

# Mesa Verde

NATIONAL PARK

Colorado

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## Prehistoric and Historic Events

Earliest occupation of the Mesa Verde region by farming Indians was about the beginning of the Christian Era.

**5th to 8th centuries.** Early agriculturists developed pottery and houses. Semi-subterranean homes spread widely over the Mesa Verde.

**8th to 12th centuries.** Pueblos supplanted the pit houses and developed steadily toward the great structures of the Classic Period.

**12th and 13th centuries.** Classic Period of the Mesa Verde during which hundreds of pueblos were constructed; first on the mesa tops, later in the caves.

**1276** Beginning of 24-year drought, one of the causes of abandonment of the Mesa Verde.

**1765** Don Juan Maria de Rivera explored area north of the Mesa Verde.

**1776** Fray Escalante, following Rivera's trail, camped near present park entrance, August 10.

**1848** Mesa Verde region acquired by United States from Mexico by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

**1859** J. S. Newberry, first white man in the Mesa Verde, climbed to top of the mesa.

**1874** Discovery of the first Mesa Verde cliff dwelling by a Geological Survey party, of which W. H. Jackson, famous "Pioneer Photographer," was a member.

**1888** Discovery of Cliff Palace and other major cliff dwellings by early cowboys.

**1891** Baron Nordenskiold, Swedish archeologist, conducted first scientific excavation of cliff dwellings.

**1906** Mesa Verde National Park established by act of Congress, June 29.

**1908** to date. Excavation of ruins by archeologists.

**1913** First entrance road completed.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Douglas McKay, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

# Mesa Verde

## NATIONAL PARK

MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK was established to preserve the ruins of hundreds of dwellings which prehistoric Indians built on the mesa tops and in the caves of a score of rugged canyons. The park, containing 51,017 acres of federally owned land, is a unit of the National Park System and is administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior.

The Mesa Verde, Spanish for "green table," rises high above the surrounding country. For about 1,300 years agricultural Indians occupied the mesa and surrounding regions and from the hundreds of ruins that remain archeologists have compiled one of the most significant chapters in the story of prehistoric America.

Only a few ruins of each type have been excavated, but as the archeological work continues there comes a better understanding of the ancient people. The visitor who is able to leave his modern self behind, momentarily, and live and think only in the past, is able to understand and enjoy a fascinating story of life in ancient America.

In addition to Mesa Verde National Park, a number of national monuments have also been established to preserve outstanding ruins that remain as evidence of

the same tribe and of another tribe which lived just to the south. These national monuments are Aztec Ruins and Chaco Canyon, in New Mexico, Canyon de Chelly, in Arizona, and Hovenweep, in Colorado and Utah.

### Preservation of the Ruins

Today there are hundreds of ruins in the Mesa Verde, only a few of which have been excavated. Abandoned for many centuries, they have been weakened by natural forces, and some were badly damaged by modern man before the area was made a national park. Maximum protection must be given to the ruins in order to preserve them, and visitors are asked to cooperate with the National Park Service by observing its rules.

One rule is rigidly enforced: VISITORS MAY ENTER CLIFF DWELLINGS ONLY WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY A PARK RANGER. This rule does not apply to excavated mesa-top ruins. Visitors who have received instructions at the museum and maps may visit these mesa-top ruins at any time.



MUSEUM DIORAMA SHOWING PUEBLO LIFE OF A. D. 850.

## Prehistoric Inhabitants of the Mesa Verde

The Mesa Verde was inhabited for about 1,300 years by agricultural Indians who began to drift into the area shortly after the beginning of the Christian Era. At first their culture was simple, but there was constant progress and by A. D. 1200 they had reached a high cultural level. Archeologists divide the long occupation into four archeological periods, each of which has a descriptive name. They are not, of course, sharply marked; the dates given for each are approximate.

*Basket Maker Period.*—A. D. 1 to

400—The first farming Indians of the Mesa Verde are called Basket Makers, because weaving of excellent baskets was their outstanding craft. At this early date three important things were unknown to the people: pottery, houses, and the bow and arrow. Since there was no pottery, baskets served for all household purposes for which containers were needed. The people lived in shallow caves that are common in this area, and perhaps, in summer, in brush huts near their fields on the mesa top. In the floors of the caves they built roofed pits (cists) for storage of corn and squash raised in small mesa-top fields. The atlatl, a primitive dart-throwing stick, was used for hunting and defense.

