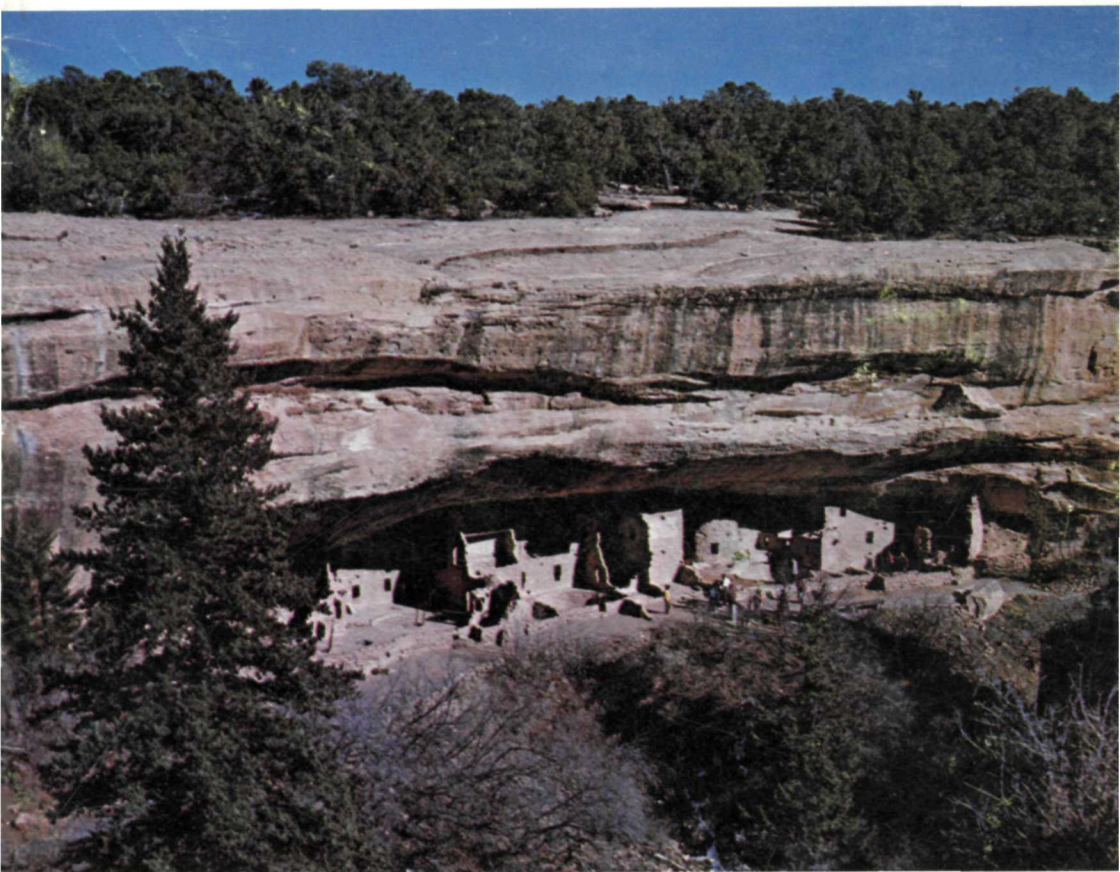


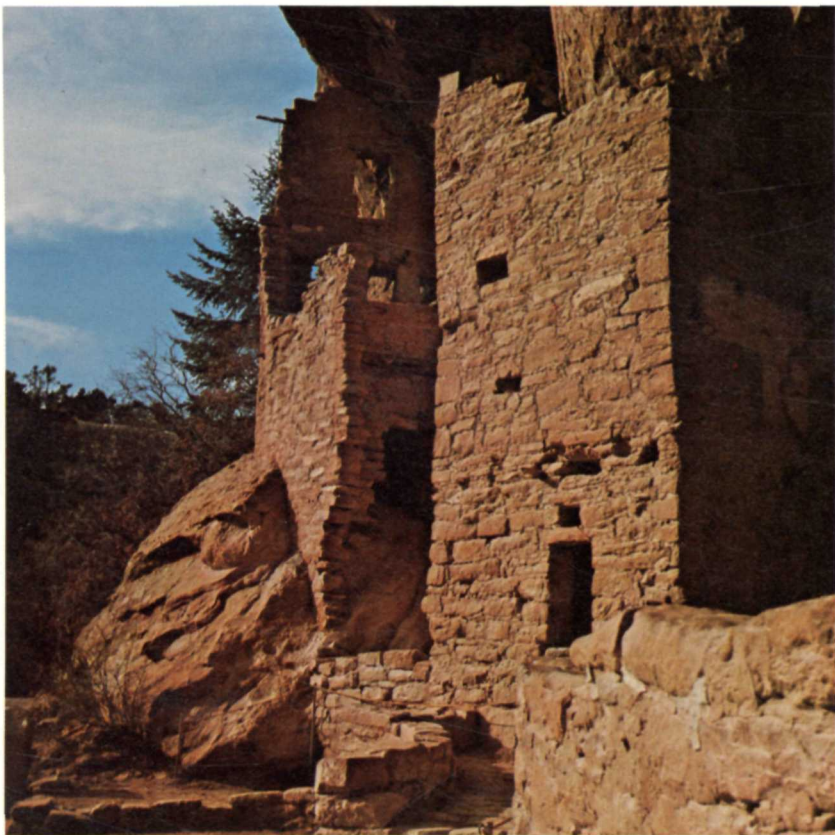
SPRUCE TREE HOUSE

an interpretive guide



——— *if you take it home*

MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK, COLORADO



This guide booklet has been prepared to help you enjoy one of the larger cliff dwellings in Mesa Verde National Park.

You are welcome to use this booklet. Please place it in the box at the other end of the ruin as you leave. If you wish to purchase the booklet, please drop 15 cents in the coin box.

PLEASE DO NOT CLIMB OR STAND ON THE WALLS OR CRAWL THROUGH ANY OF THE DOORWAYS.



Spruce Tree House in the Winter

SPRUCE TREE HOUSE

Mesa Verde National Park was created in 1906 to preserve the spectacular cliff dwellings of this region. Spruce Tree House is not only one of the largest of these structures, but is one of the best preserved as well.

The natural cave, 216 feet across the front, 89 feet from front to back and 35 feet high, provided a good site for building a community type village.

This cliff dwelling village was occupied from about A. D. 1200 to shortly before A. D. 1300. Perhaps as many as 100 people lived in the completed village of 114 rooms and 8 ceremonial rooms.



The First Court

Spruce Tree House, typical of the larger cliff dwellings, consists of several blocks of rooms grouped around open courts. Within each court is a round underground ceremonial room called a kiva (key-vah). 650 years ago these kivas were covered with flat roofs which formed a courtyard floor, a good working area for daily activities. The rooms around the court provided privacy and space for sleeping and storage.

Even though the house in front of you is two stories high the rooms are generally small. They average 6 by 8 feet and are about 5½ feet high. Floors and roofs of the upper stories were composed of large poles covered with small sticks, then bark or grass, finally a thick layer of clay.

Notice the different colored clay in the lower center of the 2 story wall. When discovered this section had fallen so the National Park Service rebuilt this lower section to preserve the original upper story.

As you move into the next court notice. . .

. . . how the sandstone rock was shaped into building blocks. Such accomplishments indicate the builders had spare time to devote to such work. Mud mortar was made from local soils.

. . . on your left are corn grinding bins. Women knelt with their heels against the wall and ground corn, dried nuts, berries and roots on the large flat stone, the metate, with the smaller hand stone, the mano.

