

Trail Guide - Una Vida Pueblo

Trail length = 1/3 mile. Trail is steep and can be slippery. Use caution and wear proper footwear.

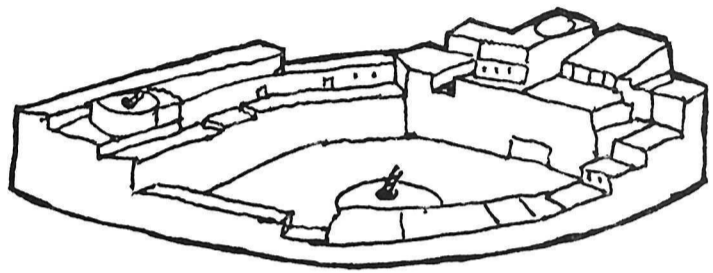
1. The Pueblo

The pueblo of Una Vida (town of One Life) was first mapped and described by a military expedition that passed through Chaco Canyon in 1849.

One of the medium-sized Chacoan buildings, Una Vida had from 150 to 200 rooms. Several of the room blocks rise to three stories.

Construction of this building began about AD 850 and saw continuous construction and occupation over a span of 250 years. This makes Una Vida one of the oldest of the pueblo type buildings in Chaco Canyon.

Construction in the canyon had ceased by AD 1150. By 1200 most of the Anasazi had walked away from Chaco never to return.



Early artists conception of Una Vida based on a painting by Coffin.

2. The Site

CAUTION! These walls are over 900 years old and are more fragile than they appear. Wind, moisture, and many thousands of visitors each year take their toll. Please help to protect the ruin by staying on the developed trails. Thank you.

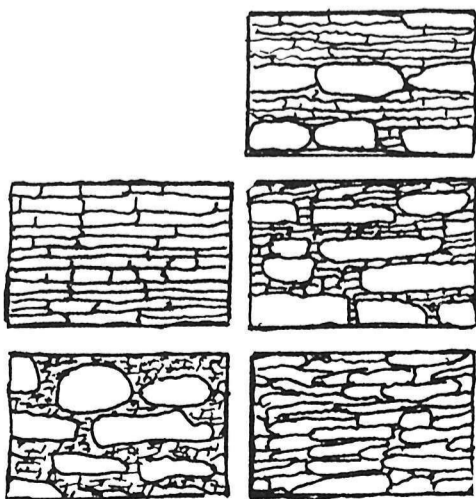
Looking at Una Vida from the bottom of the hill you will notice

the high walls silhouetted against the sky.

The building was constructed on a distinctive natural mound which gives Una Vida the appearance of great height. The purpose of building on this mound may have been to impress other Anasazi, much as it impressed the early explorers who thought the site was 4 to 6 stories high.

“The structure has been built of very thin tabular sandstone—the highest present elevation of the main walls being about 15 feet. Two stories are now discoverable but the mass at the base of the walls clearly shows that there must have been more.”

Lt. James Simpson
August 28, 1849



3. The Construction

As you move closer, notice the different types of masonry work. These subtle but telling differences in masonry styles allow archeologists to relate the construction periods at Una Vida to other great houses in the Chacoan system.

The stout walls, broad at the base, are typical Chaco Anasazi construction. It indicates a measure of pre-planning as the thick lower walls are necessary to sup-

port anticipated second- and third-story rooms.

More information on the masonry and construction of these pueblos can be found in the park brochure and in the visitor center museum.

Around the turn of the century, Navajo families built an oven, a corral, and a hogan on this site. The Navajo dry-laid (without mortar) masonry incorporated some of the original Anasazi walls of Una Vida.

