

# 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 United States citizen 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, Spruce Tree House, and Square Tower House by early cowboys, Richard Wetherill and Charles Mason.

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.

*The National Park System, of which this park is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.*



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Stewart L. Udall, *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 Federal 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. If you are able to leave your modern self behind, momentarily, and live and think only in the past, you may be 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 prehistoric way of life to the south and to the west. 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 you 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.

*Basketmaker Period (A. D. 1 to 400).*

The first farming Indians of the Mesa Verde are called Basketmakers, 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 Basketmakers 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.

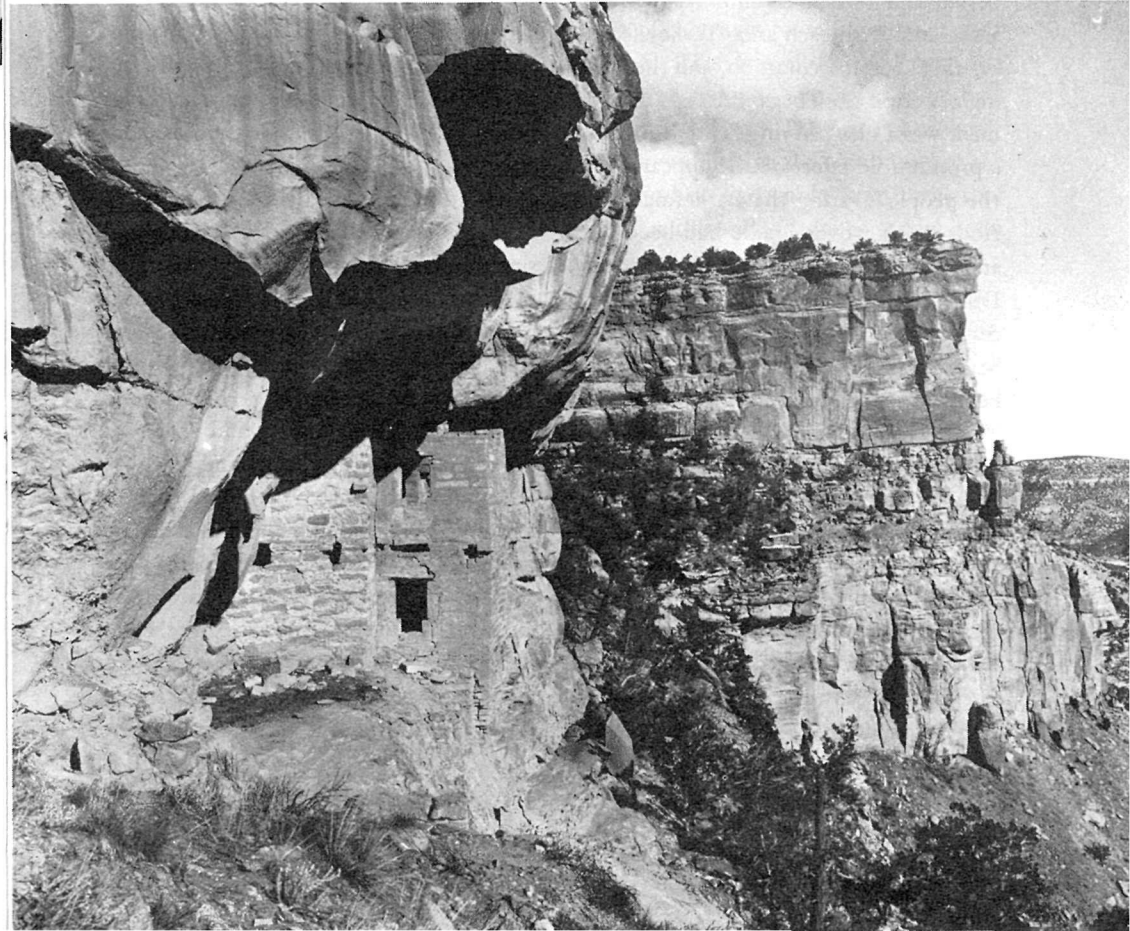
*Modified Basketmaker Period (A. D. 400 to 750).* About the year 400 important new developments came. The Indians learned to make pottery and build roofed dwellings. Somewhat later, they began to use the bow and arrow. Although the people were still the same, the culture was changing. The early pottery 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 Basketmaker 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 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-

