

# Mesa Verde

NATIONAL PARK • COLORADO

About 1,300 years ago, a group of Indians who lived in the Four Corners country picked Mesa Verde for their home. For 700 years they lived and prospered on the mesa and in its canyons. Near the end of the 13th century, however, this part of the American Southwest was abandoned by the Indians who had lived here for so many years.

When these people departed, they left behind their homes and many of their personal possessions. Today these relics are preserved in Mesa Verde National Park, and archeologists study them to reconstruct the life of the Indians who lived here hundreds of years ago.

At first the Mesa Verde people lived in pithouses, dwellings dug into the ground so that the walls of the pit were the walls of the house. Archeologists have named them Basketmakers in recognition of their impressive skill in that craft. They also made pottery, but at this stage of their history the pottery lacked the quality of their baskets. These Basketmakers clustered their pithouses to form small villages, usually on the mesa top, but occasionally in the caves of the cliffs.

They raised crops of beans, corn, and squash in the rich, red, wind-blown soil of the mesa tops. Dogs and turkeys were their only domesticated animals. The turkeys seem to have been raised more for their feathers than for food. The feathers were woven into blankets and robes for the cold winter months.

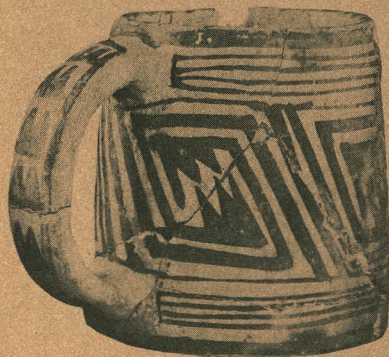
Over many years the Basketmakers prospered on the mesa. The population increased and their skills improved. By the middle of the eighth century, their descendants were building houses above ground. They set poles upright in the ground to form the outline of a house, then wove sticks among the poles. They made the roof the same way, and added a thick coating of mud to weatherproof both walls and roof. They built these houses one against another, in a long curving row. Frequently, they built one or two deep pithouses in front of the crescent-shaped rowhouses. Perhaps these were the beginnings of the underground religious rooms (kivas) of later times. The people who built these new villages were the descendants of the Basketmakers, but we call them Pueblo Indians in recognition of their altered way of life.

Before A.D. 1000, stone masonry began to replace pole-and-mud construction. Sturdy compact apartmentlike buildings were built, and by the 12th century they were exceptionally well made. Some stood as much as three stories high and contained more than 50 rooms. Often the rooms were built around courtyards which contained several kivas similar to those used today by Pueblo Indians.

Near the end of the 12th century something caused the Mesa Verde people to make another great change in their lives. They began to abandon their houses on the mesa tops and move down into the caves in the cliffs, where they built the cliff dwellings we find today.

Why did they make this drastic move? The caves were uncomfortable places to live—hot in summer, cold in winter. They required a difficult climb up and down the cliffs to reach the cornfields, and

Everyday objects recently excavated from the Mesa Verde ruins: a stone hammer, a little over one foot long, and a drinking mug with a black-on-white design.



they were hazardous for children and old people. One guess is that this was a time of warfare—either with local Indians fighting among themselves or with a foreign enemy tribe—and the caves were sought out for defensive purposes.

At any rate, this period of living in cliff dwellings lasted less than 100 years, and before the close of the 13th century, the cliff dwellers left Mesa Verde, never to return.

What caused the abandonment remains a mystery. Perhaps the people tired of strife. Perhaps they left because of drought. We know that the 13th century, particularly the last half, was a time of repeated drought. With drought comes crop failure.

We think that when the Cliff Dwellers left here they traveled to the south and southeast—down to the valley of the Rio Grande and its tributaries. They may have joined existing villages of Pueblo Indians in this new land, or they may have established villages of their own. Perhaps both. Whatever happened, it seems likely that some of the Pueblo Indians in central New Mexico are at least partly descended from the Cliff Dwellers.

