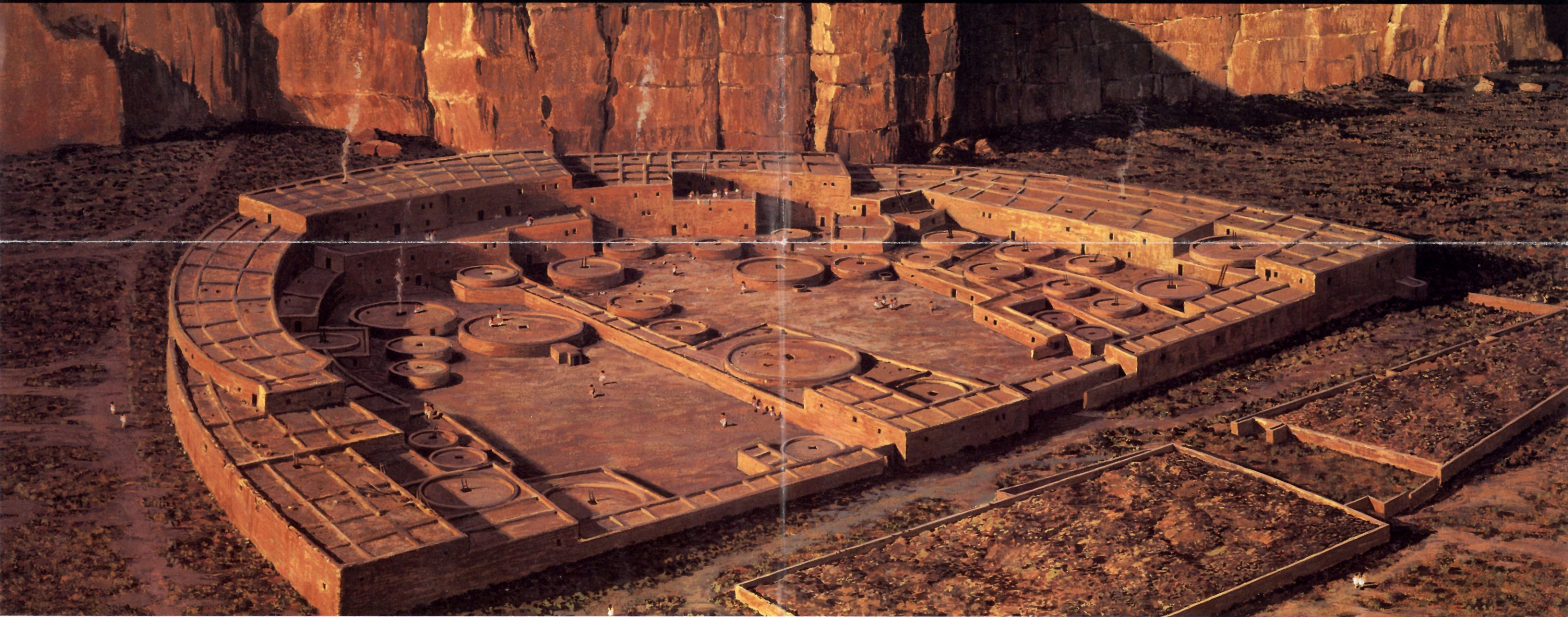




Pueblo Bonito was the largest structure in the Chacoan system. This painting by L. Kenneth Townsend is a well-researched though still hypothetical view of the great house in the early 1100s, when it stood four stories high and contained hundreds of rooms and dozens of kivas.

©1984, Reader's Digest Association, Inc.

The Center of Chacoan Culture

Chaco Canyon, for all its wild beauty, seems an unlikely place for a major center of ancestral Puebloan culture to take root and flourish. This is high desert country, with long winters, short growing seasons, and marginal rainfall. Yet, a thousand years ago, this valley was a center of community life, commerce, and ceremony. People built monumental masonry buildings that were connected to other communities by a wide-ranging network of "roads." In architecture, complexity of community life, social organization, and regional integration, the master builders of Chaco Canyon attained a unique cultural expression.

The cultural flowering of the Chacoan people began in the mid-800s and lasted over three hundred years. We can see it clearly in the grand scale of the architecture. Using masonry techniques unique for their time, they constructed massive stone buildings ("great houses") of multiple stories containing hundreds of rooms much larger than any they

had previously built. The buildings were planned from the start, in contrast to the usual practice of adding rooms to existing structures as needed. Construction on some of these buildings spanned decades and even centuries. Although each is unique, all great houses share architectural features that make them recognizable as "Chacoan."

During the middle and late 800s, the great houses of Pueblo Bonito, Una Vida, and Peñasco Blanco were constructed, followed by Hundo Pavi, Chetro Ketl, Pueblo Alto, and others. These structures were often oriented to solar, lunar, and cardinal directions. Lines of site between the great houses allowed communication. Sophisticated astronomical markers, communication features, water control devices, and formal earthen mounds surrounded them. The buildings were placed within a landscape surrounded by sacred mountains, mesas, and shrines that still have deep spiritual meaning for American Indian descendants.

