

# Walnut Canyon

NATIONAL MONUMENT • ARIZONA

**HOURS OF OPERATION**

The monument is open year-round except Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. The hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day of the week.

**ADMINISTRATION**

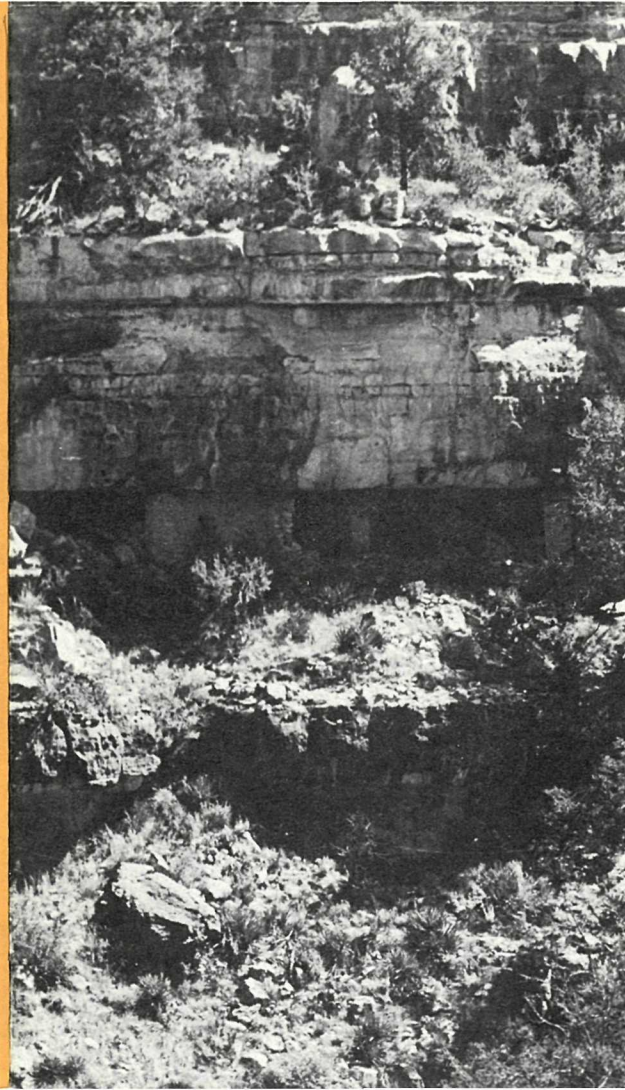
Walnut Canyon National Monument, containing 2,249 acres, was established on November 30, 1915. It is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. For more information contact: Superintendent, Walnut Canyon National Monument, Walnut Canyon Road, Flagstaff, AZ 86004.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. 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**

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**THE SINAGUA**

Sometime before AD 600 groups of people from southeastern Arizona set out for the area east of the San Francisco Peaks. There they established permanent settlements and made their living by hunting and gathering and farming. These were the people now called the Sinagua—Spanish for “without water”—named for the high desert region they inhabited. As time went on, scattered families united into villages. Walnut Canyon became an important community between about 1125 and 1250. The homes we see today beneath the canyon's limestone overhangs were built during this period, when Sinagua culture flourished.

Archeologists once thought that debris from the eruption of nearby Sunset Crater in 1064-65 made the land more fertile and drew remote farming peoples to the San Francisco volcanic field in a prehistoric “land rush.” Theoretically, this population surge accounted for changes in Sinagua life. Recent findings suggest that the volcanic eruption probably did not cause a great migration after all, and that the Sinagua were more likely influenced by increased rainfall, new water-conserving farming practices, trade with other peoples, and a general population increase in the Southwest. If the reasons for the development of Sinagua culture are debatable, their departure is downright mystifying. By about 1250 they had moved southeast, leaving the empty cliff homes as evidence that they once thrived in Walnut Canyon.

This cave provided protection for a family home.

## WALNUT CANYON IN SINAGUA TIMES

It is difficult for us to know how the Sinagua lived. They left no written history when they abandoned the pueblos and cliff dwellings of the Flagstaff region sometime before 1400. To reconstruct what life must have been like for these ancient farmers, archeologists and anthropologists rely on whatever material has survived through the centuries: pueblo ruins, ceramic fragments, weapons, farm tools, and jewelry. By examining these objects, establishing their ages, and comparing them with the belongings of groups elsewhere in the Southwest, scientists have constructed a picture which, though incomplete, tells us a good bit about life in this part of the Southwest before European settlement.

Projectile points and split-twig animal figurines thousands of years old indicate that the Sinagua were not the first to inhabit Walnut Canyon. The Sinagua arrived from the southeast and settled in the region before AD 700. Like the earlier inhabitants, they were probably attracted by the canyon's abundance of plants and animals. While the Sinagua depended to a large extent on the same wild food sources as their predecessors, they were also farmers. Caring for crops required people to remain in one place, at least for the duration of the growing season. The Sinagua built one-room pit houses and became the canyon's first permanent inhabitants.

The cliff dwellings were built during the main occupation of the canyon, between 1125 and 1250, when populations throughout the Southwest were growing and seeking out new environmental niches. These were the years of the Sinagua culture's greatest geographical extent. Settlements reached from the eastern slopes of the San Francisco Peaks northeast to the Little Colorado River and south to the Verde Valley. Walnut Canyon's villages are good examples of dwellings from this era. Other significant communities of the time include Elden Pueblo and the structures of Wupatki National Monument, both northeast of Flagstaff.

Walnut Canyon homes were generally situated on cliffsides facing south and east to take advantage of warmth and sunlight. Some sites, fewer in number, face north and west. These may have been occupied during the warmer months. Although the cliff dwellings are the most spectacular ruins in the park, other archeological sites dot the canyon rims. Study of the rim and canyon sites reveals much about settlement patterns.

