



When the Navajo first came into this area, they discovered these ruins, left by an earlier people.

- 1 The doors in this block of rooms opened onto a "street" that ran the length of the village.
- 2 Sheltered by overhanging cliffs, these ruins are among the best preserved in the Southwest.
- 3 Granaries had grooved door jambs. The Anasazi placed rock slabs in these openings to keep out rodents.
- 4 Think of these rooms as the home of a family. At night fires flickered in the windows and figures stirred in the dim light.
- 5 Pencil-sized cores taken from ancient timbers told archeologists when rooms were built or remodeled.
- 6 Kayenta masonry was not as well dressed as Chaco's or Mesa Verde's. Rocks were given a rough shape and then set in mud mortar with the smoothest side out.
- 7 These vertical poles may have been used to hang things on or as perches for captured ceremonial birds.

The Kayenta Anasazi

Some eight centuries ago farmers lived in this stark canyon country. The climate then was greatly different from now, and they grew crops, raised their families, and built villages. The ruins of some of those villages are preserved in Navajo National Monument.

These people had not always been farmers. A thousand years earlier they lived by hunting and gathering. They were people with no permanent homes, who moved with the seasons to wherever wild plants were ripening and migrating animals were gathering. In time something new came into their culture. Corn grains were traded into the region from Central America. The development of agriculture took many centuries, and slowly wrought far-reaching changes. The reason was simple: crops made it practical to settle down in one place.

It was a profound change for the Anasazi, as these people are called. The farmers began to replace their temporary brush structures with perma-

nent houses. At first these were pithouses—circular, below-ground structures that were common throughout the Southwest. But gradually they began to build above-ground houses, usually of stone but sometimes of adobe and sometimes of sticks covered with mud, a type of construction called "jacal." The need to store the surplus of each year's harvest led to storage chambers and also hastened the development of pottery.

Anasazi culture was not identical throughout the Southwest. Based on such traits as pottery decoration and architecture, the culture has three divisions: the Chaco, the Mesa Verde, and the Kayenta Anasazi. The differences, while not great, are enough to distinguish groups. It was popular for a while to label the Kayenta as the backwater of the Anasazi. New pottery styles apparently came into this area after other groups had adopted them, and there seems to be more randomness of design in Kayenta architecture than in the architecture of the other groups. But

this culture as a whole can hardly be called primitive: it supported a greater population in these canyons than can be supported here today.

About A.D. 1200, while Europe echoed with news of crusades to recover holy lands in the Middle East, the Marsh Pass region (the area visitors drive through on their way into the park) was dotted with the farms of the Kayenta Anasazi. Their villages, built as masonry room clusters, stood nearby, usually on a rise with a view of the surrounding fields. The farmers raised corn, beans, and squash and traded for things they needed from elsewhere, such things as cotton and turquoise. They were a religious people, and the kivas—the subterranean ceremonial chambers oddly reminiscent of the old pithouses—were often busy. There were ceremonies to make the crops grow and to keep the village strong and healthy.

Even so, hard times came. There were droughts and perhaps other prob-

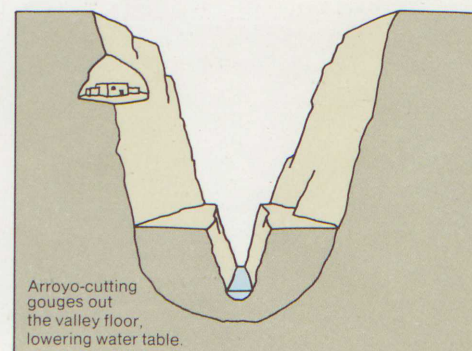
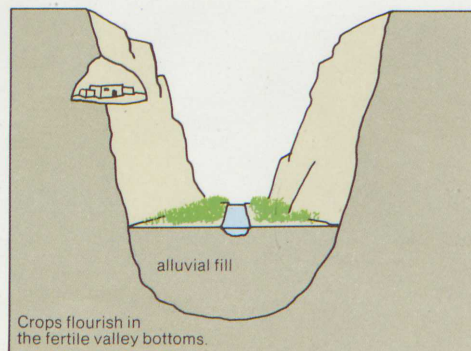
lems we cannot detect by studying the things left behind. Arroyo-cutting almost certainly made farming more difficult. It was not unusual for the Indians to abandon a village and move to another place, and that is what they did this time. Groups moved into the Tsegi Canyons and in a remarkable change of custom, for most Kayenta Anasazi still lived in the open, built the cliff dwellings that are preserved in Navajo National Monument. This emergency move gave them another 50 years until arroyo-cutting reached even up into the canyons. Some combination of this and other problems—archeologists suspect social tensions—led to the abandonment of the whole area about 1300. Centuries later the Navajo found these ruins left by ancient Anasazi farmers.

