Salinas

Salinas National Monument
New Mexico

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Photo by Russ Finley

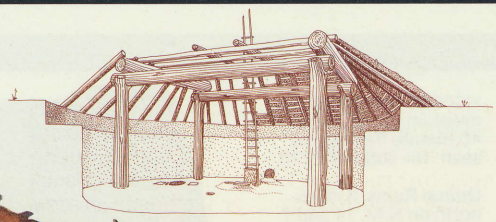
Pueblos of the Salinas Valley

In the stones of the Salinas Valley pueblo ruins are faint echoes of the communities that lived there three centuries ago. Before they abandoned the area in the 1600s, Pueblo Indians forged a stable agricultural society whose members lived in apartment-like complexes and participated, through rule and ritual, in the cycles of nature. Two ancient southwestern cultural traditions—the Anasazi and Mogollon—overlapped in the Salinas Valley to produce the later societies at Abó, Gran Quivira, and Quarai. These traditions had roots as far back as 7,000 years ago and were themselves preceded by nomadic Indians who arrived perhaps 20,000 years ago. As the southwestern cultures evolved, better agricultural techniques from Mexico and the migration of Tompiro- and Tiwa-speaking peoples from the Rio Grande spurred the growth of settlements in the Salinas Valley. By the 10th century, substantial Mogollon villages flourished here. The dwellers practiced minimal agriculture supplemented by hunting and gathering, made a simple red or brown pottery, and lived in pit houses and, later, above-ground *jacales* of adobe-plastered poles. By the late 1100s the Anasazi tradition from the Colorado Plateau, introduced through the Cibola (Zuñi) district and Rio Grande pueblos, began to assimilate the Mogollon. The contiguous stone-and-adobe homes of the Anasazis represented the earliest stage of the pueblo society later encountered by the Spanish. Over the next few hundred years the Salinas Valley became a major trade center and one of the most populous parts of the Pueblo world, with perhaps 10,000 or more inhabitants in the 17th century. Located astride major trade routes, the villagers were both producers and middlemen between the Rio Grande villages and the plains tribes to the east. They traded maize, piñon nuts, beans, squash, salt, and cotton goods for dried buffalo meat, hides, flints, and shells.

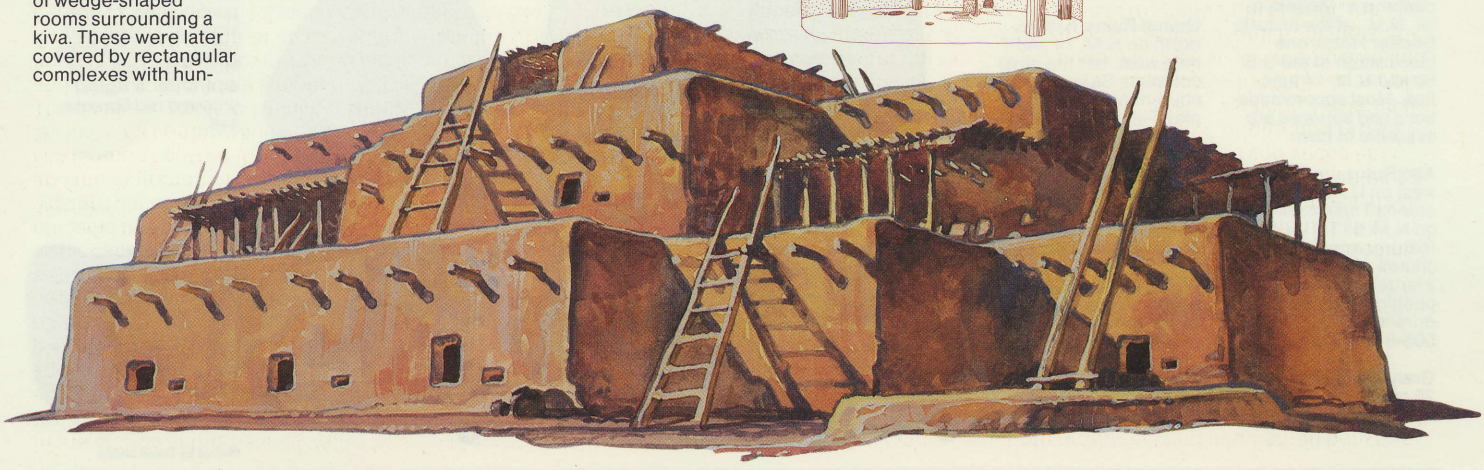
By 1300 the Anasazi culture was dominant, although the Salinas area always lagged behind the Anasazi heartland to the north in cultural developments. Brush-and-mud *jacales* had evolved into large stone complexes, some with hundreds of rooms, surrounding kiva-studded plazas. Besides the plants already mentioned, the inhabitants ate wild plants, raised turkeys, and hunted rabbits, deer, antelope, and bison. They wore breech cloths, bison robes, antelope and deer hides, and decorative blankets of cotton and yucca fiber. Turquoise and shell jewelry, obtained by trade, brightened rituals. The Spaniards were impressed by the Pueblos' weaving, basketmaking, and fine black-on-white pottery, a technique the Salinas people borrowed from the Rio Grande pueblos. The Salinas pueblo dwellers were an adaptable people who drew what was useful from more advanced groups. But strong influences from the Zuñi district, the Spanish explorers, and deteriorating relations with the Apaches to the east radically altered pueblo life. In the 1670s the Salinas villages were abandoned, and their peoples dispersed.