By 1050, Chaco was well on the way to becoming the political, economic, and ceremonial center of the San Juan Basin. Its sphere of influence was extensive. Dozens of great houses in Chaco Canyon were connected by roads to more than 150 great houses built throughout the region. Current thought is that the great houses were not traditional farming villages occupied by large populations. They may instead have been impressive examples of "public architecture" that were used only periodically during times of ceremony, commerce, and trading when temporary populations arrived in the canyon for these events.

Why the need for social complexity and integration on such a large scale? Chaco was the hub of an extensive trading network. Turquoise was made into beads, ornaments, and jewelry at Chaco, and traded throughout the Southwest and northern Mexico for parrots, macaws, copper bells, and other precious commodities. Chaco may have been

a distribution center for food and resources in response to the region's highly variable climate and growing populations. Ceremonies may have brought "pilgrims" to Chaco along a ritually used road system that connected Chaco to distant communities and to the sacred landscape. We may never fully understand the Chaco story.

After prevailing for 300 years, Chaco Canyon declined as a regional center during the middle 1100s, when new construction ceased. Chacoan influence continued at Aztec Ruins and other centers to the north, south, and west into the late 1100s and 1200s. In time, the people shifted away from Chacoan ways, migrated to new areas, reorganized their world, and eventually interacted with foreign cultures. Their descendants are the modern Southwest Indians. Many Southwest Indian people today look upon Chaco as an important stop along their clans' sacred migration paths—a spiritual place to be honored and respected.

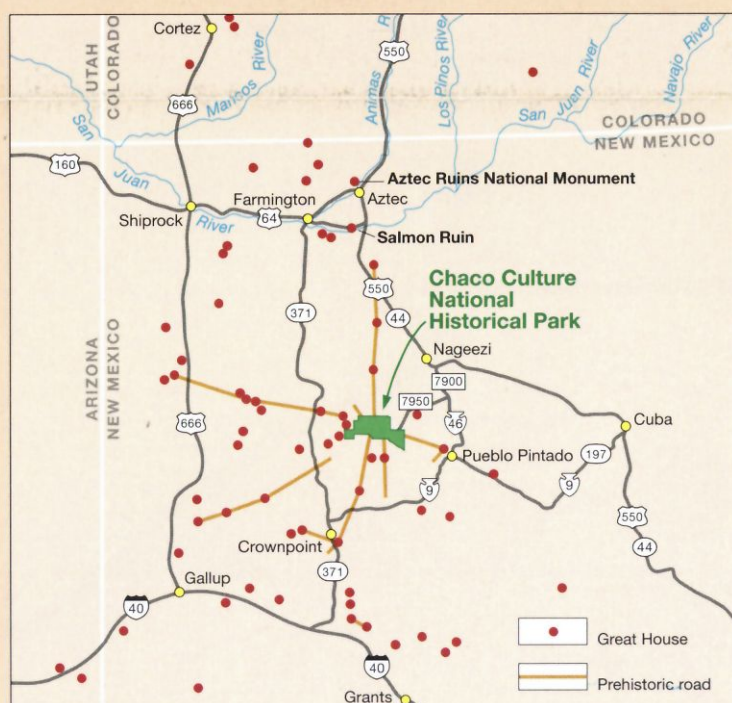
Clues to the Past

The Road System

The extensive Chacoan road system is impressive. More than 400 miles of prehistoric roadway have been identified. This system connected Chaco to outlying communities and resource areas. It also provided connections between the outlying communities. Some segments appear to lack a recognizable destination. One of the longest identifiable segments of road headed north, leading to the prehistoric communities of Salmon and Aztec.

These roads were not simple trails worn by centuries of foot travel. They were engineered and planned, and they represent a significant amount of labor investment in their construction and maintenance. Their function may have been more than utilitarian. There is a growing consensus among archeologists that the road features may directly reflect the pueblo world view.

The most elaborate road construction occurs near the great houses, where double and quadruple road segments have been found. These segments may relate to ritual and ceremony. The prehistoric road system facilitated communication between communities and assisted in the transportation of goods. It also provided a means for bringing the culture together through its relation to the social organization and cosmography of these ancient people.



Chaco Culture and Related Great Houses

Trade

During its Classic period (1020-1120), Chaco was the center of a far-ranging trade network. Goods were exchanged internally within the Chacoan system and externally with groups as far south as Mexico. Chaco's distinctive Cibola black-on-white pottery (below right) may have originated in outlying towns to the south and west. One estimate is that only about 20 percent of the pottery used here was made here.

