HACKBERRY RUIN

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.

It is easy to understand why this canyonhead group of ruins is named Hackberry. Many hackberry trees grow here, taking advantage of the abundant moisture provided by the two seeps.

Although you will not see many standing walls, compared to other Hovenweep areas, Hackberry is one of the most complex at Hovenweep. You can find evidence of towers, roomblocks, kiva depressions, rubble mounds, garden terraces, water control devices, and an irrigation system.

Approach the area quietly and look for the red-shafted flickers and other birdlife that frequent the area. In the winter snow you may see deer, coyote, and rabbit tracks. The birds enjoy feeding on the dark red hackberries in late summer and fall.

At the edge of the canyon, just before you decend into the cavelike area to your right, stop and look along the rim to your right. There is a large rubble mound and in front of it are remnants of a dam which helped direct water runoff over the edge to a probable irrigation ditch below.

In the cave area is a standing pool of water. The people who lived here modified this seep by building a rock-lined cistern with a connecting irrigation ditch leading to the side of the canyon. These features are buried now under sediments. Archeologists collected ancient pollens of corn, squash, wolfberry, jimson weed, sedges, rushes, and beeweed in the ditch, which suggest that farming and washing of food vessels may have occurred in the immediate vicinity.

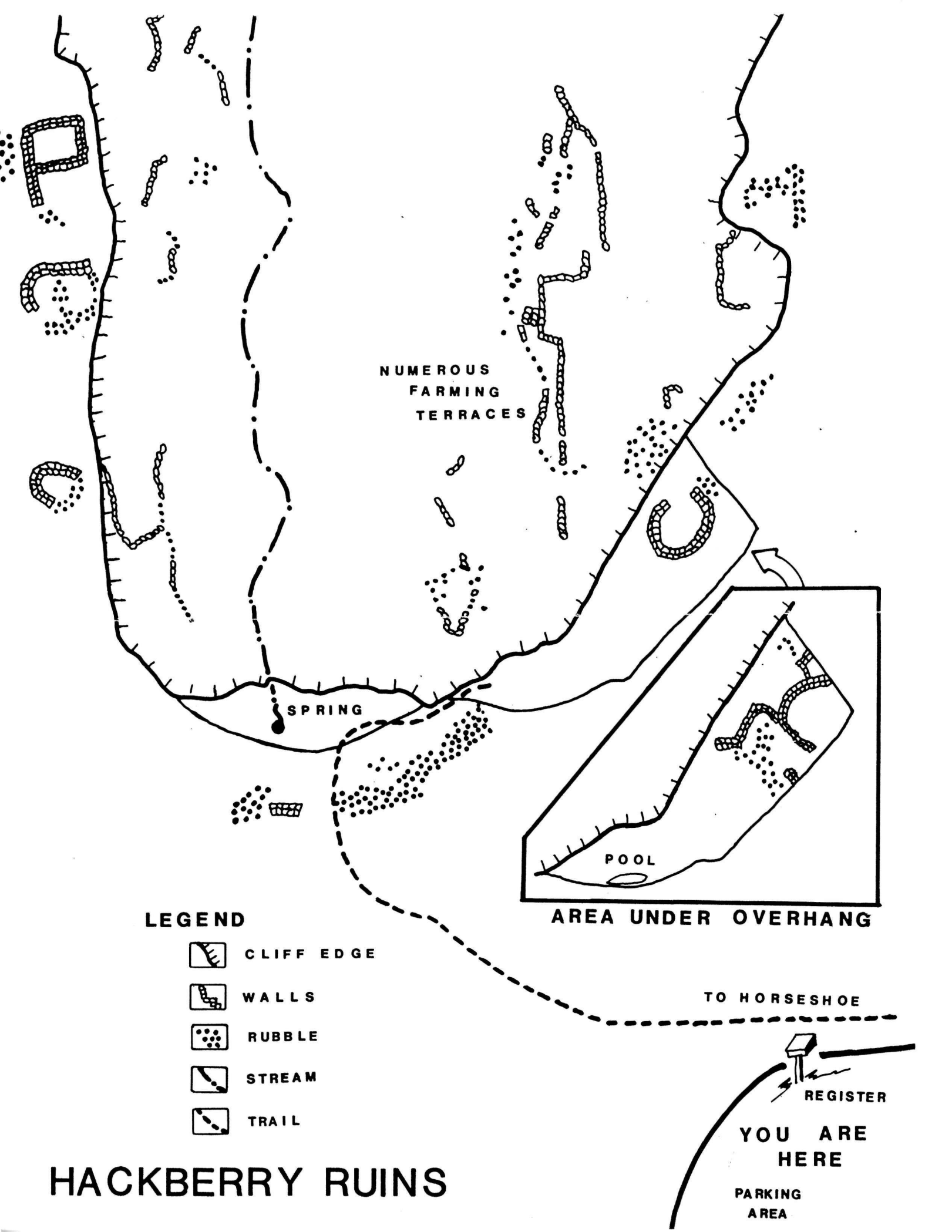
On the cave wall, blackened by smoke from years of firebuilding, you can detect both prehistoric rock art and modern graffiti. Test pits in the cave revealed a variety of prehistoric and modern artifacts, among them prehistoric maize and pottery sherds mended with cotton string and sinew, and 20th century newspapers and corncobs. The purpose of the low masonry wall is not certain, but may have been part of a storage shelter.

Along the slopes of the canyon, over 100 meters of rock wall terracing inhibited erosion and allowed for a greater expanse of soil for agriculture. These gardens were probably irrigated by a system of ditches which originate at the seep under the cave.

Modern Pueblo people, the Zuni and Hopi, have irrigated garden terraces, where they grow some of their vegetable delicacies and ceremonial plants difficult to grow elsewhere. These include green and sweet corn, onions, squash, chile, gourds, sunflowers, melons, tobacco, fruit trees, and dye plants. Many of these plants were introduced in historic times. Irrigated terraces such as these likewise provided relatively moisture controlled conditions for the prehistoric people, where their crops had a better chance of thriving.

In a storage shelter in the canyon, ancient pollen of cotton was found which indicates the possible cultivation of this plant. Until recently, Hopis grew a variety of cotton which has a much shorter growing season than the kind grown commercially. They wove the fibers into clothing primarily used for ceremonies.

On top of the canyon rim, the numerous rubble mounds and tower remains indicate that a sizable community of people lived here. In one of the tower structures, test pits revealed a number of artifacts, including a stone axe, projectile points, other lithics, bone and pottery sherds. These artifacts suggest that the people could have used the tower as a tool manufacturing area in addition to other activities. Many times limited excavations, such as those done at Hovenweep, raise more questions than they answer about the purposes of the structures and the lives of the people who built them.



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