Native Southwestern Architecture

The Salinas peoples' communal life was reflected in their shared-wall, stone and adobe pueblos. The earliest pueblos at some sites were concentric circles of wedge-shaped rooms surrounding a kiva. These were later covered by rectangular complexes with hundreds of rooms for living and storage. Daily chores were performed on roofs and in the plazas, which on religious days were stages for ceremonial dances.



For centuries before pueblos were developed, Indians lived in pit houses covered with pole-and-mud frames.



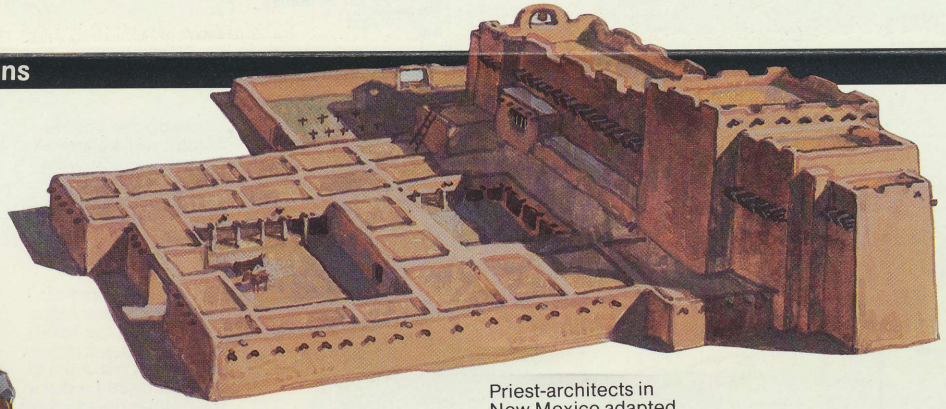
The Coming of the Spaniards

Soon after Spain had conquered and colonized Mexico, tales of great wealth to the North drew explorers to New Mexico. Coronado's expedition in 1540 failed to turn up the fabled land of Quivira, although the name and story lingered on. In 1598 a party led by Juan de Oñate came to New Mexico to plant a permanent colony. He called salt, which was abundant in Salinas, "one of the four riches of New Mexico," but the other expected riches—especially mines—failed to materialize. Agriculture too proved difficult in the harsh climate. Relations with the Indians soured when the soldiers attempted to collect tribute to the Crown. Spain finally concluded that New Mexico would never be profitable. However, the Pope had charged the Spanish Crown with Christianizing the natives of the New World. Phillip II therefore decided to maintain the colony, partly at the Crown's expense, as primarily a missionary effort. While many of the Franciscan missionaries were sincere and well-intentioned, the overlapping privileges granted to the church and civil authorities inevitably led to conflict between the Franciscans and the governors. Without the natural riches of some other colonies, the governors relied on profits from the sale of slaves captured in raids on Plains tribes and from goods produced by Indian labor.

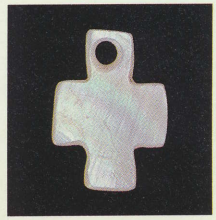