Canyons as Homes

Erosion profoundly influenced the lives of the Anasazi here. The shelters in which they built their homes were formed by water seeping through the sandstone cliffs. When the water met an impermeable layer of rock, it moved sideways, eroding alcoves in the cliffs. These alcoves were good living spaces. They usually had springs, and if they faced south, they were fairly warm in winter.

A more harmful form of erosion helped deplete

the soil in the canyon bottom. In the mid-1200s, arroyo-cutting, caused perhaps by climate changes and removal of ground cover, lowered the water table. Farming became impossible, and the Anasazi left. Soil slowly refilled the canyon. But about 1890, arroyo-cutting picked up again, probably caused this time by overgrazing. Conditions in the canyon today are like those that led to abandonment 700 years ago.

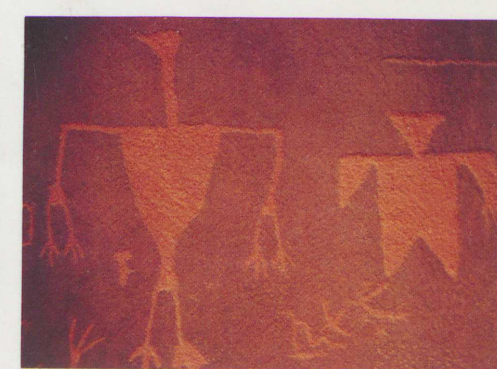


Ancient Artists

The technology of a people who lack metal may well be called primitive, but not necessarily their art. The Anasazi lavished more care on their pottery than required by the strict demands of utility. Their vessels were often beautifully shaped and decorated with geometric designs of originality, grace, and balance. Their weaving also showed the same mind: they worked fine designs into fabrics whose purpose was essentially utilitarian.

Whether rock art was ceremonial or mere pictorial scribbling, it is a form of expression and of interest to students and casual observers alike.

At right are two examples of Kayenta art. The petroglyphs were found in Tsegi Canyon. One figure is an interesting interpretation of a bird, the other is anthropomorphic. The bowl, now a lovely museum piece, was originally a household utensil, used perhaps to store grain.



Navajo

Visiting the Park

To reach park headquarters, follow U.S. 160 northeastward 50 miles from Tuba City or southwestward 20 miles from Kayenta. A 9-mile paved road, Ariz. 564, takes you

from the highway to the park. There are exhibits and audio-visual programs at the visitor center, and books, pamphlets, and Indian craftwork are sold there. A

campground (open mid-May to mid-October) and picnic area are nearby. Wood fires are not allowed. In summer rangers give campfire programs.

A half-mile trail leads to an overlook and a fine view across the canyon to the ancient village of Betatakin. This trail is accessible to handicapped persons who have assis-

tance. You can only visit this ruin with a park ranger. Guided tours are conducted from May through September. Inquire at the visitor center for times. The round-trip

hike, which takes about 3 hours, is strenuous; the climb back out is the equivalent of walking up a 70-story building. The altitude is 7,300 feet. If you have heart or respi-

ratory trouble, don't attempt the hike. Wear sturdy shoes and carry water.

To visit Keet Seel (open Memorial Day to Labor Day) you must obtain a permit at the visitor center. Reservations are recommended because numbers are limited to

20 persons a day. The 8-mile trail is primitive, and the hike, which takes a full day, is arduous. Inquire at the visitor center about horseback trips.