Turquoise was a precious commodity in the Chacoan world. Great quantities of finished ornaments, offerings, and work-site debris were found throughout Chaco Canyon. Raw turquoise was imported from distant mines and transformed with exquisite craftsmanship into beads, necklaces, and pendants. Large amounts of such jewelry may have been traded to the regional center of Paquimé (Casas Grandes) in northern Mexico. The

small frog (right) found in Pueblo Bonito is carved from jet, its eyes and collar inlaid with turquoise.

Other evidence of the trade system found here includes the many seashells (often strung into necklaces), copper bells, and remains of macaws and parrots. The two latter items suggest further contact with Mexico, perhaps with the ancient Toltecs.



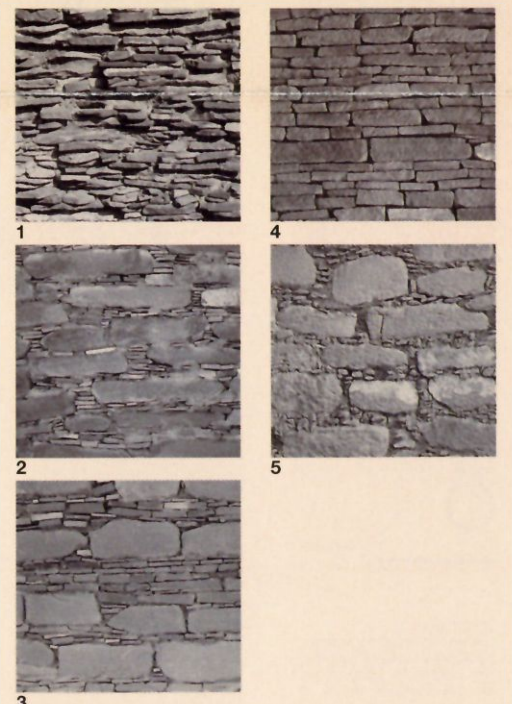
Masonry

The Chacoans were skilled masons. Working with stone tools, they erected vast communal buildings that still compel admiration. Their masonry techniques evolved over centuries. The earliest dwellings were built with simple walls one stone thick, held together with generous courses of mud mortar. The oldest walls in Pueblo Bonito used this type of masonry (1). When the Chacoans began to build higher and more extensively, they employed walls with thick inner cores of rubble and fairly thin veneers of facing stone. These walls tapered

as they rose, evidence of the planning that went into the large-scale construction in Classic times. An early example of this wall (2) is characterized by large blocks of tabular sandstone chinked with smaller stones set in mortar.

About half the ground floor of Pueblo Bonito was built in masonry styles (3) and (4) (late 11th century). These styles were employed at roughly the same time. Though the patterns are attractive as they stand, there is evidence the Chacoans covered most of the stonework with plaster.

The last distinctive masonry style, called McElmo (5), appears in Kin Kletso and in other early 1100s architecture. Kin Kletso's walls were built with a thin inner core of rubble and thick outer veneers of shaped sandstone resembling the masonry of the Mesa Verde region.



A Guide to Chaco Culture



Pueblo del Arroyo is a D-shaped great house that rose three and four stories high in the rear, stepping down to one story in front.



Abutting the rear wall is a tri-walled structure, one of a handful known in the Southwest. This feature was built sometime after



New Alto, on the north mesa, is a compact structure with rooms of uniform size around a central kiva. It was built in the early



Chacoan masons worked with precision and care, as these doors at Pueblo Bonito show.



Chetro Ketl, one of the largest Chaco structures, flourished about 1050. Note its "great kiva" and three elevated kivas. The remains



Casa Rinconada is one of the largest kivas in the Southwest. As with other kivas of this size and design, it is referred to as a

"great kiva." Built in the 1100s, it is located in the central area of the canyon and may have served communal needs.

Chaco's Ancient Architecture

Begin your sightseeing at the visitor center. The exhibits will help you understand Chaco and its people. Rangers will answer your questions and help you make the most of your time.

The best way to see Chaco is to go on a ranger-conducted walk. Information about these tours and the evening campfire programs is available at the visitor center.

The great house closest to the visitor center, **Una Vida**, is a short walk from the parking lot. Its construction was underway by the mid-800s and continued until the mid-1100s, concurrent with construction at Pueblo Bonito and Peñasco Blanco. There are about 150 rooms and five kivas in the structure. It is an excellent example of a mostly unexcavated site.

The core of the Chacoan complex lies farther down the canyon. The largest of the great houses is **Pueblo Bonito**, the center of the Chacoan world.

Planned and built in stages, Pueblo Bonito was occupied from the mid-800s to the 1200s. Eventually the structure towered four stories high and contained over 600 rooms and 40 kivas. Pueblo Bonito is one of the most extensively excavated and studied sites in North America and a place sacred to many American Indian groups.