Relations with the pueblos were determined mainly through the *encomienda* system, in which ranking citizens *(encomenderos)* were appointed by the governor to provide protection, aid, and education to Indians and military support for the government in return for the privilege of collecting tribute. But the system was abused, and New Mexico was too remote for the exploitation to be checked by higher authorities. The Franciscans tried to lighten the burden on the Indians, but the settlers and government refused to give up the profitable arrangement, and in any case, the friars themselves placed heavy demands on the pueblos to support the missions. Still, some changes brought by the Spanish were beneficial. Wheat and wheat bread, fruit trees, and grapes were introduced. Cattle, goats, and sheep became a fixed part of the economy. Craftsmen began working metal.

In the end, however, cultural conflict and natural disaster devastated the Salinas pueblos. The Apaches, formerly trading partners, now raided the pueblos for food and in retribution for Spanish slave raids in which Pueblo Indians had participated. The Pueblos might have survived the raids, but they—and the Apaches and Spaniards—were hit during the 1660s and 70s with drought and widespread famine that killed 450 people at Gran Quivira alone. Recurring epidemics further decimated the populace, which had little resistance to European diseases. The ability of the pueblos to withstand these disasters may have been weakened by the disruption of their culture under Spanish rule. In any event, the Salinas pueblos and missions were abandoned during the 1670s, and the surviving Indians went to live with cultural relatives in other pueblos. In 1680 the pueblos north of Salinas, in an uncharacteristic show of unity, revolted and expelled the Spaniards from New Mexico. In the general exodus of Indians and Spaniards, the Piro and Tompiro survivors of the Salinas pueblos moved south to the El Paso area. They were absorbed by Indian communities there, making them the only linguistic group among the Pueblo Indians during the historic period to lose forever their language and their homeland.

A Clash of Religions

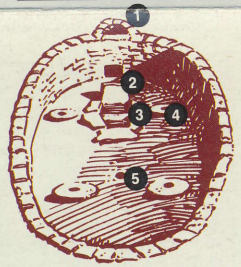


Priest-architects in New Mexico adapted European styles to native materials.



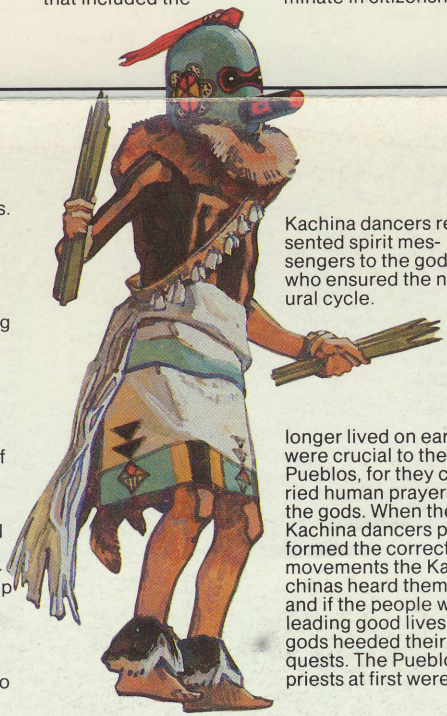
Mother-of-pearl cross found at a Salinas mission.

