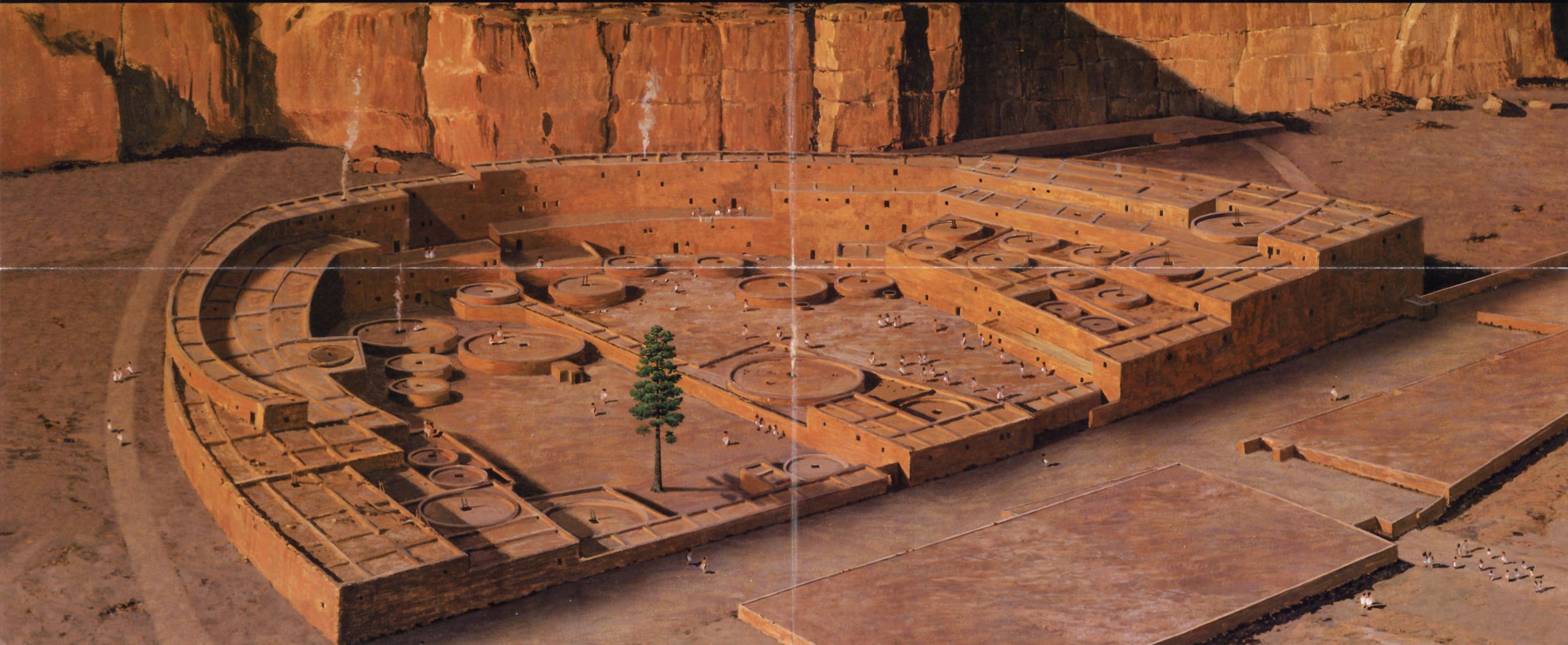




Pueblo Bonito, shown here as it appeared in the early 1100s, was the largest structure in the Chacoan system.

Illustration is derived from an original painting by L. Kenneth Townsend. Digital revisions are based on data furnished by John Stein, Dabney Ford, and Richard Friedman. Original painting from *Mysteries of the Ancient Americas*, ©1986, The Reader's Digest Association, Inc.

The Center of Chacoan Culture

For all the wild beauty of Chaco Canyon's high-desert landscape, its long winters, short growing seasons, and marginal rainfall create an unlikely place for a major center of ancestral Puebloan culture to take root and flourish. Yet this valley was the center of a thriving culture a thousand years ago. The monumental scale of its architecture, the complexity of its community life, the high level of its community social organization, and its far-reaching commerce created a cultural vision unlike any other seen before or since.

The cultural flowering of the Chacoan people began in the mid-800s and lasted more than 300 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 Hungo Pavi, Chetro Ketl, Pueblo Alto, and others. These structures were often oriented to solar, lunar, and cardinal directions. Lines of sight 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 their descendants.