Once the farming culture was established, the Basket Makers showed marked capacity for development and a willingness to borrow ideas from people with whom they came in contact. There was steady progress, and by the 400's significant changes took place.

*Modified Basket Maker Period.—*  
*A. D. 400 to 750*—About the year 400 important new developments came. The Indians learned to make pottery and build roofed dwellings. Somewhat later, they began to use the bow and arrow. Although the people were still the same, the culture was changing. The early pottery was a plain, gray type that took the place of baskets for many uses such as cooking and water carrying. The dwellings were shallow

pits with head-high roofs of poles and adobe. These provided ample protection from the weather, and the people were then able to live the year round on the open mesa tops in the midst of their corn fields.

Weaving was still an important craft, and farming was being more highly developed. Beans, squash, and several colors of corn were grown.

The population seems to have increased rapidly, and soon there were hundreds of villages on the mesa tops and in the caves of the Four Corners region. Toward the end of the period the architecture grew more elaborate. Rectangular rooms with vertical walls developed, and these were joined together to form large villages.

TWO-STORY CLIFF HOUSE, FIRST CLIFF DWELLING DISCOVERED IN THE MESA VERDE.



*Developmental Pueblo Period.—A. D. 750 to 1100*—From about the year 750 on, the people showed an increasing tendency to group their houses together to form compact villages. To these a Spanish term, "pueblo," meaning village, has been given. The name, Developmental Pueblo, simply indicates that during this period the ground work was laid for the Great Pueblo Period that followed. As the term implies, it was a period of development and experimentation. Many types of house walls were tried: adobe, adobe and poles, stone slabs topped with adobe, adobe and stones, and finally true coursed masonry. The houses were joined together to form compact clusters around open courts and in these courts were pit houses that grew deeper and finally developed into ceremonial rooms, now called kivas.

As the result of much experimentation, pottery improved greatly during this period and certain definite types became associated with each area. Turkey-feather blankets became common, and the weaving of cotton cloth began. An odd development was a new carrying cradle which had a pronounced effect on the appearance of the people. During the Basket Maker periods a soft woven cradle had been used and the babies' heads developed normally. During the 800's the people adopted a cradle made of wood and as a result the heads of most of them were deformed, being noticeably flattened on the back.

The Developmental Pueblo Period was a time of peace, expansion, and progress. Innumerable farming villages dotted the region, the population increased, and arts and crafts showed constant improvement.

*Great, or Classic, Pueblo Period.—A. D. 1100 to 1300*—As the name implies, this period marked the climax of the Pueblo culture in the Mesa Verde region, and arts and crafts reached the peak of

their development. Houses were built of fine horizontal masonry of well-shaped stones laid in adobe mortar. Most of the walls were smoothly plastered, and designs painted in red, yellow, black, and white added a touch of color to the homes. Villages ranged in size from a few rooms and a single kiva to great terraced structures with as many as 200 rooms and more than a score of kivas.

The pottery was well-shaped, carefully fired, and elaborately decorated with geometrical and animal figures, the outstanding Mesa Verde ware having black designs on a light-gray background. The finely woven cotton cloth was often decorated with designs woven in color, and for personal adornment there was a profusion of jewelry made of turquoise and other brightly colored stones.

A rigid social structure developed and a highly ritualistic religion evolved. The importance of this religion in the lives of the people is evidenced by the large number of ceremonial rooms and by the fact that separate buildings, designed solely for ceremonial use, were sometimes constructed.

For a time the culture flourished, establishing a peak of spectacular archeological significance. It was the classic period of the prehistoric pueblo culture of the Mesa Verde, the period that produced such outstanding structures as Cliff Palace, Square Tower House, Spruce Tree House, Long House, Far View House, and scores of other great cliff dwellings and pueblos.

Although the pueblo culture reached its highest level during this period, there are evidences that adverse influences were affecting the people. During the 1100's most of the Pueblo Indians of the Mesa Verde lived on the open mesa tops in widely scattered villages, large and small. About A. D. 1200, there was a movement

toward the caves and within a short time pueblos were built in most of the caves of the Mesa Verde. During the 1200's, few people lived out on the open mesas.