The Spanish and Pueblo priests viewed each other's religions through the lens of their own cultures. To pueblo leaders who directed collective rituals to influence a pantheon of gods, the Christian stress on the relationship between one god and one human was alien. The Franciscans, regarding the pueblo religion as idolatry, told the Indians that their salvation depended on their willingness to undergo religious instruction. The missions for this purpose were self-sufficient communities that included the pueblo, church, friars' quarters, work areas, and the pueblo's fields and hunting and gathering areas. The Indians were instructed in European crafts and husbandry in an attempt to bring them into Spanish society. The process was intended to culminate in citizenship in the Spanish Empire. But suppressing the masked Kachina dances and kiva rituals proved difficult for the priests. They were thwarted by the local civil authorities, who pressured them to speed up the conversion so the new Christians could work for the settlers, then encouraged the Indians to continue the ancient dances. The Inquisition came to the priests' aid. The Indians, caught in the middle, were not subject to the Inquisition, but a Spaniard who encouraged idolatry did so at great risk.



Underground kivas, reminiscent of ancestral pit houses, served as men's workrooms and sacred chambers for special ceremonies.

1 ventilator openings. **2** slab to deflect draft from ventilator. **3** fire pit. **4** post hole. **5** sipapu (symbolic opening to lower world.)



Kachina dancers represented spirit messengers to the gods, who ensured the natural cycle.

Photo by David Noble

Kiva wall painting of Kachina dancers.

Every Pueblo Indian was a member of one of the religious kiva societies into which the pueblo was divided. The rules were stringent in these highly-organized theocracies, but in times of illness or need the individual could expect aid from his or her group—and was obligated to offer it to others. The survival of the group was the motivating principle of the Pueblo religion. A communal effort was needed to bring rain, seed fertility, and dependable harvests. Participation in the rituals by the entire group maintained the universal harmony that allowed plants—and humans—to flourish. Kachina spirits, who no longer lived on earth, were crucial to the Pueblos, for they carried human prayers to the gods. When the Kachina dancers performed the correct movements the Kachinas heard them, and if the people were leading good lives, the gods heeded their requests. The Pueblo priests at first were willing to accept the new Christian god and saints into their pantheon, but soon concluded that these deities wouldn't heed—or weren't powerful enough to grant—their supplications for summer rain and fruitful harvests. When some Franciscans destroyed the Kachina masks and burned the sacred kivas, the break was complete. In the century after the Reconquest of 1692, Spanish officials relented and allowed the practive of native religions alongside Christianity, but the change of heart came too late for the Salinas pueblos. They had been abandoned a few years before the revolt.

Paintings by Roy Andersen

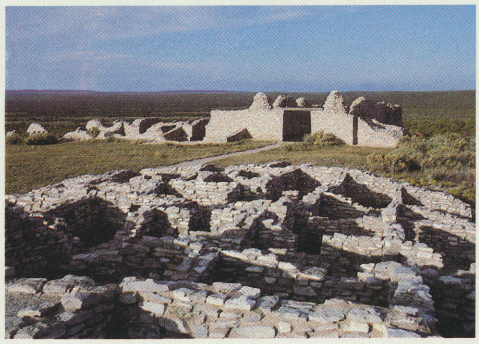
☆GPO: 1985—461-444/20014

Salinas

For Your Safety Watch your step; deep rooms are near the trails. Children should stay with persons responsible for their safety. Climbing on the walls is prohibited. If you see a rattlesnake, leave it alone and report it to the National Park ranger.

Administration Salinas National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. For information, write the Superintendent, Salinas National Monument, P.O. Box 496, Mountainair, N.M. 87036. Tel. 505-847-2585.

