

Casa Grande Ruins

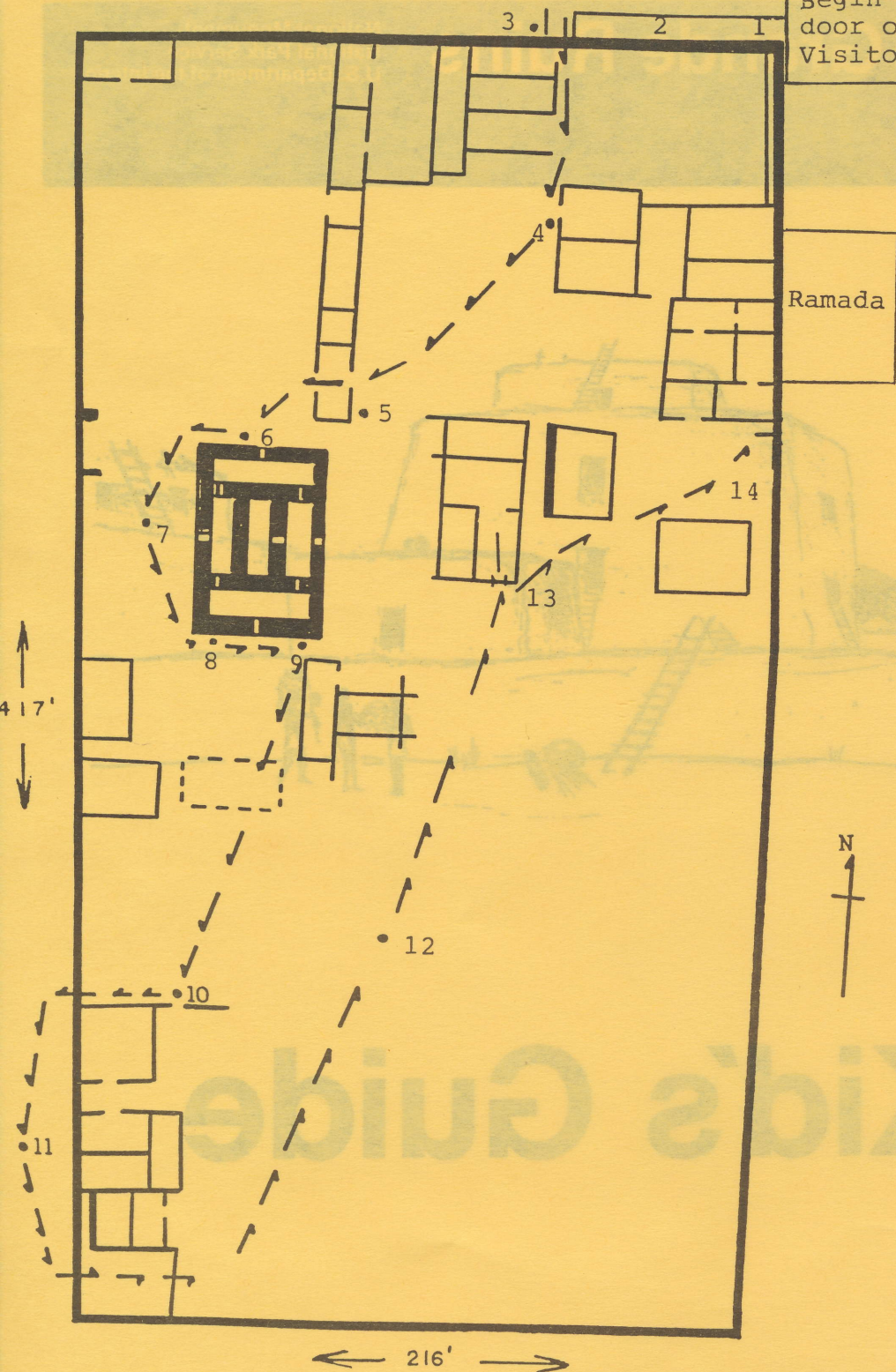
National Monument
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Kid's Guide

Can you imagine digging one of these canals using only
bat sticks and stakes?

