

Canyon de Chelly

Official Map and Guide



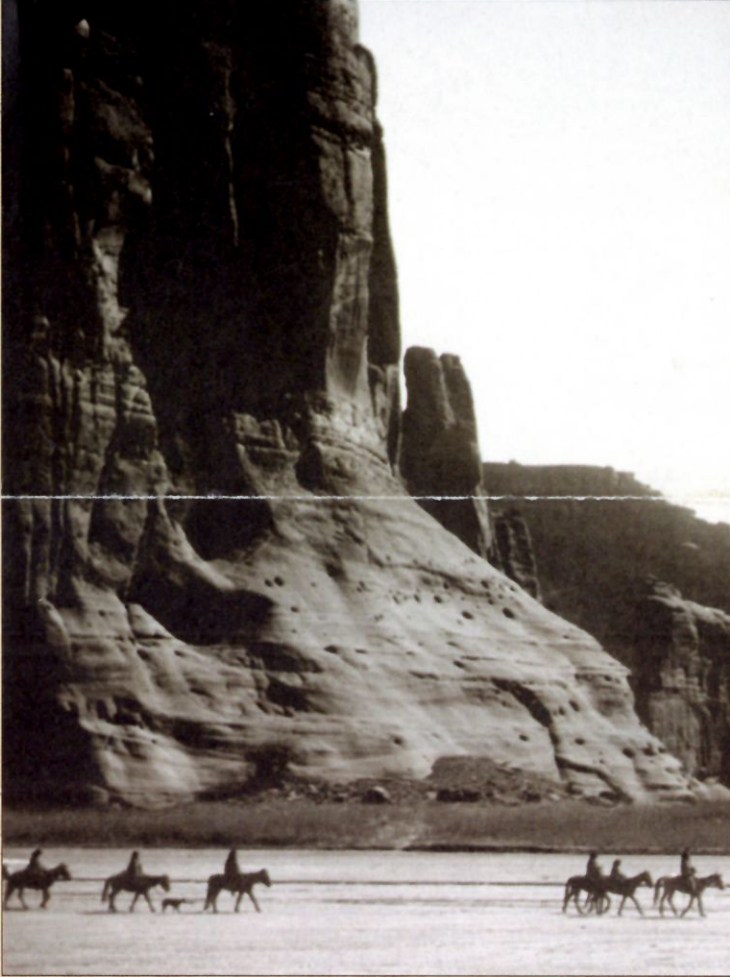
Mummy Cave in Canyon del Muerto (above) was built by ancient Puebloan Indians. They decorated the interior walls with white and pale green plaster.

The Canyons

A red-tailed hawk casts moving shadows on the sheer walls as it floats high above the canyon. A Navajo woman tends her corn on the canyon floor, surrounded by a cathedral of towering red cliffs. A family at Spider Rock Overlook marvels at the 800-foot free-standing spire and the quilt of colors far below. For each, there is a different view. Yet, for all, the canyon is quiet—its silence challenged only by the call of a distant raven.

Archeological evidence shows that people have lived in these canyons for nearly 5,000 years—longer than anyone has lived uninterrupted anywhere on the Colorado Plateau. The first residents built no permanent homes, but remains of their campsites and images etched or painted on the canyon walls tell us their stories. Later, people we call Basketmaker built household compounds, storage facilities, and social and ceremonial complexes high on ledges in the walls of the canyons. They lived in small groups, hunted game, grew corn and beans, and created paintings on the walls that surrounded them. The ancient Puebloan people followed. Predecessors of today's Pueblo and Hopi Indians, they are often called Anasazi: a Navajo word meaning ancient enemy. These Puebloan people built the multi-storied villages, small household compounds, and kivas with decorated walls that dot the canyon alcoves and talus slopes. About 700 years ago most of these people moved away, but a few of them remained in the canyons. Later, migrating Hopi Indians

Canyon de Chelly National Monument
Arizona



and other tribes spent the summers hunting and farming here. Finally, at the end of a long journey, the Navajo arrived. They built homes in the canyon, learned new crafts and new ways of farming, and added their own designs to the walls of this ancient gallery.

The labyrinth called Canyon de Chelly (pronounced d'SHAY) is really several canyons, which include Canyon de Chelly and

Canyon de Chelly National Monument
U.S. Department of the Interior



The Window in Canyon de Chelly (not visible from the rim) offers spectacular canyon views. Navajo still live, farm, and raise sheep here, as they have for centuries.