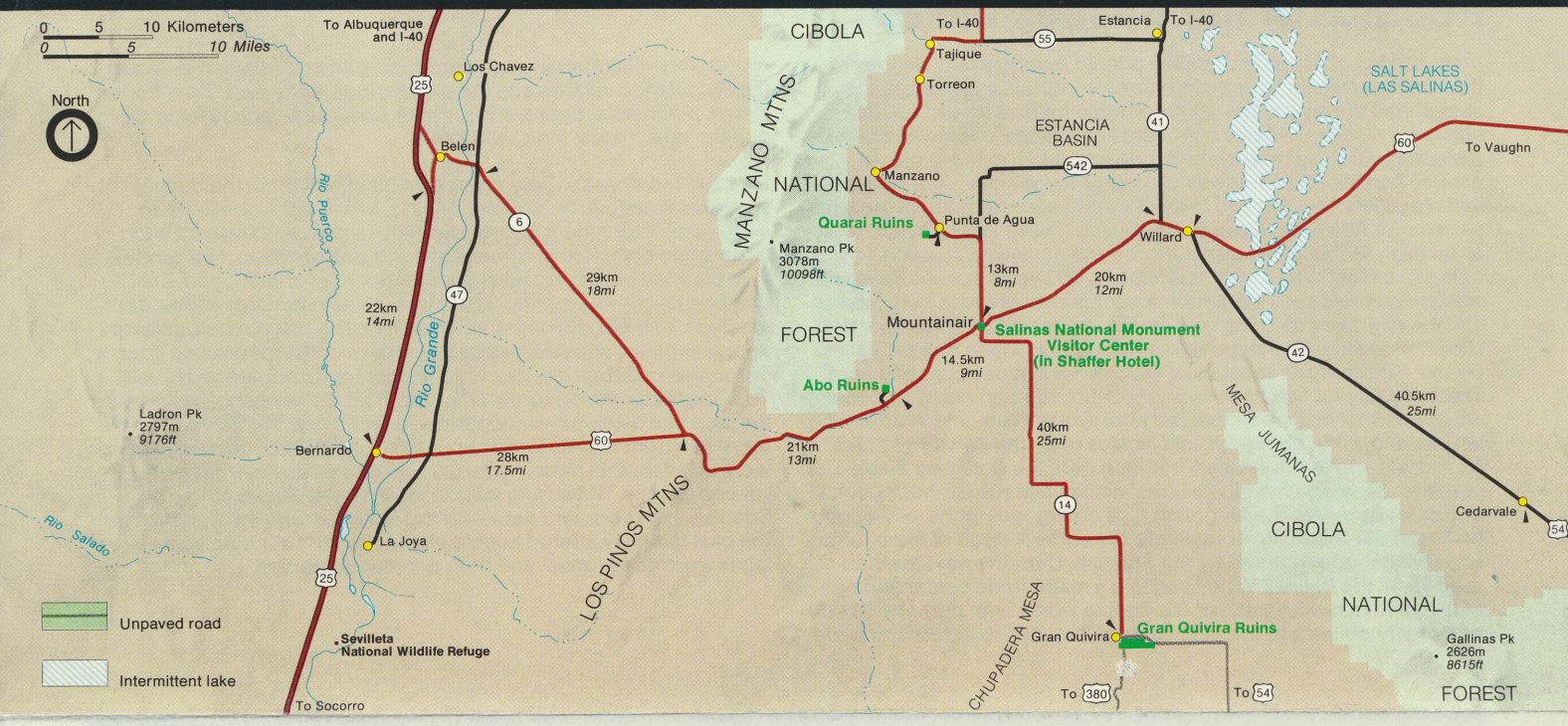
San Gregorio de Abó church, at Abó.



San Buenaventura church, Pueblo de las Humanas, at Gran Quivira. Photo by Russ Finley

Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Cuarac church, at Quarai. Photo by Russ Finley

Sites of Salinas National Monument



Visitor Information

Salinas National Monument is open daily, year round. The park headquarters and orientation center is in Mountainair, N.M., at the historic Shaffer Hotel, one block south of the U.S. 60 and N.M. 14 junction. Most accommodations and services are available in town.

