

Interior. A permanent superintendent and ranger are stationed in the monument for the guidance of visitors and to give them information. The monument is open to the public every day in the year. The

Revised 1951

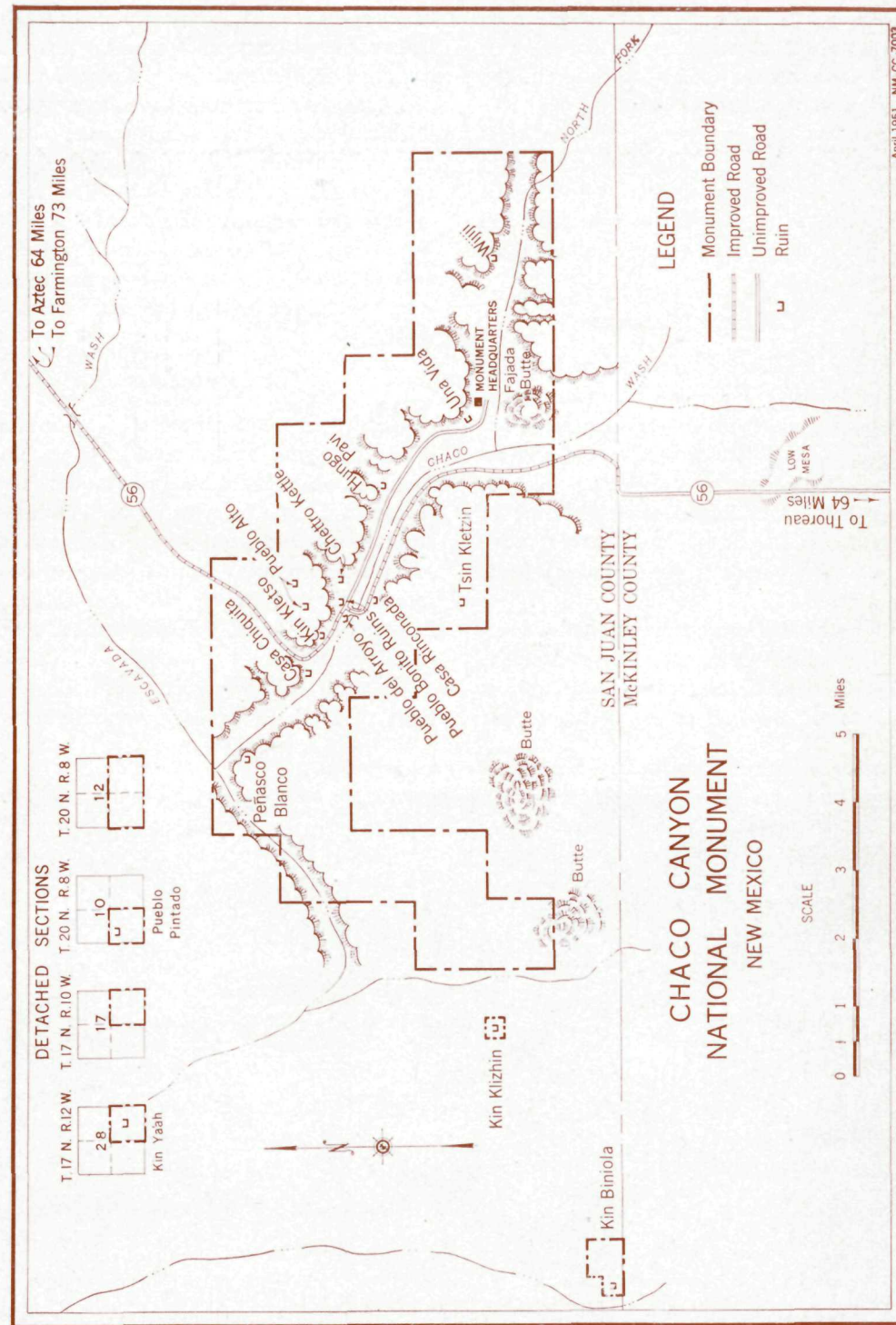
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*Threatening Rock before it fell on January 22, 1941.*



National Park Service maintains a picnic area at monument headquarters.