There are numerous evidences that these cave pueblos, or cliff dwellings, were deliberately fortified, so it is apparent some danger faced the people. It is possible this resulted from a breakup within the tribe itself, with consequent quarreling between villages. There are many indications, however, that some new people, probably nomadic Indians, had moved into the area and had begun to harass the peaceful Pueblo farmers.

The end came quickly. Beginning in the year 1276, drought struck the region. For 24 years precipitation was deficient. Year after year the crops failed. One by one the springs dried up and the people were in serious trouble. Their only escape was to seek regions which had a more dependable water supply. Village after village was abandoned and before the drought ended all of the Indians had left the Mesa Verde, never to return.

They drifted southward and eastward where today, along the Rio Grande, in New Mexico, and on west to the Hopi country, in northern Arizona, live the modern Pueblo Indians. Undoubtedly, among the ancestors of many Pueblo Indians of today are the former inhabitants of Mesa Verde.

## The Ruins

Ruins of many different types are accessible to Mesa Verde visitors. They range from pit houses built during the 500's to the cliff dwellings of the 1200's. The cliff dwellings are the most spectacular, but the mesa-top pit houses and pueblos are equally important for, seen in their chrono-

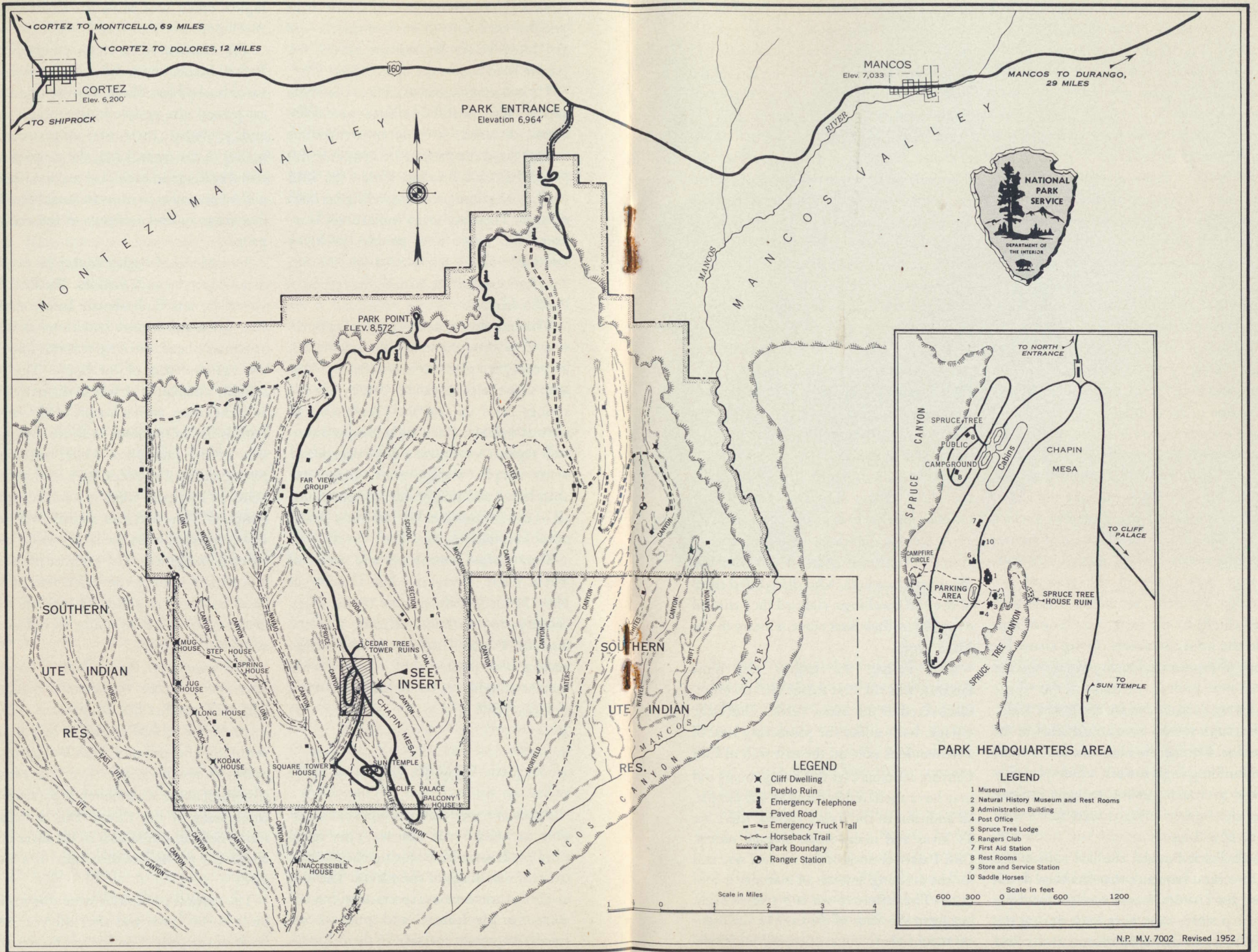
logical order, they show the architectural development of the Mesa Verde.

