

# Walnut Canyon

NATIONAL MONUMENT • ARIZONA

## CAUTION

This area possesses hazards not normally encountered in home surroundings. Please guard your family's safety.

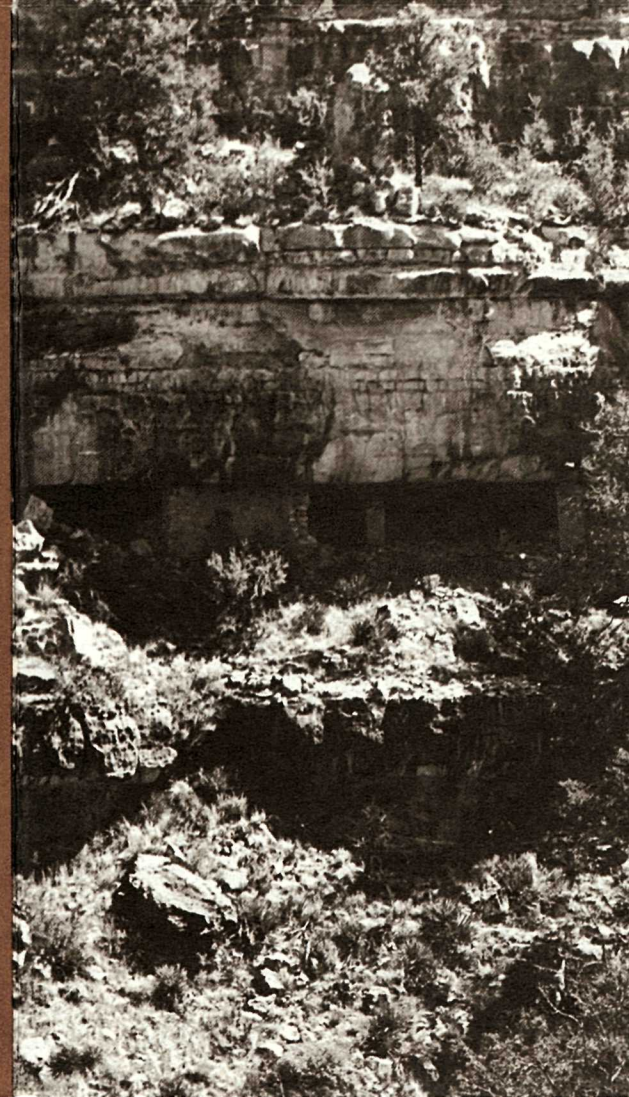
## ADMINISTRATION

Walnut Canyon National Monument, containing 1,879 acres, was established on November 30, 1915. It is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

A superintendent, whose address is Route 1, Box 790, Flagstaff, AZ 86001, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, park and recreation areas, and for the wise use of all those resources. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

**National Park Service**  
**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**



## THE SINAGUA

Nine hundred years ago, in what is now north-central Arizona, a volcano erupted and spewed fine cinders and ash over an area of about 800 square miles. The porous cinder layer formed a moisture-retaining agent that transformed the marginal farmland into rich farmland.

Word of this fertile oasis amid great areas of dry, thin soil spread among the Indians of the Southwest, setting off a prehistoric land rush that brought together the Pueblo dry farmer from the east and north, the Hohokam irrigation farmer from the south, and probably Mogollon groups from the south and east and Cohonino groups from the west. The immigrants sought the stretches of land lying some 15 miles northeast and southeast of the volcano, bordering territory already occupied by the Sinagua Indians.

Nudged out of their then crowded corner by the newcomers, some of the Sinagua moved to a canyon south of the volcano that offered building sites and a means of livelihood. Here they made their homes.

Remains of the Sinagua's new homes are now preserved in Walnut Canyon National Monument; the cone of the benevolent volcano, in Sunset Crater National Monument; and one focal point of the immigrants, in Wupatki National Monument.

This cave provided protection for a family home.

## WALNUT CANYON THEN

The Sinagua arrived at Walnut Canyon with new ideas and skills they had acquired from other Indians through the exchanges of ideas and customs that were common among friendly tribes. At Walnut Canyon the Sinagua put to use one of their new crafts: masonry. They built more than 300 small cliff rooms in the shadowy recesses of the canyon's limestone walls. By the simple device of extending their houses into these recesses, the Sinagua gained protection from the weather and probably from marauding tribes.

But Walnut Canyon offered the Sinagua more than cozy homesites. A dependable supply of water flowed along the streambed on the floor of the canyon. Fertile soil lay within 2 miles of both rims of the canyon. A great variety of trees, for fuel and implements, grew within the canyon and on the mesa. Other wild plants, a source of food and medicines, lined the banks of the stream and blanketed the slopes. Game, furred and feathered, haunted canyon and mesa top.