Canyon del Muerto. At the mouth of the canyon the rock walls are only 30 feet high. Deeper into the canyons, to the east, the walls rise dramatically until they reach more than 1,000 feet above the floor. The cliffs rise straight up, overshadowing the streams, cottonwoods, and small farms below. It has taken about 2 million years and volumes of water to etch these stone paths through the layers of sandstone and igneous rock as the Defiance Plateau pushed its way upward. Today, the canyon still beckons us—with its towering stone monoliths and ledges bearing the open windows of ancient people.

Canyon de Chelly National Monument was established in 1931 to preserve these canyons and their important record of human history. Embracing nearly 84,000 acres within the Navajo Reservation, the monument is administered by the National Park Service. But, *Tsegi*—these rock canyons called Canyon de Chelly—belongs to *Diné*, the Navajo people.

People of the Canyon Through Time



There are many ways to look at the human history of Canyon de Chelly. Archeologists and historians examine physical evidence—artifacts and written accounts—to place humans in a timeline, a chronology that marks events on a calendar. To the Navajo and many American Indians, the passage of time is not important. Native histories and the past are explained through traditional beliefs, stories, and images.

Archaic 2500—200 B.C.

The earliest inhabitants of these canyons lived in seasonal campsites located in rock shelters in hidden recesses. These small mobile groups used the landscape in a variety of ways. Embarking on daily hunting and gathering expeditions, they covered familiar territories on the canyon floor and upland plateau, which were connected by steep trails. Incised images on shelter walls or boulders may have marked the boundaries of these ranges.

Canyon de Chelly provided an abundance of food for these first settlers. Fragmentary archeological evidence reveals a diet rich in large animals such as antelope and more than 40 types of plants. Through countless foraging trips these people gained a knowledge of the canyons that eventually would be used to cultivate a new plant from the south—corn.

Basketmaker 200 B.C.—A.D. 750

About 2500 years ago a fundamental change occurred in how people lived here. Instead of relying only on hunting and gathering, a group now known as Basketmaker began the arduous process of learning how to farm. Early fields, tucked into protected corners of the canyon floor or on the mesas, were small and subject to failure. Over time, the agricultural skills of the Basketmaker improved and led to a consistent food supply. With agriculture as a foundation, these people became more sedentary. They built communities of dispersed households, large granaries, and rudimentary public structures.

The rock paintings of the Basketmaker illustrate a revealing glimpse of families, conflict, death, ceremony, and religion. Collectively, the evidence suggests a society of extended families working together to grow and store surplus food, engage in communal activities, and explore the vast mysteries of life.

Pueblo 750—1300

The dispersed hamlets of the Basketmaker gave way about 1250 years ago to a new kind of settlement—the village. Why this change occurred is unclear. Perhaps the rock shelter households became too crowded. Perhaps conflict, ever present, forced the people to band together for defense. Another possibility is that they wanted to live closer to their agricultural fields. Finally, it may have been simply a desire to organize themselves in new ways and follow ideas introduced from other areas of the southwest.

There were advantages and disadvantages to this new way of life. Villages offered opportunities for social interaction, trade, and ceremony. But, villages also provided a breeding ground for disease, internal conflict, and the overuse of intensely farmed fields. For the next five centuries these Puebloan people experimented with village life and created a landscape that was useful and spiritual.

Hopi 1300—1600

The end of Puebloan life in the canyons came abruptly about 700 years ago. Prolonged drought, disease, conflict, and possibly the allure of religious ideas from the south led the people to abandon Canyon de Chelly and the surrounding areas. Searching for a constant water supply, they moved south and west, helping establish villages along the Little Colorado River and at the southern tip of Black Mesa. In time, people of these villages and the groups from the Rio Grande became the Hopi. Despite the trauma of dislocation, the Hopi describe these events as part of a migratory cycle rather than abandonment. Hopi traditional histories, supported by archeological remains, chronicle seasonal farming, ritual pilgrimages, and occasional lengthy stays in the canyons. This pattern continued until the Hopi encountered the Navajo in Canyon de Chelly in the late 1600s or early 1700s.

Navajo 1700—1863

The Navajo, an Athabascan-speaking people, entered Canyon de Chelly about 300 years ago. Pushed south and west by adversaries, they brought domesticated animals acquired from the Spanish and a vigorous culture tempered by centuries of migration and adaptation. Like those before them, the Navajo used both the canyons and the upland plateau to support a diversified way of life.

Canyon de Chelly was known throughout the region for its fine fields of corn planted in the shimmering sands of the canyon floor and for its orchards full of delectable peaches. Small settlements of three to as many as ten hogans set in open clearings gave the landscape a tranquil, perhaps idyllic, quality.

This tranquility was shattered in the late 1700s when lengthy warfare erupted between the Navajo, other American Indians, and the Spanish colonists of the Rio Grande valley. Characterized by quick raids and certain reprisal, they fought over land and the animals grazing upon it.