*Pit Houses.*—No ruins dating from Basket Maker times have yet been excavated in the Mesa Verde. During this earliest period, the people built storage cists and probably their first experimental houses in the caves. Later, the people built cliff dwellings in each cave so that now it will be necessary to excavate under the cliff dwellings to find evidence of the earliest people.

Two Modified Basket Maker pit houses may be seen by park visitors. The first, Pit House B, was built shortly before A. D. 600. Although it once had a roof as high as a man's head, nothing remains but the underground part of the house. The pit, roughly circular, is 20 feet in diameter and 30 inches deep, with a fire-pit in the center. Four holes in the floor indicate the position of the four posts which once supported the roof of poles, bark, and adobe. South of this main room is a smaller antechamber. This was also roofed over and was connected with the larger room by a covered passageway. The entrance probably was a small door in the south wall of the antechamber. The smoke hole in the roof of the main room no doubt served as an additional entrance.

The second pit house, built a century later, shows certain very definite changes. The antechamber has disappeared and in its place is a vertical shaft that served as a ventilator and entrance. This D-shaped pit house is much deeper than the earlier structure, and a wide bench is present on three sides of the room. This structure shows definite similarities to the kivas into which the pit houses developed at a later date.

The earliest pit houses were sometimes built in the caves, but after the year 600, most of the people built their houses out





in the open. Scores of pit house villages have been found on the mesas and in the valleys of the Mesa Verde region.

*Pueblo Ruins.*—The wider canyon bottoms and the mesa tops are dotted with scores, perhaps hundreds, of pueblo ruins dating from both the Developmental and Great Pueblo Periods.

Six pueblo ruins recently have been excavated along one of the ruins roads. They follow in chronological order the pit houses described above and show the architectural development preceding the cliff dwellings.

The first pueblos, built during the 800's, were constructed of thin stone slabs, poles, and adobe. The small, rectangular, flat-roofed houses were joined together in long rows, and in the court south of the houses were one or more deep pit rooms. Later, stone masonry came into use, and the pit rooms developed into kivas.

After stone masonry came into general use, it improved rapidly. During the 1100's, the thick walls of the mesa-top pueblos were made of well-cut blocks of stone laid in adobe mortar. At this time an important change was made in the plan of the pueblos. Formerly, the kivas, which were used chiefly by the men, were located outside the house structure, being some distance to the south. During the 1100's, the kivas were built in the midst of the village and were surrounded by the house walls. Often high towers were constructed in the pueblos. Placing the kivas inside the walls and building high towers, which probably served as watch towers, perhaps indicate that the Pueblo Indians were faced with some new danger.

Sun Point Pueblo, the last ruin in the architectural sequence that has been developed for visitors, is an excellent example of the pueblos that were built during the 1100's. It contained 30 rooms, and a kiva

and tower were built in the center of the structure. Little remains of the pueblo, however, for when its occupants deserted it they tore down the walls and carried the stones to nearby caves, where they used them in constructing cliff dwellings.

Far View House, which is located on the entrance highway 5 miles north of the museum, is an even better example. When the occupants deserted this pueblo they did not carry the stones away, and some of the walls stand three stories high. Far View House contained 5 kivas and about 50 living rooms.

*Cliff Dwellings.*—During the last century of the Great Pueblo Period (A. D. 1200–1300), most of the Pueblo Indians of the Mesa Verde left the mesa tops and built their homes in the caves that abound in the many canyons. It is possible this was done for security from harassment by some other tribe of Indians.