Examples of the houses, tools, and clothing of the Mesa Verde people can be seen in the park. Nowhere else in the country is a sequence of pre-Columbian architectural development so completely displayed as on the Ruins Road. The National Park Service has attempted to preserve the remains of this ancient people rather than make restorations based on guesswork.

For information on points of interest on Chapin Mesa, see the other side of the folder.

## SEASONS

*Mid-May to October 15.* Accommodations and other services are available; maximum interpretive services, June 15 through Labor Day.

*October 15 to mid-May.* Food, gasoline and other concession services are NOT available. The museum is open, tours are conducted to Spruce Tree House if weather and trail conditions permit, and you may drive one loop of the Ruins Road, viewing cliff dwellings from canyon rims and visiting mesa-top ruins.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

*Lodging.* Far View Lodge at Navajo Hill is open from mid-May to mid-October. From June 1 through Labor Day, it is advisable to make reservations with the Mesa Verde Co., P.O. Box 277, Mancos, CO 81328. Telephone 303-529-4421.

*Meals* and snacks are served at Far View Terrace Restaurant at Far View. Snacks and groceries are also available at a small store in the park headquarters area. Carry-out food may be obtained at Morfield Village.

*Camping.* Morfield Campground, for both tent and trailer camping, is open all year. Camping is permitted only in this campground, and is limited to 7 days. Campsites should not be left unattended for more than 24 hours. Reservations cannot be made.

The campground has restrooms and single and group campsites (with tables, benches, and charcoal and woodburning fireplaces). Fuel is available at the Morfield Village store. There are no utility hookups; but the campground has a holding-tank disposal station. Dump trailer refuse there or at designated receptacles.

Fires are permitted only in fireplaces in the campground and park headquarters picnic area. Never leave a fire unattended; be sure your fire is out before you leave it. Report brush, grass, and forest fires to the nearest park ranger.

Gathering firewood is prohibited. Do not injure any tree or shrub.

*Picnic* only in the picnic area at park headquarters, in the small picnic areas near the comfort stations on each loop of the Ruins Road, and in Morfield Campground.

## SERVICES

*Bus transportation* within the park available in summer from the Mesa Verde Company.

*Religious services.* In summer, nondenominational services each Sunday morning and evening at Morfield Campfire Circle; Catholic Mass, at Morfield Village each Sunday morning.

*Service stations* at Morfield Village and Navajo Hill. Towing and emergency road and mechanical services available through the Mesa Verde Company.

*Miscellaneous.* Coin-operated showers, washers,

dryers, and hair-dryers at Morfield Village.

*General stores* at Morfield Village and Spruce Tree Terrace. Curio shop at Far View Terrace.

*Horseback riding.* Wrangler-guided rides of 1 and 2 hours start at Morfield Village from about Memorial Day to Labor Day. For reservations, write to MV Pack and Saddle Horse Co., Mesa Verde National Park, CO 81330. Tel: 303-529-4509, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

## REGULATIONS

These regulations are enforced to protect and preserve all prehistoric and natural features and to provide for your safety.

*Prehistoric and natural features.* Do not disturb, mar, or remove from place any object of antiquity or rocks, plants, and other natural life. Do not enter any cliff dwelling except on a guided trip or when a park ranger is on duty at a ruin. Severe penalties, including both fine and imprisonment, may be imposed for any violation.

*Wildlife.* Teasing, frightening, capturing, feeding, wounding, or killing any bird or other animal is prohibited.

*Firearms* are prohibited; they must be cased, broken down, or otherwise packed while in the park.

*Accidents.* Report all accidents to the nearest park ranger station as soon as possible.

*Smoking.* Do not throw smokes or matches from cars. In periods of extreme fire danger, smoking is prohibited in moving vehicles and along trails.

*Littering* is prohibited—trash receptacles are provided for your convenience.

*Pets* must be physically restrained at all times; they are not allowed in public buildings or on trails.

*Motor vehicles* are allowed only on roadways or parking areas. Please drive carefully.