The nearest food and fuel is at Black Mesa Trading Post at the junction of Ariz. 564 and U.S. 160. The road that continues beyond the park is unpaved and not recom-

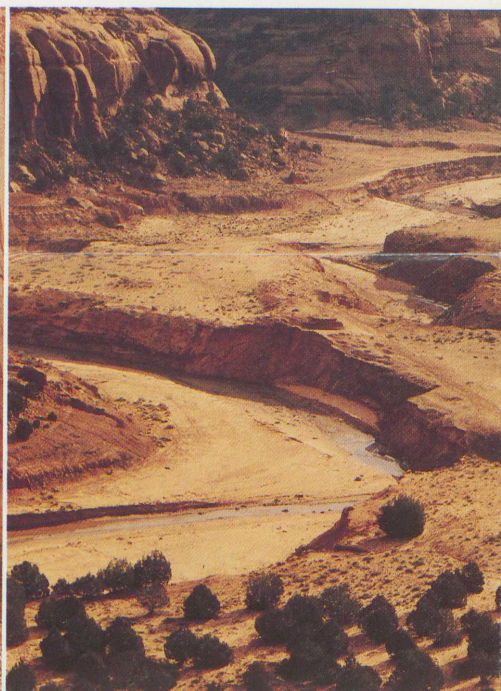
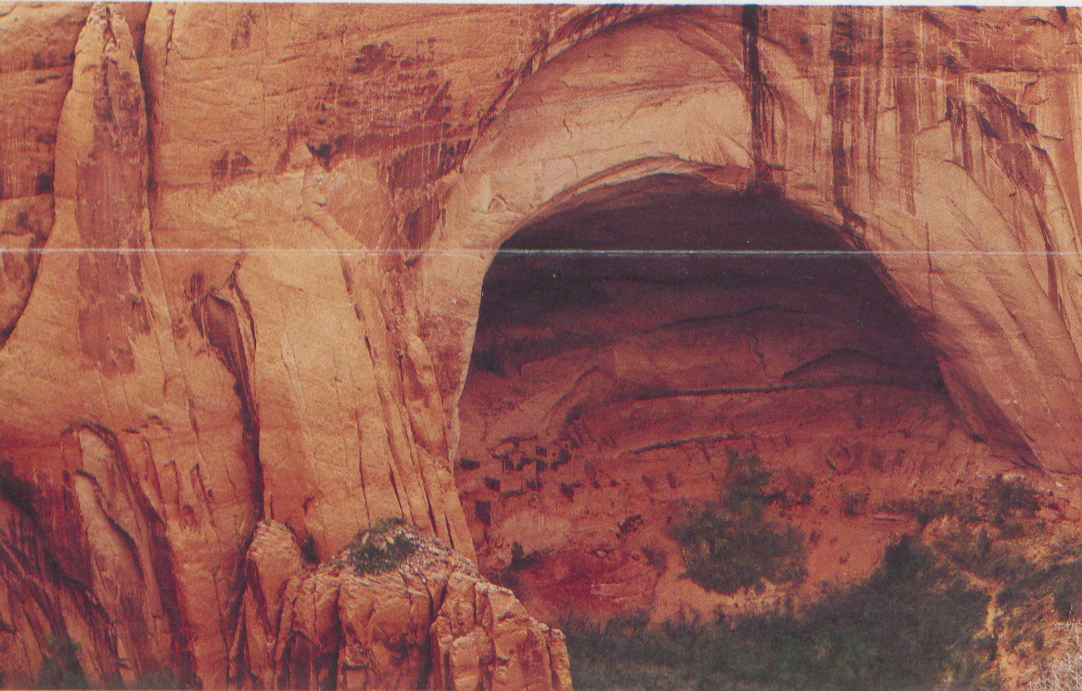
mended as a short-cut to Page, Ariz. Keep pets on a leash at all times; they are not allowed in buildings or on trails. These ruins are fragile. Please help us preserve them.