Abó Ruins are 9 miles west on U.S. 60 and one-half mile north on N.M. 513. The site features sophisticated church architecture and a large unexcavated pueblo. There is no drinking water. Tel. 505-847-2400.

Gran Quivira Ruins are 26 miles south on N.M. 14. Two churches, excavated Indian structures, museum exhibits, and a 40-minute film can be seen. Tel. 505-847-2770.

Quarai Ruins, 8 miles north on N.M. 14 and 1 mile west, has the most complete Salinas church. Artifacts on display.Tel. 505-847-2290

Rules Collecting of cultural or natural materials is prohibited. Stay in designated areas at ruins. Pets must be under physical control.

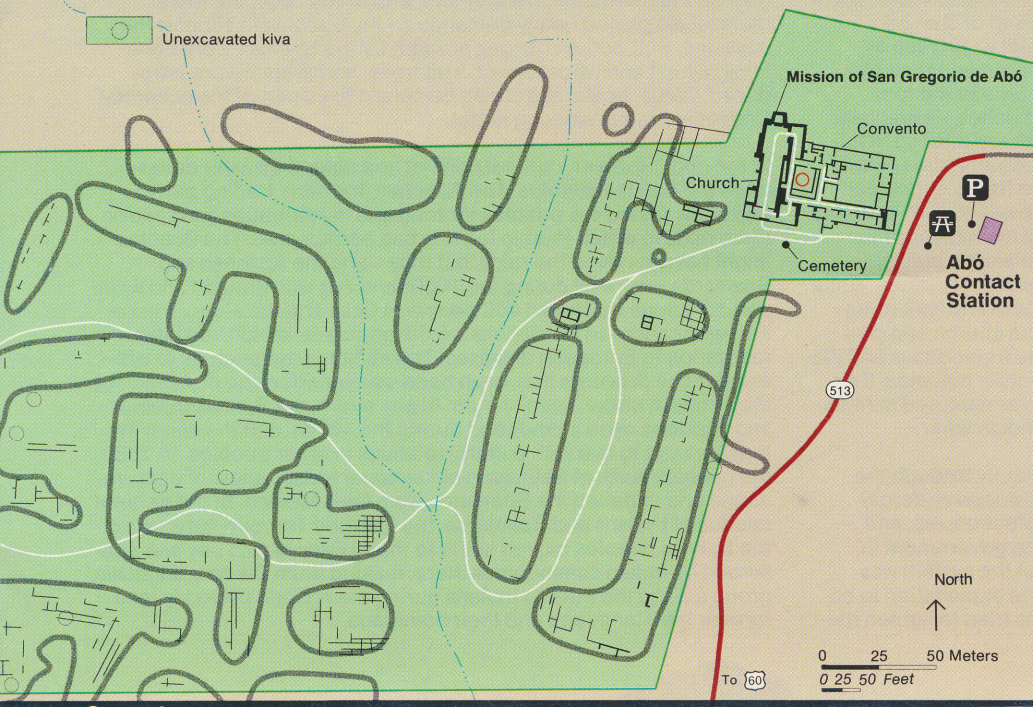
Picnicking and Camping The ruins have picnic areas but no camping. Nearby campgrounds: Cibola National Forest (847-2990) and Manzano State Park (847-2820).

Thousands of 17th-century Indian and Spanish artifacts have been found at Salinas pueblo sites: **1** Limestone mountain lion effigy. **2** Carved stone face. **3** Bird effigy of quartzite. **4** Spiral-grooved red fibrolite axe.