Sites are clustered, suggesting communities of related family groups. A typical cluster consisted of a pueblo or pit-house village, surrounded by smaller, one-room, farming structures called field houses. These clusters were often associated with pueblos found atop isolated prominences or concentrated at the ends of ridges that extend into the canyon. Such pueblos have been labeled "forts" by those who assumed that the structures were built for defense. Archeologists now propose that the "forts" were gathering places for ceremony and trade. The settlement cluster around the visi-



tor center is the best example of this community pattern in the park. The cliff dwellings along the Island Trail are part of this cluster, which is centered around several rooms enclosed by a rock wall, along with a large community room, on top of the island. Such a pattern was by no means unique to this park.

The scattered cliff dwellings and rim-top sites were linked by a system of trails, most of which are now obscured by vegetation. Trails have been found where natural cracks in the cliff faces provide access to ledges, the canyon bottom, and the rim. Such access routes, structured by topography, probably formed boundaries for the individual communities within the canyon.

The canyon rims, relatively flat with deep soil, were the main farmlands. Even in the semi-arid climate, water was available most of the time, though Walnut Creek probably did not flow year-round. To conserve water runoff and to collect soil, the Sinagua built check dams and terraces. They grew corn, beans, and several varieties of squash. Recent evidence shows that edible wild plants were just as important to their diet as cultivated crops. More than 20 species of plants that could have been used for food and medicine still grow in the canyon. Among these are wild grape, serviceberry, elderberry, yucca, and Arizona black walnut. On the rims, edible wild plants were fewer but no less sought-after. The Sinagua also hunted deer, bighorn sheep and other smaller animals.

Surplus food may have been among the things the Sinagua exchanged for items not available locally. Archeological findings tell us that the canyon's inhabitants were active traders. Pottery made by the Anasazi people to the north was particularly abundant in the canyon ruins, but the Anasazi were not the only ones with whom the Sinagua traded. Researchers have unearthed obsidian from 20 miles northwest of Flagstaff, textiles and cotton from Sinagua relatives in the Verde Valley to the south, argillite, malachite, and azurite from the Verde Valley, turquoise from the Santa Fe area, seashell ornaments from the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of California, and macaw feathers from Mexico. These goods may have been acquired by the Sinagua while serving as middlemen facilitating trade between various prehistoric groups. Artifacts such as these make it clear that the Sinagua did not develop in isolation. They were members of an extensive Southwestern cultural system in which knowledge and skills must have been transported from place to place along with goods.

The Sinagua lived in Walnut Canyon intermittently for almost 150 years, then abandoned their homes for no apparent reason. Perhaps it was drought, worn-out soil, warfare, or disease that caused them to leave the canyon. Anthropologists believe that their descendants live today among the Hopi Indians of northeastern Arizona, whose villages date from AD 1300.

## 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 other 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

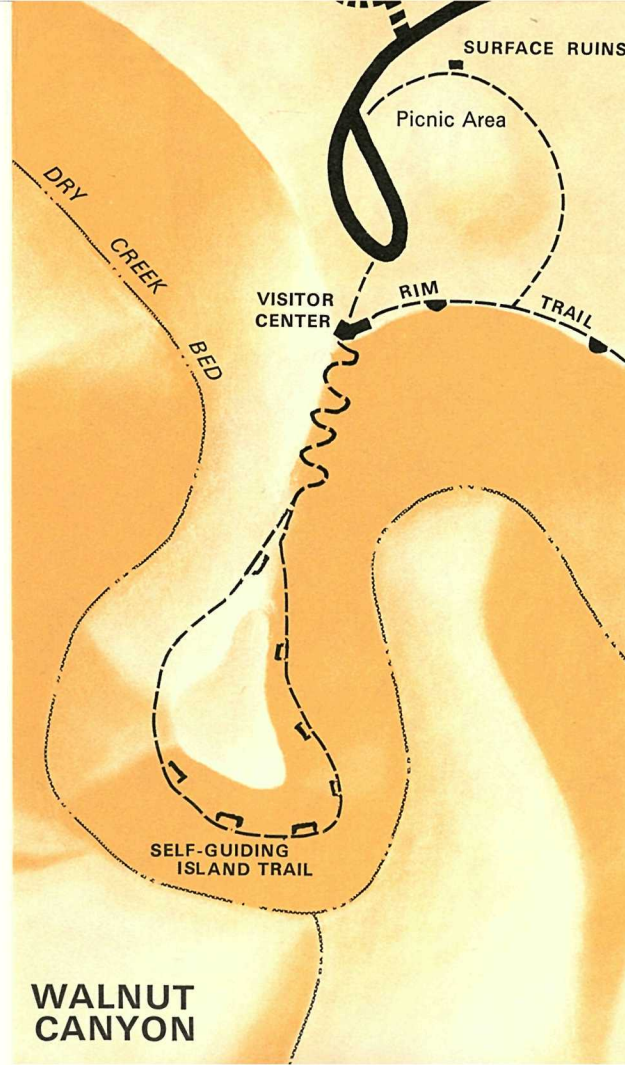
Federal laws prohibit the removal or defacement of any object of antiquity, the removal or damaging of any plant or other natural feature, and the hunting or capturing of any animal within the monument.

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 designated 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.

Pets are not permitted in the visitor center or on the Island Trail.



## 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.

## CAUTION

It is dangerous to walk off designated trails. Those with heart ailments or other infirmities should realize that the ISLAND TRAIL includes a 55-meter (185-foot) climb at an altitude of 2,134 meters (7,000) feet. These conditions can tax the heart.