For Your Safety This is a natural area with canyons, cliffs, flash floods, falling rocks, lightning, and other hazards. Do not camp near cliff walls. For the protection of you and

your family, remain alert and be safety conscious at all times.

Administration Navajo National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address

is Tonaalea, Arizona 86044, is in immediate charge. Phone: 602-672-2366.



Betatakin

Tree-ring dating has revealed much about Betatakin ("ledge house" in Navajo). We know that about A.D. 1250 a few persons moved into the cave and that in 1267 several more families arrived. Though its agricultural fields lay a mile away, this alcove was a good place in which to build: it was deep and faced south. In late summer 1269, while the crops were ripening and there was time for other chores, the villagers cut and stockpiled many timbers. They apparently knew that others were coming to

join them, perhaps from a place threatened by arroyo-cutting. In 1275 the group arrived, and there was a burst of construction, using the stockpiled timbers. Over the next few years more rooms were added, perhaps for new arrivals but probably also for natural increase. At its height, about 1286 when the last building took place, Betatakin could have held about 125 persons. The village was abandoned about 1300. Birth, life, and death all took place within less than 50 years.

Keet Seel

Keet Seel ("broken pieces of pottery" in Navajo) was occupied much longer than Betatakin. Tree-ring dating and pottery found below the ruin show that Anasazi lived here as early as A.D. 950. Those early houses are completely gone, but their stones and timbers were reused in the final village built here about 1250. Unlike Betatakin, where the inhabitants apparently came as a group, Keet Seel was a place of random arrivals and departures. There are even more kivas here than at Betatakin and more variation

in room design and construction, indicating that different groups built the two villages.

In 1272 there was a surge of building activity and new types of pottery turn up, suggesting a new group of people. Their arrival, along with normal family growth, soon taxed the capacity of the alcove, and more rooms were built nearby. The population may have reached 150 at this time, but this crest did not last. There is no indication of warfare. It's more likely that arroyo-

cutting threatened their agricultural fields. Families began moving out, and those who remained converted the abandoned rooms into granaries, apparently storing food against hard times. About 1300 they too began leaving, but not in a hurry. They sealed many doorways, perhaps hoping to return someday.

Inscription House

This ruin, closed since 1968, is considerably smaller than either Betatakin or Keet Seel. A tree-ring date of 1274 indicates that this village was built about the same time as the other two. The main architectural differences between this village and the others are its T-shaped doorways and partial adobe construction. The ruin is exposed to the weather and therefore is not as well preserved as the others. Because of its fragility, visits are not allowed.

The Navajos

The Navajos are comparative newcomers to the Southwest. They are members of an Athabascan group that migrated from northern Canada in the 1400s, perhaps earlier. They were hunters and gatherers and lived alongside the sedentary Pueblo Indians in a relationship sometimes characterized by raids and sometimes by peaceful trading. After acquiring the horse and later sheep from the Spanish, they became a powerful nation. They

were formidable raiders, and Spaniards, Mexicans, Anglos, and other Indians learned to fear them. After the United States displaced Mexico as the dominant power in the region, the old practices and animosities continued. There were raids and counterraids and much suffering on both sides. To put a stop to these wars, the U.S. Army in 1863-64 invaded the Navajo homeland, slaughtered their sheep, and took most of the tribe captive. The survivors

were marched off to Fort Sumner in eastern New Mexico in the "Long Walk" that still lives in Navajo memory. The army tried to turn the Navajo into sedentary farmers but failed. Four years later they were given a new stock of sheep and restored to their own land. There are today about 200,000 Navajos living on or near reservations. They live a life that is a rich blending of old and new, adapting as they always have.



Related Sites

At its peak Anasazi culture had three important regional centers: the Kayenta (represented by this park), the Mesa Verde (represented by Mesa Verde National Park), and the Chaco (represented by Chaco Culture National Historical Park). The map at right locates these parks and several others—Canyon de Chelly, Aztec Ruins, and Wupatki—associated with the Anasazi. All are well worth a trip