Begun about 1020, **Chetro Ketl** experienced a major construction phase within 30 years and subsequent modifications in the 1100s. There are an estimated 500 rooms and 16 kivas here. The builders constructed an immense elevated earthen plaza that rises above the surrounding landscape.

Pueblo del Arroyo was built in stages over a relatively short time. The central part was started about 1075; north and south wings were added between 1101 and 1105; the plaza and the tri-walled structure were built around that same time as well. The building had about 280 rooms and more than 20 kivas.

Kin Kletso seems to have been built in two stages. The first one dates from about 1125, the second from 1130 or later. This great house had about 100 rooms and five enclosed kivas and may have risen three stories on the north side.

Casa Rinconada, on the south side of the canyon, is the largest known "Great Kiva" in the park. The trail leading to this structure passes several "small house sites" contemporary with Casa Rinconada and the great houses but very different in construction and function.

Hiking trails, as indicated on the map, lead to a number of other sites. **Pueblo Alto Complex**, on top of the mesa, is important as the junction of several prehistoric roads. **Tsin Kletsin** and **Peñasco Blanco** can be reached by hiking from the central canyon. **Wijiji**, built in a single stage in the early 1100s, is notable for its symmetrical layout and rooms of uniform size. **Hiking permits are required for these trails and can be obtained at the visitor center.**

About Your Visit

Chaco Culture National Historical Park is located in northwestern New Mexico. *The recommended access route is from the north:* turn off N. Mex. 44/U.S. 550 at County Road 7900, 3 miles east of Nageezi and about 50 miles west of Cuba (at mile 112.5). Follow the signs for the next 21 miles to the park boundary (16 miles of this route is unpaved). From the south (I-40 at Thoreau): turn north onto N. Mex. 371 and proceed to Crownpoint. Four miles north of Crownpoint, turn right onto Navajo 9. Continue east for 36 miles to the marked turnoff in the town of Pueblo Pintado. Turn left on County Road 7900 for 7 miles (unpaved). Turn left on County Road 7950 and follow the signs for 16 miles (unpaved) to the park entrance. From the Grants area (I-40 at Milan): turn north on N. Mex. 605 for 13 miles, then north on N. Mex. 509 for 36 miles to Whitehorse. Turn east on Navajo 9 for 12 miles to Pueblo Pintado and proceed as above. *Note that unpaved roads can become impassable during inclement weather. For information about the current road conditions, call the park at 505-786-7014.*

No lodging, gasoline, repair services, or food are available at the park. The nearest town is 60 miles away. Staples can be purchased at the convenience store on N. Mex. 44/U.S. 550. The National Park Service operates the Gallo Campground, one mile from the visitor center. Tables, fireplaces, and central toilets are provided. Water is available only at the visitor center; no firewood is available in the park. Trailers over 30 feet long cannot be accommodated. Camping is limited to seven days.

Administration Chaco Culture National Historical Park is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 parks that are important examples of our nation's natural and cultural heritage. Write to: Superintendent, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, P.O. Box 220, Nageezi, NM 87037-0220; call 505-786-7014; visit www.nps.gov/chcu.

For Your Safety and the Park's Protection The superintendent and staff are here to help you understand and enjoy the park and to protect all cultural

and natural resources. The Federal Antiquities Act of 1906 and the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 prohibit the appropriation, injury, destruction, or removal of any object of antiquity, or the excavation, injury, or destruction of any ruin on federal land.

The cultural sites of Chaco Culture National Historical Park are fragile and irreplaceable, and form a significant part of our cultural heritage. They are part of the sacred homeland of the Hopi, the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico, and the Navajo, who continue to respect and honor them. You can help protect and preserve this significant part of our global cultural heritage by following these regulations: Do not collect pottery or other protected artifacts, plants, or rocks. • Do not deface, add to, or alter the petroglyphs, pictographs, or rocks. • Do not walk, climb, sit, or lean on fragile walls. • Pets are not permitted to enter the cultural sites. • Stay on designated trails. • All trails close at sunset. • Watch out for rattlesnakes. • As you explore Chaco Culture remember that the past belongs to everyone.

©GPO: 2000-460-976/00234 Reprint 2000 Printed on recycled paper.

Hiking Chaco's Trails

All backcountry hiking trails require a free permit, available at the visitor center or from a park ranger. • Stay on designated trails for your safety and the preservation of park resources. • Camping and fires are not permitted in the backcountry. • All trails and Chacoan cultural sites are closed from sunset to sunrise. • Pets are permitted on backcountry trails on a leash. They are not permitted at cultural sites. • The park's elevation is 6,200 feet. Winters are cold and summers are hot with very little shade. Brief, violent thunderstorms occur in summer. Trails are steep, uneven, and icy in the winter. • Wear good hiking boots and appropriate clothing, and drink plenty of water. Prepare for extremes.

