

CHACO CANYON

NATIONAL MONUMENT New Mexico

This remote and semiarid region was once a principal center of culture in the Southwest. An ancient Indian civilization developed here more than a thousand years ago and reached a high level of achievement. The people excelled in tool-making, in weaving, and farming, but above all they were expert masons.

The major section of Chaco Canyon National Monument, established to preserve the remains of this center of culture which flourished for more than 200 years, contains a dozen great ruins and more than 300 smaller archeological sites in an area about 2 miles wide and 8 miles long.

Relics and partially fallen walls tell much of the lives and habits of the prehistoric Indians who made this agricultural-urban civilization the most highly developed in the Southwest. But of the arrival and departure of the people, they tell little.

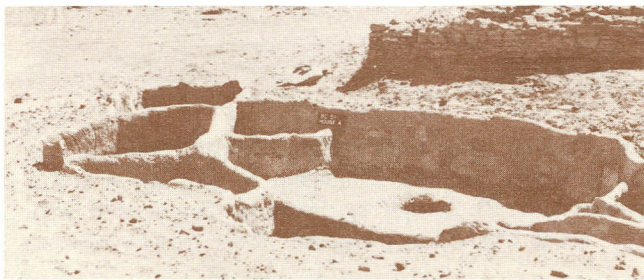
INTERPRETIVE SERVICES

Your first stop within the monument should be at the visitor center. The museum here is the key to understanding Chaco Canyon and its early inhabitants.

Many of the major ruins are near the road that parallels the north side of the canyon and are easy to reach over short trails. You are urged, however, not to explore them until you have stopped at the visitor center, where you will find displays that explain the life of the prehistoric people who built the massive dwellings. National Park Service personnel at the visitor center will answer your questions about the monument and suggest ways to help you make the most of your visit. And if you will read this folder before setting out for the ruins, you will gain a better understanding of what you will see.

Two self-guiding trails through the ruins are provided, one for Pueblo Bonito ruin and a second at the Casa Rinconada ruin complex. Guide booklets, keyed to points of special interest along these trails, are available at the information stations at Pueblo Bonito and Casa Rinconada. Walking time for each trail is about 1 hour.

The information station at Pueblo Bonito houses a small display of prehistoric remains and serves as a focal point



RUINS OF A PITHOUSE WITH STORAGE ROOMS.

for the Pueblo Bonito area. During summer, park rangers are stationed here to provide information and assistance.

For information concerning conducted tours through Pueblo Bonito and special evening programs, inquire at the visitor center information desk.

Representatives of large groups should write or telephone in advance to request special services or assistance with group camping.

PREHISTORY

The greatest distinction of the prehistoric people of Chaco Canyon lies in the massiveness of the buildings they constructed and the excellence of their masonry—achievements that were realized to the fullest during the 11th and 12th centuries.

The opening chapter of human history in Chaco Canyon begins, however, some 400 years earlier, when the Basketmaker Indians were in a more advanced stage of their cultural development.

The Basketmakers

The Basketmakers were farmers, obtaining most of their food from the crops they were able to grow on the mesas and, more often, on the sheltered floor of the canyon, where rainfall from summer thundershowers could most easily be diverted to their family gardens. Harvest of their staples—corn and squash—was supplemented by the wild plants and seeds they gathered and by the small game they snared or hunted with the aid of a recently developed device—the bow and arrow.

Numerous dwellings of Late Basketmakers remain as ruins in Chaco Canyon today. These shelters are called pithouses because their construction began with the excavation of a pit, from 1 to 3 feet in depth and circular to roughly rectangular in shape. The sides of the pit were plastered or lined with slabs of stone set vertically in the packed-earth floor. Several poles, the average height of a man, were erected from the floor to support the framework for a flat roof and inward sloping walls. The part of the structure that extended above ground level was enclosed with poles chinked with tree bark and coarse vegetation, and the whole was covered with a thick layer of mud.

A pithouse usually included storage bins, a firepit, and a means of ventilation. Fresh air came into the room through a small opening in the wall or by a doorway at ground level. A ladder thrust through a smoke hole in the roof provided the family entrance to the pithouses of later periods, such as those unearthed in Chaco Canyon.

The Late Basketmakers used fibers of the native yucca plant to weave sandals, bags, cordage, and remarkably



CHETRO KETTLE.

decorative though sturdy baskets. They learned to make pottery, a craft introduced about A.D. 500, which the earlier Basketmakers had lacked. And they shaped tools of wood, bone, and stone and fashioned ornaments of shell, turquoise, and colorful fragments of rock.