Pottery, pendants, and houses left by the Sinagua show that they appreciated the graceful and the beautiful. They must, then, have responded to the setting for their new homes: the soothing blend of grays and greens of the canyon walls; the meadow-like expanse of treetops far below, enlivened by moving cloud shadows; the purples and blues of distant horizons.

Surprisingly, Walnut Canyon had been little used by humans before the arrival of the Sinagua. Remains of pithouses on the rim suggest that earlier occupation was light and probably seasonal.

The Sinagua made the canyon a place of activity. On a spring morning eight centuries ago, the scene might have been something like this:

Six girls, carrying clay pots filled with water, pause at the rim of the canyon to gasp for breath. They have just climbed up the steep trail from the stream.

After a few minutes of rest, they continue on the trail to the fields.

Men and women stop their work with digging sticks as they notice the approach of the water-bearers. They are slight but muscular, and have dark hair and eyes and brown skin. Some of the men wear small woven cotton blankets around their waists, kiltlike; others wear breechclouts of woven cotton. The women wear "skirts," or "aprons," of yucca cord. Small fur blankets, which they will drape around their shoulders when they leave the fields, hang from bushes near the trail. Sandals of plaited yucca fiber rest beside the bushes.

The field workers quench their thirst and enjoy a needed rest, but soon return to planting the seeds of corn, beans, and squash. If these seeds fail to



fulfill their promise, the coming winter will be one of hunger.

A grandmother, twisted and bent by arthritis, sits on a stone on the ledge in front of her house and watches tiny children playing about her. When a child toddles too near the edge or strays too far up the trail, her call brings it back. Accustomed to the sharp arthritic pain, she smiles a toothless smile as she guards the small ones. Bits of stone from metate and mano, unavoidably mixed with cornmeal, have worn away her teeth.

In another shallow cave in the opposite wall of the canyon, two men and two women are building a house by adding another 12- by 14-foot room to an existing house. Walls, made of slabs of limestone, are double, the space between being filled with mud. Mud is used also as mortar and plaster, and—firmly packed and dried—it will be used as a floor. A hole above the small door is intended as an outlet for smoke from the fire that will be built inside the room. During cold weather, an animal skin will be hung over the door.

A group of women, chatting and laughing, kneel beside the stream as they weave baskets of yucca fiber. Nearby, other women gather clay from which they will fashion their pottery.

Several men and older boys appear at the lower end of the canyon walking along the trail that parallels the stream. They are equipped with bow and arrow, throwing stick, and stone-bladed knife. Proudly they display the results of their successful hunt: two deer, a fox, six rabbits, a porcupine, pack rats, a brace of jays, and a great horned owl.

In front of his house in one of the topmost caves, a young man bends over his fire-making equipment and twirls a hardwood spindle rapidly between his palms; with one foot, he holds the cottonwood hearth firmly. Smoke rises from the hearth, and he will soon be able to blow a spark to flame.

The excited barking of dogs near the rim announces the arrival of strangers in the community. All eyes peer at the three figures descending one of the trails, figures that are instantly recognized. They are traders from the south. In proper time, they will exhibit the finished shellwork that they obtained by trade from other Indians. And when the traders return to the south, they will take some of the local products: pinyon nuts, black walnuts, baskets, and pottery. From other traders, the Sinagua obtain salt, turquoise, decorated pottery, and raw cotton.

Thus the Sinagua lived in Walnut Canyon for almost 150 years. Then they abandoned their homes. Why? No one knows. Perhaps it was drought, worn-out soil, pressure from enemy groups, disease—any, all, or none of these. Anthropologists believe that some of their descendants live today among the Pueblo Indians.

*Sinagua families built these walls over 800 years ago.*

## VISITING THE RUINS

For 600 years, the cliff dwellings here apparently stood deserted, undisturbed, and unknown, until the earliest report of them in 1883. From then until the area was placed under the protection of the National Park Service in 1933, vandals removed much of the cultural material that had been left by the Sinagua, even damaging and defacing the dwellings themselves. Present understanding is largely derived from investigations at the sites.

The entrance road to Walnut Canyon National Monument is a 3-mile oiled highway connecting with Int. 40 at a point 7.5 miles east of Flagstaff.

Your first stop in the monument should be at the visitor center. Employees of the National Park Service will answer your questions and suggest ways you can make your visit to the monument most meaningful and enjoyable.