As a result, the Navajo used Canyon de Chelly as a refuge, a fortress hidden in the mysterious serpentine canyons. The Navajo fortified trails with stone walls, found hiding places in the high rock shelters, and stockpiled food and water at critical points throughout the canyons. Despite all of these precautions, Spanish, Ute, and U.S. military parties penetrated the defenses leaving death and uncertainty in their wake. The testimony of these times can be found in the traditional histories of the Navajo people, in the archeological remnants of the canyon's fortified places, and in rock paintings that graphically narrate the endurance of the Navajo.

The Long Walk 1863—1868

The years of Spanish and later Mexican control of what is now Arizona and New Mexico came to an end in 1846. During a remarkably short campaign, a U.S. military force under command of Stephen Watts Kearny subdued Mexican forces and claimed the territory for the United States. Soon, Kearny offered the Navajo qualified peace and friendship in order to end decades of mutual raiding. For the next 17 years this agreement was tested by continued conflict, broken promises, and numerous expeditions into the Navajo territory.

In 1863, Colonel Kit Carson, under orders from the territorial commander, began a brutal campaign against the Navajo. In the winter of 1864, using information

gained during earlier reconnaissance expeditions, Carson's force entered Canyon de Chelly at the far eastern end and pushed the Navajo toward the canyon mouth. All resistance proved futile and most of the Navajo were killed or captured. Later that spring Carson's troops returned to Canyon de Chelly and completed its campaign of devastation. They destroyed the remaining hogans, orchards, and sheep.

A bitter, humiliating trial awaited the Navajo who survived the ordeal. Forced to march more than 300 miles—called the Long Walk—to Fort Sumner, in New Mexico territory, scores perished from thirst, hunger, and fatigue. Their years of internment at Fort Sumner were no kinder. Poor food, inadequate shelter, disease, and the unending sense of being lost in a foreign place brutalized the survivors. Finally, after four years of senseless incarceration, the Navajo were allowed to return home in 1868 to begin the process of rebuilding their lives and their spirit.

Trading Days 1868—1925

The Navajo faced starvation after they returned from Fort Sumner. Food distribution centers, such as the one established at Fort Defiance, helped solve this problem. These centers and practices taken from Spanish and Mexican traders provided a model for the trading posts in Navajo country.

Trading posts became a focal point for Navajo communities—a place where Navajo men and women exchanged news, discussed problems, and traded rugs, jewelry, and crafts for food and other staples. Traders established four posts near Canyon de Chelly, two built by Lorenzo Hubbell in 1886 and 1900 did not last long. Fragments of Camille Garcia's early-1900s post survived into the 1960s and are incorporated into the Holiday Inn. Sam Day's trading post, built in 1902 at the mouth of Canyon de Chelly, was a log structure more than 60 feet long. It has survived more or less intact and is now part of the Thunderbird Lodge's cafeteria.

Navajo of the Canyon Today

White House (shown below) is not a Navajo structure. Built and occupied centuries ago by ancient Puebloan people, it is named for a long wall in the upper dwelling that is covered with white plaster.

Within the four sacred mountains lies a canyon that cradles the history and culture of *Diné*—the Navajo people. To the outside world it is known as Canyon de Chelly. To the people who live here it is *Tsegi* (SAY-ih)—a physical and a spiritual home.

The smell of wood smoke and the dis-

tant sounds of sheep bells, barking dogs, and children playing tell us that *Diné* still live here. Alfalfa and small fruit orchards surround the traditional log hogans on the canyon floor, weaving a tapestry of everyday life. To *Diné* the canyon means more than a summer home or a place to raise sheep and corn. The Navajo

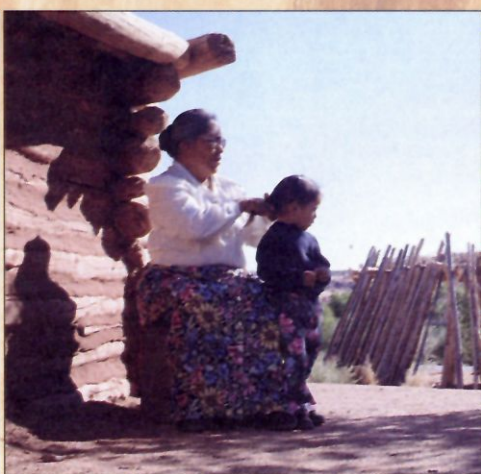
culture emerged from this land. The language often refers to the landscape, and the people identify themselves by this.