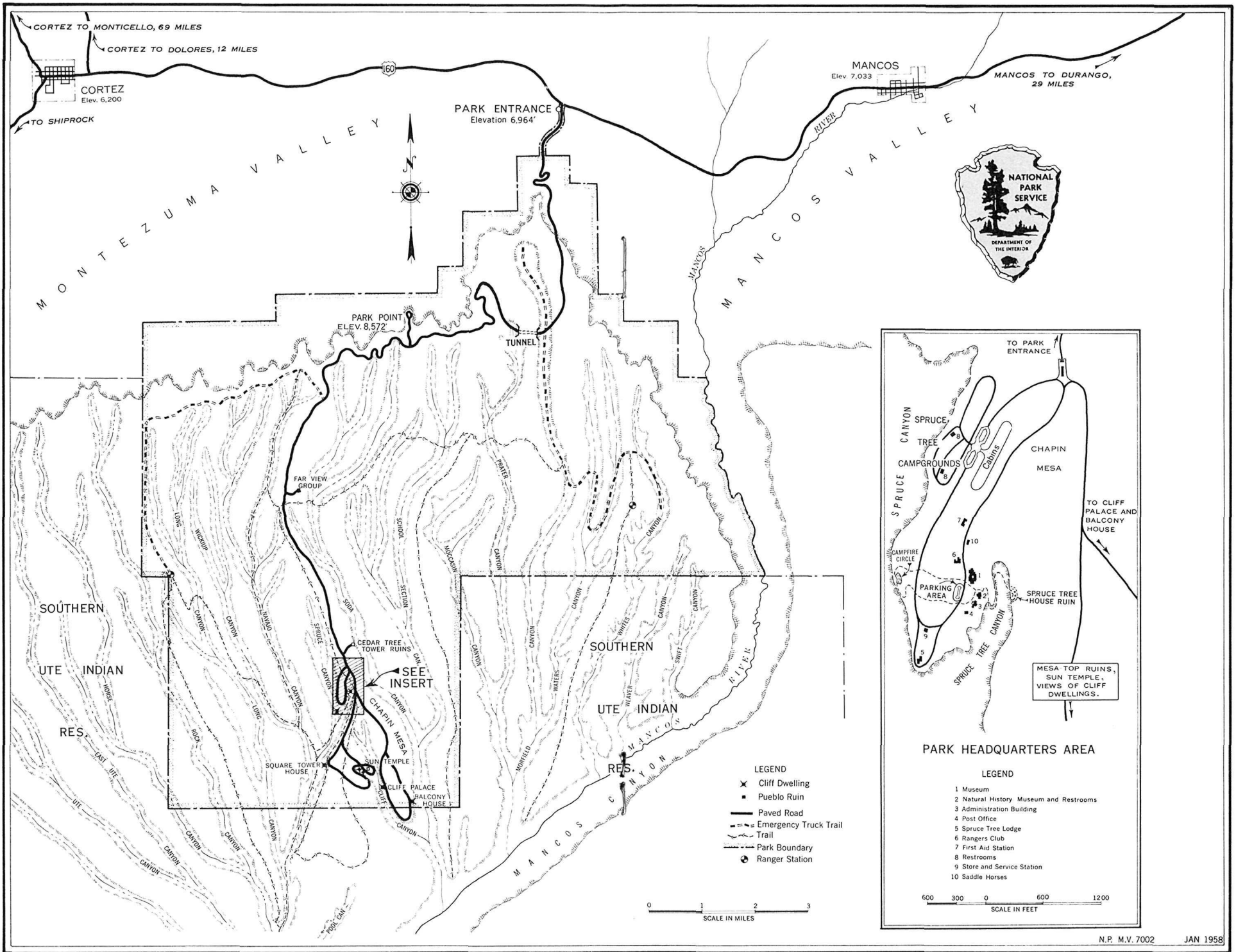
logical order, they show the architectural development of the Mesa Verde.