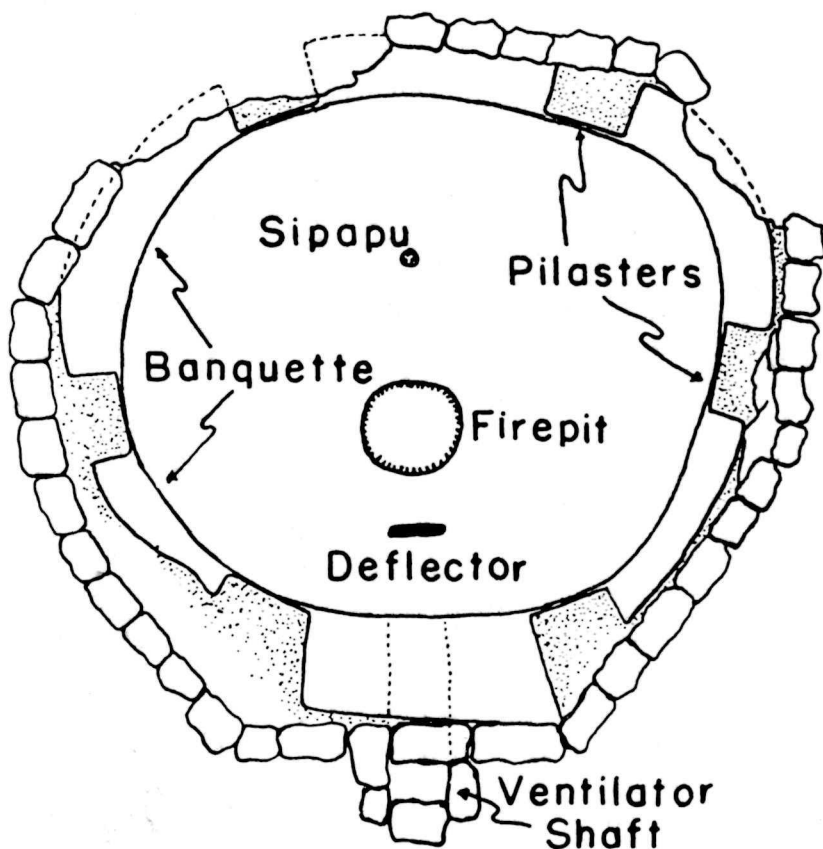
The circular room directly ahead of you is one of the two found in this dwelling. Circular towers such as this found on the mesa-tops are considered to be ceremonial and those found in cliff dwellings may have served a similar purpose.

If you look down the passageway you will see how the rooms were built one behind the other to the back of the cave.

A number of small fireplaces occur along this passage.

The Second Court, Main street section





Ground plan of a kiva

While in the courtyard look into the kiva. The name kiva is a modern Hopi Indian word meaning ceremonial room. Judging by present day Pueblo Indian custom, generally only men would be members of kiva societies which performed religious ceremonies for bringing rain, good crops and general well-being to the village. Women undoubtedly assisted in some ceremonies. When no rituals were being held, the kiva probably was used as a clubroom and workroom by men.

The *ventilator shaft* brought fresh air into the kiva. The *deflector* was a baffle to keep the air from blowing directly across the *firepit* in the floor. The fire provided light and warmth. The smoke escaped through a hatchway in the

roof. The *sipapu* (see-pah-poo) was a symbolic opening from the underworld of the gods and spirits. The bench, or *banquette*, was a shelf or storage space. The *pilasters*, of which there are generally six, were roof supports. Entrance to the kiva was by means of a ladder through the roof hatchway.

If you want to go into a kiva, climb down the ladder in front of the next courtyard. Notice the cribbed roof. This is a restoration copied from originals found in place in other ruins.