Diné are connected with the landscape of *Tsegi*, deriving meaning, culture, and spirituality from the natural features that surround them. The land nourishes the people and is intrinsic to the activities of daily life.

The elders are especially close to the land. From their stewardship comes a set of ethics based on experience and tradition. Through their teachings, stories, and songs, the traditional information is sustained through the generations.

The cycles of the sun, earth, and moon, and seasons, ceremonies, and generations are part of the continuity

of life in Canyon de Chelly. Maintaining balance with Mother Earth is key to a harmonious life. Each person's well-being contributes to the health of the family and, ultimately, to the community. It is this perspective that has helped the Navajo people recover from the trauma of the Long Walk. Canyon de Chelly, then and now, is the epicenter of Navajo culture.



The people who live here retain that spirit of their ancestors. Traditional beliefs are reflected in everyday life—in how the Navajo care for their families, livestock, and homes, and in how plants are grown and collected for ceremonial, medicinal, and traditional uses.

Yet, *Diné* thrive on challenges and new experiences. In *Diné* philosophy, it is im-

portant for the health of the people to maintain traditions while adapting to changes in the physical world. Adhering to this belief makes *Diné* a truly bicultural society. The Navajo people lean on traditions during times of contemporary demands to help preserve their way of life. As a Navajo Nation leader once said, "We will be like a rock a river has to go around."

Plants of Canyon de Chelly — Tséyi 'dée' nanise' attas'ei

Tradition says that *Haashch'eeh diné e*, the Holy People, created plants from the air, water, light, and soil to beautify the land and to provide for *Diné*, the Navajo people. The Navajo respect plants as a perpetually renewing gift and as being connected with all things on Earth.

For centuries *Diné* have raised crops and collected plants for food, medicines, dyes, and ceremonies. Traditional plant use continues today. Farmers plant corn in the canyon as their ancestors did before them. *Hataalii*, chanters (medicine men and women), collect wild plants to use for medicines and ceremonies. Here are a few of the plants you may see at Canyon de Chelly, along with some of their uses.



Narrow-leaf yucca
Tsá ászí ts bóz

Narrowleaf yucca
Long, stiff leaves with sharp ends grow from a central clump. A single stalk of white flowers reaches 4 feet. *Ceremonial*: soap from root cleanses hair; fibers used for weaving baskets. *Other*: dyes; edible fruit.

Yucca root
Tálawosh



Prickly pear cactus
Hoshnitéelí



Sumac
K'íí'

Prickly pear cactus
This sprawling cactus with flat, waxy pads (leaves) grows throughout canyon area. Flowers emerge along top edges of pads, forming plump red fruit. *Medicinal*: peeled pads reduce bleeding. *Food*: edible fruit and pads. *Other*: fruits make bright red and pink dyes, stems make glue.

Snakeweed
Ch'íidilyesil yázhí



Snakeweed
This short shrub has a dense halo of yellow flowers that bloom from July through September. *Medicinal*: heals cuts and bites. *Ceremonial*: used to make purifying incense.



Sagebrush
Silvery-green leaves and a strong aroma distinguish this shrub. *Medicinal*: roots, leaves, and tassels used in healing remedies; tea relieves stomach problems. *Food*: flavoring. *Other*: makes gold and yellow-green dyes.

Sagebrush
Ts'ah

Juniper
This evergreen tree grows to 25 feet. The blue, fleshy berries are its cones. *Medicinal*: relieves headache and flu symptoms. *Ceremonial*: cleanses and purifies. *Food*: adds flavor, potassium, and other minerals. *Other*: dried berries used to make necklaces.

Juniper
Gad



Visitor Information



Visiting Navajo Land
The Navajo Reservation observes daylight savings time, but the rest of Arizona and the Hopi Reservation do not. If you are traveling here during that period, clocks on the Navajo Reservation will read one hour ahead of clocks off the Reservation, such as at the Grand Canyon. The Navajo Tribe has its own police department. Drive carefully and obey all speed limits. This is open range land; watch out for livestock on roads. Ask permission before photographing or drawing any people or their homes; a fee is usually expected. Be aware that this is private land. Hiking or driving off established roads is not recommended. Please respect the property rights of the Navajo Nation.

Take time to enjoy this place of magnificent beauty. You may tour the Rim Drives or hike the White House Trail on your own. You may also wish to experience the canyon by taking a tour with an authorized Navajo guide.

