

Tonto

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Monument
Arizona



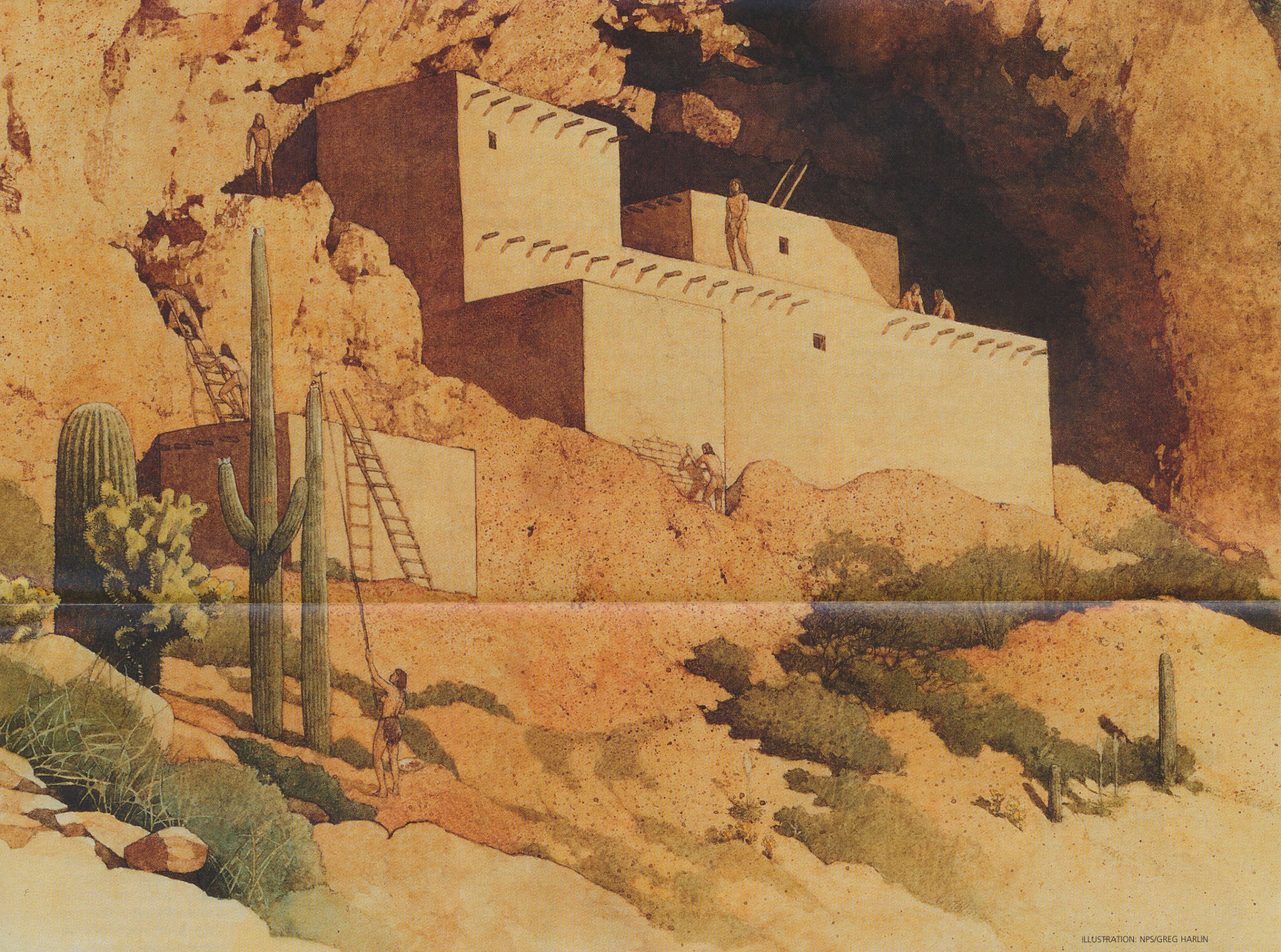


ILLUSTRATION: NPS/GREG HARLIN

The Salado: People of the Salt River

Shallow caves overlooking the Tonto Basin in southeastern Arizona shelter masonry dwellings nearly 700 years old. This was home to the prehistoric Salado people, named in the early 20th century after the Rio Salado, or Salt River. For 300 years they made their living from what nature provided in the mountainous desert terrain.

This rugged land is full of life. The basin's topography—a river valley surrounded by steep slopes rising some 2,000 feet—created different environments, each with its own community of wildlife. Salt River and Tonto Creek deposited rich soil in the floodplain, nourishing stands of mesquite, black walnut, and sycamore. Hillsides and mesas supported vegetation characteristic of semiarid climates: saguaro, cholla, prickly pear, agave, and jojoba. A few pinyon and juniper trees grew on the hilltops. Deer, rabbit, quail, and other game flourished here. Nomadic peoples found their way to the basin as early as 7,000 years ago.

