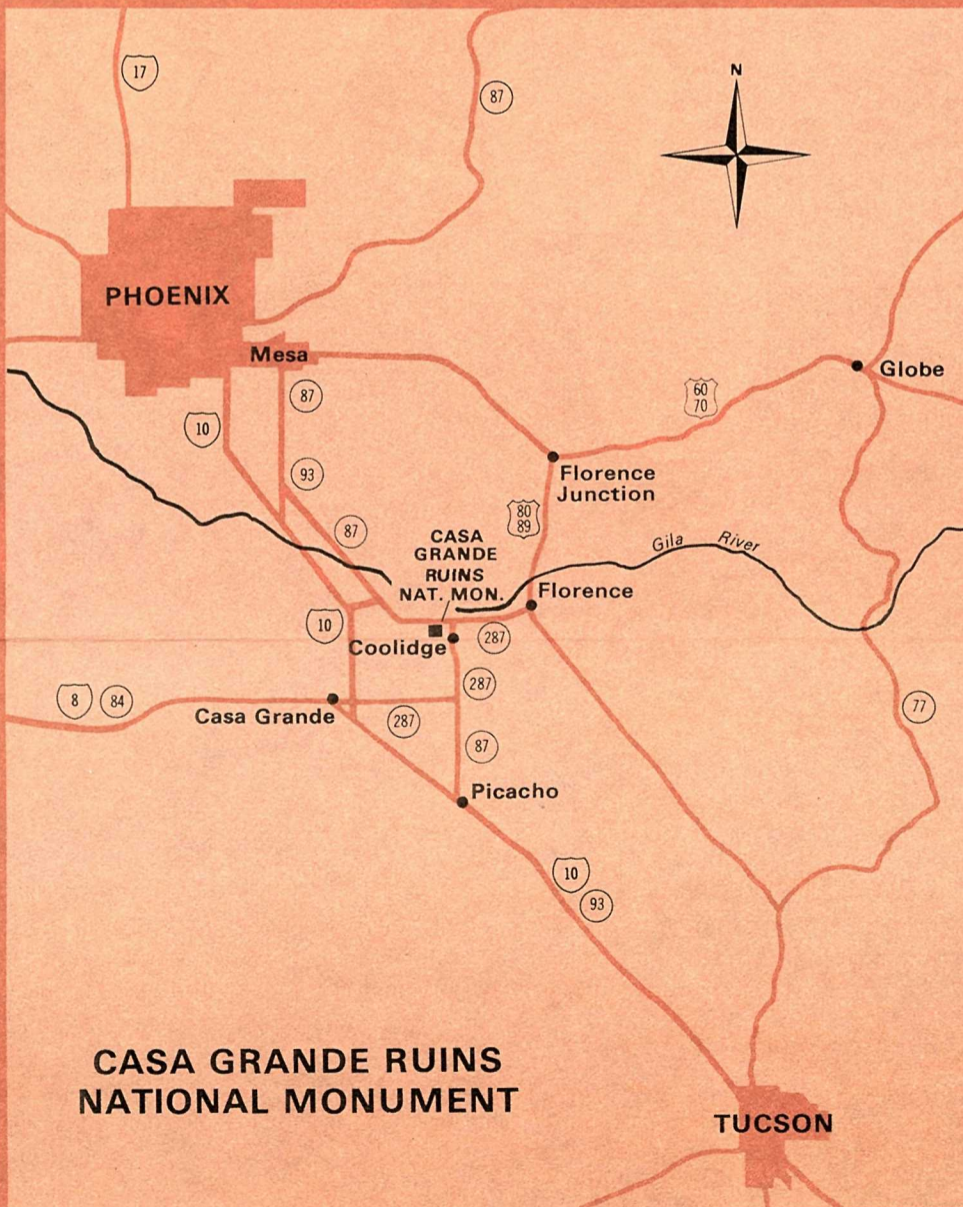
Excavation of the ruins began in 1891 when Cosmos Mindeleff, for the Smithsonian Institution, cleared out the fill and stabilized the Casa Grande. Other excavations have been conducted in the Casa Grande group of ruins by the Smithsonian Institution (1906-8), the Southwest Museum (1928), the Los Angeles 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 in 1892. It was designated a National Monument under the National Park Service in 1918.

## ADMINISTRATION

Casa Grande Ruins National Monument, containing 472 acres is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Coolidge, AZ 85228, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, park and recreation areas, and for the wise use of all those resources. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.



## WARNING

You are in a desert area. Sometimes the desert can be harsh. Cactus spines can hurt. Intense heat can cause varying degrees of discomfort. Poisonous animals, though rare, are here. Know your own limitations and exercise caution.