*Pit Houses.*—No ruins dating from early Basketmakers have 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 Basketmaker 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 A. D. 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 watchtowers, 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

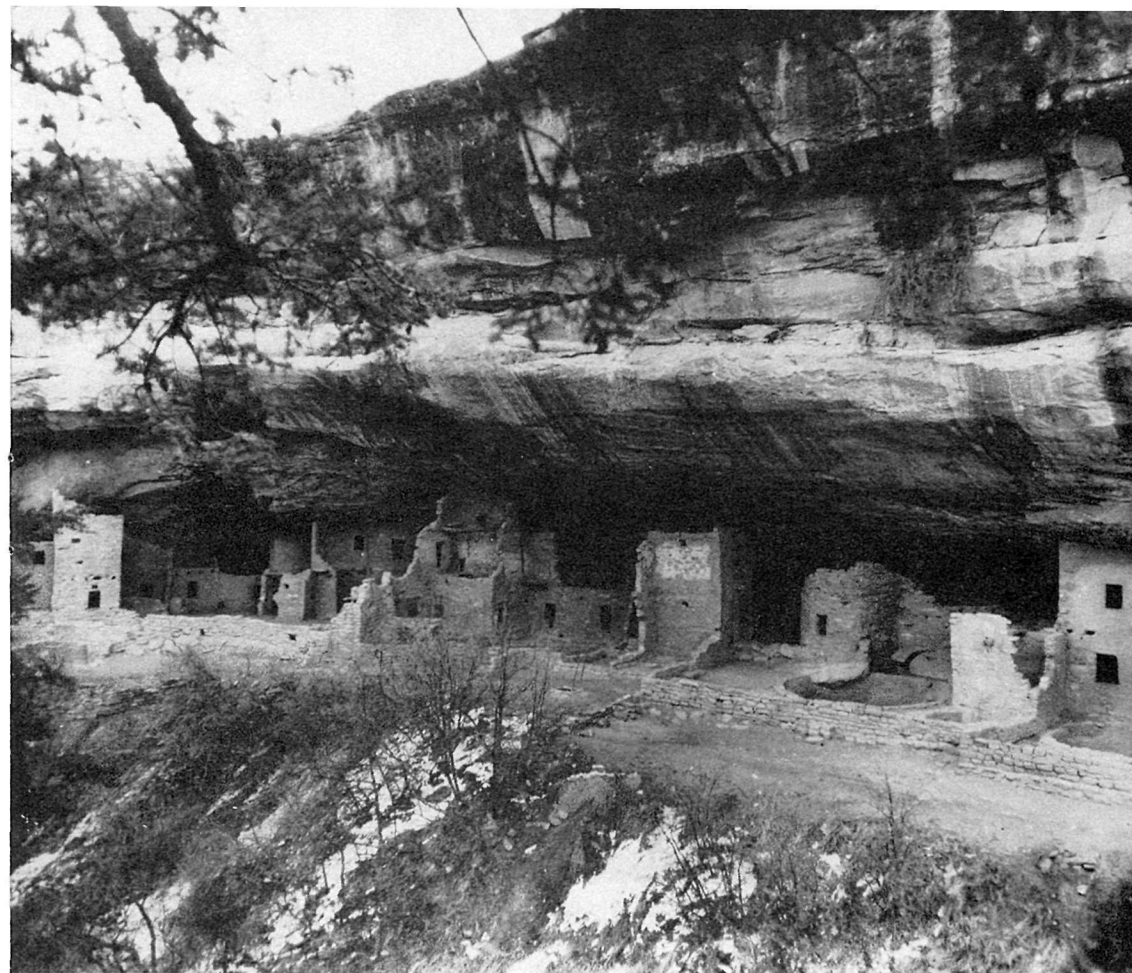
and tower were built in the center of the structure. Little remains of the pueblo, however, for when its occupants deserted it they tore down the walls and carried the stones to nearby caves, where they used them in constructing cliff dwellings.