The first permanent settlement dates from 100 to 600 C.E. (common era). A communal structure and 15 pit houses reveal one of the Tonto Basin's earliest farming communities. Architecture and pottery show similarities to early ceramic sites in Arizona's central mountains. Expanding south into Tonto Basin, these people used irrigation farming and gathered plants. About 1,400 years ago this community was abandoned with no evidence of reoccupation for the next 150 years.

The next occupation of Tonto Basin dates from the latter half of the 8th century. Hohokam colonists moved here, expanding their domain in the lower Gila and Salt river valleys (near present-day Phoenix). By 850 these Hohokam established pithouse villages, where they lived for a few hundred years. Perhaps because of conditions within, perhaps because of outside influences, their way of life changed. Pottery styles, construction methods, settlement patterns, and other traits indicate that by 1150 the inhabitants of the basin no longer followed Hohokam traditions or those of any other Southwestern group. A new culture had apparently emerged—the Salado.

Like their predecessors, the Salado were farmers. Their villages dotted the riverside near irrigated fields of corn, beans, pumpkins, and cotton. Groups gathered plants and hunted in the hills. They exchanged food and goods with neighboring communities, joining the trade network that reached from Colorado to Mexico and to the Gulf of California. By the early 1300s some Salado had moved to the nearby foothills.

Erosion had carved out recesses in a layer of siltstone partially exposed on these hillsides. Floors of these alcoves were littered with debris from the ceiling. Bonding rocks with mud, the Salado constructed apartment-style dwellings for sleeping, storage, cooking, and protection. The pueblo now called the Lower Cliff Dwelling consisted of 16 ground floor rooms, three with a second story. Next to this was the 12-room annex. The Upper Cliff Dwelling, within a similar shelter on a nearby ridge, was larger—32 ground floor rooms, eight with a second story. Terraces and rooftops provided level open space for work and play. The highlands offered a bounty of useful plants and animals. (Steep slopes and rough terrain made farming difficult.) A favorite was the fruit of the saguaro cactus that ripened in midsummer, harvested by Salado women. Some hill-dwellers began to specialize in weaving and pottery, trading their wares for food and cotton grown below in the valley.

The Salado lived in the Tonto Basin for about 300 years, then left sometime between 1400 and 1450. No one knows why, although the Salado were not the only people to depart their homelands in the southern mountains of the Southwest around this time. The cliff dwellings, less than 150 years old, were left to the sun and wind.

Archeological studies reveal aspects of this culture. Even so, we have only a vague notion of the Salado. They left no written records, no chronology of events that shaped their society. The most vivid signs of life are in their pottery, in remnants of fabric, in smoke stains from their cook fires, and in handprints on pueblo walls—all reminders that humans once led rich and productive lives here by the Salt River.

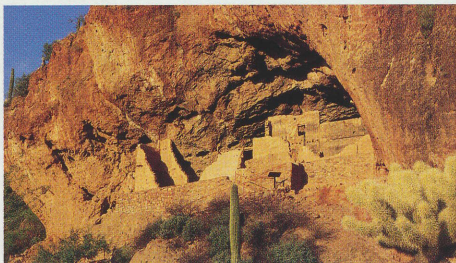
Your Visit to Tonto National Monument

Things to Do The park is open daily (except December 25) from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Begin your tour at the visitor center, one mile off Ariz. 188. Inside are exhibits on the culture and crafts of the Salado people and an audiovisual program. The visitor center is accessible to visitors in wheelchairs. A one-mile trail (round-trip) climbs 350 feet to the Lower Cliff Dwelling; allow one hour. *Note:* this trail closes at 4 p.m. Guided tours to the Upper Cliff Dwelling (November through April only) require reservations. Contact the park.

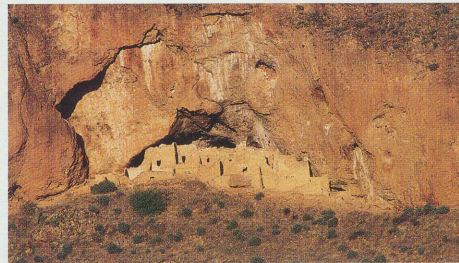
Facilities A picnic area is near the visitor center. Camping is not permitted in the park; camping is available at Theodore Roosevelt Lake. Services are found in Roosevelt, Globe, and Payson.

Climate Summers are very hot (100°F and higher), and winters are generally mild with periods of rain. Wildflowers bloom in March and April; arrive early in the day to avoid parking delays during this popular display of natural beauty.

For Your Safety and the Park's Protection Do not collect or disturb any plants, animals, or archeological objects; all are protected by federal law. • Do not climb or lean on walls. • Pets, leashed and under control, are allowed on Lower Cliff Dwelling trail. • Stay on established trails. Steep grades and uneven surfaces can create hazards. Visitors with heart or respiratory conditions should use caution,



Lower Cliff Dwelling



Upper Cliff Dwelling

especially in hot weather. • If you see a rattlesnake, retreat slowly and report the sighting to a ranger.

Location Tonto National Monument is 110 miles east of Phoenix, Ariz. (see map). Possible routes: Ariz. 188 west from Globe; 188 east from Ariz. 87 (Beeline Highway); or Ariz. 88 (Apache Trail) beginning at Apache Junction (the easternmost 22 miles of this road are unpaved and mountainous).