## FOR YOUR SAFETY

To visit the cliff dwelling, you must climb down steep stairs, walk across uneven terrain, and climb 32 feet up stone stairs and wooden ladders, some as high as 32 feet. This strenuous climb is hazardous for anyone with a respiratory ailment or a heart condition. Do not attempt such trips unless you are in good physical condition. While every effort is made to provide for your safety, you must remain alert and cautious. Your safety and your children's safety are of primary concern to us.

## HOW TO REACH THE PARK

The park entrance is midway between Cortez and Mancos on U.S. 160. It is 21 miles up the side of the mesa to park headquarters, where the Chapin Mesa Museum and picnic areas are located. The campground is 4 miles from the entrance; the Far View Visitor Center, a cafeteria, and lodging are 15 miles.

There are scheduled flights to Durango and Cortez. The nearest railroads are at Grand Junction, Colo., and Gallup, N. Mex. Rent-a-car service is available at airline and rail points.

## HOW TO SEE THE PARK

To give you a glimpse into the lives of the pre-Columbian inhabitants, the Service maintains museums, roadside and trailside exhibits, self-guided and guided trips, and (during peak of the summer season) campfire programs.

*Entrance road features.* There are five numbered stops along the entrance road. To avoid crossing traffic lanes you are urged to visit Stops 1 and 2 on your way into the park; Stops 3, 4, and 5 on your way out.

1. *Montezuma Valley Overlook.* Outstanding view of the valley and mountains north and west.

2. *Park Point,* halfway between the entrance and headquarters, affords superb views of the entire Four Corners region.

3. *Cedar Tree Tower,* a ceremonial structure, is one-half mile from the main road, just north of park headquarters.

4. *Far View House, Pipe Shrine House, and Mummy Lake,* a short distance from the main road, are 4 miles north of park headquarters. These three large mesa-top pueblos date between A.D. 1000 and 1200.

5. *Mancos Valley Overlook* is below Point Lookout, the towering promontory you see on entering the park. From here you can view the valley and mountains to the east and north.

*Information and orientation.* You are urged to go first to the Far View Visitor Center (in summer only) or to the Chapin Mesa Museum for assistance in planning your visit and to see exhibits of arts and crafts of the ancient people and of Indians now living in the Four Corners region. Chapin Mesa Museum is open from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. in summer; from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. the rest of the year. Far View Visitor Center is open from 8:15 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. from Memorial Day to Labor Day only.

*Ruins Road.* Two 6-mile self-guiding loops are open from 8 a.m. to sunset. Many cliff dwellings can be viewed from canyon-rim vantage points. On the west loop, exhibits at the five stops explain the 10 excavated mesa-top ruins that can be visited.

*Ranger-guided ruins tours.* In summer, park rangers conduct tours through some of the cliff dwellings. Since the tour schedule may be changed, you should check at Far View or Chapin Mesa Museum information desks. In winter (weather permitting), tours are conducted to Spruce Tree House only.

*Campfire programs.* Conducted each evening from early June to September, these programs deal with pre-Columbian and modern Indians of the Southwest, and with archeology, history, and natural history.

*Hiking.* In order to protect Mesa Verde's fragile, irreplaceable ruins, **HIKING IS RESTRICTED.** Before you use the two short trails in the headquarters area, you must register at the chief park ranger's office and check in at that office on completion of your hike. Longer trails in the Morfield Canyon area do not require permits.

