



# upatki

*National Monument*

A R I Z O N A

# Wupatki NATIONAL MONUMENT

Remains of many eleventh-century pueblos which sprang up when a volcanic eruption supplied unusually fertile soil

The red sandstone prehistoric pueblos of Wupatki, gleaming against a background of black basaltic cliffs and facing a view of the Painted Desert of the Little Colorado River, were built by groups of farming Indians, ancestors of the picturesque Hopis. More than 800 home sites have been discovered in the monument, varying from the pits of ancient earth lodges to house structures three stories high. Studies of ancient wooden beams in the ruins have dated the major occupation as occurring during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

These abundant prehistoric ruins constitute the tangible and colorful remains of an eleventh-century Indian "land rush" that resulted from the earlier eruption of Sunset Crater, a nearby volcano.

Coming from several directions and bringing different customs, the various tribes met and mixed, though remaining in large part distinct groups, forming a local cultural pattern differentiated from its contemporaries in other sections of the prehistoric American Southwest.

The many ruins in Wupatki National Monument are in an unusual state of preservation. The most accessible are the Citadel and the Wupatki, located 5 and 14 miles, respectively, from U. S. No. 89.

## The Eruption and the Land Rush

Prior to the eruption of Sunset Crater, the vast area from the San Francisco

Peaks to the Little Colorado River was sparsely inhabited due to scarcity of rainfall for raising crops. A few families were scattered along the base of the peaks where abundant snow and frequent summer rains made farming possible.

Between A. D. 1046 and 1071, there were rumblings in the valley at the foot of the peaks. Earth lodges abandoned by the frightened Indians decayed into ruins. Then came the eruption of what is now Sunset Crater. Huge clouds of volcanic cinder or ash buried remains of the homes and spread a black mantle over more than 800 square miles of territory between the mountains and the river.

While this was probably regarded as a great catastrophe at the time, some of the Indians soon discovered it was possible to raise corn where plants previously had shriveled and died from lack of water. The fine layer of cinder over the soil formed a mulch which absorbed moisture from the scanty rain and snow. Gradually, news of this new farming land filtered out over the Southwest. The land rush was on.

## The People

Here truly was a "melting pot." Indian families came from the north, south, east, and west. In the cinder-covered area is the only place where we find the Pueblo dry farmer from eastern and northern Arizona mingling with the Hohokam irri-

gation farmer from the south; where there are strong influences from the Mogollon groups to the south and east along with those from a more backward and, as yet, little-known people from the west.

Each tribe came with their precious corn seed and digging sticks to cultivate the cinder soils. They met and mingled. In the earlier village ruins it is possible to distinguish these various people by characteristic styles of their utensils, tools, and weapons, but as time went on these differences became less and less apparent.

## The Villages

Villages were developed throughout the cinder-covered area. One of the most important and longest inhabited of these was a ruin which is now called Wupatki—a Hopi Indian word for "Tall House." Here was a spring, one of the few in this arid region.

Wupatki is one of the most spectacular pueblos in northern Arizona. Its sandstone walls rise from a sandstone spur at the base of a black lava mesa that overlooks the Painted Desert. From an insignificant pueblo of a few rooms, Wu-

patki grew until it became the largest in the region. During the 1100's it contained more than 100 rooms, was in places at least three stories high, and had an estimated population of from 150 to 200 persons. To one side of the ruin, protected from the prevailing winds, was an open-air amphitheater which apparently was used for public ceremonies. In the valley below is a "ball court," the only stonemasonry one that has been discovered in the Southwest. Little is known of the game itself, but it was very popular in southern Arizona and was brought up by migrants from that region. In 1933-34 Wupatki was partially excavated and a few of the rooms restored by the Museum of Northern Arizona in cooperation with the National Park Service.

Around the Citadel was another concentration of prehistoric Indians. Within a square mile there are more than 100 sites, varying in size from earth lodges to the larger pueblos. The Citadel itself, as yet unexcavated, is a fortified apartment house. Probably it was once two stories high and contained nearly 50 rooms. Its impregnable position on top of a small

lava-capped mesa, overlooking a wide expanse of country, suggests that it served as a retreat during times of stress. Numerous loopholes through the thick walls strengthen this impression. On the terraced slopes of the mesa are circles of boulders, the remains of more temporary homes. It is possible that the Citadel was built to guard a water supply that existed in the nearby limestone sinkhole.

Just below the Citadel is the small pueblo now called Nalakihu, a Hopi word for "House Standing Alone." It, like Wupatki, was excavated and partially restored in 1934.

Other outstanding ruins in the monument are Wukoki ruin, another fortified apartment house; and Crack-in-the-Rock ruin near the Little Colorado River. To reach these more inaccessible ruins, it is necessary to make arrangements with the superintendent, whose office is near the Wupatki ruin.

## Abandonment

All of the ruins were abandoned in the 1200's. This is accounted for, partly at least, by several factors—high winds sweeping the moisture-conserving cinder

fields, climatic changes, and disease among the Indians. It brought to a close one of the unique chapters of Southwestern archeology. Probably among the present day Hopis the descendants of these people are to be found.

Drought and disease, possibly also attacks of nomad enemies, caused the abandonment by the Pueblos of most of northern Arizona during the thirteenth century. This region, the Segi region (Navajo National Monument and vicinity), and the region of Canyon de Chelly National Monument were deserted. The survivors from all these areas must have congregated at the Hopi mesas, where the springs never fail. Later, in the fourteenth century, the great pueblos of Chaves Pass and Homolovi (near Winslow, Ariz.) and of the Verde Valley (notably Tuzigoot and Montezuma Castle National Monuments) were abandoned, their people going northeast to swell the Hopi nation. When the Spaniards arrived in 1540, there were no pueblo villages occupied in Arizona save those of the Hopi, in Tusayan.

## Tree-Ring Dates

The time of occupation of each ruin in this region is fairly well known, through

The Wupatki Ruin



The Citadel