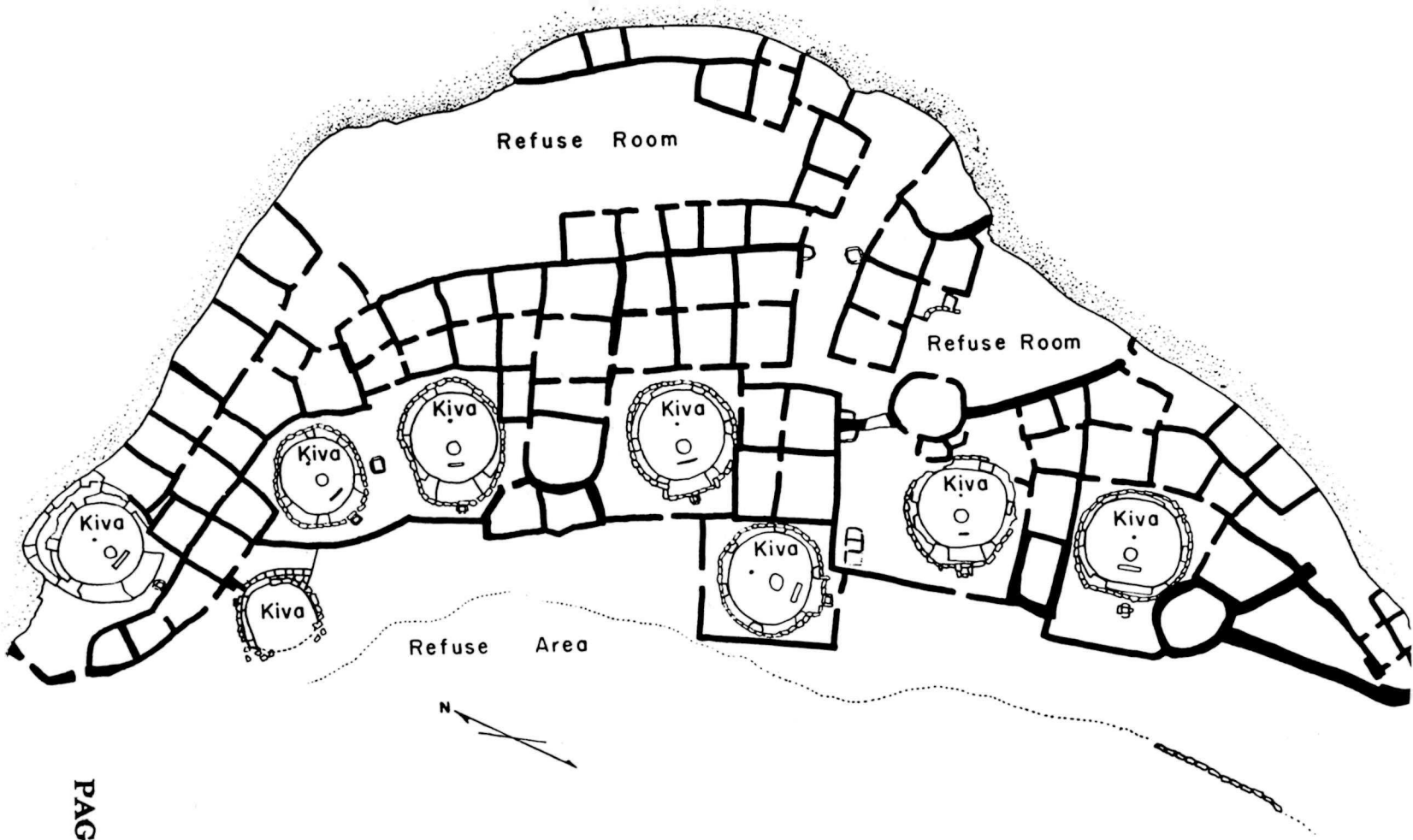
Behind the rooms in this middle court there was a large room used for trash. The Pueblo villagers also kept some of their domesticated turkeys penned up in it. The main trash dump was along the talus slope in front of the village. The black stain on the cave roof is from smoke.

The wall decorations on the second floor room to your left were made by plastering colored clay on the walls. Many rooms were once decorated like this - notice other walls.

Just above the three short logs protruding from the wall on the back wall you can see where a doorway has been blocked.

