

NATIONAL MONUMENT / NEW MEXICO

CHACO CANYON

Indian Farmers, according to archeological evidence, were living in this area more than 1,300 years ago. By A.D. 1000, they had become skilled builders and expert potters and jewelers as well. For more than a century thereafter, Chaco Canyon was a major center of Pueblo Indian culture. The monument, established to preserve the remains of this agricultural society, contains 12 large and more than 400 smaller ruins in an area about 8 miles long and 2 miles wide.

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, whose address is Star Route 4, Box 6500, Bloomfield, NM 87413, is in immediate charge of the monument.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR



CHACO BLACK-ON-WHITE POTTERY



PETROGLYPHS



PUEBLO BONITO



CHETRO KETL



GREAT KIVA AT CASA RINCONADA

MAN IN CHACO CANYON

Ancestors of the Architects. Bands of hunters and gatherers roamed the Chaco 5,000 to 7,000 years ago; about the first century farming became their way of life. The more dependable and greater food supply led to stable villages and larger populations. During the 600's to 700's more people began to move into Chaco Canyon, seeking land suitable for farming. They used water from summer thunderstorms to irrigate their corn-and-squash gardens on the canyon floor and collected wild plant foods and snared or hunted game. They used ponderosa and pinyon pine for fuel and to construct their partially underground dwellings, called pithouses. In later times, they primarily used ponderosa pine for room beams.

Their two principal handcrafts were basket weaving and pottery making. They were named Basketmakers because of the many fine baskets found in archeological sites of this period.

The Basketmakers of Chaco Canyon seem to have been willing to accept new and better ideas and practices. By 800, a new culture pattern emerged, called the Pueblo culture, using the term applied by the Spaniards to Southwestern Indian villages of the historic period.

The Pueblo Peoples. One of the notable traits that marked the Pueblo culture was the development of flat-roofed houses of mud, rock, and poles, constructed entirely above ground in rows or clusters of small rectangular rooms. By the middle 900's, the walls of these rooms were built of masonry. Each pueblo had one or more small, circular, semisubterranean rooms, called kivas. Reminiscent of the Basketmaker pithouses, they were used primarily for ceremonial purposes. Other new traits included cotton textiles and distinctive black-on-white pottery.

With a dependable diet and the addition of immigrants from adjacent areas, the population of Chaco Canyon increased steadily and reached a peak of about 7,000 individuals during the 1000's and early 1100's.

The Classic Period. By the late 1000's, the main pueblos in Chaco Canyon had been enlarged to their maximum size. Some of the larger pueblos included Chetro Ketl, Pueblo Bonito, and Pueblo del Arroyo.

Great Kivas were the focal points of religious life. The most impressive example of these structures excavated in Chaco Canyon, Casa Rinconada, is 64 feet in diameter.

CHACO CANYON

NATIONAL MONUMENT

NEW MEXICO

37 km (23 mi) to Hwy. 44
To Aztec National Monument and
Mesa Verde National Park

Navajo Hogans

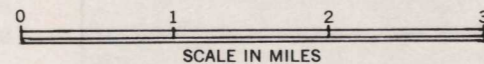
Navajo
Hogans



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

DO NOT DRIVE OFF THE GRADED ROADS
PERMIT REQUIRED
TO ENTER BACK COUNTRY

103km (64mi) to I-40
To El Morro National
Monument



Major building projects included complex irrigation systems and an elaborate network of roads.

Trade was extensively developed during this period. Jet and turquoise were obtained from neighboring Pueblo groups, but such items as cotton fabrics or raw cotton were acquired from unrelated people living in what is now southern Arizona. From Mexico, by way of southern Arizona, came parrots, shell, and small copper bells, the only metal objects known to the Puebloans.

Abandonment. The Indians began to leave Chaco Canyon during the middle of the 1100's, probably because of drought, erosion, or soil depletion. Most of the great apartment houses are believed to have been vacated by the late 1100's, followed by sporadic reoccupation in the 1200's.

The final exodus of these people in the late 1200's left a void into which the Navajo Indians moved some time in the 1700's. The Navajo continue to occupy much of the area surrounding the monument today.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Sparse stands of pinyon pine and juniper grow on the higher mesas. Saltbush and greasewood dominate the alkaline soil of the canyon floor. In the deep arroyos, where there is slightly more moisture, recently planted cottonwood, willow, and the locally exotic tamarisk (saltcedar) thrive. Grama grass, Indian ricegrass, rabbitbrush, sagebrush, and many other small plants are common throughout the monument.

Mammals you are most likely to see include antelope ground squirrel, cottontail, and jackrabbit. Also present are mule deer, bobcat, coyote, gray fox, skunk, and badger. Common birds are the scaled quail, brown towhee, red-tailed hawk, turkey vulture, and house finch. Lizards are prevalent, as is the harmless gopher snake. The prairie rattlesnake, the only poisonous reptile in the monument, is rarely seen.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

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

Since the monument is in a high plateau region at 6,200-foot elevation, you may expect maximum daytime temperatures in the upper 90's in summer and low 40's in winter. Nighttime temperatures may drop to the low 40's in summer and well below freezing in winter.

How to Reach the Monument. Chaco Canyon National Monument is in northwestern New Mexico.

From the north, turn off N. Mex. 44 at Blanco Trading Post and follow N. Mex. 57 for 23 miles to the north entrance of the monument. The visitor center is 7 miles beyond this entrance.

From the south, turn north on N. Mex. 57 from I-40 at Thoreau and proceed on 44 miles of paved road. A marked turnoff begins a 20-mile stretch of N. Mex. 57 leading to

the south entrance. The visitor center is 1.5 miles ahead. Inquire locally or call the monument (505-786-5384) about dirt road conditions during stormy weather.

Interpretive Services. Your first stop in the monument should be at the visitor center where museum displays will help you understand Chaco Canyon and its early inhabitants. National Park Service personnel at the visitor center will answer your questions and assist you in making the most of your visit.

Self-guiding trails take you through Pueblo Bonito, Chetro Ketl, and the Casa Rinconada ruin complex. Walking time for each trail is about 1 hour.

For information concerning conducted tours and evening programs, inquire at the visitor center.

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

Accommodations. No lodging, gasoline, repair services, or food are available at the monument, which is 60 miles from the nearest town. On weekdays, a limited assortment of staples can usually be purchased at trading posts on Hwy. 44. The nearest towns in which to obtain food, supplies, and lodging at all times are located on N. Mex. 44 and U.S. 66.

The Park Service maintains a campground 1 mile from the visitor center. Tables, fireplaces, water, and a restroom are provided. There are turnouts for small trailers, but no utility connections are available. It is unwise to bring house trailers that are more than 30 feet long. There is no firewood in or near the monument. Camping is limited to 14 days.

Regulations. The superintendent and his staff are here to help you understand and enjoy this monument, and to protect its prehistoric remains and its plant and animal life.

The Federal Antiquities Act of 1906 prohibits the appropriation, injury, destruction, or removal of any object of antiquity, or the excavation, injury, or destruction of any ruin on Federal land, such as Chaco Canyon National Monument.

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

Drive carefully. The monument's unpaved roads are not built for speed. They are frequently rough, dusty, and narrow; they are very slippery when wet. Observe posted speed limits and traffic signs.

Do not drive off the graded roadway.

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

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

The use or display of firearms is prohibited.

Do not climb on the walls of ruins. These ancient walls are weak and dangerous.

You are entering an area managed to preserve its historic and scenic resources. There are inherent conditions that can be hazardous to you. You are urged to remain alert and safety conscious.