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



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. Cottontails, 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 Park

In order to give you 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. You 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, trained park ranger archeologists conduct trips to some of the outstanding ruins. Some of these trips start at the museum; in other cases, you can drive to the ruins and meet the rangers there. A schedule of all trips and activities is given 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 8 ruins, 2 pit houses, and 6 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

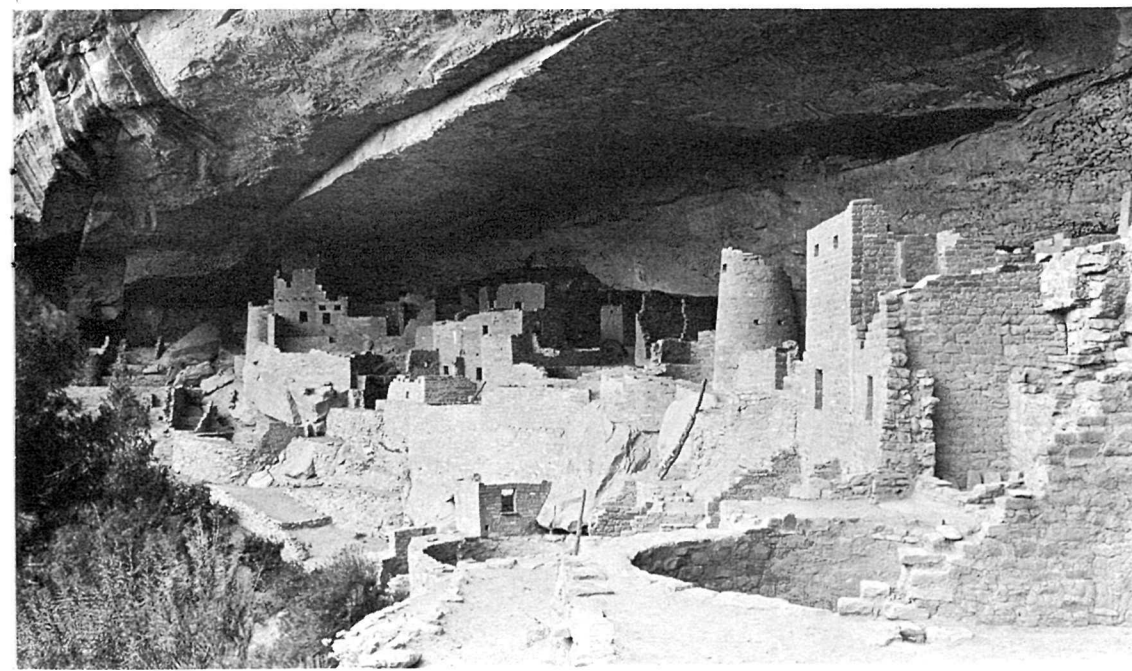
featured part of the interpretive program. Navajo Indians who work in the park sometimes give parts of their tribal dances at the campfire program.

*Museums and Library.*—The park museum is the key to a real understanding of the prehistoric people of the Mesa Verde, and you 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* along the rim rocks and into the canyons lead to spectacular views and ruins that cannot be seen from the roads. Most trail trips require strenuous exertion, and because of the danger of getting lost, hikers must obtain maps and a *permit* before leaving the headquarters area. Horseback trips are arranged with the pack and saddle concessioner. (See *Accommodations.*)

*Church Services.*—Protestant and Catholic services are held each Sunday from June 1 to September 15.

CLIFF PALACE, THE LARGEST OF THE CLIFF DWELLINGS.



## How to Reach the Park

**By Automobile.**—The park entrance is on U. S. 160, midway between Cortez and Mancos, Colo. From the park entrance it is 20 miles to headquarters, where the museums, lodge, and all facilities are located.

U. S. 160 connects with a number of other major highways which approach the park from all directions. The motorist approaching the park is offered a great diversity of western scenery—high mountains to the north and east, mesa-canyon country to the south and west.