Begin at the back door of the Visitor Center



← 216' →

↑ 417' ↓

Welcome to Casa Grande Ruins National Monument. You are visiting pre-historic Indian ruins built more than 650 years ago. The biggest ruin here is called the Casa Grande, the Spanish words for "big house." A Spanish priest named Father Kino was the first explorer to see the building, and he named it the Casa Grande. To take a tour of the ruins, follow the numbered map on the opposite page.



Long before Columbus sailed from Spain to America, Indian people that we call the Hohokam (HO-ho-kahm) lived at the Casa Grande and all over the Arizona desert. The ruins you are looking at are part of one of their villages. Although the Hohokam lived in the dry desert, they were able to live quite successfully.

How do you think they were able to survive in such a dry place?



Look around you at the different trees and plants. See if you can find a mesquite (mes-KEET) tree or a saguaro (sa-WAH-ro) cactus. The Hohokam ate mesquite seeds and saguaro fruit along with many other wild plants. They also hunted small animals. You might see some of these animals around the Ruins today.



The Hohokam were also excellent farmers. They made their living by growing corn, beans, squash, and cotton. To grow their crops, the Hohokam used water from the Gila River, 1 1/2 miles North. The Hohokam dug canals to bring water all the way from the river to their fields. This is known as irrigation. But the Hohokam didn't have tractors, dump trucks or metal shovels. They had to use wooden sticks and stone hammers to dig canals. Modern farmers still use irrigation in the desert. After you leave the Monument today, you might see some of these modern irrigation canals.

Can you imagine digging one of these canals using nothing but sticks and stones?



Look into the room in front of you and use your imagination. When the Hohokam lived here these walls were about 7 feet high and had flat roofs made of layers of wood poles and very hard mud. These rooms were used as houses by Hohokam families, but they probably spent most of their time outdoors. You can see that there is a lot of open space between the houses. These open spaces are called courtyards.



Look at the biggest building in this pre-historic village. This is the Casa Grande. The Hohokam built it out of caliche (ka-LEE-chee). Caliche is a hard soil found under ground in the desert. It is like cement. The Hohokam used a grinding stone to make it into powder and then added water to make a sticky mud. They built the Casa Grande out of layers of caliche mud. After each layer dried, they added another layer of caliche mud until the building was four stories high.



Look at the opening in the wall in front of you. This is not a window, but a door. The Hohokam people used ladders to reach the doors. They made the doors small to keep out bad weather.



The study of the sun, moon and stars is called astronomy. The Hohokam were astronomers long ago. Look at the top of this wall. You will see 2 round holes. The Hohokam used these holes to watch the sun and the moon. The hole at the upper left lines up with the setting sun on the longest day of the year (June 21st). The hole at the upper right lines up with the moon at a certain point in its cycle. The Hohokam may have used these holes the way we use calendars--to tell time.

In the museum you can see a picture of the sun shining through the hole on the longest day of the year.



Look inside, about half way up, and you will see a row of holes. These holes once held wooden poles that formed the second floor. The Hohokam used special pine wood from far away to build the floors. Because they did so much work to build the Casa Grande, we know it was not just another house. Besides astronomy, the building may also have been used for special ceremonies, or it may have been a control center used to watch the river, the canals and the fields. Perhaps an important family lived inside.

Why do you think the Hohokam built the Casa Grande?



The Casa Grande is very old and has become weak since the Hohokam abandoned it 600 years ago. If you look at the walls you can see many cracks and gaps. The metal rods and the wooden beams were put in the walls to make it stronger, but the Casa Grande is still so weak that it would not be safe for you to go inside. The walls of the other buildings are also very weak.

Please help the rangers to protect the ruins by not climbing or sitting on the walls.

Have you noticed all the names and dates carved into the walls? This was done a long time ago before people decided that the Casa Grande should be preserved. Today it is against the law to write on the walls.



This is all that remains of a two story building. A large red pot was found in the room just in front of you. Pottery was one of the most important things that the Hohokam made. You can see the large red pot and many other examples of Hohokam pottery in the museum.

