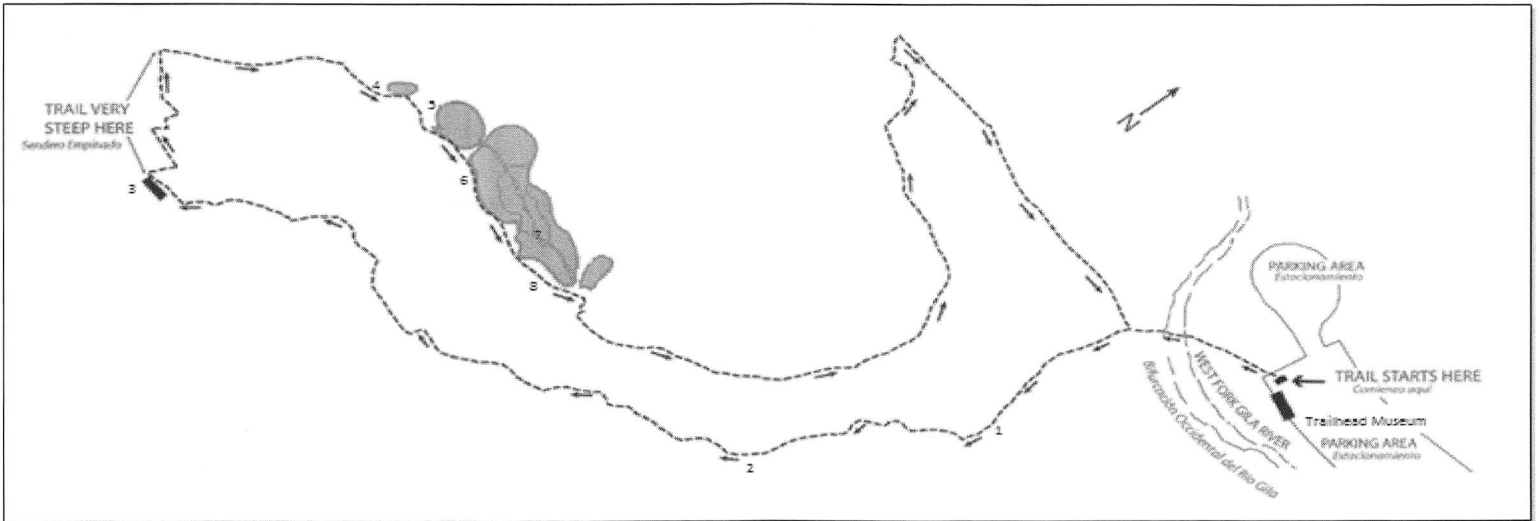




Cliff Dweller Canyon Companion



Exploring a Piece of Mogollon Cultural History

You are about to journey into Cliff Dweller Canyon and discover one of the most spectacular archeological sites in this area. In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt established Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument as the only place in the National Park Service that interprets and preserves part of the Mogollon Culture history. Today, your help is needed to keep this place special for future visitors to enjoy. Stay on the trail at all times, take only water with you, and remember that everything in the monument is part of the story and needs to stay in place. Take only photos. Leave only footprints.

The trail is unpaved, steep in some places, and uneven. You are walking in the footsteps of the Mogollon people who called this place home. Allow yourself to be transported back over 700 years to their world.

1. Crossing the Bridges: Water is Life

All living things need water to survive, and in the Southwest where precipitation can be highly variable and rare, water is more valuable than gold.

The Gila River

Beginning in mountains just north of the dwellings, the three forks of the Gila River converge in this valley and ultimately flow toward the Colorado River.

Cliff Dweller Creek

A natural spring at the head of the canyon provides a small, but constant flow of water that has sustained this lush canyon oasis for centuries.

Reliable water sources is probably a major factor that attracted the Mogollon to this canyon instead of other places. The resulting abundance of plant and animal life was an added bonus to the people seeking a new home.

2. In the Canyon: Nature's Market

The steep walls of the canyon shelter a wide variety of plants and wildlife. In one mile you'll travel from a cool and lush riparian area (look for wildflowers, javelina, and wild turkey), to sunny, rocky slopes. (Note the prickly pear cacti, juniper trees, and Canyon wrens.) Your return descends through a fire-burned hillside regenerating grasses, flowers and shrubs. Watch for birds, lizards and snakes.

The Mogollon people relied on nature's bounty to provide food, clothing, fuel, and building materials.

Yucca: The Wonder Plant

Would you know what to do with such an unusual-looking plant? For the Mogollon, the yucca had many uses. The leaves were frayed at the ends to become paintbrushes. Fibers from the leaves became weaving twine, mats, and sandals. Young stalks and fruits were good eating. Roots were used for soap while the spiny leaf tips made sharp needles for sewing.

3. At the Stairs: Foundations for a New Life

You are standing on the edge of a caldera, the collapsed remains of a giant volcano! About 28 million years ago, the ground under your feet literally exploded and shot huge amounts of ash and shards of volcanic glass into the sky. As this material fell to the ground, it was still so hot that it welded together into a stone called tuff.

Later volcanoes spread lava over the welded tuff forming the darker andesite rock above. As the lava erupted, escaping gases left the many holes you see in the andesite today.

Cave Formation

As the volcanoes quieted, the long process of steady erosion began. The end product is the sedimentary stone the Mogollon people sheltered in over 700 years ago: The Gila Conglomerate. Ground level was once at the height of the caves. The creek slowly carved through weak points in the ground and seeped into the stone. The canyon wall weakened, allowing large boulders to be dislodged thus expanding the caves that you see today.

