



# GILA CLIFF DWELLINGS

## YOUR VISIT

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument is a 44-mile drive north from Silver City on State Highway 15. The approximate driving time is 2 hours. There is no public transportation to the monument, which is open all year except December 25 and January 1.

Your first stop should be the visitor center (jointly operated by the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service) where you may obtain information and suggestions that will add to the enjoyment of your visit. The visitor center is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. throughout the year.

Visiting hours at the ruins vary seasonally; call 505-536-9461 for current information on hours of operation. Those using a Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD) should call (505) 536-9344.

The cliff dwellings are a short drive from the visitor center up the West Fork of the Gila River. Park your car in the parking area and walk to the trail, which begins at the ranger station. At the trail head you will find a box containing leaflets with descriptions keyed to markers along the self-guided trail.

The 1-mile loop trail leads to and through the cliff dwellings, about 180 feet above the canyon floor. The trail is steep in places, so you should walk slowly and watch your step. The round trip takes about an hour.

GILA NATIONAL FOREST AND WILDERNESS is administered by the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, and camping in rugged country are to be found in the Gila National Forest and Wilderness. You may obtain detailed information and maps on these activities at the visitor center.

FOR YOUR SAFETY. You are entering a scenic area preserved in as natural a condition as possible. These natural conditions can be hazardous to you. Though every effort is made to provide for your safety, you must remain alert and exercise individual caution.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICE. Improved campgrounds and picnic areas are available. For information on their location and use, inquire at the visitor center or ask a uniformed ranger. Although there are no accommodations within the monument, the nearby town of Gila Hot Springs has overnight lodging and a grocery store that sells camping supplies and gasoline. Arrangements for horse rentals and guided pack trips may be made in town also.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU. *Removing or marring* any natural or man-made object is not allowed. Hunting is not permitted within the monument. *Pets* are not allowed within the monument; kennels are available. The *speed limit* within the area is 25 miles an hour. Drive carefully and enjoy the scenery. *Trash containers* are not available; please pack out your trash and leave the places you visit clean for those who follow you.

## ADMINISTRATION

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, containing 533 acres, was established on November 16, 1907. Administration of the monument was transferred from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the U.S. Department of the Interior on August 10, 1933. In the spring of 1975, the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service signed a cooperative agreement whereby the Gila National Forest is responsible for administration of the monument. A district ranger, whose address is Route 11, Box 100, Silver City, NM 88061, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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Seven centuries ago, the people who traveled to the communities in what is now Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument did so on foot, following trails across mesas and mountains and along the clear streams. Until recently, the routes were still little more than trails, and the few people who made the trip to the ruins did so on foot, on horseback, and by 4-wheel-drive vehicle. Today, you can drive to the monument over a paved road. The road ends at the monument.

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument is surrounded by Gila National Forest and lies at the edge of the Gila Wilderness, the nation's first designated wilderness area. This designation means that the wilderness character of the area will not be altered by the intrusion of roads or other evidence of human presence.

The park offers a glimpse of the homes and lives of Indians who lived here from the 1280s through the early 1300s. The surroundings probably look today very much like they did when the cliff dwellings were inhabited.

#### THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED HERE

The earliest ruin that has been found within the monument is a pit-house of a type that was made from about AD 100 to 400. This dwelling, in the open, was circular and had a narrow entrance, 2 feet wide and 10 feet long, on the east side; the floor was below ground level. People of this period, referred to by archeologists as the Mogollon, grew corn and beans, hunted, and gathered wild plant food. They made plain brown pottery and undoubtedly were skilled in crafts whose products have disappeared. Such things as nets and snares, baskets, and wooden tools last but a short time in open sites.

The monument also is the site for the remains of later pithouses, those prevalent in the area until about AD 1000. These rectangular structures, unlike their predecessors, were built entirely above the ground. In constructing the buildings the Mogollon usually used masonry or adobe (sun-dried bricks of mud and straw), although some were made of wattle (interwoven twigs). It was around this time that they developed their style of white pottery with black designs.

It was sometime after AD 1000 that the cliff dwellings were built, along with other pueblos situated on terraces overlooking the West Fork of the Gila River.

The term "cliff dwellers" refers to Pueblo people who built their homes in natural caves, but Pueblo people also built in the open. Here at the monument are examples of both types of settlements, which were occupied—at least for a while—simultaneously.

Seven natural caves occur high in the southeast-facing cliff of a side canyon, and five of the caves contain the ruins of cliff dwellings—a total of about 40 rooms. Walls of the dwellings were constructed of stone from the formation exposed to the cliff, the Gila Conglomerate. Thus, it was easily quarried by the Indians. All the timbers in the dwellings are the originals. Tree-ring dates obtained from these timbers range through the 1280s.



Probably not more than 10 to 15 families lived in the cliff dwellings at any one time, but the rooms were used for several generations.

The people were farmers; their fields were on the mesa tops and along the river. They raised squash, corn, beans, and probably amaranth and tobacco. And they supplemented these with animals that they hunted or snared and with wild berries and nuts gathered from the forest.

They were excellent weavers and skilled potters, producing handsome brown bowls with black interiors and black-on-white vessels.

Materials obtained by trade with other peoples included pottery, cotton, obsidian for arrow points, and shell for ornaments.

What was their appearance? The women averaged 5 feet, 1 inch and the men about 5 feet, 5 inches in height. They were slight of build, yet muscular. They had dark hair and eyes and brown skin.

Women's clothing consisted of small cotton blankets worn around the shoulders, "skirts" or "aprons" of yucca cord, and sandals plaited of yucca, agave leaves, and bark. The men wore headbands, small cotton blankets draped over their shoulders and probably sometimes tied around their waists as kilts, breechcloths of woven cotton, and plaited sandals. Both men and women probably wore their sandals only while walking on rocky hillsides. Few objects of adornment, such as bracelets and beads, have been found here.

And so these small, diligent, artistic people lived in their cliff houses and riverside village, tilling their fields with digging sticks, grinding their cornmeal with metate and mano, fashioning their pottery and cloth, carrying on trade with Indians of other communities, hunting, and gathering wild plants and fruit. For generations, the sounds of their voices and laughter echoed in the canyons. And then there were only the sounds of the streams and birds.

The cliff dwellers had abandoned their homes and fields by the early 1300s. Why they left and where they went are not known. Perhaps they joined other Pueblo Indian villages to the north or south.

The area may have been uninhabited for a period of years after the farming Indians left. In any case, nomadic bands of Apaches then made it their homeland. Later, Spanish colonists settled in the areas to the east and south of the monument, and many of their descendants still reside in the vicinity.

After acquisition of the region by the United States under the terms of the Gadsden Purchase, the Apaches directed their depredations against American pioneers traveling across southern New Mexico. A small military camp was established at Gila Hot Springs in the late 1800s to guard the local homesteaders.

