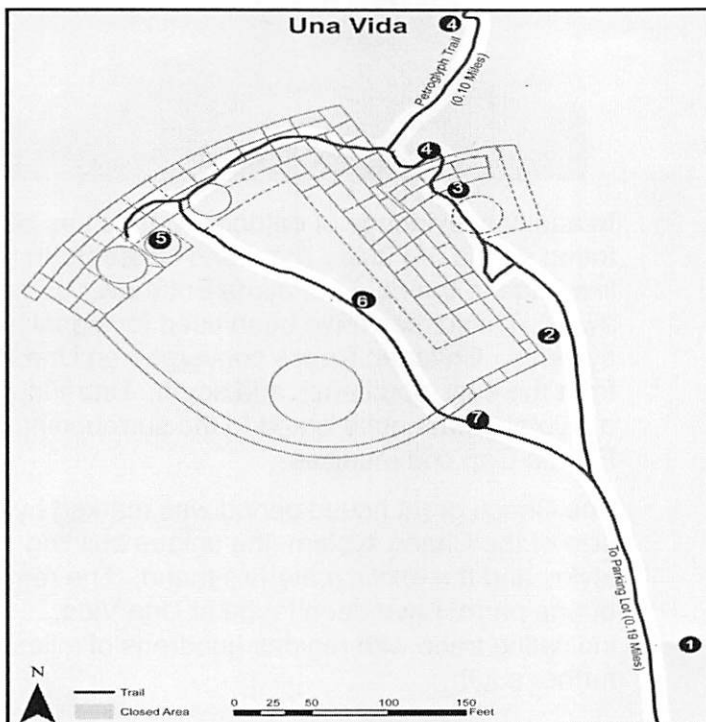




Una Vida Trail Guide

The trail is ½ mile roundtrip (add ¼ mile to see the petroglyphs). The trail has some difficult and rocky portions and several stairways. The path up to the petroglyphs is very steep and rough.

When you visit Chacoan sites, please remember that American Indian descendants consider these living and sacred places. Enter with respect. Cultural sites require special care when we visit them. The walls are very fragile and subject to many forces of erosion. Wind, rain, snow, and foot traffic from about 50,000 visitors annually impacts this site. **Please** help to protect this important cultural area by walking only on designated trails, by not climbing on walls, and by leaving everything as you find it. **Remember** to take water and a hat with you, and don't forget sunscreen!



Based on Lekson, Stephen H. Great Pueblo Architecture of Chaco Canyon. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1984/80.

1) The Site

Una Vida exists today in a near-natural state of preservation, free from major vandalism, and with only minor excavations and preservation repairs. Time and the forces of nature have collapsed the roofs. Walls have fallen. Centuries of blowing sand have covered the rooms with a protective blanket of sand and native vegetation. The architecture appears much the same as it did when Chacoan descendants returned to the area on pilgrimages, when Navajo families settled the canyon in the 1700s, and when US government military expeditions passed through the canyon in the mid-1800s.

Named "Una Vida" (Spanish for "One Life") by Lt. James Simpson and his Mexican guide Carravahal during a military expedition into Navajo land in 1849. Pueblo, Hopi, and Navajo place names also exist.

2) The Geology and the Drainage

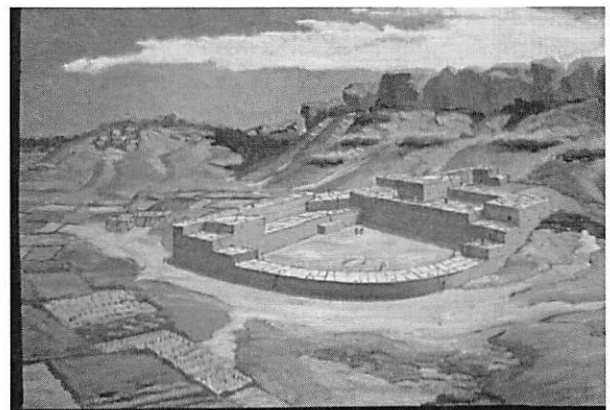
You are standing in an ocean. 75 to 85 million years ago sharks, dinosaurs, and fish swam in these waters while shrimp-like creatures burrowed in the sands. At that time, Chaco was at the edge of a wide shallow sea that stretched from the Arctic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. Sometimes Chaco was under water, while at other times it was a marshy environment. You can see these changes in the rock. The orange layer on top is called the Cliffhouse Formation and it was formed beneath ocean waters. The alternating layers of black and light stone below is called the Menefee. These layers were formed by very shallow waters and marshy environments. Later the Colorado Plateau was uplifted thousands of feet and eventually wind and wind and water carved out the canyon you see today.

To the north, you can also see where the canyon wall recedes, forming a natural drainage area. To the south, the broad flood plain is where three washes – the Gallo, Chaco, and Fajada- all converge. This area would have been advantageous for farming corn, beans and squash.

Agriculture arrived in the Southwest starting around 800 BC. Before that, people travelled through the canyon, hunting and gathering. Gradually people began to rely more heavily on growing crops. They started to stay in more permanent homes called pithouses, which are partially subterranean homes with 1-2 rooms. There are many of these structures at the base of Fajada Butte. By the time people began constructing great houses, agriculture was well established. How many people did this farming support in the canyon? Scholars disagree with estimates ranging from 800 people to 5000 people.

