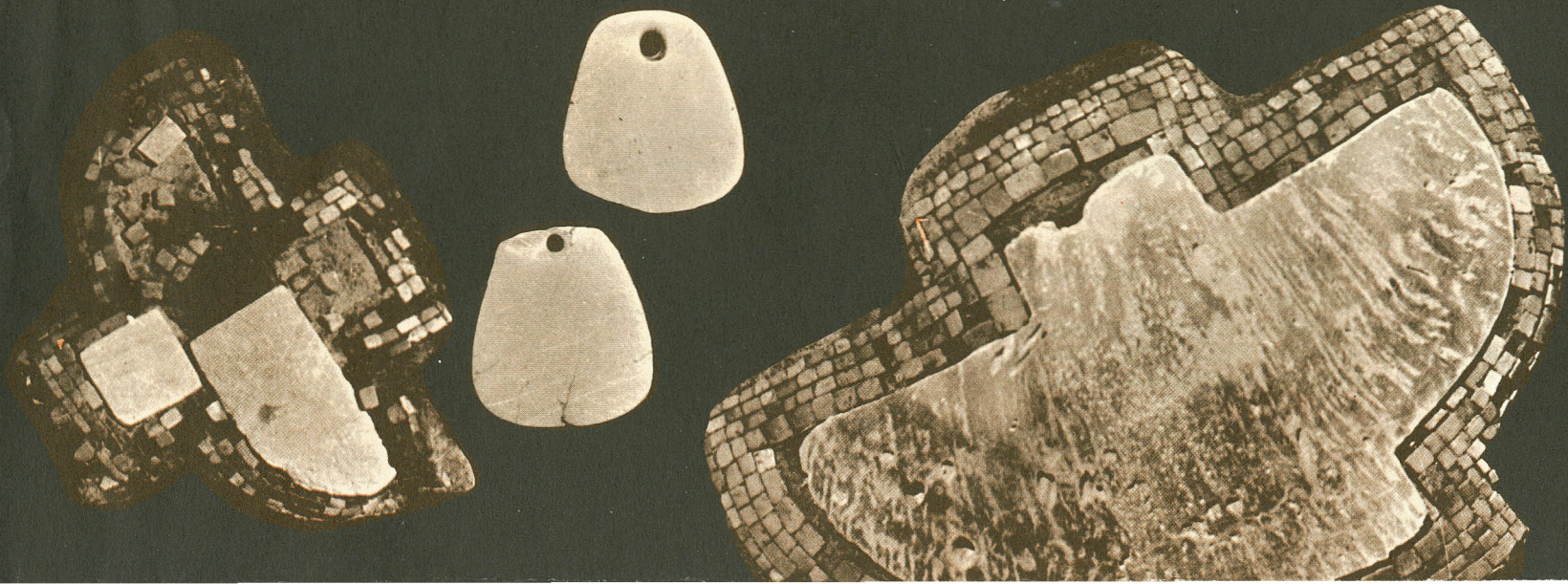
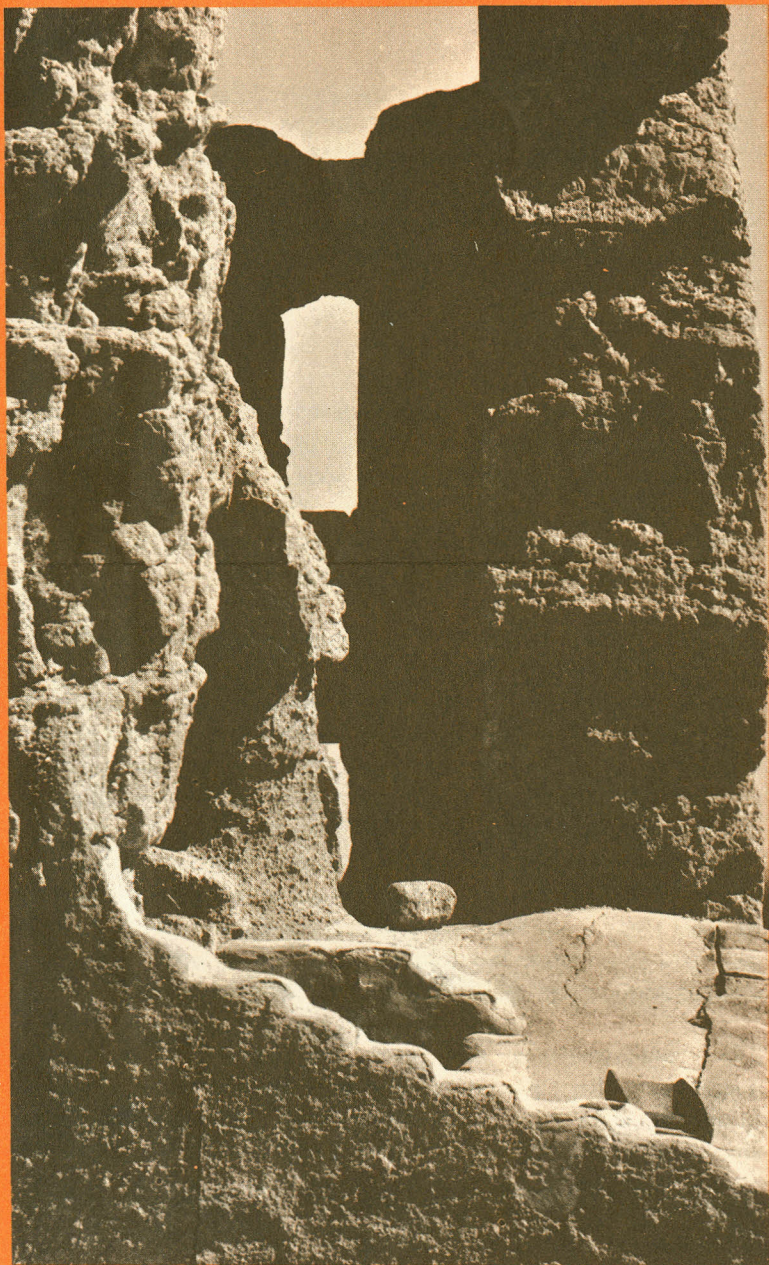