The Late Basketmakers of Chaco Canyon were progressive, willing to discard old ideas and practices when new and better ones were found. In time, the cultural traits that distinguished the Basketmakers became so modified by change that archeologists found it necessary to recognize the dominance of a new level of prehistoric civilization—that of Pueblo culture. The Basketmaker period ended about A.D. 750.

The Pueblos

Many changes that developed in the transition from Basketmaker to Puebloan covered the broad phases of social practices, dress and ornament, agriculture, crafts, and architecture. These changes, with further modifications, continued to distinguish the culture as long as the Puebloans of Chaco Canyon endured.

One of the notable features that marked the introductory phase of the Puebloan culture was the practice of flattening the backs of the skulls of infants by the use of rigid cradleboards. In crafts, there was the introduction of the use of cotton and an increase in the weaving of feather-and-string robes, which had led to the domestication of the wild turkey. In agriculture, an increase in the cultivation of beans as a staple food, in addition to corn and squash, is believed to have taken place. In pottery, there was the introduction of the application of a surface slip of pure clay to the decorated ware and a more expert execution of stylized decorations. In ornamentation, the use of turquoise for beads and mosaics increased.

During the period of transition, the construction of pithouses gave way to the development of multifamily dwellings, built entirely above ground in rows or clusters of small rectangular rooms having at least one common wall. The masonry of these pueblo structures was, unlike the pithouses, laid up of unshaped sandstone blocks embedded horizontally in an abundance of adobe mortar. Each pueblo unit built in Chaco Canyon included one or more circular semi-subterranean rooms, called kivas (KEY-vahs), which are reminiscent of the pithouses.

The developmental era extended from about 750 to 1050. The population had increased steadily as immigrants from other sections of the central southwest region came to Chaco Canyon to establish homes until the peak of occupation was reached during the 1000's and 1100's. At this time it is believed there were 5,000 inhabitants.

The Climactic Period

With the construction and expansion of the great pueblos, which began in the 10th century, rooms and kivas were made larger and walls were extended in height to provide for additional floor levels. Smaller pueblos were being built and occupied at the same time the great ones were being expanded.



PUEBLO BONITO.

By the 12th century, the major pueblos had been enlarged to their greatest size. Among the largest was Pueblo Bonito, built to a height of 5 stories on a floor plan exceeding 3 acres and capable of housing as many as 1,200 persons in about 800 rooms.

In addition to living and storage rooms, 32 kivas were incorporated in the structure of Pueblo Bonito. Kivas are believed to have had their origin in the pithouses of the Basketmakers and to have served the Puebloans as headquarters for clans, clubhouses for men, and ceremonial chambers—but never as living quarters. Two Great Kivas, so designated by reason of design as well as size, can be seen in the courtyard at Pueblo Bonito, and other

excavated Great Kivas are found in Chetro Kettle. The most outstanding, however, is solitary Casa Rinconada, which is 64 feet in diameter. Another earlier solitary kiva is Kin Nahasbas, which is on a slight elevation near Una Vida.



CHACO BLACK-ON-WHITE POTTERY.

The excavation of Great Kivas has yielded some of the finer ceremonial objects: ornaments of jet and shell, necklaces of turquoise beads, and painted wooden ornamental plaques.

Trade with other tribes and communities was common at the climax of the cultural development achieved by the Chacoans. Jet and turquoise could be obtained nearby, but such items as cotton fabrics and probably raw cotton were obtained from the people of what is now southern Arizona. From Mexico, traders brought parrots and small bells of copper, the only metal that the Puebloans knew.

Only dogs, macaws, and turkeys were domesticated by the prehistoric Chacoans. The birds were apparently raised to provide feathers for robes and fancy dress, rather than food, although turkey eggs and probably dogs were sometimes eaten.

The prehistoric Chacoans continued to cultivate crops and to hunt small animals for food. As in Basketmaker times, they farmed by floodwater irrigation, a method that could well have led to a precarious balance between plenty and starvation in a marginal land for agriculture.

Abandonment

The Chacoans gradually began to abandon their canyon homes during the early part of the 12th century. It is not known why the great structures of Chaco Canyon were abandoned. Extended drought, soil depletion and erosion, harassment by other Indians, internal bickering, or a combination of these and other influences might have brought about the exodus.