3) The Early Years

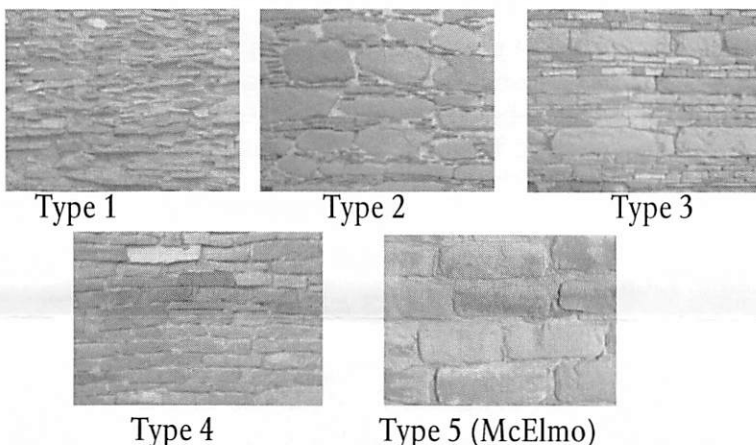
Around AD 850, people began to build great houses like Una Vida. The rough masonry you see here is known as "Type 1". The first building phase wasn't much larger than the two walls you see in front of you. Still, early great houses like Una Vida demonstrated a new and much larger building style in the region. Eventually the structure grew into the L-shaped building you see here today.



Early great houses seem somewhat experimental in shape. Una Vida, for example, is one of the few L-shaped buildings. Two other early great houses are also uniquely shaped; Pueblo Bonito is the only half-moon shaped building and Penasco Blanco is the only oval shaped structure in the Chaco

system. Una Vida is also the only site to follow the natural ridgeline, which is why Lt. Simpson thought the site was 6 stories tall. It only appears this way though because of the ridge.

As Una Vida expanded, its masonry styles also changed. Today we use the stylistic changes in masonry for approximate dating of the walls. As you continue towards the next stop, note the blocky masonry on the other side of this wall. This is known as McElmo style masonry (also known as Type 5) and comes near the end of great house construction. Below are other masonry styles. See if you can find them at Una Vida during your visit.



4) The Petroglyphs

The sandstone walls of Chaco Canyon were an important place for the people to record images and symbols. A short walk up the slope will take you to two petroglyph panels. Petroglyphs are carved into the rock. Please respect the images and do not touch them as this may lead to further disintegration.



The panel towards the left is more difficult to see because the people avoided the natural patina, or darker color of the rock. This means there is no contrast between the dark outside layer and the light inside carving. This seems intentional and is one of the unique things about petroglyphs in Chaco. As you turn towards the right, you can see the second petroglyph panel. This panel is very easy to see because the natural patina of the rock provides contrast.

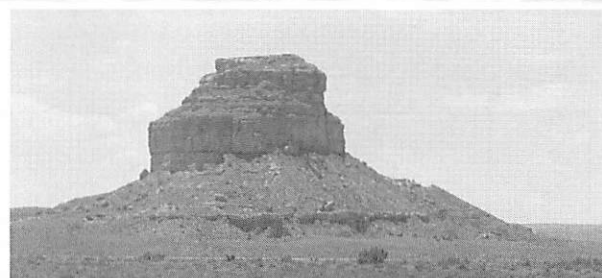
There are many questions about these images today- what did they mean and when were they created? Petroglyphs are very difficult to date. Instead researchers often use different styles to date images, although this is not exact. It is also difficult to know what these petroglyphs meant for their creators. For many of the descendants of Chaco, these images are sacred and have meaning, though not necessarily the same meaning. For some, the spiral is a migration symbol. For others it is a water symbol.

5) Kiva

This round room is known as a “kiva”. The word itself has a ceremonial meaning and many of the Pueblo people use kivas for rituals, initiation rites, societal meetings and other purposes. However it is possible they served a different function 1000 years ago. Notice the masonry in the Southwestern corner of the building. It is the only clear example of a 3rd story wall at Una Vida.

6) Great Kiva and Plaza

The wide open area you are standing in is called a plaza. The large circular depression you see is called a great kiva. Note how large Una Vida is. It has 150-200 rooms and was at least 3 stories tall. This scale and type of masonry at Chaco is unique to great houses. From AD 850-1150, the buildings at Chaco were not only larger than anywhere else in the Southwest, but the structures were also part of a much larger Chacoan system. This system included over 200 great houses spread over 60,000 square miles. That system also included roadways and features throughout Fajada Gap.



In addition, evidence of outdoor hearths has been found on top of Fajada Butte and Hosta Butte (the low ridge to the right of Fajada Butte over 30 miles away). These may have been used for signal systems. Chacoan Roads converged on Una Vida from the east, southeast, and south. Una Vida was a pivotal great house linked to the surrounding Fajada Gap communities.

The Chaco great house period was marked by the size of the Chaco system, the unique building styles and the exotic materials found. The remains of one parrot have been found at Una Vida, indicating trade with regions hundreds of miles further south.

7) Circular Stone Structures

Facing south, about 10 feet in front of you, is a circular structure. Facing north, you can see dry-laid masonry that formed a corral for housing livestock. These features were added in the 1700s, possibly by the Navajo or by Spanish shepherds who lived in the canyon. It is rare to find reoccupation of great house sites and many people today will not enter these buildings out of respect.

Sites that archaeologists recognize as Navajo settlements began appearing in the canyon as early as the 1600s. However, some Navajo oral histories place occupation of the canyon much earlier. Many Navajo families continued to live in the canyon until the 1930s and 1940s. At that time, the park began fencing off park boundaries and removing these people.

Today, people continue to honor their history and heritage with Chaco Canyon. Una Vida, Fajada Butte, and other locations in the canyon are included in many oral traditions which continue to resonate with many people today. Please respect the sites during your visit.