The Third Court





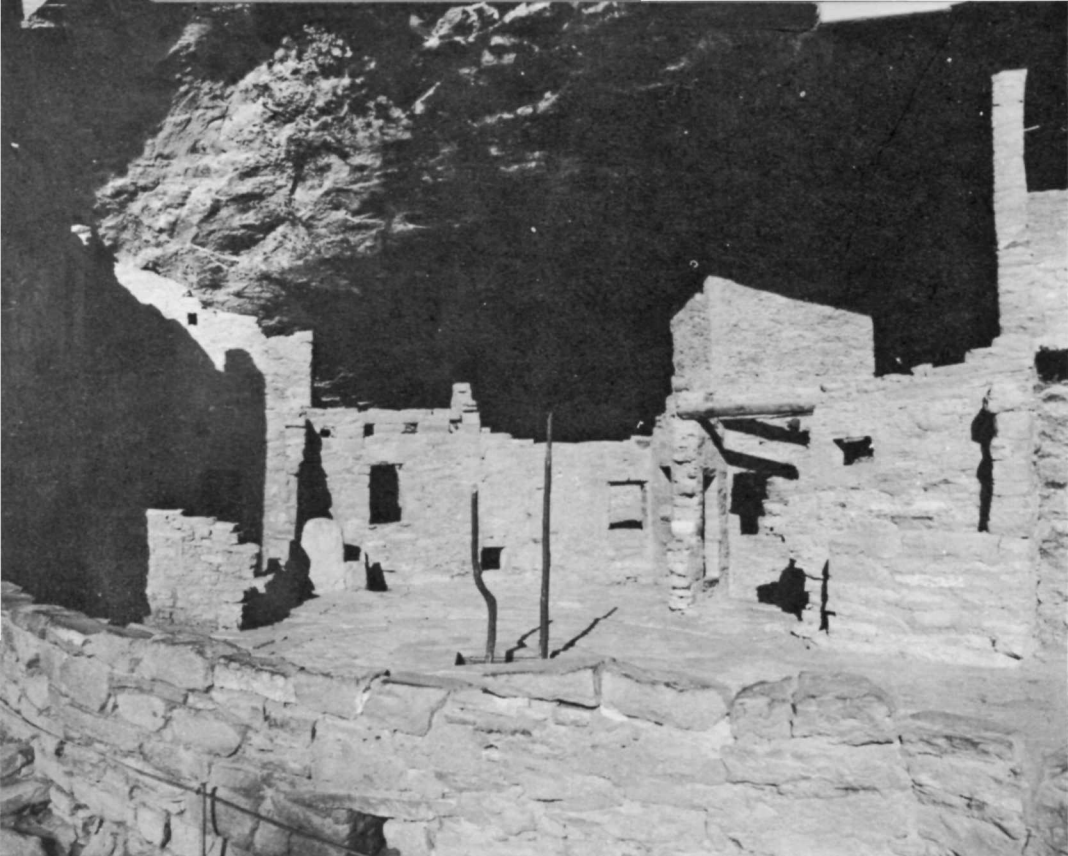
Ground plan of Spruce Tree House



Spruce Tree House about A. D. 1260. (Museum diorama)

Spruce Tree House 700 years ago was a thriving village. If you could have visited it you would have seen women busily cooking over firepits in the courtyards, others grinding corn, weaving baskets or making pottery. Men who were not tending their mesatop fields might have been building a new room, making or mending their tools or performing an age-old ceremony in one of the kivas. You would have seen children playing and old people resting against the low wall across the front of the dwelling as they basked in the warm sun dreaming of their younger days. There would also be dogs and turkeys wandering through the village and picking over the trash dumps for bits to eat. Unfortunately, this all came to an end shortly before A. D. 1300.

For more details please turn the page.



The T shaped and oblong openings are doorways. Shape was apparently a matter of personal preference. Small doors served two functions; easier to defend rooms from unwanted intruder, and it was easier to cover small doorways in winter to keep the rooms warm.

These original timbers supported a balcony as well as the floors in the rooms. Balconies made it easy to get into the upper rooms. Balconies and rooftops were reached by ladders.



Most of the cooking was done outside in the courtyard over firepits like the one between these two kivas. Very few rooms had firepits in them.

The courtyard was the scene of most of the daily activities — grinding corn, preparing food, making tools, pottery etc.

The ladders lead to kivas beneath the courtyard. These ladders and kiva roofs have been restored.

Notice that some of the doorways have been sealed with sandstone slabs.



Spruce Tree House from the north end.

The cliff dwelling was named Spruce Tree House by the ranchers who first discovered it in 1888. A large tree which they mistakenly identified as a Spruce tree was found growing against the cliff in front of the dwelling. It is said that the men first entered the ruin by climbing down this tree.

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Thank you.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Spruce Tree House is the third largest cliff dwelling in Mesa Verde National Park. It is located in Spruce Tree Canyon, a branch of the much larger Navajo Canyon. The cave, which is really a very large overhang, was formed by flaking or spalling of the cliff above a seep-spring and by freezing and thawing during the winter. There is no evidence that the Indians tried to shape or enlarge the caves; to do so would have been a tremendous task with their primitive tools.

Spruce Tree House was an Indian village and, like towns and villages of today, it was not all built at one time; rather, it grew section by section over a period of years. Sometime around A. D. 1200 a group of Indians — perhaps related families — moved into the cave and built the first units. Each unit consisted of living and storage rooms clustered about an open court which contained a kiva. The courtyard and kiva probably served as a center for social and religious activities of the group. New units were added to the structure as other families moved into the village. When people needed more space, they added new rooms, alongside, in front, in back, or on top of the existing rooms. Shortly before A. D. 1300 when the Indians finally abandoned Spruce Tree House, the village contained 114 rooms.

