

WUPATKI AND SUNSET CRATER NATIONAL MONUMENTS

SUNSET CRATER NATIONAL MONUMENT was established in 1930 to preserve Arizona's youngest volcano. Sunset Crater is a classic cinder cone volcano (a cone-shaped hill of loose volcanic fragments called "cinders"). The volcano is 1,000 feet high and the crater at the top of the volcano is nearly a half mile in diameter. The name Sunset Crater was suggested by John Wesley Powell who remarked that the red cinders at the top of the volcano were "like a sunset always on the rim."

The eruption of Sunset Crater began in A.D. 1064 or 1065. Recent studies indicate the volcano was active sporadically for about 200 years. Cinders and ash were ejected early in the volcano's eruption covering an area of about 800 square miles. The cinder cone and two lava flows near the base of the volcano each developed at different times during this period of activity.

The Bonito Flow is an a'a' lava flow (a type of lava flow with a rough, jagged surface). This type of surface is caused by lava that is thick, pasty and slow moving while in a molten state. Special features of this lava flow include squeeze-ups (thick, molten lava that once oozed through the cracks of the solid lava crust), and lava tubes (a type of cave found in lava flows). Both of these features, and many more, can be seen along the Lava Flow Trail, located 1½ miles east of the Sunset Crater Visitor Center. (The lava tube is presently closed because many rocks in the cave have been determined to be unstable and hazardous).

Nine hundred years ago, when Sunset Crater began to erupt, the Sinagua Indians who lived and farmed in this area must have wondered about the restless earth we live on. Part of what remains of this culture can be seen at Wupatki National Monument.

WUPATKI NATIONAL MONUMENT, established in 1924, exists to preserve and protect over 2,000 prehistoric Indian sites. The Sinagua Indians (perhaps a prehistoric relative to modern day Hopi Indians) were a farming people who inhabited the Wupatki area from about A.D. 1100 to 1225. Originally living in pit houses, the people began to build stone and mortar multi-storied structures around A.D. 1100. The largest of these pueblos is Wupatki Ruin. Wupatki is unique for its associated structures; the amphitheater and ballcourt.

Less is known about the Sinaguan culture than other culture groups such as the Anasazi or Hohokam. When Wupatki Ruin was excavated in the 1930s definitive theories were proposed regarding the prehistoric occupation of the Wupatki area. A mulch-like blanket of cinder and ash (produced by the eruption of Sunset Crater) was believed to be the major factor in drawing agriculturalists to the region. Today archaeologists realize that other factors were important in the prehistoric development of the area.

Perhaps more will be known when an ongoing site survey is completed. Begun in 1981 the survey will take at least five years. Every foot of the monument will be examined by a team of archaeologists and all surface features and artifacts recorded. It is painstaking work that is of value only when artifacts, even the smallest potsherd, are left in place and undisturbed. Enjoy your visit. Linger, look and let be.

SUNSET CRATER AND WUPATKI NATIONAL MONUMENTS are administered by the National Park Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 2717 N. Steves Blvd., Suite 3, Flagstaff, AZ 86001, is in charge.

PLANNING YOUR VISIT: It takes about an hour to drive the 36-mile loop road through the parks. Along the way are several points of interest that are easily accessible. Each monument has a visitor center with museum displays, information desk and sales area. From mid-June through late August there are ranger conducted activities at both parks. Check bulletin boards at the visitor centers and campground for more information.

REGULATIONS: Hiking is not permitted on Sunset Crater. The ruins shown on this map are open all year, but all of the other archaeological sites and the Wupatki backcountry are closed. Please do not enter these areas--research and studies are being conducted and the sites must not be disturbed.

