

INFORMATION ON WALNUT CANYON NATIONAL MONUMENT

I. The Indians at Walnut Canyon:

By A.D. 600, people from the Mogollon area of east-central Arizona spread into the Flagstaff region and developed into a culture known to archaeologists as "The Sinagua" - the People Without Water. This name was derived from the early Spanish explorers' name for the San Francisco Peaks - the "Sierra Sin Agua", the mountains without water.

It was not until about A.D. 700 that the Sinagua began to live in Walnut Canyon on a permanent basis. While the Sinagua, like the earlier inhabitants, made use of natural food resources, they were also farmers. Farming required people to remain in one place in order to take care of the crops through the growing season.

The main occupation of the canyon occurred between A.D. 1125-1250, when populations throughout the Southwest were growing and expanding into new environmental niches. This happened here at Walnut Canyon and is the time when the Sinagua reached their greatest geographical extent.

Although the cliff dwellings you will see here are the most spectacular ruins in the monument, other archaeological sites abound on the canyon rims. It is necessary to look at these rim sites, as well as the cliff dwellings, in order to fully understand the community and settlement patterns at Walnut Canyon National Monument.

Walnut Canyon provided a rich environment for the people who lived in the cliff dwellings. Water, although probably not flowing the year 'round, was available most of the time. The canyon contains over 20 different species of plants that could have been used for food and medicinal purposes, such as wild grape, service berry, elderberry, yucca, and Arizona walnut. On top of the rim, wild plant food resources were less numerous but pinyon, prickly pear, oak, and agave, which are found there, provided a rich and useful part of the Sinagua diet. In addition, the deep soils on top of the rim were the main farmlands for the canyon inhabitants. Check dams and terraces here were used to control water run-off and to collect soil for agricultural pursuits. Although corn, beans, and several varieties of squash were grown by the Sinagua, new evidence shows that edible wild plants were just as important to their diet as domesticated crops.

Sinagua population centers shifted through time, probably in response to climatic change and depletion of soil nutrients in their farmlands. By A.D. 1250, the Flagstaff area was mostly abandoned as large pueblos developed 65km. (40miles) to the southeast. These large pueblos lasted until about A.D. 1400, when the Sinagua probably merged with the people in the Little Colorado River Valley to become the ancestors of the Hopi Indians.

II. Other interests at Walnut Canyon:

There are bird lists, mammal lists, plant displays and other information available at the visitor center.

Natural resources (plants and animals) of Walnut Canyon are considerable and of great importance both to the prehistoric people of the 1100's and for people today. The wide range of plants and animals found at Walnut Canyon is unusual. The range includes: Canadian Zone vegetation (usually found at elevations above 8,000 ft.), Upper Sonoran Desert (usually found at elevations under 5,000 ft.), and Stream Bottom vegetation. The elevation at Walnut Canyon is 6790 ft., but due to the curvature of the canyon the sun's rays have both south and north exposures effecting the vegetation growth at these exposures. For instance on the hot, dry south facing slopes we find Prickly Pear cacti, on the cool north facing slopes Douglas Fir trees are found (which are indigenous of the Canadian Zone), and Black Walnut trees are found in spots where the warmth and protection give it a chance to survive. As a result of different plant resources, many different birds and animals are able to find food and shelter here.

III. Activities available at Walnut Canyon:

There are two walking trails: the Island Trail and the Rim Trail. The Rim Trail does not require a guide booklet, is level, and gives distant views of the cliff dwellings. It enables you to walk along the edge of the canyon rim approximately 1/4 mile (.4km), and past surface ruins which are near one of the farming areas. The trail is about 1/2 mile (.5km) and takes 20 - 30 minutes to complete.

The Island Trail enables you to go inside the cliff dwellings. It is 3/4 mile (1.2km) loop and has a 185 ft.(61m) descent, which consists of 240 steps down and back out of the canyon. This is equivalent to walking down and up 18 stories, or 60 meters. It takes about 1 hour to complete the 3/4 mile round-trip. THIS IS A STRENUOUS CLIMB, AND SHOULD BE CONSIDERED CAREFULLY BY THOSE WITH HEART PROBLEMS. The high elevation here may cause shortness of breath.

There are distant views of the cliff dwellings from the visitor center windows. The museum in the visitor center gives the story of the prehistoric people that once occupied Walnut Canyon.

The picnic area is available near the visitor center, and three picnic sites are found along the entrance road.

Accessibility for the handicapped: The Rim Trail is level with no steps and is accessible by wheelchair; however the Island Trail has 240 steps and is not accessible by wheelchair, the visitor center is limited in its accessibility, and does have a few steps; the restrooms are accessible.

IV. Fees: * Effective January, 1987

Golden Age Passport: free to citizens of the U.S. who are 62 years of age or older; card is good in all Park Service areas.

Golden Eagle Passport: \$25.00 permit which gives entry to family groups to entrance fee park areas in the U.S. (good for calendar year).

By car: \$3.00 for any groups which enter by private vehicle (car or motorcycle).

Individual: \$1.00 for each person entering by foot, bicycle or commercial (tour) bus; for those between 12 and 62.

V. Safety precautions and other regulations:

All visitors should be aware that this is a potentially hazardous area. For everyone's safety we ask that you remain on the paved trails. Hiking is not permitted in the backcountry because of safety considerations and for the preservation of the monument.

In order to help keep our parks clean we ask for your help in preventing litter by disposing it in the appropriate receptacles. Smoking and eating is not permitted in the visitor center and smoking on the trails should be limited to areas with ashtrays if possible.

Since the area is to be kept in its natural state as much as possible, plants and animals may not be removed or disturbed at the National Monument.

We thank you for your cooperation in keeping our National Parks & Monuments clean and helping to preserve these areas so that future generations may enjoy the same.