

INSCRIPTION HOUSE
GUIDE
Navajo National Monument
ARIZONA

A GUIDE TO INSCRIPTION HOUSE RUIN
IN
NAVAJO NATIONAL MONUMENT

This trail guide to Inscription House is designed to point out some of the most significant features, and we hope it will make your visit more interesting and informative.

We ask your assistance in protecting this prehistoric ruin, which is one of the best preserved and most valuable in our country. It is part of our priceless heritage, and should be given every consideration possible so that it may not only be seen and enjoyed by you, but by countless thousands in the future. Climbing over its walls and roofs or digging for or removing any relics, or otherwise damaging it in any way, would be a sacrilege. We have not closed this ruin to visitors, believing that anyone interested enough to make the hike to it would be of the type who can appreciate its value and will give it every protection.

Inscription House is located in the north wall of an arm of Nitzin Canyon, which is a tributary of Navajo Canyon. It was constructed by Pueblo Indians during the A.D. 1200's and probably was abandoned by A. D. 1300, thus being contemporary with Betatakin and Keet Seel, the two other ruins protected by Navajo National Monument. The builders of this town were primarily farmers, raising corn, beans, and squash, supplementing this diet with wild plants and game.

Stake A. The ruin is located in a natural cave, modified only very little by the prehistoric Indians. The cave is so situated that it receives sunlight during a large part of the day, especially in winter.

Protection from the elements, plus this exposure, made it an ideal place to build. The spring flowing behind you assured a good water supply. At the time the village was occupied, a perennial stream probably flowed at the level of the valley. The present deep channel was cut between 1935 and 1942.

Notice the "fresh" appearance of the ruin. A large part looks as though it could still be inhabited, or perhaps vacated only yesterday, instead of some 650 years ago. The major portion of it is original construction; the only major repairs made by the National Park Service have been to the retaining wall in front of the cliff pueblo. We hope that visitor traffic will be so considerate of the original walls and roofs that people 650 years from now can still see them as they were left by the builders.

At your feet you have probably noticed the numerous pieces of broken pottery. These were thrown over the wall above into the "city dump" upon which you now stand. These bits of pottery give us glimpses of the artistic feeling and state of craftsmanship achieved by these people. They are very important tools of the archeologist. Please feel free to look at them, pick them up, try to imagine what the entire design looked like. BUT please do not take even one. There are not enough for every one to "take just one." Allow others who come after you to have the same experience you have now. Remember, we can as yet give you no very definite occupation dates for this ruin; every potsherd is part of that picture, and all the sherds the inhabitants left here will eventually, when studied, bring us closer to knowing just when it was first and last occupied.

On the way to the ruin you will walk on trash discarded by prehistoric inhabitants.

Stake B (On the talus slope, very near the top). Stop and rest a minute. Like to try climbing this with someone above hurling rocks or shooting arrows at you? We don't think selection of this cave was for defense, although defense would certainly have been rather easy.

Notice the lower front, or retaining wall. Very little of the original, visible as dark brownish sections, remained in 1939. So what you see was nearly all rebuilt in order to preserve this fragile ruin. It took 150 man days to reconstruct this wall. Please do not walk on the edge of it when you get up in the ruin.

Stake C (Kiva). The circular room here was a kiva or ceremonial room. While having some of the typical features found in nearly every kiva, it has lost most of them with the crumbling of the outside wall. Circular rooms of this size were nearly always kivas. Smaller circular rooms were used as granaries. The row of four holes on the west side is a feature commonly found in kivas in this area. These holes at one time had willow loops in them which came up to about floor level. A short piece of rope or leather was tied through each loop and a stick was run through them. This served as the bottom anchor for a vertical loom. The top would have been tied to one of the roof beams. This type loom is very similar to those used by Navajo weavers today.

Kivas were used primarily by men for conducting the ceremonial life of the people. In this respect they were comparable to our churches. They probably also served as "club houses" for the men. Most of the weaving seems to have been done in the kivas. Among the Hopi in recent times men wove ceremonial

garments in kivas.

As you turn around to see the remainder of the ruin you can see the purpose of the original retaining wall. This wall, as rebuilt, and as it originally was, served to level a section of the cave for construction; the natural cave floor was too sloped. The retaining wall was built, the area behind it filled in, and the result was a level area on which building foundations could be laid. You will probably wonder why it wasn't wider or why there wasn't more space left in front of the room walls. So do we. Several places have only very narrow walkways, so proceed with care.

