

CAJON RUINS

As you enter this area, remember that the Hovenweep ruins and artifacts are protected by law. This applies equally to surrounding Bureau of Land Management and Tribal lands. Please do not do the following: Remove or disturb artifacts which include pottery sherds, projectile points, flakes from stone tool manufacture, and rubble from buildings; touch fragile pictographs and petroglyphs; mark on walls; dig or scratch the soil; or climb on ruin walls. If you observe anyone doing any of these things, please report this immediately to a ranger. Explore, enjoy, and contemplate, but let those who visit after you enjoy the area in the same condition.

You are now six miles north of the San Juan River and stand on the southern part of Cajon Mesa. The elevation is 5,160 feet above sea level. On a clear day you can see the sandstone formations of Monument Valley, Arizona in the distance to the southwest. Notice the shrubland vegetation which is a result of lower elevation, warmer temperatures, and less precipitation.

Archeologists feel fairly certain that sometime between 8,000 B.C. and 6,000 B.C., hunters pursuing big game passed through the area. From the ridge tops above the large spring, these people, referred to by archeologists as Paleo Indians, may have camped and scanned the broad San Juan Valley below for their quarry.

Then from about 3,000 B.C. until A.D. 1, hunters and gatherers of the Archaic culture frequented the area, again using the ridges for camping and the spring as a hunting ground. Not much is known about the Paleo and Archaic people because they roamed freely and made no permanent dwellings.

Anasazi people probably started using the area about A.D. 450 and depended increasingly on farming as the years passed. The structures you see today date from the 1200's.

Stop at the first group of structures and survey the canyonhead area. The larger structure on the left of the canyon rim as you look across was built before the smaller one on the right. Some researchers believe that perhaps together, these two buildings may have acted as a giant sundial, where the shadows of the buildings fall in specific spots according to the time of the year. The ranger station at the Square Tower Unit has more information on the archeoastronomy of the area.

Below the canyon rim are a series of walls and enclosures. Walk to the left and follow the path down into the canyon and along its wall to the right. Look into each of the niches. In one are some very fragile pictographs applied with mineral paint. Do not touch them, as they easily rub off. The interlocking stepped design occurs on various ceramics and basketry. The animal figure to the left of it may symbolize the Mountain Sheep clan, with which some modern Pueblo people identify.

The walled enclosures were probably for food storage rather than habitation. On the rock ledge of one before you reach the cave, look for some smooth depressions. The inhabitants may have ground corn and seeds here, or manufactured ground stone tools, such as mauls and hoes. Look for the long grooves in the rock at your feet. These may have been used to straighten arrows and sharpen bone tools and axe edges.