The exact number of cliff dwellings in the Mesa Verde is unknown. The 20 large canyons and the numerous small side canyons contain hundreds of caves and in almost every one there is a ruin. The Wetherill brothers, who discovered most of the cliff dwellings, claimed they entered over 500 in their first three winters in the Mesa Verde.

Cliff Palace, the largest and most famous, was the first major cliff dwelling discovered in the Mesa Verde. This large village, built under the protecting roof of a tremendous cave on the east wall of Cliff Canyon, contains over 200 living rooms and may have sheltered as many as 400 people. In addition to the living rooms, there are 23 kivas and many small storage rooms. Cliff Palace is notable for its vast size and for the amazing amount of masonry it contains. The tallest tower is 4 stories high, but from the floor of the cave to the highest rooms there are at least 8 floor levels.



SPRUCE TREE HOUSE, THE BEST-PRESERVED LARGE CLIFF DWELLING IN THE MESA VERDE.

Spruce Tree House is one of the largest of the cliff dwellings and is notable for its excellent state of preservation. A great many of the high walls still touch the top of the cave and many of the original roofs are still intact. Spruce Tree House contains 114 living rooms and 8 kivas.

Other famous cliff dwellings to be seen along the ruins roads are Square Tower House, with its striking four-story tower; Oak Tree House; New Fire House; Fire Temple, an unusual ceremonial structure built in a cave; and Balcony House, best known for its spectacular defensive location.

## Geology, Fauna, and Flora

Mesa Verde is important geologically as the type locality of the Mesaverde formation, which consists of Cliff House sandstone, Menefee shale, and Point Lookout sandstone, in descending order. It is underlain to a depth of 2,200 feet by the shale, sandstone, and limestone of the Mancos formation. All have been extensively exposed by the forces of erosion.

The fauna and flora of Mesa Verde represent a mingling of types from the low, arid country to the south with types from



PARTY OF VISITORS ENTERING BALCONY HOUSE.

the high mountains to the north. Rocky Mountain mule deer are plentiful, and the larger predators, such as mountain lions, foxes, coyotes, and bobcats are present. Cottontail rabbits, squirrels, porcupines, and chipmunks are abundant. More than 100 species of birds have been noted, and several interesting forms of reptiles are present.

The dense forest of the mesa is composed almost entirely of pinyon pine and Utah juniper. In certain areas are small stands of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine, and along the high north rim are scrub oaks and such flowering shrubs as antelope-brush, service-berry, mockorange, fendlera, and mountain-mahogany. Some of the most spectacular

flowers are the penstemon, lupine, sweet-pea, paintbrush, mariposa lily, and sulphur flower.

### What to Do in the Mesa Verde

In order to give visitors an understanding of the archeology of the park and a glimpse into the lives of its prehistoric inhabitants, an extensive program of talks and guided trips is offered by the Government, free of charge, during the summer season. Visitors are urged to take advantage of these services, as the story of the ancient people is difficult to understand without such help.

*Guided Trips.*—During the summer season, trained park ranger archeologists conduct visitors to some of the outstanding ruins. Some of these trips start at the museum; in other cases, visitors drive to the ruins and meet the rangers there. A schedule of all trips and activities is given to visitors at the information desk in the lobby of the park museum.

*The Ruins Roads.*—The two loops of this road, totaling 12 miles, wind across the mesas and along the canyon rims. Over 40 cliff dwellings can be seen from the canyon rim view points. Along a 1-mile section of the road are eight ruins, two pit houses, and six pueblos that show the architectural sequence of the Mesa Verde. Trailside exhibits have been installed at all points of interest. These roads are open during daylight hours only.

*Campfire Talks.*—Each evening in the summer informal talks are given around a campfire by members of the archeologist staff. The talks deal with the prehistoric and modern Indians of the Southwest and the archeology of the region and are a featured part of the interpretive program.

Navajo Indians who work in the park sometimes give parts of their tribal dances at the campfire program.