Photos by David Noble

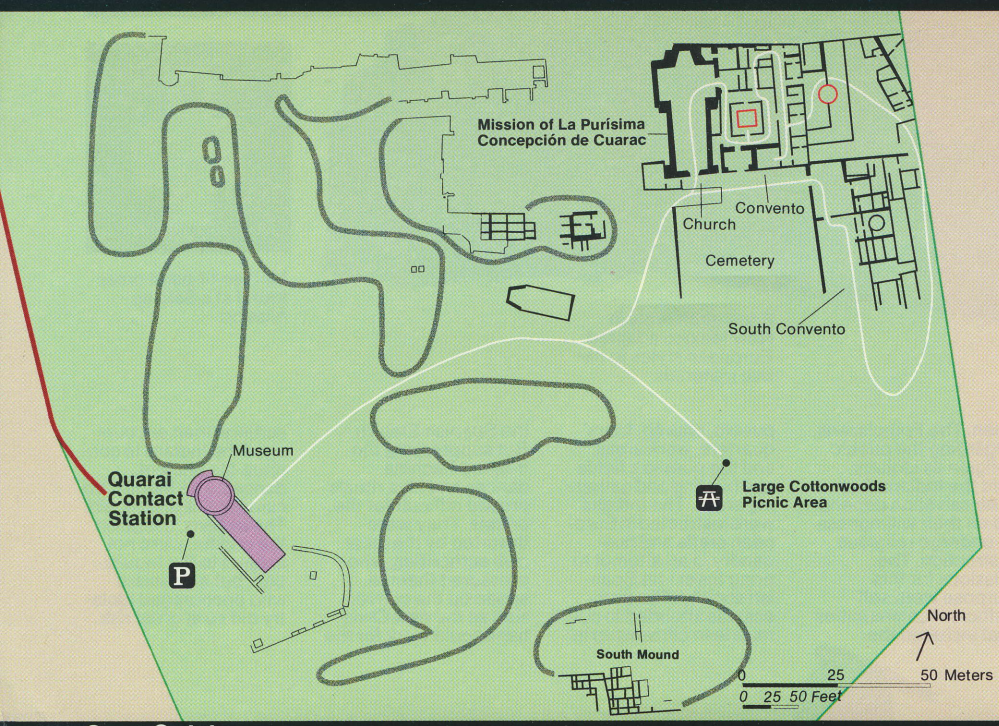
Unexcavated mound | Visible pueblo walls | Excavated pueblo rooms | Excavated kiva | Trail | Parking | Picnic area