Stake D. Here is a circular room, but obviously not a kiva. This type of construction, one of three methods found at Inscription House, is called jacal (ha cal) or wattle-and-daub. There were no rocks used. It most likely served as a storage bin or granary. Look closely at it and you can see how the heavier poles were shallowly buried in the predetermined shape, then the spaces filled with twigs and arrowgrass. All of this was bound together with easily bent twigs which went around the outside, and then the whole was covered with clay. The present structure has been almost completely replastered to protect the remaining original material. It was possibly 3 or 4 feet high when first built, high enough to keep out the dogs and children. Farther along you will see a similar structure which has been almost completely destroyed by careless visitors. Please don't contribute further carelessness while visiting Inscription House.

Stake E (Rock Wall). This type of rock wall is very common in ruins throughout this area. It is the second type of construction used in

Inscription House. Note the small spalls of rock which were set in the mortar as the wall was being built. The replastering at the top (lighter color plaster) was necessary because the rock and mud had come loose.

Stake F. This wall, composed of horizontal bunches of twigs and grass set in mud, is one of the variants of the third type of construction used in walls here. Generally walls of this type were made only of grass and mud. This style will be referred to from now on as adobe brick. The use of adobe in construction is found throughout large sections of the Southwest, but only at Inscription House and vicinity are found such fine and large hand-molded bricks with so much good straw in them. These bricks were normally made of bunch grass which was pulled up as a clump, mixed with mud to form a brick or adobe about 18 inches long and joined in place on the wall. The ends were staggered in the same way as modern homes built of regular brick or cement block. To finish it off, the whole wall was plastered with more mud. Few, if any, rocks were used, and where included were usually incidental. Farther along you will see more examples of this type of construction.

Stake G (Log end and roof construction). This log has been cut by archeologists in order to study its annual growth rings and thereby determine: the year the tree started growing; when it was cut by the builders. Thus we can say that this room was probably built in A.D. 1274. The break in the roof here is an excellent place to note construction details. Heavy beams, anchored in the walls, were the main supports. Smaller cross beams then supported a layer of twigs. The twigs were covered with

several layers of arrowgrass and then plastered with several inches of mud or adobe. These were good roofs, but no longer very strong, so please DO NOT climb on them.

Stake H. This pile of grass is the type that was used extensively in the construction of much of the remainder of Inscription House. It was piled here during our stabilization of the ruin. Large quantities of this grass were used, and it no doubt came from the canyon floor behind you. Notice its absence now.

Above and a little to the right, on the second floor, is a doorway strengthened by the original inhabitants. The base at one time rested on the roof of the room in front of you. This reinforced doorway is made of mud and grass (adobe) bricks, one of which is visible on the lower left side of the door. This extension was plastered over, and it acted as a buttress for the wall, which is also of mud and grass.

Stake I (Plastered room). This is one of the best plastered rooms remaining in Inscription House. It was used for a considerable time without plaster. This is evident on the side walls (especially the right hand one) where the rock is exposed. Black soot deposit on it came from many fires over a period of time. Someone did her "spring house cleaning" by plastering over the sooty walls. That this was done on numerous occasions is shown by the number of plaster layers which are exposed in the broken edge of wall at your left, just below the roof pole which is still in place.

Stake J (Inscription). Inside this room on the east wall is the date 1661. When first discovered there were several partial words

with it, but they have since weathered away. It is from this inscription that the ruin was named. Just who scratched in the date is a mystery. It would have had to be an early Spanish explorer, but as yet, in Spanish records, we find no mention of explorations in this part of the country at that time.

The next known white people to view this ruin were Dr. Byron Cummings, University of Utah Archeological Explorations, and Mr. John Wetherill, who visited the ruin in the spring of 1909. The location of it was no doubt reported to them by some of the Navajo Indians living in the vicinity.

Stake K (Adobe wall). This wall remnant provides a good example of adobe construction. The bricks are about 18" long and average about 4" wide and 5" to 6" high. The grass temper gave them great transverse strength. Notice that when an entire wall was made of these adobe bricks it was very thin and uniform.

On the cliff to your left are several white handprints. To the right of the handprints and just above the second story room, are three sets of holes. These were made by the prehistoric inhabitants. Loops of willow or yucca rope were tied in them and they were very handy for suspending objects to dry out in the sun.