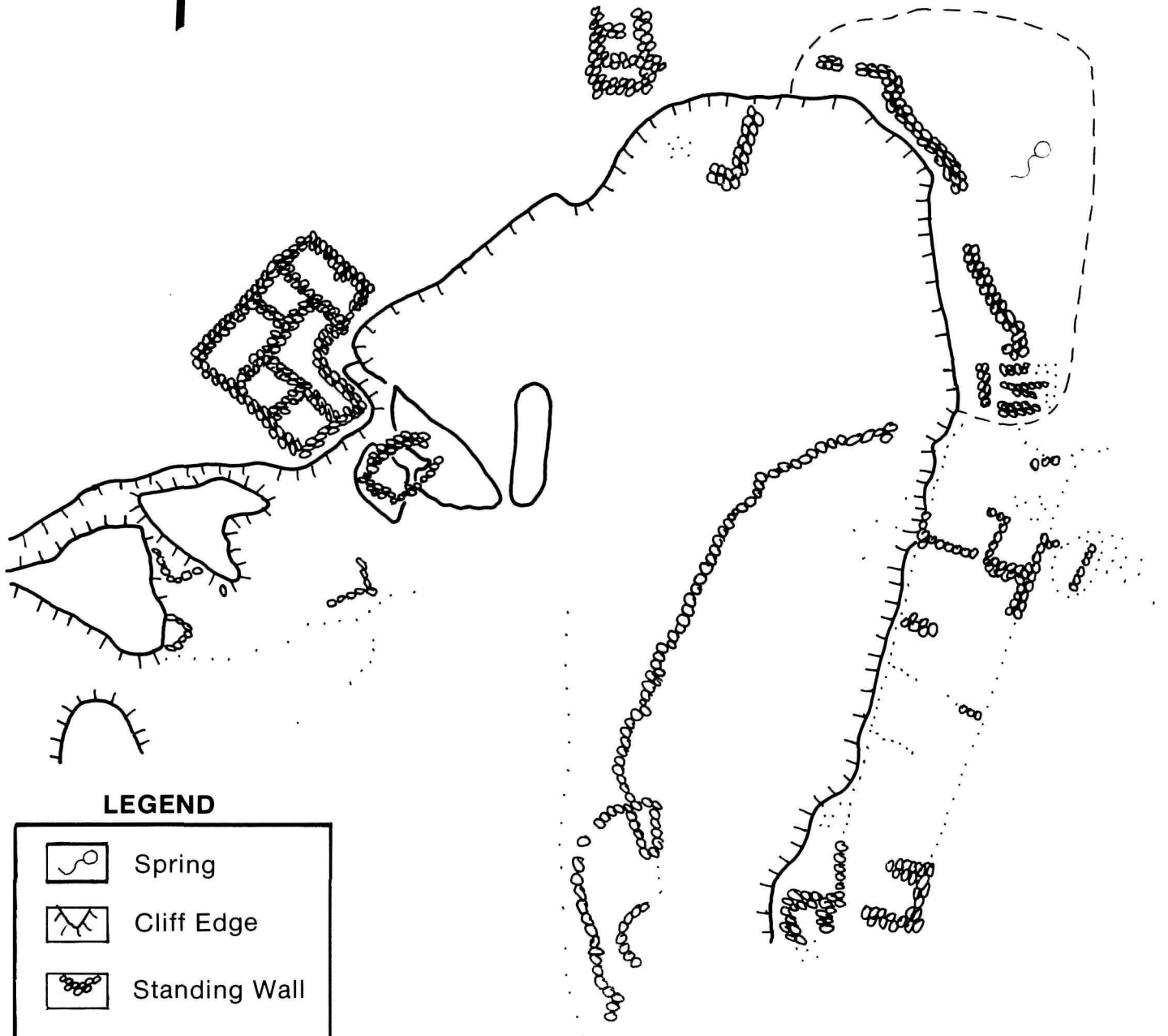
The pipe leading out from the spring feeds a trough just outside the boundary. Cajon is surrounded by the Navajo Reservation. This is an important watering spot for Navajo cattle. The Navajos, who were unrelated to the Anasazi inhabitants, moved into the area around the 1860's to herd sheep. Today, there are Navajo dwellings within two miles of Cajon.

The tower has a small entrance between the rocks on the north side. The National Park Service stabilized the structure by replacing mortar and adding the stones stretching across the boulders.

Looking from the tower across to the other side of the canyon, you can detect remnants of rock terracing which expanded ground area for farming. The spring was a good water source for their corn and squash and the other plants they encouraged, which included cattail, beeweed, jimson weed, and wolfberry.

From here you can retrace your path, climb atop the rim, and take a closer look at the buildings. In the arroyo which drains into the head of the canyon rim, archeologists found what seems to be a large reservoir. The wall of the earth and rock dam may have originally been over three feet high and several yards thick. Water control devices like this are not unusual. Just as we build dams and reservoirs to harness, control, and direct scanty or erratic water supplies, the Anasazi did also to successfully adapt to their marginal environment.

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LEGEND

	Spring
	Cliff Edge
	Standing Wall
	Rubble Area
	Cliff Overhang
	Walls in Overhang