Abó

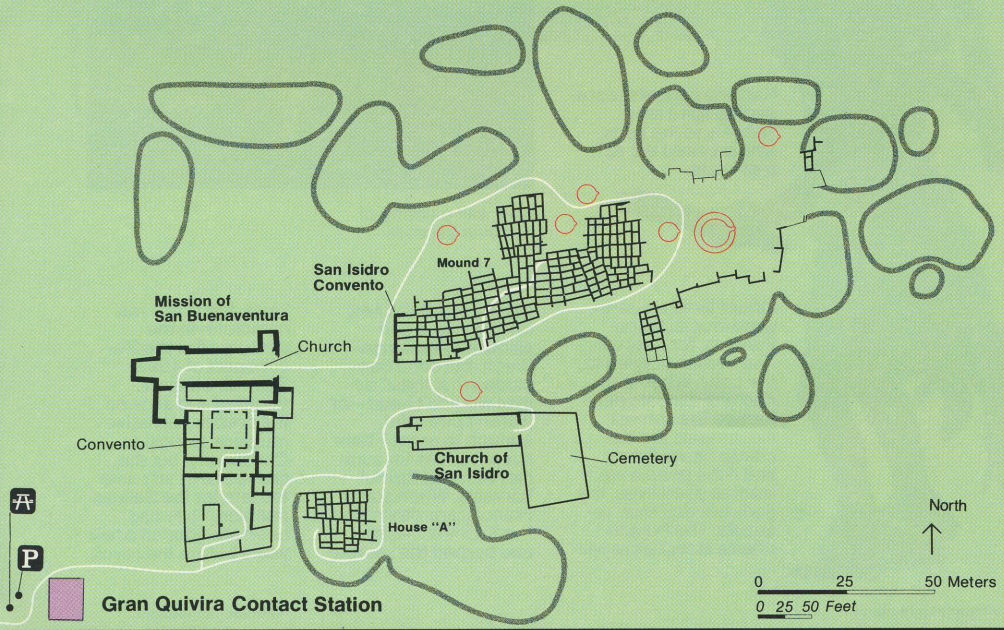


On an expedition to investigate the Salinas district in 1853, Maj. J.H. Carleton came upon Abó at dusk. "The tall ruins," he wrote, "standing there in solitude, had an aspect of sadness and gloom. . . The cold wind. . .appeared to roar and howl through the roofless pile like an angry demon." Carleton recognized the ruins as a Christian church, but didn't know that the "long heaps of stone, with here and there portions of walls projecting above the surrounding rubbish," marked the remains of a large pueblo. Located on a pass opening onto the Rio Grande Valley, Abó had carried on a lively trade with people of the Acoma-Zuñi area, the Galisteo Basin near Santa Fe, and the plains. Salt, hides, and piñon nuts passed through this trading center. Springs provided water for households, crops, and flocks of turkeys. Abó was a thriving community when the Spaniards first visited the Salinas Valley in 1581. Franciscans began converting Abó residents in 1622, and by the late 1620s the church was finished. It was built with a sophisticated buttressing technique unusual in 17th-century New Mexico and had an organ and trained choir. But the good times did not last. Battered by the same disasters that struck the other Salinas pueblos, the people of Abó departed, sometime between 1672 and 1678, to take refuge in towns on the Rio Grande.

Quarai



Like Abó and Las Humanas, red-walled Quarai was a thriving pueblo when Oñate first approached it in 1598 to "accept" its oath of allegiance to Spain. Three of Quarai's Spanish priests were head of the New Mexico Inquisition during the 1600s, including Fray Estevan de Perea, Custodian of the Franciscan order in the Salinas Jurisdiction and called by one historian the "Father of the New Mexican Church." Despite the horrors associated with the word "Inquisition," records from hearings show that the early inquisitors, in New Mexico at least, were compassionate men usually capable of separating gossip from what the church regarded as serious transgressions. In one case, tensions between church and state reached a peak when Perea charged the *alcalde mayor* of Salinas with encouraging the native Kachina dances. That case was dropped, but the *alcalde's* continued disruption at the mission prompted the Inquisition to banish him. Testimony recorded by Perea and others for trials at Mexico City provides a valuable picture of Spanish-Indian relationships in the 1600s. Spain's sophisticated legal system was applied (when it worked as intended) to protect the Indians' civil and property rights. And perhaps the Spanish colonists learned the patience and endurance that the Pueblos had practiced for hundreds of years.



Las Humanas, largest of the Salinas pueblos, was an important trade center for many years before and after the Spanish *entrada.* The people resisted the newcomers at first, but they reconciled themselves to the Spanish presence, and borrowed freely from them, as they had from other cultures. The pueblo's black-on-white pottery took on new forms reflecting European styles. Other artifacts from the site recall the Spanish presence: Chinese porcelain, metal tools, religious medallions, and evidence of cattle, goats, sheep, horses, and pigs. Documents of the 1600s tell of strife between missionaries and *encomenderos,* who complained that the friars kept the Indians so busy studying Christianity and building churches that the *encomenderos* could neither use Indian labor nor collect their tributes. Burned and filled kivas attest to the friars' determination to exterminate the old religion. Hurriedly altered above-ground rooms converted to kivas attest to the Pueblo priests' response. By the time the large church was built in 1659, Apache raids had begun. In 1672, further weakened by drought and famine, the inhabitants (only 500 by that time) abandoned the pueblo.