The Hohokam left behind many other things that tell us about them. For example, they made beautiful jewelry out of sea shells and turquoise. You can see it in the museum. But sea shells and turquoise are not found in this area.

How do you suppose the Hohokam got them?

The Hohokam traded their extra food, cloth, and pottery with people who had sea shells, turquoise, and other things.



Sometimes the Hohokam would build high walls around the outside of a group of houses. The Casa Grande and the other buildings you have seen had a wall around them that was seven feet high. A group of Hohokam buildings surrounded by a wall is called a compound. Most of the wall around this compound is gone today, but you are looking at part of it now.

Why would the Hohokam build a big wall around groups of houses?

The Hohokam probably built these walls for the same reasons we sometimes put walls around our neighborhoods today. The walls help give us privacy. You can probably think of some other reasons why they might have built the walls.



Imagine you were standing in this courtyard 700 years ago. Imagine the sounds you would hear--people talking as they worked, children playing, and dogs barking.

If you were here 700 years ago, you would probably see many Hohokam children in this city. Hohokam children didn't go to school like we do today, but they learned important things all the time. Parents might have taken their children along when they went to work in the fields. By helping their parents water and weed the crops, the children learned how to farm.

In the museum you can see some of the farming tools they used.



The Hohokam learned to live in the desert very well. They built the first canals and the first cities in Arizona. Many of the cities in Arizona today are built on top of the ruins of the old Hohokam cities.

The Hohokam farmed the desert for over 1,000 years. But then something happened to them. They stopped building canals and began to leave their villages. By the year 1450 there was no one left living in the Casa Grande or any of the other Hohokam cities.

We don't know exactly why they left their cities over 500 years ago. But they didn't all disappear. Some of them stayed in the area and continued to make a living in the desert, even though they didn't live like they had before.

In fact, there were people in this area when Father Kino passed through. The Spanish travelers called them the Pima and Papago. Many of these people, known today as the O'odham (oh-oh-DAHM), are still living here in the desert. They are probably distant relatives of the Hohokam.

Look at the ruins one last time and imagine how it used to be. Now that you know about the Hohokam, can you imagine yourself living as a Hohokam child 650 years ago?

If you have any questions or ideas about the Hohokam, be sure and talk to the park rangers.



Ball Court

Before you leave, walk across the parking lot to the picnic area and look for a platform. From there, you can see a Hohokam ball court. We don't know just what kind of ball game they played, but it may have been more than just a game to them. In Mexico, ancient people played ball games that were part of very important ceremonies.

Archaeologists (ar-kee-ALL-o-gists) are scientists who study the past. They dig up information from places where people like the Hohokam lived. How many of the listed words can you dig out of this puzzle?

astronomy
 ball court
 beans
 cactus
 caliche
 canals
 Casa Grande
 corn
 deer
 farmers
 Father Kino
 Gila River
 Hohokam
 hunter
 irrigation
 mesquite
 O'Odham
 Papago
 Pima

pottery
 saguaro
 shell jewelry
 solstice
 Sonoran Desert
 squash
 turquoise

S G R G J W E A S T R O N O M Y
 O C S A G U A R O N L S V B C G
 O A N Z Q I R R I G A T I O N F
 D S H E L L J E W E L R Y R T B
 H A P A P A G O R B X F M S D B
 A G B F C O R N C R D A U O G A
 M R F A P P E A P X R R A N M L
 E A T T B D C F O N S M F O A L
 V N F H T C I B T U W E B R K C
 I D R E L A P H T U T R S A O O
 R E M R P L T C E A H S O N H U
 T E E K U I A B R X H W L N O R
 A K S I M C L E Y N U P S D H T
 L M Q N S H U A O R N T T E C B
 I T U O G E O N R P T L I S D T
 G I I E T N V S W C E E C E W A
 H Z T B U W B L D W R Z E R D D
 G F E H F Y H S Q U A S H T G Y
 T U R Q U O I S E T H S P I M A

THE MAN IN THE MAZE

The O'Odham Indians have many legends about their creator, I'ittoi, (EE-it-toy) or "older brother," who lives hiding in the mountains. The only way to find him is through this maze he created when he hid. Can you find the path to the center?