Visitor Center
Here you will find information about the park, exhibits about the history of the canyons, and a bookstore with maps and publications. A film is shown in English and in Navajo. The visitor center is open daily except December 25. **There is no entrance fee.**

Guided tours
Canyon tours are available through the Thunderbird Lodge, a park concession. Private hiking, backcountry camping, horseback, and 4-wheel-drive vehi-

cle tours are available with authorized Navajo guides. Prices vary according to the variety, length, and difficulty of the trip. For more information, check at the visitor center. **Permits are required; only NPS authorized Navajo guides and NPS personnel are allowed to lead canyon tours.**

White House Trail
This 2.5-mile round trip trail is the only place where you may enter the canyon without a permit or an authorized Navajo guide. Allow 2 hours for the round-trip hike. You descend 500 feet to the canyon floor, cross the Chinle Wash, and view the cliff dwellings. Chinle Wash may contain water during the spring snow melt or rainy periods. Pit toilets are available at the bottom. There is no drinking

water—you must carry plenty of fresh water. Temperatures are cold in winter and extremely hot in summer. Stay on the trail. Please respect the fragile environment and the privacy of the Navajo people. Do not enter dwellings or disturb historical or natural features.

Camping
Year-round camping is available in the park at Cottonwood Campground on a first-come, first-served basis. It has grills, tables, and restrooms. There are no showers or hook-ups. Group sites are for tent campers only; reservations required.

Accommodations
Chinle has lodging, supplies, and a bank. Thunderbird Lodge, in the park, has lodging, food, and canyon truck tours.

North Rim Drive—34 miles round trip
Some of the most beautiful cliff dwellings and a Navajo historic landmark are along this drive. In addition to the well-known dwellings, watch for small sites that dot the alcoves and blend in with the canyon walls.

Ledge Ruin
Ledge Ruin has living and storage areas, kivas, and a 2-story structure built more than 900 years ago by the ancient Puebloan people.

Antelope House Ruin
is named for the illustrations of antelope attributed to Navajo artist Dibe Yazhi (Little Sheep) who lived here in the early 1800s. Excavated in the 1970s, this ancient Puebloan village has an unusual

circular plaza built in the 12th century.

Navajo Fortress is a historic landmark used as a refuge by early Navajos.

Mummy Cave Ruin, one of the largest ancient Puebloan villages in Canyon de Chelly, was occupied from earliest times to about 1300. The east and west alcoves are comprised of living and ceremonial rooms. The tower complex resting on the central ledge was built in the 1280s by people who migrated from Mesa Verde.

Massacre Cave refers to the Navajo killed here in the winter of 1805 by a Spanish military expedition led by Antonio Narbona. About 115 Navajo took shelter on the ledge above the canyon floor

and were discovered by Narbona's men. A fight ensued, and shots fired from the rim killed all the people on the ledge.

South Rim Drive—37 miles round trip
This drive offers panoramic views of the canyons, the Defiance Plateau, and the Chuska Mountains. Watch for changes in vegetation and geology as the elevation rises from 5,500 feet at the visitor center to 7,000 feet at Spider Rock.

Tsegi Overlook gives you a glance at the beautiful scenery and the Navajo farmlands at the bottom of the canyon.

Junction Overlook has views of Chinle Valley and the conflu-

ence of Canyon del Muerto and Canyon de Chelly

White House Ruin was built by ancient Puebloan people and occupied around 1,000 years ago. It is named for the long wall in the upper dwelling that is covered with white plaster. The 2.5 mile (roundtrip) White House Trail begins at this overlook.

Spider Rock is an 800-foot sandstone spire that rises from the canyon floor at the junction of Canyon de Chelly and Monument Canyon. From here you can see the volcanic core of Black Rock Butte and the Chuska Mountains on the horizon.

For Your Safety
Be aware of these conditions and regulations.

■ The canyons are deep and have steep, vertical walls—falls can be fatal. Use extreme caution at the canyon rims. Stay on established trails and behind the protective walls. Keep control of your children and pets at all times. ■ Watch out for snakes, stinging insects, and thorns. Do not put your hands or feet into any place that you cannot clearly see.

■ Pets must be on a leash at all times; they are not allowed on the White House Trail or in the canyon. ■ Thefts can occur wherever you travel. Lock your vehicle at overlooks. Secure valuables out of sight or take them with you. ■ Alcohol is prohibited within the park and on the Navajo Reservation. ■ All cul-

tural and natural features are protected by federal and tribal law. Collecting artifacts or disturbing archeological sites is strictly forbidden. Do not pick or disturb plants; many are used by the Navajo people and grow in traditional plant collecting areas. Do not damage or harass wildlife.

In an emergency, contact a ranger or call 911.

Information
Write: Canyon de Chelly National Monument, P.O. Box 588, Chinle, AZ 86503-0588. Call 520-674-5500. You can find more information at www.nps.gov/cach on the Internet.

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