**By Bus.**—Continental Trailways operates bus service twice daily to the park from Durango and Cortez, Colo., where connections are made with transcontinental buslines which operate daily bus service.

**By Air.**—Frontier Airlines schedules daily flights to Cortez and Durango, Colo., from Grand Junction and Denver, Colo., Albuquerque, N. Mex., and Phoenix, Ariz. At these points, connections are made with various transcontinental lines.

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

## Park Seasons

**Summer.**—From early May to late October the National Park Service maintains a daily schedule of activities, and you are able to visit ruins on ranger-guided trips. The campground is open during this period and the lodge offers meals and overnight accommodations.

Through the summer season, evening campfire programs are held and saddle horses are available.

**Winter.**—The park is open during the winter, but no overnight accommodations are available. At times during the winter season, snow and icy road conditions call for careful driving both in the park and the surrounding region. 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 Campgrounds** are located on the rim of Spruce Canyon, a few hundred yards from the museum, lodge, store, post office, and park headquarters. Each campsite is provided with a fireplace, a table with seats, and a level place for a tent. Water has been piped to convenient places. Toilet facilities, showers, and laundry tubs are provided.

CAMPING AND PICNICKING ARE PERMITTED ONLY IN THESE CAMPGROUNDS. 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. The lodge, which is located near the museum, provides sleeping accommodations ranging from tents to housekeeping and de luxe cabins.

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

**Meals.**—The lodge dining room serves breakfast, luncheon, and dinner at scheduled hours. A lunch counter, serving sandwiches and soft drinks, is operated during the summer.

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

**Souvenirs.**—The lodge gift shop has displays of modern Southwest Indian handicraft, photos and slides of the park, and other souvenirs.

**Communications.**—Telephone and telegraph services are available at Spruce Tree Lodge. Telegrams sent prepaid to Dolores, Colo., will be phoned to the addressee at the lodge. The post office address for park visitors is Mesa Verde National Park, Colo.

**Grocery Store and Filling Station.**—Groceries, gas, oil, and limited campers' supplies are available at the Mesa Verde

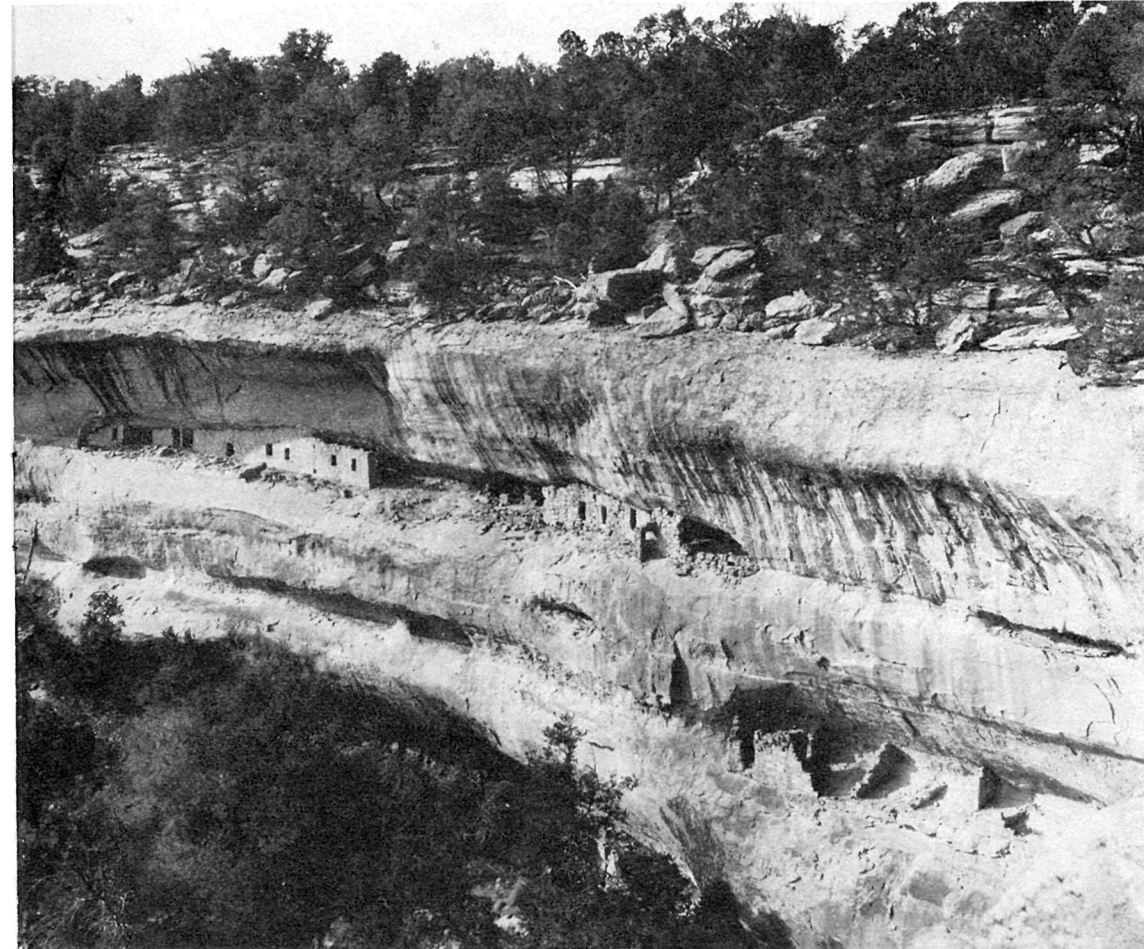
Store, located near Spruce Tree Lodge, in the headquarters area.