By 1050, Chaco had become the ceremonial, administrative, and economic 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 throughout the region. It is thought 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 periodically during times of ceremony, commerce, and trading when temporary populations came to the canyon for these events.

What drove this great social experiment? Pueblo descendants say that Chaco was a special gathering place where many peoples and clans converged to share their ceremonies, traditions, and knowledge. Chaco is central to the origins of several Navajo clans and ceremonies. Chaco is also an enduring enigma for researchers. Was Chaco the hub of a turquoise-trading network established to

acquire macaws, copper bells, shells, and other commodities from distant lands? Did Chaco distribute food and resources to growing populations when the climate failed them? Was Chaco "the center place," binding a region together by a shared vision? We will never fully understand Chaco.

In the 1100s and 1200s, change came to Chaco as new construction slowed and Chaco's role as a regional center shifted. Chaco's influence continued at Aztec, Mesa Verde, the Chuska Mountains, and other centers to the north, south, and west. 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 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.

ance. Their function may have been more than utilitarian. There is a growing consensus among archeologists that the road features may directly reflect the puebloan 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



American Museum of Natural History

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.



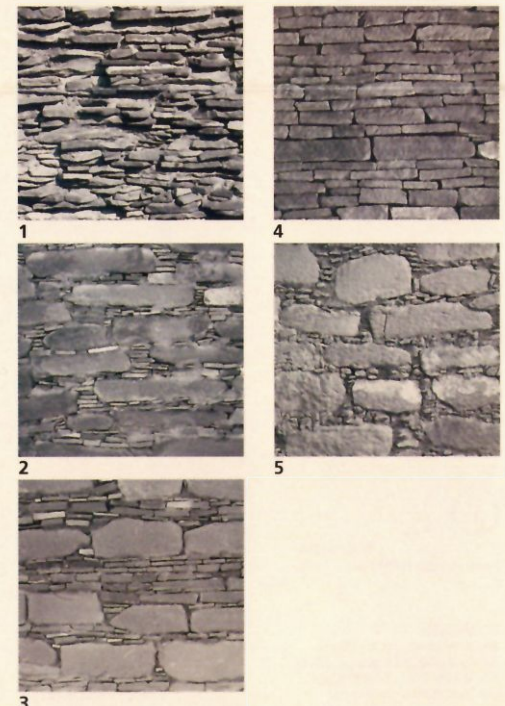
Masonry

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)

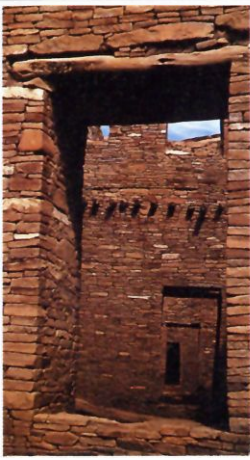
is characterized by large blocks of tabular sandstone chinked with smaller stones set in mortar.

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



David Muench

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 1100, late in the building's construction history.

This flooring in Pueblo del Arroyo was carefully constructed of layers of beams, poles, sticks, bark, and adobe mud.

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 1100s in a style known as McElmo. The builders may have been influenced by architectural trends from the north.

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 of a colonnade (later filled in during remodeling) along

the north side of the plaza suggest influences from Mexico.

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 more than 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, via US Hwy 550/44 and County Roads 7900 and 7950.* Turn off US 550 at CR 7900, 3 miles east of Nageezi and about 50 miles west of Cuba (at mile 112.5). Follow the signs south on CR 7900 for 5 miles (paved), then turn right on CR 7950 (16 miles, unpaved) to the park boundary.

Two roads access Chaco from the south. Both access the park from Navajo 9, running between Crownpoint, Pueblo Pintado, and Cuba. Signs direct travelers to the park via Pueblo Pintado and via Seven Lakes: At Pueblo Pintado turn north on Navajo 46 (for 10 miles), left on CR 7900 (7 miles), and left on CR 7950 (16 miles) to the park entrance (33 miles over rough dirt). At Seven Lakes (3 miles north and 12 miles east of Crownpoint), turn north on N.M. 57 to the park entrance (20 miles over rough dirt). *All routes include sections of dirt roads that are infrequently maintained; they can become impassable during inclement weather. Call the park (505-786-7014) for road conditions.*

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 US 550/44. 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 more than 30 feet long cannot be accommodated. Camping is limited to seven days.

For More Information Chaco Culture National Historical Park, P.O. Box 220, Nageezi, NM 87037-0220; 505-786-7014; www.nps.gov/chcu. Chaco Culture National Historical Park is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities.

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 global 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 these sites 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.

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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.