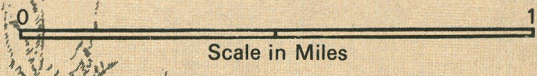


TO PARK ENTRANCE AND VISITOR CENTER

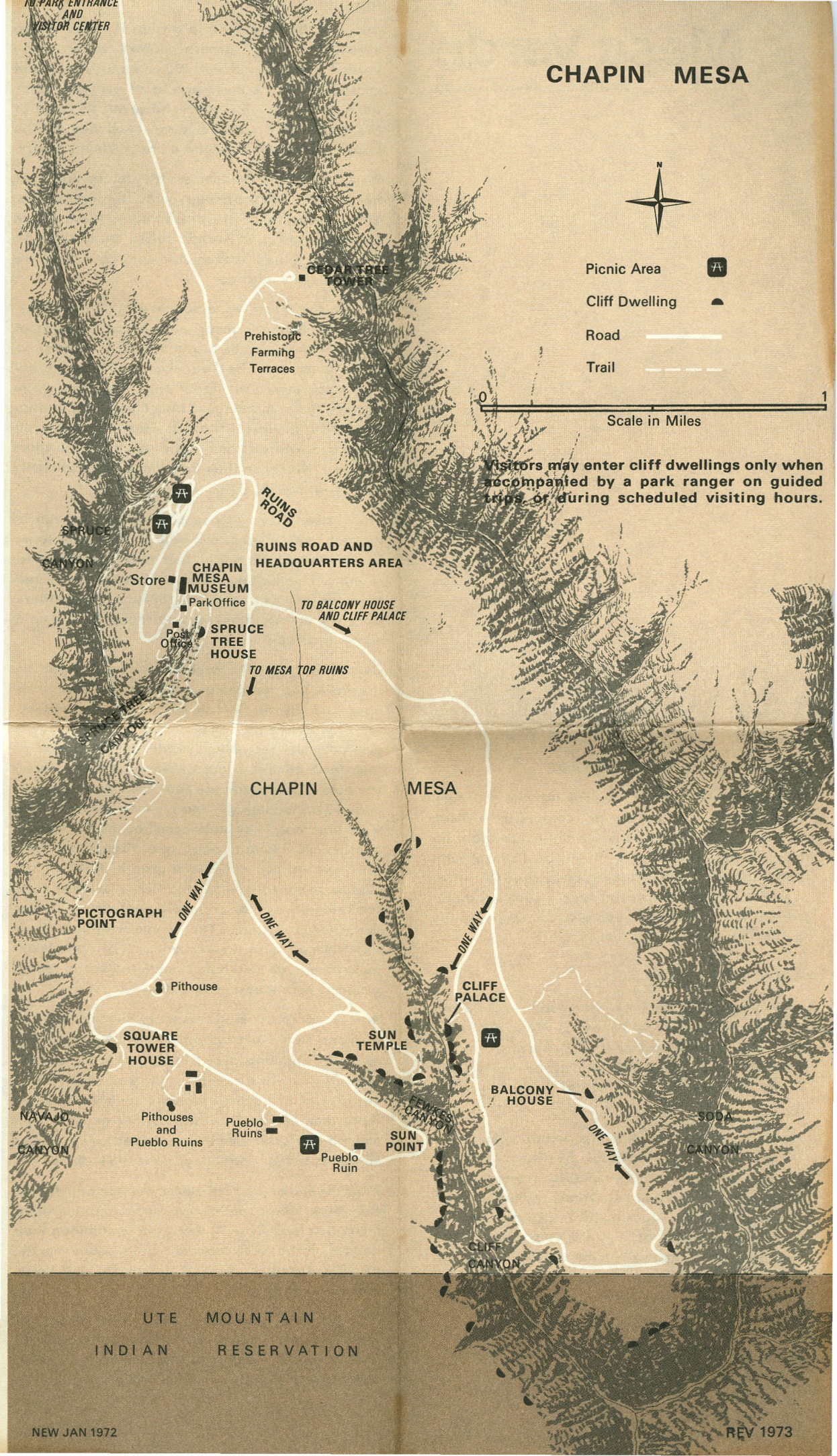
# CHAPIN MESA



- Picnic Area
- Cliff Dwelling
- Road
- Trail



Visitors may enter cliff dwellings only when accompanied by a park ranger on guided trips or during scheduled visiting hours.



UTE MOUNTAIN  
INDIAN RESERVATION

## **THE FEDERAL ANTIQUITIES ACT**

The Antiquities Act of 1906 prohibits the appropriation, injury, destruction, or removal from place of any object of antiquity, or the excavation, injury, or destruction of any ruin on Federal land under the jurisdiction of the Secretaries of Interior, Agriculture, and the Army, except such scientific research or excavation as these Secretaries may authorize.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Mesa Verde National Park, established in 1906 and containing about 52,000 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Mesa Verde National Park, CO 81330, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

**National Park Service**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**