4. A Good Place for the Family Home

While you pause here to catch your breath, imagine this is your home. Do you see closets or storage space? Is there a kitchen area for cooking? What about working and sleeping space for the family? It's all here, with a solid roof over your head, and a pretty awesome view of the area as well.

The smaller rooms were for storage, the large space that now looks open was likely an enclosed living space, and the fire pit represents a cooking area.

5. Architecture Tells a Story

Looking up, you see a T-shaped doorway. How did they get up there? Careful observation reveals a row of wood beams just below the door. Archaeologists think that occupants may have climbed a ladder up onto a wooden balcony to enter the door.

Some scientists associate the T-shaped door with the Ancestral Puebloan Culture found to the north of this area. How did an Ancestral

What's Cooking?

Of 32 species of plant remains found in the dwellings, 24 were wild. These included wild grapes, berries, acorns, and piñon nuts. Domestic crops grown included several varieties of corn, beans, and squash. Early inhabitants grew these crops along the river as well as in mesa-top fields. The rabbits and deer of the area would have been a welcome source of protein for the Mogollon diet.

Pueblo door get on a Mogollon home? Some feel that the door is an indication of trade. Not just trade of goods; but of ideas, beliefs, and even architecture styles. Others feel that the T-shaped door is a feature of the entire Southwest, rather than being indicative of a single cultural group.

The actual purpose or meaning of the door shape remains a mystery to science.

6. How Old are the Dwellings?

Before entering the cave, look up. Do you see the wooden poles overhead? They are the original logs the Mogollon used to build their home. Look for the small round "plug" in one of the beams.

Using dendrochronology (the study of tree ring patterns), archaeologists can accurately date the structures you see before you. Most of the rooms were built in the 1280's, but humans used these caves for shelter much earlier.

The heavy soot on the cave ceilings; and artifacts that date to earlier cultural groups make it likely that humans temporarily camped in the caves for thousands of years.

Yet, only the Mogollon decided to build within the caves and make this place their home. There must have been very compelling events that caused these people to leave their pueblos and reside in the cliffs.

7. Discover the Details

Climb the ladders to peer over the walls, but be careful not to touch whenever possible. Look for pieces of the past. Perhaps you will see a painted pictograph, a shell bead, a pottery sherd, or a 700 year old corn cob. All of these help tell the story of the past. Several families made the dwellings their home for about one generation; building, crafting art, raising children, and sharing stories much as we do today. Uncover the details of their lives, and leave them for others to discover and enjoy as well.

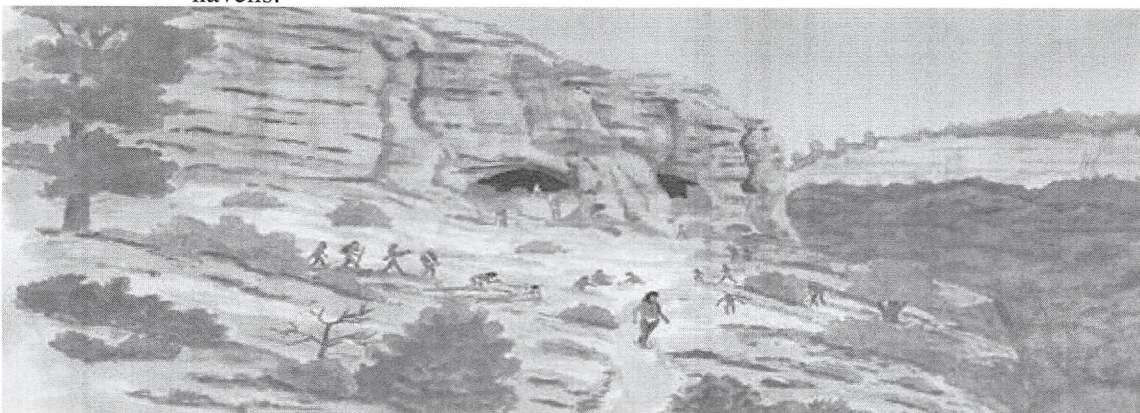
Where Did They Go?

The reasons the Mogollon left the dwellings around 1300 remain unknown. However, they continued a tradition of journeying that was part of the culture. Although evidence of the Mogollon *Culture* disappears from the archaeological record in the 1400s, the Mogollon *people* did **not** disappear. Their descendants live on in today's Pueblo Cultures of Arizona, New Mexico, and Northern Mexico.

8. Hidden and Defensible

Cliff dwellings have been described as the architecture of upheaval. Their appearance across the southwest coincides with a surge in warfare and people moving into defensive settlements. Less accessible locations became havens.

Building in cliff caves provided protection from the elements as well as strife. The strategy seems sound, as there is no indication that these cliff dwellings were ever attacked.



Your National Heritage and History

The natural protection of the caves preserved these dwellings and artifacts. However, they are not the only evidence of early human occupation. There are thousands of sites in the surrounding Gila National Forest you might discover. For further adventure, explore the two-room structure and pictographs at the Lower Scorpion Campground's "Trail to the Past."

We need your help. Take only photos and report any discoveries to rangers. **Leave all artifacts exactly where you find them.**

Gila Cliff Dwellings is one of the few sites that allow interior access to visitors. Help us continue this special experience by taking care of your heritage and conserving your history.