More Information
Tonto National Monument
HC 02 Box 4602
Roosevelt, AZ 85545-4602
928-467-2241
www.nps.gov/tont
Email: tont_superintendent@nps.gov



Tonto NM is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park

System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

Reading the Salado Past

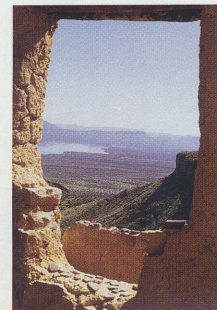
Distance and rugged terrain isolated the cliff dwellings from the modern world until the mid-1870s, when ranchers and soldiers came to the Tonto Basin. In 1906 construction began on Roosevelt Dam, bringing attention to the dwellings. The following year, recognizing the need to protect the sites from vandals and pothunters, President Theodore Roosevelt set the area aside as a national monument. Today these cliff dwellings give rise to questions about the Salado people and their way of life. Most of what we know—or think we know—about the Salado has been reconstructed from what remains of their material culture—their personal and community belongings. Taken together, Salado artifacts give us a picture of an adaptable people who coped successfully with a dry, harsh climate and made the most of their environment.

Some of the findings: Salado dwellings were permanent, indicating a farming people were on hand year-round to tend crops. Outlines of irrigation canals were visible until flooded by Roosevelt Lake. Decorated earthenware and intricate textiles reveal that not all of the people devoted their efforts to farming; some had the interest and time to master other skills. Seashells found here came from the Gulf of California and macaw feathers from Mexico, showing that the owners participated in trade with remote groups. Ideas made the circuit along with trade goods, for much of Salado technology resembles that of other native people.

We are fortunate to have available for study the very objects the Salado created for their own use or obtained in trade. Plants and animals that made up their natural environment still thrive

here. Like pieces of a puzzle, each element contributes to the larger picture of Salado culture. As you explore this ancient place, please remember that you, too, are responsible for its preservation. Keep the pieces of the puzzle together. What you find here, leave here.

For centuries this civilization etched its mark on the landscape. The ancient people built dwellings in the valley and on hillsides and diverted water for crops. Cattle grazing in the 19th century obliterated some plant species and increased erosion. Today Roosevelt Lake covers old farmlands, providing electrical power and water for irrigation and recreation.



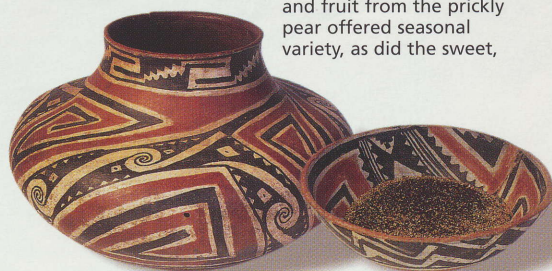
NPS

Plants and animals of the Sonoran Desert

The Salado looked to the desert to supplement cultivated foods and fulfill their material needs. Mammals, birds, and reptiles were important to their

diet. Bones were fashioned into tools. Yucca provided edible stalks and buds, sewing needles from leaf tips, and leaf fiber for rope, nets, mats, and sandals. Soap was extracted from its roots. Succulent new leaf pads and fruit from the prickly pear offered seasonal variety, as did the sweet,

red fruit of the saguaro. Sturdy saguaro ribs were used to construct ceilings. Beans of the mesquite tree, eaten raw or roasted, or ground into flour, were rich in protein.

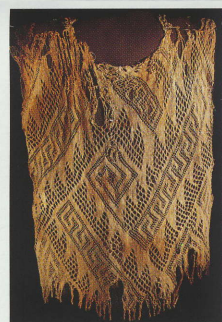


©GEORGE H.H. HUEY

Polychrome pottery We can identify Southwestern cultures by their pottery because the vessels and fragments survive for centuries, and because the artistry and materials vary from place to place.

Like other pueblo people, Salado women fashioned plain and decorated wares for cooking, storage, and ceremonial use. Red clay came from local pits along the river or on hillsides, and coloring was derived

from plants and minerals. These polychrome wares, a jar and bowl, are prime examples of the Salado's art and imagination.



©JERRY JACKA

Cotton shirt One of the few Southwestern groups to cultivate cotton, the Salado spun cotton thread for weaving cloth. Tradition among modern Pueblo groups suggests that it was the men who practiced this art. This shirt, with its intricate linked-diamond pattern, is the best surviving example of Salado weaving.

Elf owl

Saguaro cactus



NPS

Woven sandals Footwear was crafted from yucca or agave fibers. Many Tonto specimens show exquisite workmanship. Matting might be woven from nolina or sotol. The Salado made a variety of close-coiled and coarse baskets.



NPS

Stone grinding tools The mano and metate, commonplace in Southwestern agricultural societies, were used to crush corn, beans, seeds, and nuts.



ILLUSTRATION: NPS/GREG HARLIN

©GPO:2005-310-394/00344 Reprint 2004
Printed on recycled paper.