A paved foot trail leads to 25 of the cliff dwelling rooms; from the trail, you can see about 100 others. The three-fourths of a mile round trip requires a climb of 185 feet. Elevation at the canyon rim is about 7,000 feet. The combination of the climb and the elevation will make unaccustomed demands on your heart; and so if you have a heart condition or are uneasy about attempting the climb, you should not take the trail trip. Much can be seen from the rim of the canyon, along a short trail.

Accommodations are not available within the monument. Meals and lodging may be obtained at nearby towns and along the major highways. No campgrounds are available.

## A REMINDER

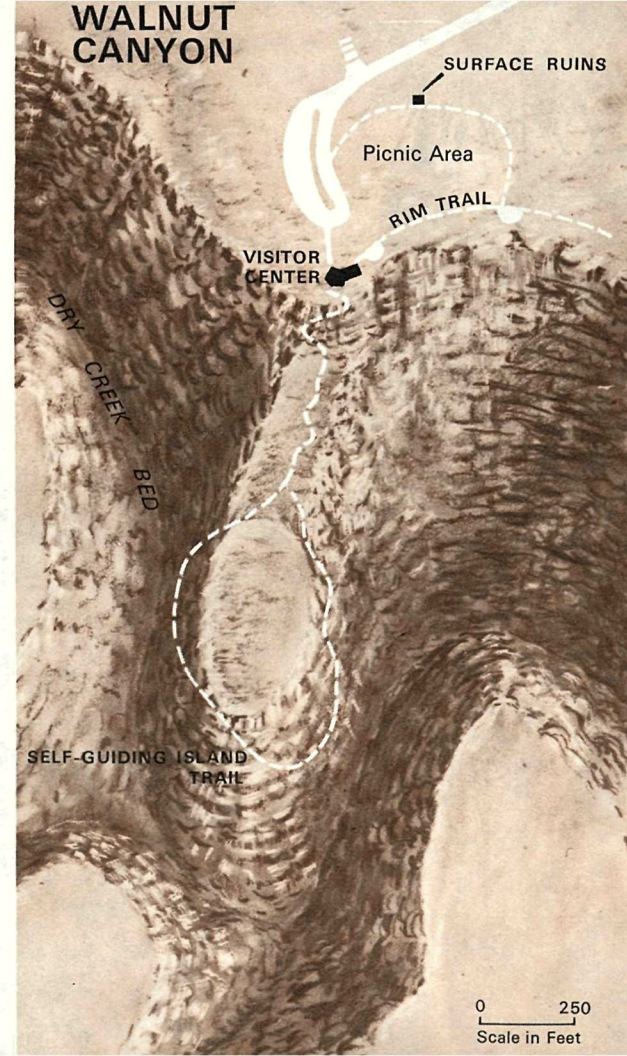
Federal laws prohibit the removal or defacement of any object of antiquity, the removal or damaging of any plant or other natural feature, and the hunting or capturing of any animal within the monument.

Fire is one of the greatest dangers to the monument. A carelessly dropped cigarette stub or match could cause a serious fire in this dry area. You are therefore asked to exercise extreme caution while smoking, especially while you are on the trail.

Hiking off established trails within the monument is permissible only by authorization of the superintendent.

Picnicking is permitted only in the designed picnic ground. No open fires are allowed in the picnic ground or anywhere else in the park. Portable gas stoves are permitted in the picnic ground, only. Just as you appreciate a clean picnic area, so will the visitors who come after you.

Because wild animals become tame and trusting in this their protected refuge, you must keep your pet in your car at all times.



## WALNUT CANYON NOW

More than half a millennium has passed since the voices and laughter of the Sinagua were heard in the canyon. And yet a trace of the mood that these people created is still discernible.

You can still transport yourself back in time to the days when the Sinagua lived in this canyon. Their homes are here, and you can walk among them. The plants that they used so well for food, fiber, dye, medicines, fuel, construction, ceremonial purposes, implements, and weapons still grow here: ponderosa pine, pinyon pine, juniper, Douglas-fir, locust, black walnut (for which the canyon was named), aspen, willow, boxelder, hoptree, holly-grape, serviceberry, elderberry, snowberry, lemonade sumac, mountain-mahogany, cliff rose, currant, saltbush, wild tobacco, Mormon tea, grape, agave, yucca, and several species of cactus.

Most of the animals, too, that the Sinagua hunted for meat, sinew, skins, and feathers may still be seen in and near the canyon: mule deer, coyote, bobcat, gray fox, cottontail, pack rat, Abert's squirrel, porcupine, and birds of many species. Cougar and bear are sometimes seen.