Most of the great apartment houses are believed to have been vacated in the 1200's, the people of Chaco Canyon having moved in small bands to the Rio Grande and Zuñi districts of New Mexico.

The exodus of the Chacoans left a cultural void into which the Navajo Indians arrived more than 300 years later. The Navajos, living in a dispersed fashion, required much less productivity per unit of area than the prehistoric Puebloans. Members of the Navajo Tribe continue to occupy much of the area surrounding the monument today.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

The plants of Chaco Canyon are typical of the lower ranges of the Upper Sonoran life zone. Stands of juniper cover the higher mesas, and fourwing saltbush and greasewood predominate in the alkaline soil of the canyon floor. In the deep arroyos where there is slightly more moisture, cottonwood, willow, and the introduced tamarisk (saltcedar) thrive. Gramagrass, Indian ricegrass, rabbitbrush, sagebrush, and many other small plants are common throughout the monument.



A SMALL PUEBLO NEAR CASA RINCONADA.

Animals you are most likely to see include the antelope ground squirrel, prairie dog, cottontail, and jackrabbit. The mule deer, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, skunk, and badger are present but are not likely to be seen. Resident birds include the scaled quail, brown towhee, golden eagle, raven, and species of hawks and owls. Lizards are common, as are the harmless gopher snakes. The monument's only poisonous reptile, the prairie rattlesnake, is rarely seen by visitors.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The monument is open all year.

Although the climate is semiarid, you may find several inches of snow on the ground during winter, and you may run into thundershowers—usually of short duration—from June through September.

Since the monument is in a high plateau region at an elevation of 6,300 feet, you may expect maximum daytime temperatures in the high 90's during summer and the low 40's in winter. Nighttime temperatures drop to the low 50's in summer and well below freezing in winter.

How to Reach the Monument

Chaco Canyon National Monument is in northwestern New Mexico.

To reach the monument from the north, turn off N. Mex. 44 at Blanco Trading Post and follow N. Mex. 56 for 23 miles to the north entrance of the monument. The visitor center is 7 miles beyond this entrance.

To reach the monument from the south, turn north on N. Mex. 56 from U.S. 66 at Thoreau and proceed for 64 miles to the south entrance of the monument. The visitor center is a short distance ahead.

N. Mex. 56 is unpaved between Blanco Trading Post and Crownpoint. Inquire locally regarding travel over this route in stormy weather, for this dirt road can be difficult when wet.

Facilities and Services

No lodging, gasoline, repair services, or food are available at the monument, which is 50 miles from the nearest town. On weekdays, a limited assortment of staples can usually be procured at nearby trading posts. The nearest towns in which to obtain food, supplies, and lodging at all times are located on N. Mex. 44 and U.S. 66.

Camping

The National Park Service maintains a campground 1 mile from the visitor center. Tables, fireplaces, water, and toilets are provided. There are turnouts for small trailers, but no utility connections are provided. It is not advisable to bring house trailers that are more than 30 feet long. Campers must not depend upon obtaining firewood in or near the monument. Camping is limited to 14 days.

Regulations

The superintendent and his staff are here to help you to enjoy and understand this monument, and to protect its irreplaceable features, as well as all plants, animals, and prehistoric objects.

The Federal Antiquities Act of 1906 specifically prohibits the appropriation, injury, destruction, or removal from place of any object of antiquity, or the excavation, injury, or destruction of any ruin on Federal land, such

as Chaco Canyon National Monument. Please observe the provisions of this act, copies of which are posted at the major ruins and at many other points.

The following regulations are also enforced in the interest of your safety and enjoyment:

Do not drive off the graded roadway under any circumstances. All monument roads are safe if you drive carefully. Observe posted speed limits and traffic signs.

Pets are allowed if they are kept on a leash or in your car, off the trails, and out of public buildings.

Camping and picnicking are permitted only in designated areas. Fires are allowed only in fireplaces at designated campsites.

Put out your campfire with water before you leave it. Report all unattended fires to a park ranger.

The use or display of firearms is prohibited.