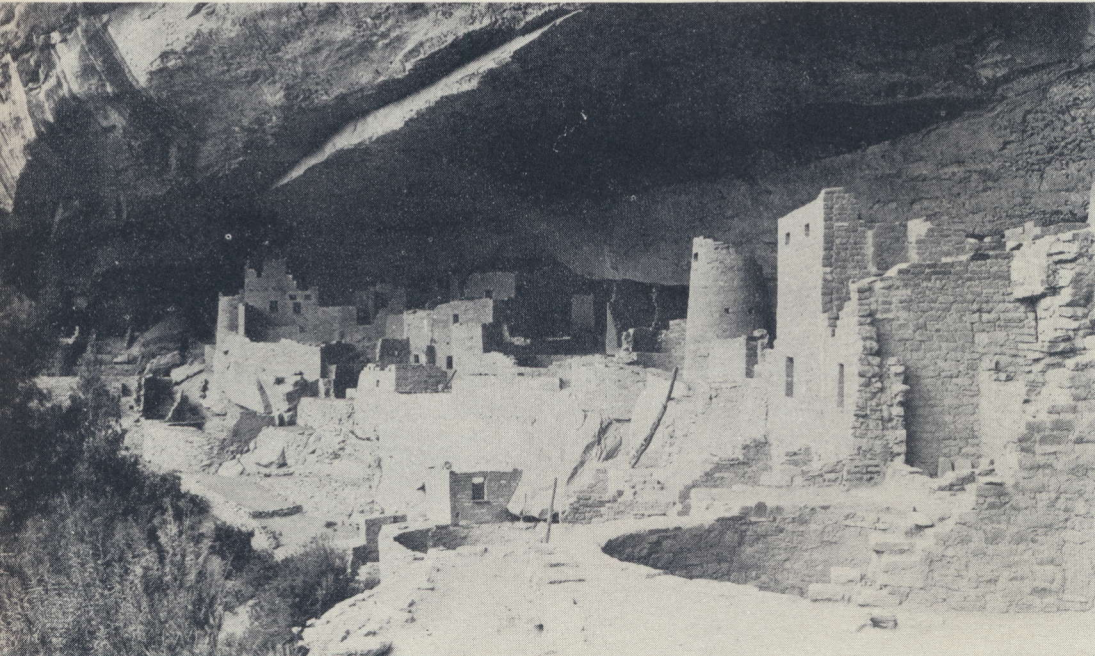
*Museums and Library.*—The park museum is the key to a real understanding of the prehistoric people of the Mesa Verde, and visitors should see it before going to the ruins. In addition to its dioramas and other exhibits, it contains an extensive library. A small natural history museum offers exhibits of the plants, animals, and geology of the Mesa Verde.

*Hiking and Horseback Trips.*—Hiking and horseback trips along the rim rocks and into the canyons lead to spectacular views and ruins that cannot be seen from the roads.

Most trails require strenuous exertion, so hikers must obtain maps and information before leaving the headquarters area. Hikers must obtain a PERMIT at the museum so the park rangers will have the information as to where they are going and when they will return.

Horseback trips are arranged with the pack and saddle concessioner. (See Accommodations.)

CLIFF PALACE, THE LARGEST OF THE CLIFF DWELLINGS.



## How to Reach the Park

*By Automobile.*—Roads approaching Mesa Verde National Park from all directions offer motorists a great diversity of spectacular western scenery. Those from the north and east cross the Continental Divide and a number of the magnificent mountain ranges of western Colorado. Roads from the west and northwest pass through the colorful mesa country of southeastern Utah; while those from the south and west cross the picturesque reservations of the Navajo, Ute, and Pueblo Indians.

The park entrance is located on United States Highway No. 160, midway between the towns of Mancos, and Cortez, Colo. From the park entrance it is 20 miles to headquarters, where the museum, lodge, and all facilities are located.

*By Railroad.*—The nearest rail approach to Mesa Verde National Park is at Grand Junction, Colo., to the north, and Gallup, N. Mex., to the south.

*By Bus.*—The Continental Trailways, of Denver, Colo., operates bus service twice daily from Durango, Colo., to the park during the summer season. Various trans-continental bus systems operate regular daily motor service to Durango from Denver and Grand Junction, Colo., Salt Lake City, Utah, and Albuquerque and Gallup, N. Mex.

## Park Seasons

*Summer Season.*—From May 15 to October 15, the Government maintains a daily schedule of activities: visitors are able to visit ruins of various types on ranger-guided trips; evening campfire programs are held; the museums and the canyon-rim drives are open; and saddle horses are available.