Stake L (Fireplace). This stone-lined fireplace was not originally outside, as it appears to be now. At one time it was just inside the doorway of a living room. A very few remnants of the wattle-and-daub wall are faintly visible, as well as the step immediately between the fireplace and doorway. There are numerous rooms with this ground plan in Keet Seel, the

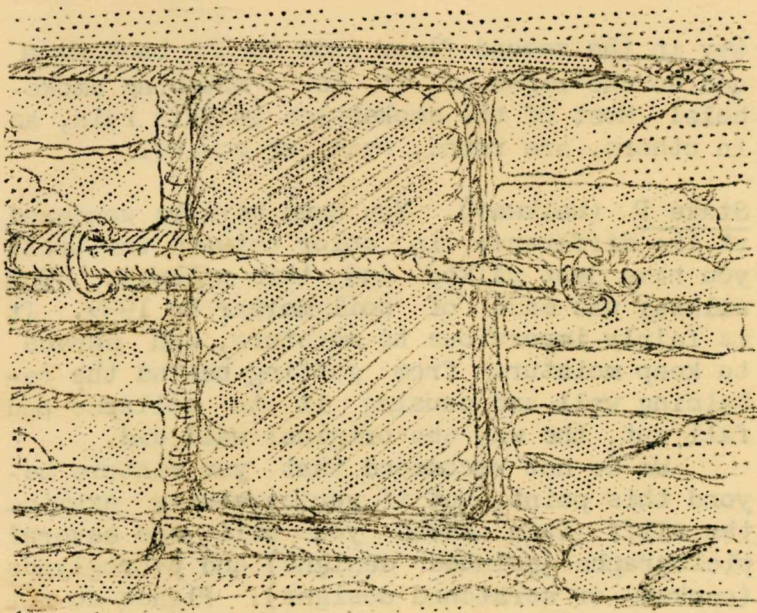
largest ruin in the Monument. Most of the firepits in Inscription House were clay-lined, with a clay lip several inches high.

On the talus slope to your right are some of the adobe bricks used in construction. These had fallen many years ago from rooms above. By estimating the amount of fallen material of this type, archeologists can at times determine where additional rooms have been, even when no traces remain today.

Stake M (Room). With the exception of its doorway, this is one of the very best preserved rooms in the ruin. You may enter this one. The left wall as you enter is wattle-and-daub. Notice the horizontal pole imbedded in this wall near the ceiling. This was used by the builders to strengthen the wall at the top. The original ties which held this pole in place are still visible. The ceiling is also original.

Stake N (Doorways). These two "T"-shaped doorways are in one of the better preserved two-story structures of adobe bricks. Just why the people built doorways of this shape is not known. Several reasons occur, but none can be proved. Some of these follow: the smaller the doorway, the stronger the wall; you only need a small space to get your feet through; smaller openings let out less heat; because the doors were small and you had to stoop to enter, the two projections were places where you could put your hands to maintain your balance. You can take your pick, or think up still another possible reason!

Notice the inside doorway in the back of the lower room. This was the entrance to a storage room where beans, dried corn, squash, and other foods were stored. Notice the lip



Rodent-proof, slab-sealed doorway.

or rim around this doorway. This held a flat, thin stone in place. Very noticeable, several inches to the right of the lip and a little more than halfway up the door, are two holes. The two ends of a bent willow loop were once anchored in them. The loop projected several inches from the wall, and on the other side of the doorway was a similar loop. With the slab in place, a stick was run through the two loops to hold it there, thus securing contents of the storeroom against molestation by children or rodents. Many of these loops remain at Keet Seel, and there is one slab door still in place there.

Stake 0 ("T"-doorway). Someone here had either a sense of humor or a sense of the "fitness of things." Notice the "T"-shaped door-

way in the second floor room in the back. Above and to the right of it is a matching smoke-hole! Most of the smokeholes in this ruin, as in others, are round, oval, or square.

Stake P (Walkway). You have perhaps wondered at the difference in color between the trail you have just walked and this walkway. The walkway was made of soil mortar in 1939. It is fairly impervious to moisture, and serves to keep moisture from getting behind the retaining wall and causing it to collapse and fall out, the way the original wall did.

We do not recommend that you venture beyond this point, but if you carefully examine the cliff face ahead you will see several pictographs (painted designs) and petroglyphs (pecked or scratched designs). Please do not add to them.

We hope this little guide has helped make your visit to this fragile ruin more enjoyable. If you have questions, please contact a Ranger at Headquarters, located at Betatakin.

We welcome comments and criticisms on this pamphlet, so that the next edition can be improved upon.

Also, if you should like a copy of this guide, you may obtain one on request at Headquarters, or by making a note to that effect next to your name in the register. If your name and address are legible, the Park Ranger will copy them on his next patrol trip, and we will send you one in the mail. If you prefer, write to the Superintendent, Navajo National Monument, Tonalea, Arizona and request a copy.

Many thanks for helping us protect this ruin.