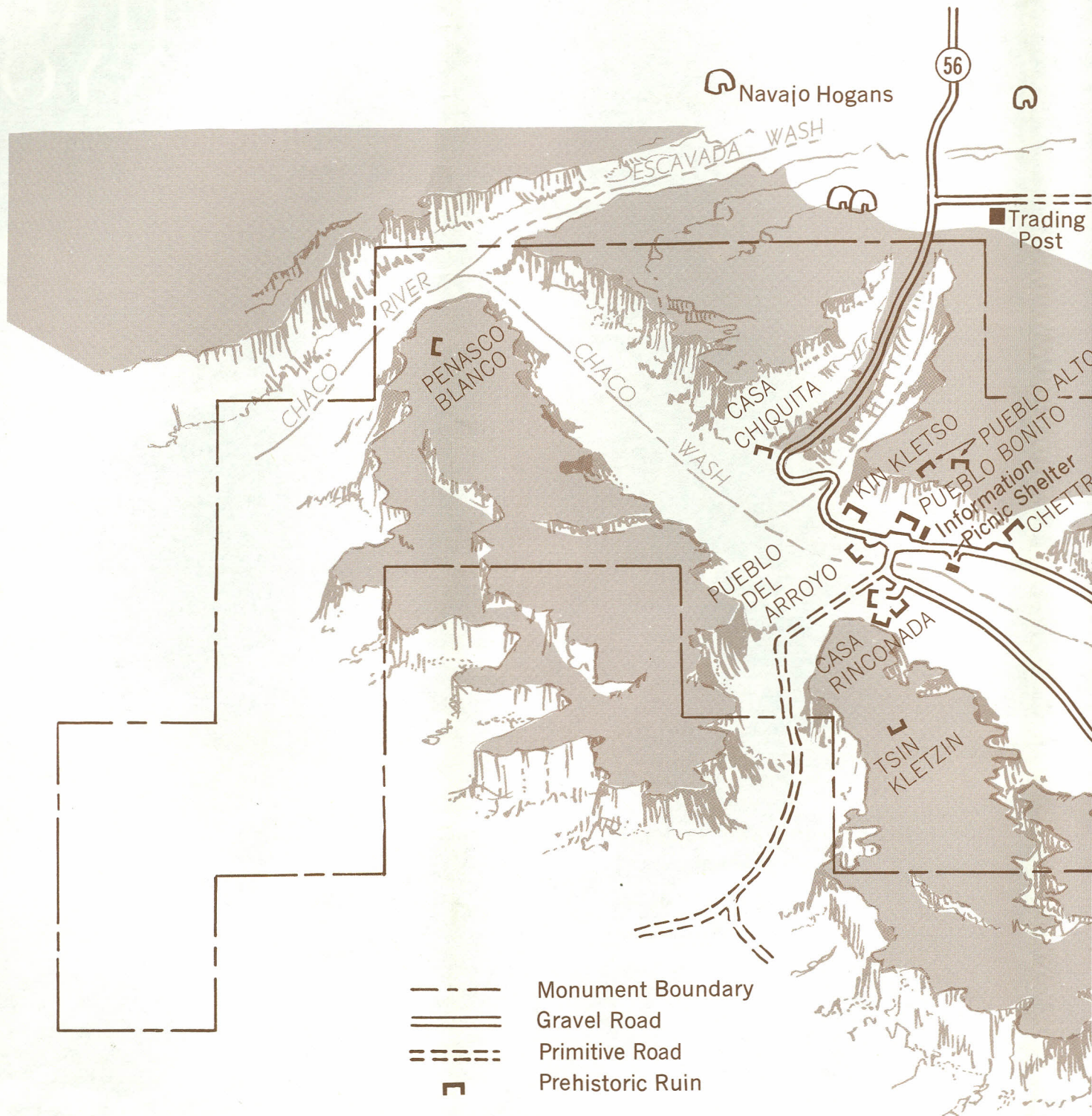
Detached Sections

The National Park Service administers four detached ruin sites as part of the monument. They range in distance from 7 to 40 miles from the principal section of the monument. You should consult with a park ranger before attempting to visit any of these outlying sections.



PETROGLYPHS.