The campground is open during this period and the lodge offers complete overnight accommodations. (See Accommodations.)

*Winter Season.*—The park is open to visitors during the winter months, but no overnight accommodations are available. There may be extended periods when heavy snows make driving hazardous, and visitors are not encouraged to travel the park roads at those times. Except during these periods of inclement weather, visitors are able to see and enjoy many of the park's features. The museums are open, as well as several miles of canyon-rim roads. Many cliff dwellings can be seen from the canyon rims, and mesa-top ruins of several types can be visited.

## Accommodations

*Free Public Campground.*—A public campground is located on the rim of Spruce Canyon, a few hundred yards from the museum, lodge, store, post office, and park headquarters. Each camp site is provided with a fireplace, a table with seats, and a level place for a tent. Water has been piped to convenient places. Firewood is provided, as are toilet facilities, showers, and laundry tubs.

CAMPING AND PICNICKING ARE PERMITTED ONLY IN THIS CAMPGROUND. LEAVE YOUR CAMP CLEAN. DO NOT DRIVE CARS ON, OR WALK OVER, THE SHRUBBERY.

*Overnight Accommodations.*—Spruce Tree Lodge, operated by the Mesa Verde Co., is open only during the summer season. The lodge, which is located near the museum, provides sleeping accommodations ranging from tents to house-keeping and de luxe cabins.

*Meals.*—The lodge dining room serves breakfast, luncheon, and dinner at sched-

uled hours. A lunch counter, serving sandwiches and soft drinks, is operated during the summer months.

All communications concerning reservations should be addressed to the Mesa Verde Co., Mesa Verde National Park, Colo.

*Transportation.*—For visitors without cars, a lodge bus is available for transportation to ruins visited on the ranger-guided trips.

*Arts and Crafts.*—The lodge gift shop has displays of modern Southwest Indian arts and crafts, and Navajo Indians demonstrate weaving and silversmithing near the lodge entrance.

*Communications.*—Telephone and telegraph services are available for visitors at Spruce Tree Lodge. Telegrams sent prepaid

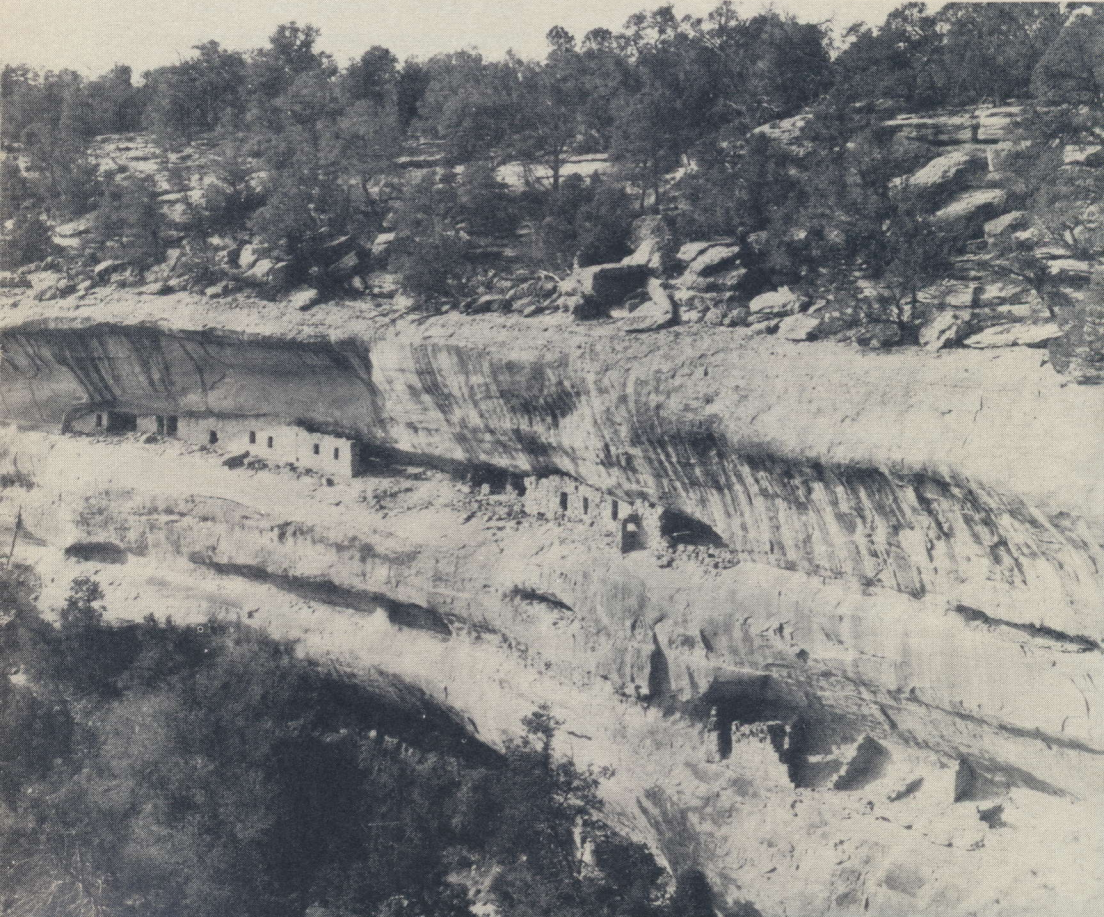
to Dolores, Colo., will be phoned to the addressee at the lodge. The post office address for parties within the park is Mesa Verde National Park, Colo.