**Pack and Saddle Horses.**—Saddle horses, especially trained for mountain trails, may be rented by the hour or day, and the 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.

**Rates.**—Rates for all accommodations within the park are approved by 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.

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





## Mission 66

Mission 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

## Administration

Mesa Verde National Park is administered by the National Park Service of the U. S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent whose address is Mesa Verde National Park, Colo., is in immediate charge.

## Help Us Protect This Park

Park regulations are designed for the protection of natural and historic objects, as well as for your comfort and convenience. Please cooperate in maintaining and protecting this park. Park rangers will help and advise you, as well as enforce regulations. If you need information, or are in any difficulty, see a park ranger.

Rules and regulations governing the park may be seen at the office of the superintendent. The following observations are made for your guidance:

*Preservation of ruins, natural features, and public property.* The ruins,

plants, animals, and the land belong to everyone; please be careful not to damage them. Cliff dwellings are entered only on ranger-guided parties in order that the ruins may be preserved.

*Speed limits:* 35 m. p. h. on the entrance road and on ruins roads to the beginning of their loop sections; 25 m. p. h. on loop sections; and 15 m. p. h. in the headquarters area.

*Fires* are permitted only in the fireplaces in the campgrounds. Be sure your fire is completely out before you leave camp.

*Firewood.* Use only firewood provided in the campgrounds. Do not use ax on any standing tree or strip bark from junipers.

*Camping and picnicking* are permitted only in designated campgrounds. Limit of stay in campgrounds: 15 days between June 15 and September 15; 30 days in other seasons. Place all refuse in garbage cans.

*Hiking.* Before venturing away from park headquarters, obtain permit and maps at the Museum Information Desk. This precaution is absolutely necessary because of the danger of getting lost and the need for protecting the ruins.

*Dogs and cats* are allowed in the park if on leash or otherwise under physical restraint at all times. They are not permitted on trails or in public buildings.

### VISITOR USE FEES

Automobile, house trailer, and motorcycle permit fees are collected at entrance stations. When vehicles enter at times when entrance stations are unattended, it is necessary that the permit be obtained before leaving the park and be shown upon reentry. The fees applicable to the park are not listed herein because they are subject to change, but they may be obtained in advance of a visit by addressing a request to the superintendent.

All national park fees are deposited as revenue in the U. S. Treasury; they offset, in part, appropriations made for operating and maintaining the National Park System.

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