To Aztec, 64 Miles and
Mesa Verde National Park



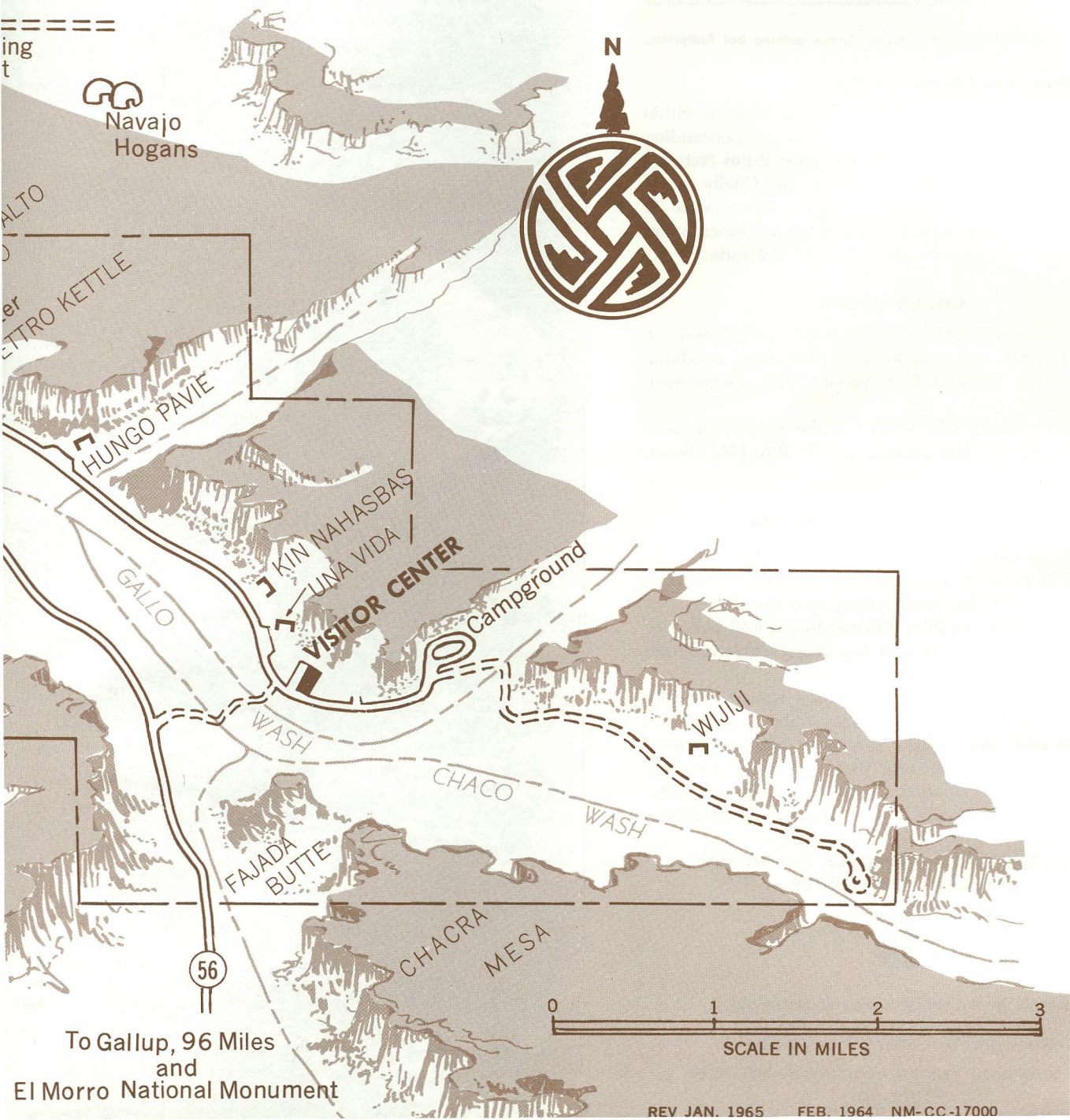
- Monument Boundary
- === Gravel Road
- Primitive Road
- Prehistoric Ruin

DO NOT DRIVE OFF THE GRADED ROADS

CHACO CANYON

NATIONAL MONUMENT

NEW MEXICO



To Gallup, 96 Miles
and
El Morro National Monument

A REMINDER

Do not drive off the graded roads.

Stay away from leaning walls.

Keep off ruin walls.

Remember: Take nothing but pictures. Leave nothing but footprints.

Nearby Archeological Areas

Other units of the National Park System that are within a day's drive of Chaco Canyon also preserve outstanding archeological sites. Among them are Aztec Ruins National Monument in New Mexico, Canyon de Chelly (pronounced Shay) and Navajo National Monuments in Arizona, Hovenweep National Monument in Colorado and Utah, and Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado.

ADMINISTRATION

Chaco Canyon National Monument, established on March 11, 1907, and containing 21,500 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

A superintendent, who resides in the monument, is in immediate charge. His address is P.O. Box 156, Bloomfield, N. Mex. 87413.

AMERICA'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



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A GREAT KIVA IN THE COURTYARD OF CHETTRO KETTLE