All communications should be addressed to the Superintendent, Chaco Canyon National Monument, Bloomfield, N. Mex.

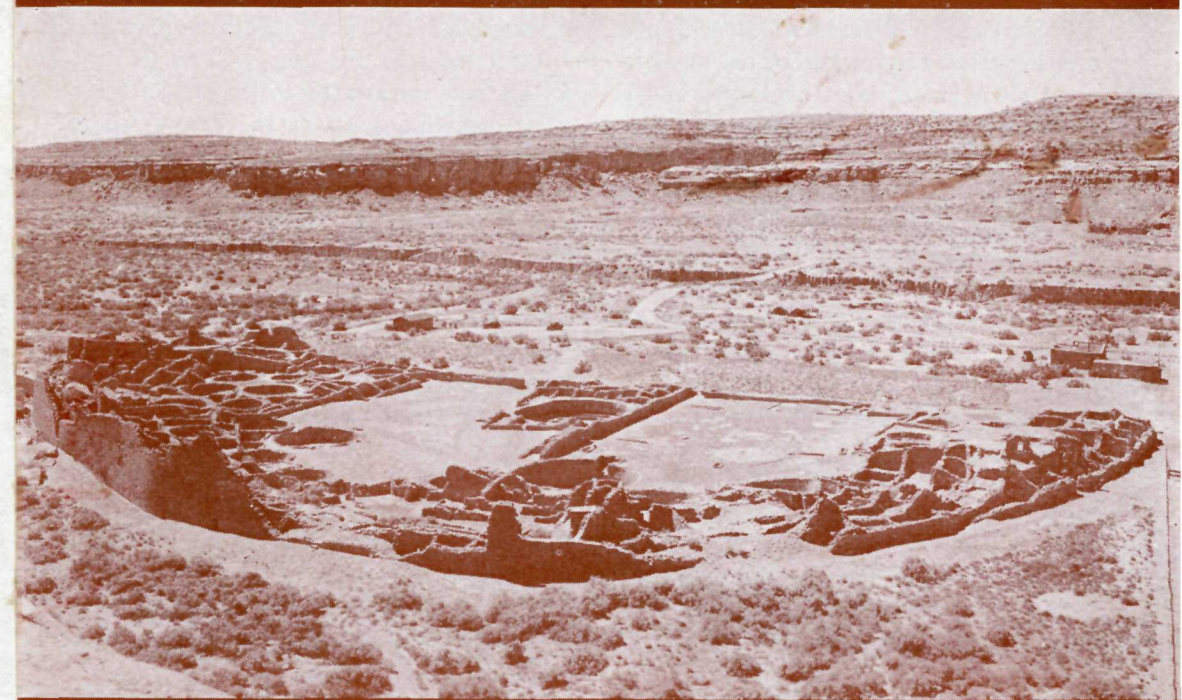


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# CHACO CANYON



NATIONAL MONUMENT  
NEW MEXICO



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE  
INTERIOR OSCAR L. CHAPMAN, Secretary

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ARTHUR E. DEMARAY, Director

The huge ruins of Chaco Canyon constitute the climax of prehistoric Indian architecture north of the Valley of Mexico

Chaco Canyon National Monument, one of the outstanding archeological areas in the United States, contains more than a dozen large ruins and hundreds of smaller archeological sites. These ruins are without equal north of central Mexico. Most of the sites are contained in a strip of land about 8 miles long and 2 miles wide, through which Chaco Canyon runs. No other archeological area in the entire Southwest exhibits such a high development of prehistoric Pueblo civilization.

It is difficult to omit superlatives when describing the ruins at Chaco Canyon, as not only are the pueblos among the largest in the Southwest, but the masonry of the walls is superior to that of any other district. In many respects, Chaco can be said to have been the cultural center of the prehistoric Southwest.