# CASA GRANDE RUINS





The 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 650 years ago by primitive Indian farmers of the Gila Valley, is nearly as much a mystery today as when it was first seen by European explorers in the 17th century. The monument grounds, which contain about 60 prehistoric sites, preserve only a small sample of the remains of a once widespread civilization that flourished throughout much of southern Arizona. It is difficult to imagine what life was like here in prehistoric times because so much around the monument grounds has changed.

#### THE PREHISTORIC INDIANS OF THE GILA VALLEY

Indians began farming the Gila Valley more than 1,500 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. Hohokam people supplemented their diet with local wild foods, among them mesquite beans, cactus fruits, fish, river clams, deer, rabbits, and occasionally small rodents.

They were also influenced by the cultures of 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.

## 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 the 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 the Casa Grande used? For years archeologists have pondered the purpose of the Casa Grande, and a number of theories have been proposed. Recent studies suggest that some of the wall openings in the upper stories of the 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 the Casa Grande was a special building with a special function.

The Casa Grande, probably built about 1350, was in use for only a few generations. By 1450 walled villages in the Gila Valley were 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.

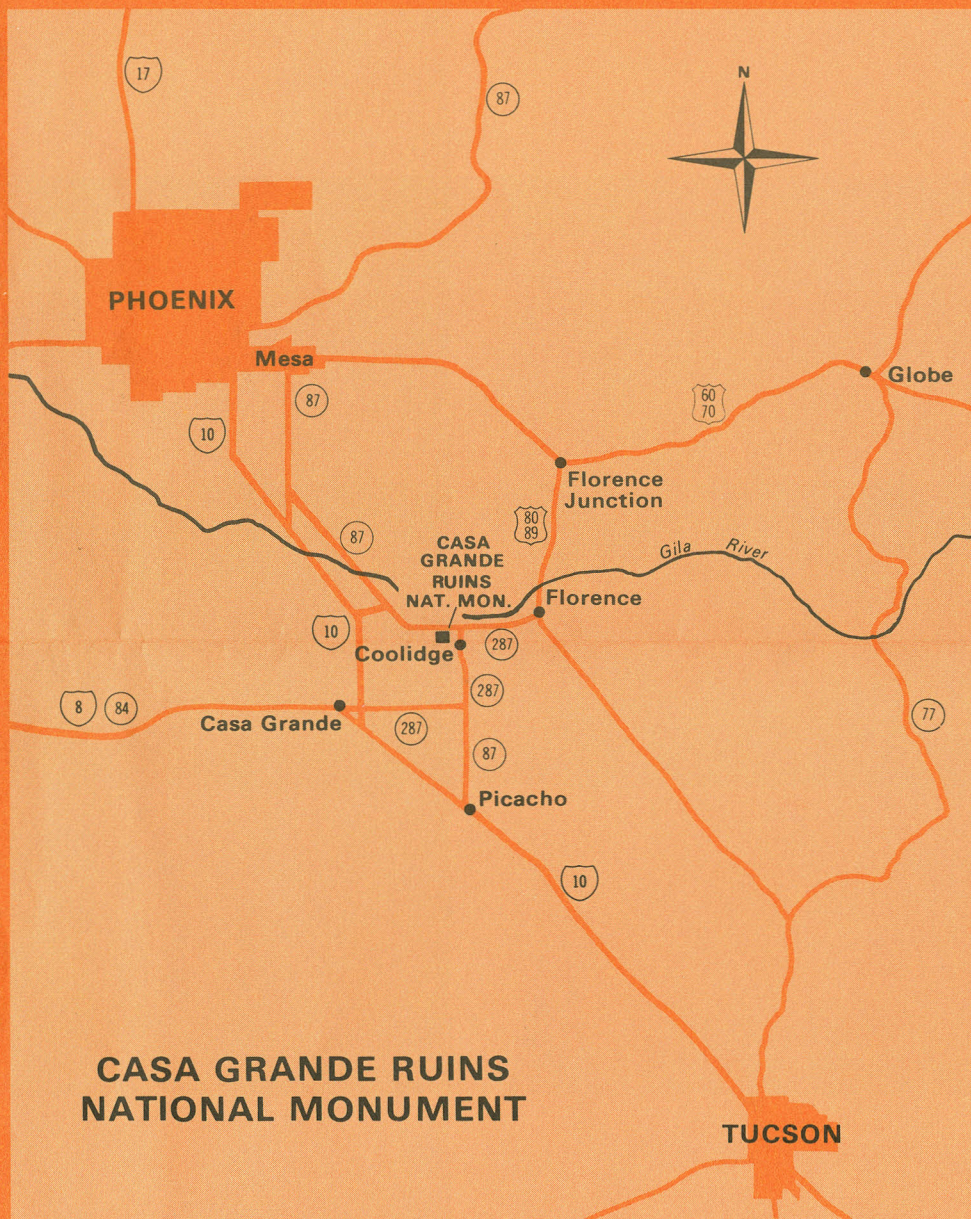
Repair of the ruins began in 1891 when Cosmos Mindeleff, for the Smithsonian Institution, cleared out the fill and stabilized the Casa Grande. Other excavations have been conducted in the Casa Grande group of ruins by the Smithsonian Institution (1906-8), the Southwest Museum (1928), the Los Angeles 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

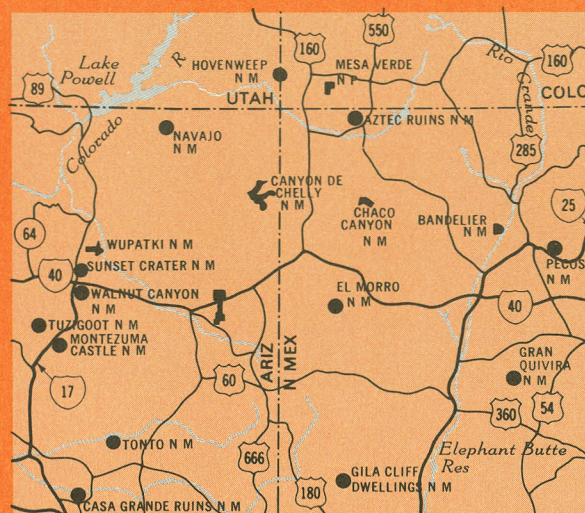
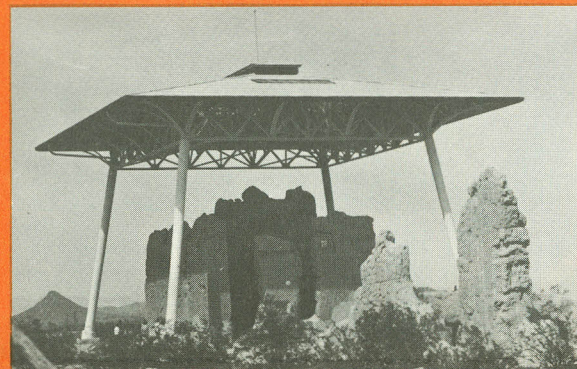
Casa Grande Ruins National Monument, containing 472 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Coolidge, Arizona 85228, is in immediate charge.

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 discomfort or illness. Poisonous animals, though rare, are here. Know your own limitations and exercise caution.



## YOUR VISIT TO THE MONUMENT

The monument is about 1 mile north of Coolidge on Ariz. 87, almost halfway between Phoenix and Tucson. 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 Hohokam artifacts.

Park Service rangers are on hand to answer your questions and interpret the ruins.

You can follow the self-guiding trail to the ruins by using a leaflet that describes points of interest. Ranger talks are given at scheduled intervals throughout the day.

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**

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