*Grocery Store and Filling Station.*—Groceries, gas, oil, and limited campers' supplies are available at the Mesa Verde Store, located near Spruce Tree Lodge, in the headquarters area.

*Pack and Saddle Horses.*—Saddle horses, especially trained for mountain trails, may be rented by the hour or day, and the reasonable rates include the services of a guide.

Arrangements for pack trips must be made by noon on the day prior to the start of the trip. A guide-cook accompanies each party, and each person is furnished with a saddle horse, bed, canteen, slicker, and food.

HIGH CLIFF DWELLINGS, ENTERED BY ROPES AND LADDERS, WERE EASY TO DEFEND.



**Rates.**—Rates for all accommodations within the park are approved by the Director of the National Park Service and the latest schedules are on file with the park superintendent. Because of fluctuating price levels, no rates are quoted in this booklet.

## Administration

Mesa Verde National Park is administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. The park superintendent is in immediate charge. He is assisted in the protection and interpretation of its features by a well-trained staff. All communications regarding the park should be addressed to the Superintendent, Mesa Verde National Park, Colo.

## Help Us Protect Your Park

Park Regulations are designed for the protection of natural and historic objects, as well as for the comfort and convenience of visitors. Please help the National Park Service in its duty of enforcing park regulations by abiding by the following rules:

**Preservation of Ruins, Natural Features, and Public Property.**—It is a violation of the law to destroy, disturb, deface, or injure in any manner any ruin or relic, any mammal, bird, or other wildlife, any tree, flower, or other vegetation, any rock or other natural formation, any public building, equipment, marker, or sign, or any other public property of any kind. DO

NOT ENTER ANY CLIFF DWELLING UNLESS ACCOMPANIED BY A PARK RANGER.

**Automobiles.**—Consideration of other drivers is important. Drive carefully at all times and obey the park's automobile regulations. Speed limit is 35 miles an hour on entrance highway; 20 miles an hour in headquarters area and on ruins roads. Free-wheeling is prohibited. Secure automobile permit at park entrance: automobile or motorcycle fee, \$1; trailer, \$1 additional.

**Fires.**—Fires are permitted only in the fireplaces in the public campgrounds. Extinguish your fire completely before leaving camp. Do not guess your fire is out; know it.

**Firewood.**—Use only the wood stacked and marked "firewood" near your camp site. In any event do not use ax on any standing tree or strip bark from junipers.

**Grounds.**—Burn all combustible rubbish before leaving your camp. Do not throw papers, cans, or other refuse on the ground or over the canyon rim; use the incinerators.

**Hiking.**—Do not venture away from park headquarters without securing a permit at the Museum Information Desk. This precaution is absolutely necessary because of the danger of getting lost and the need for protecting the ruins.

**Park Rangers.**—The rangers are here to help and advise you as well as to enforce regulations. When in doubt, ask a ranger.

A complete copy of the rules and regulations governing the park may be seen at the office of the superintendent.

OBEDY ALL SIGNS.  
THEY ARE FOR YOUR GUIDANCE AND PROTECTION.