## *Pueblo Bonito* (Beautiful Village)

Pueblo Bonito, about 3 miles down the canyon from the headquarters area, is one of the most imposing and best known

COVER: Pueblo Bonito as seen from the canyon rim.

ruins in the Southwest. Built more than 1,000 years ago, this four- and five-story village was constructed in the shape of a great capital D close to the base of the sandstone cliff forming the north canyon wall.

Prior to the fall of Threatening Rock, if one wished an over-all view of Pueblo Bonito, it was necessary to take about a half-mile trail to get to the top of the cliff. Part of this trail consists of stone steps cut by these prehistoric people. From the top of the cliff, is an excellent view not only of Bonito but of several other ruins up and down the canyon. Since Threatening Rock has now fallen, it is possible to climb through its debris and get a good view without going to the top of the cliff. The climb is still recommended, however, for those who have the time or wish to photograph the entire village.

Pueblo Bonito was extensively explored by the National Geographic Society from 1921 to 1927. The village, covering more than 3 acres of ground, contained in its heyday about 800 rooms and 32 kivas, or

ceremonial chambers. Two were great kivas, while the others were smaller ritual or society rooms. Neil M. Judd, of the United States National Museum, who conducted the excavations for the National Geographic Society, characterizes Pueblo Bonito as the largest apartment house built anywhere in the world prior to 1887 and estimates that at one time it housed 1,200 people.

## *Cultural Material*

Many interesting artifacts have been found in excavations in Chaco ruins, especially stone tools and weapons, bone implements, and the distinctive and characteristic Chaco pottery. Wooden objects, fragments of basketry, skin and bits of cotton cloth, cordage, and feathers have been found; but these perishable materials are rare.

Of particular interest are the finds of turquoise and gilsonite, a variety of asphalt. Painted wooden, stone, and bone objects were found, as well as sea shells, copper

bells, and other things acquired by trade from some distance. Of especial interest are the bones of macaws. The skeletons of 14 macaws were found in one room in Pueblo Bonito. The ancient people, like the modern Pueblo Indians, must have been eager to get macaws and local birds, such as jays and eagles, to use the feathers in sacred dances. The macaws were presumably obtained by trade from the south, as were the copper bells and most of the sea shells.

## *The Small Sites*

Most of this unusual material has come from the great ruins, especially Pueblo Bonito, and probably represents the late period of Chaco Canyon in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Many of the small ruins were occupied in this same period; some of them, however, are much earlier, having been occupied in the seventh and eighth centuries.

These earliest Chaco sites are little villages of crude pit houses, very different

from the gigantic towns of superb masonry which developed later. Pottery of the early sites is quite different and inferior in workmanship. Sequences both of masonry types and of types of the black-on-white Chaco pottery can be worked out, showing the development over a period of some six centuries in the Chaco Canyon area.

## *The Abandonment*

Soil erosion caused by deforestation is thought to have been a major factor in the relatively early abandonment of the region. Raising of crops would have been halted by arroyo cutting, such as has gone on recently. The deep dry stream bed now seen at Chaco is only some 75 years old. Less than 100 years ago there was a running stream in a shallow bed lined with vegetation, and Navajo Indians were able to grow corn in the canyon. The Chaco apparently was abandoned during the twelfth century, and its peoples are supposed to have migrated south to the Little Colorado and east to the Rio Grande.

## *How to Reach the Monument*

Chaco Canyon National Monument is in San Juan and McKinley Counties in northwestern New Mexico. The area is reached by leaving U S 66, at Thoreau and traveling 64 miles north over a graded road marked with National Park Service signs. From the north the visitor should follow State Road 44 south from the town of Aztec and Aztec Ruins National Monument for a distance of 40 miles, then State Road 56 for a distance of 24 miles to monument headquarters. Tourist accommodations may be had at Gallup to the south and at Aztec and Farmington to the north.

## *Administration and Facilities*

The Chaco Canyon was proclaimed a national monument March 11, 1907. It is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service of the Department of the

*Four-story wall of Pueblo Bonito, showing various masonry types.*