The ground plan on Page 6 shows the arrangement of the rooms. Most of these were in double rows within the cave; in some places there were three rows. The interior rooms, dark and poorly ventilated, were probably used for storage. The central portion of the structure was built three stories high and reached the cave ceiling; most of the buildings, however, were only two stories in height.

To us these small rooms seem cramped, cold and dark — quite unsuitable as living spaces. But these people probably spent little time inside the rooms, using them mainly for protection against the cold, for sleeping, and for storage. Most of the time they were probably out in the courtyards or on the flat rooftops working or carrying on their daily activities.

It is unlikely that all 114 rooms in Spruce Tree House were in use at the same time. New rooms were built as older ones fell into decay; smaller rooms were probably vacated for larger ones as the number of villagers increased.

The Indians of the Mesa Verde, like their neighbors in the surrounding areas, were dry-farmers—depending upon rainfall to water their crops. In the fields on the mesa tops they grew corn, beans and several varieties of squash. The precipitation probably averaged about 18 inches a year just as it does now, which is more than sufficient for dry-farming. The Indians supplemented their diet with wild roots, nuts and berries as well as with meat from large and small game animals.

The period of the cliff dwellings is known as the Classic Period and marks the climax of Pueblo culture in this region. The Mesa Verde people made beautiful pottery and decorated it elaborately with geometric and animal figures in black on a white or light-gray background. They also made cotton cloth which they often decorated with colored designs. Their masonry was of exceptional quality with the building blocks beautifully shaped and carefully laid in clay mortar.

The Classic Period came to an end shortly before A. D. 1300 when the Indians abandoned their homes in the Mesa Verde and moved away. We can only guess the reasons for such move. One suggestion is that a drouth, which lasted from A. D. 1273 through A. D. 1289, caused them to leave. Another suggestion is that this was a period of strife either between the villages themselves or between these village people and nomadic groups moving into the area. Whatever the reasons, the cliff dwellings of the Mesa Verde were empty by A. D. 1300.

It was a rancher from Mancos, named Richard Wetherill, who first discovered Spruce Tree House—on December 18, 1888. He and his brother-in-law, Charley Mason, also discovered Cliff Palace that same day. The men had been looking for lost cattle when they first saw the cliff ruins.



Top: Spruce Tree Ruin Before Excavation

Bottom: The Ruin After Excavation & Stabilization





Nearby storeroom

Small, isolated rooms such as these along the walls of Spruce Tree Canyon were probably used for storage rather than dwelling purposes. Many such storerooms are found throughout the park.

In 1906 Mesa Verde was set aside as a National Park by Act of Congress to protect and preserve these dwellings of the prehistoric Indians. In 1908 Dr. Jesse Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian Institution excavated Spruce Tree House. He removed the debris of fallen walls and collapsed roofs and stabilized the dwellings more or less as you see them now. It has been necessary, of course, to further stabilize the walls from time to time, but aside from minor repairs and the roofing of the three kivas, the dwelling is original work done by the Indians some 700 to 800 years ago.

The dating of Spruce Tree House and other ruins in the Mesa Verde has been done by the study of tree-rings from original roofing timbers. If you are interested in how archaeologists determine the dates, see the exhibit on tree-ring dating in the museum.

This trail guide booklet is not a government publication and is not included in your fee to enter Mesa Verde National Park. It is published and sold by the Mesa Verde Museum Association, Inc., a non-profit organization, whose aims are to help in the understanding and interpretation of the park story.

YOU AND YOUR ENVIRONMENT

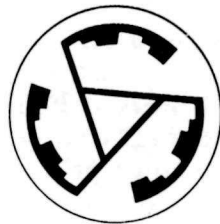
All about us throughout America we witness occurrences that contribute to the further pollution of our air, land and water. No longer can we enjoy the privilege of relying upon someone else to remedy the situation. Each of us must join the fight to save our environment. As individuals we can help by purchasing items that can be recycled into re-useable products that will not contribute further to environmental pollution.

A number of good environmental pocket books may be found in bookstores that will help guide us in this struggle. A good one for families is entitled "The User's Guide to the Protection of the Environment" published by Ballantine Books, 1970.

Equally important is your support for environmental programs in the community where you live. You can help by supporting such programs and by making your opinions known to officials in local, state and federal governments.



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