4. The Plan

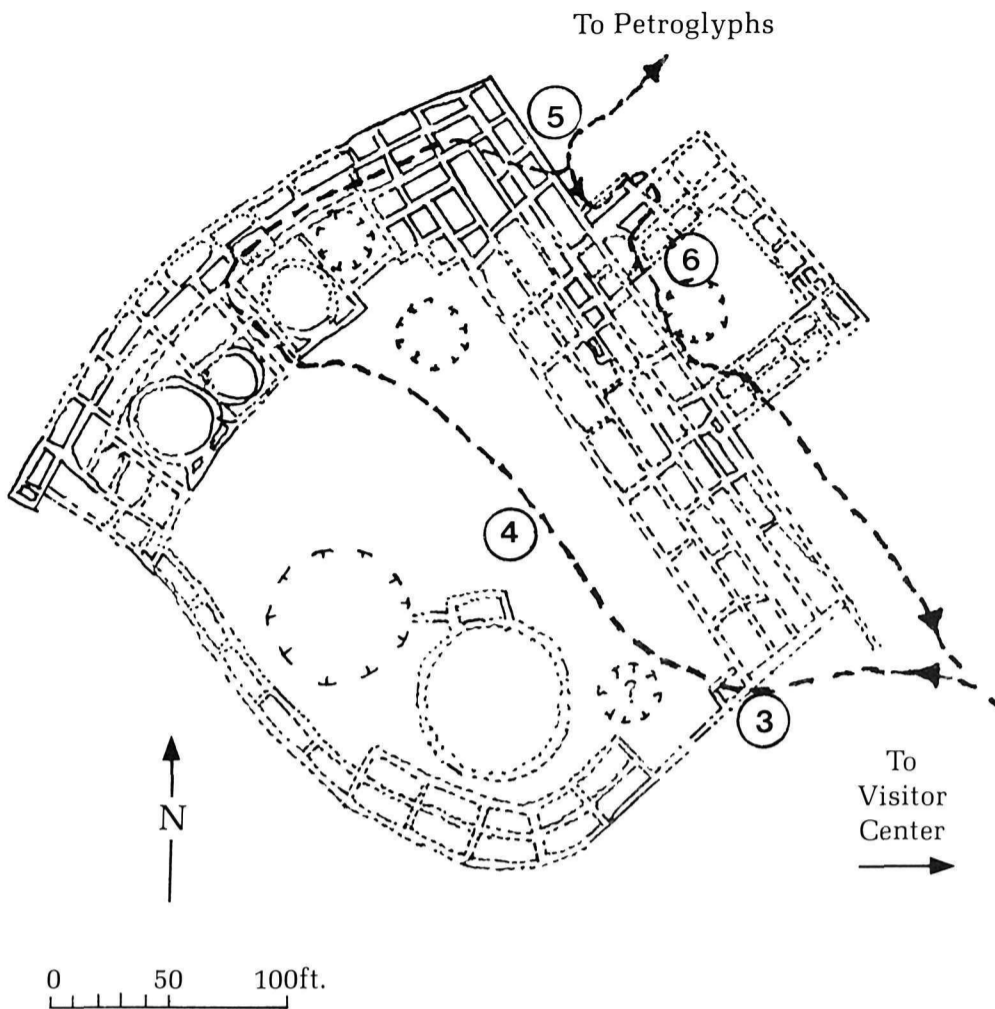
Standing in the plaza of Una Vida, the general outline of this ancient building becomes evident.

An 'L' shaped, 2 to 3 story structure opens out to the southwest. The receding rooflines would have created a terraced effect, with single-story rooms fronting the plaza then stepping back to a second story around the back wall. A few room blocks at the southwest corner rose to a third story. The ends of the 'L' are connected by a wall. This wall itself may have been an arc of 30 to 40 rooms.

Embraced inside the 'L' shape and enclosed by the wall is the large plaza where you now stand.

The depression in the east end of the plaza is a great kiva. Great kivas are characteristic elements of the Chaco culture. The size and complexity of these great structures indicate that they were used for large gatherings. The purpose and nature of these gatherings, perhaps ceremonial, have been lost to the dust of time.

An excavated and stabilized great kiva can be visited at the Casa Rinconada site four miles west along the loop road.

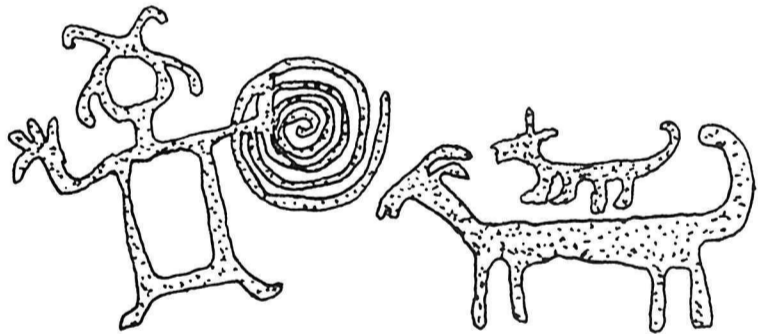


5. The Petroglyphs

Typical of Chaco Canyon are the petroglyphs on the canyon wall above Una Vida. A short walk will take you to this example of rock art.

Petroglyphs are pecked into the rock to create designs.

At present there is no sure way of knowing what the designs meant to the artist, or even who created them. What do you think they mean?



6. The Unknown

Returning to the visitor center, pause and look out over the canyon. The landscape and climate have changed little since that military expedition in 1849, nor since the days of the ancient ones called Anasazi.

From evidence recovered in almost 90 years of study, we know a lot about the Anasazi. We have studied their architecture, pottery, ornaments, and art. But there is yet more to learn.

These people created structures and communities of great size and complexity.

Their vast road network connected the canyon to other villages spread over a vast area.

Why? Why build here? What role did these buildings play in their social, religious, and economic systems? Why did the system fall apart, and where did they go?

These are questions patiently awaiting answers.

Una Vida is but one piece in the puzzle that comprises the Chaco Anasazi world. Other clues may be found elsewhere in Chaco and at other sites throughout the San Juan Basin.

You may keep this information sheet or return it to the box for others to use.
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