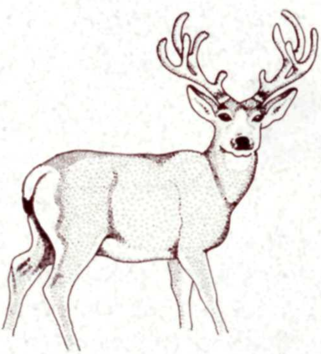
ALONG The TRAIL To ESCALANTE Ruin



ANASAZI HERITAGE CENTER

WELCOME TO THE ESCALANTE RUIN TRAIL

As you walk along the trail to Escalante Ruin let your mind travel backward in time. Atop the hill a prehistoric village is teeming with life. Imagine children laughing as they chase lizards into the sage and rabbitbrush. The sound of stone tools grinding corn is ever present. Many of the villagers are out hunting deer, rabbits, and other small game. Some are tending their gardens of corn, beans, and squash. The croaking of a jet black raven warns the settlement of your approach.

If you are quiet and observant you may see many of the same species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and plants that populated this area during the time of the Anasazi. Use this guide as you walk the trail or travel in this region to help you identify the more common species.

To learn more about the archaeology, geology, and natural history of this area, stop in at the Center and talk to members of the Anasazi Heritage Center staff. Local bookstores, the Cortez Visitor Center, and the public libraries also have information that will enrich your visit to the Montezuma Valley, heartland of the ancient Anasazi.

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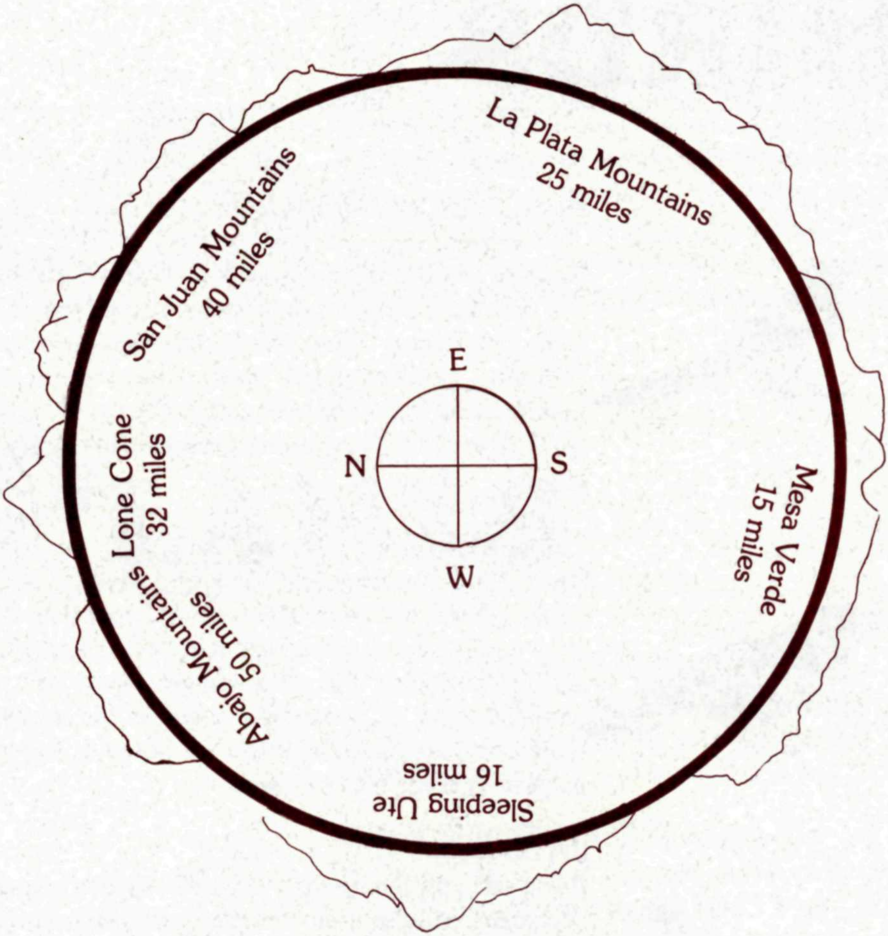


Now that you have reached the top of the trail you are standing on a high ridge which separates McPhee Lake and the Dolores River from the Montezuma Valley. As you look toward the water the large mountain range in front of you is called the La Plata Mountains. This landform is located at the top of the diagram. The distances given are line-of-sight. The diagram is not to scale.

Millions of years ago this area was flat and covered by an inland sea. Forces within the earth pushed-up sandstone sediments creating the Mesa Verde. Magma deep within the earth forced mountains to form and, in the case of the Ute Mountain and Lone Cone, broke through the surface to form volcanos.

As the high mountains formed, torrents of water from melting snows and summer rainfall washed down their steep sides and cut the wide valleys we see today. Winds from the southwest carried soil from the distant red rock deserts. It was deposited on the mesa tops and on the valley floor.

The Anasazi came to this land about 1500 years ago. They learned to farm the rich red soils. When they left the area about 700 years ago, farming ceased until the 1890's. Modern farmers work these same lands growing beans similar to the ones the Anasazi once planted and new crops like alfalfa and wheat.

BIRDS

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE
(body 17-22″)

Magpies are the only large black and white birds that you will see. They have long wedge-shaped tails. On close inspection their black feathers have an iridescent greenish-purple cast. Their nests are usually found in the upper branches of a tree. Magpie feathers were found in prehistoric sites in the McPhee area.

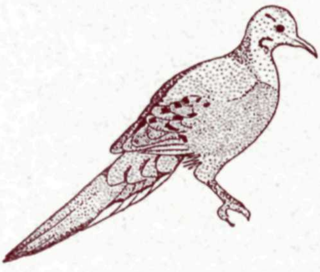
COMMON RAVEN (body 21.5-27″)

The raven is a completely black bird which is often confused with the crow. The raven is larger than the crow and has a tuft of feathers at its throat. It may be seen soaring over the piñon-juniper forest and its croaking voice is commonly heard in the woods. Raven feathers were found on the floors of houses excavated in the McPhee area.

JAYS (body 9-11″)

If you see a brilliant flash of blue in the woods you are probably looking at a jay. There are several species of jays in this area. The Scrub Jay is primarily blue with brownish-gray shoulders and a white throat with black flecks. The Piñon Jay has a shorter tail and more uniform blue coloring. These jays do not have crests as does the Stellar Jay.

MOURNING DOVES (body 11-13″)

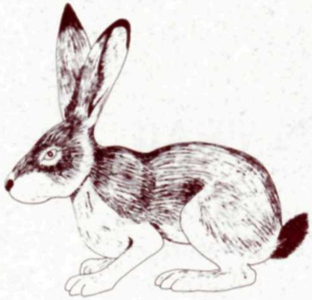


The mournful cooing of this dove is a common sound in the forest and along roadsides. They can be identified in flight by the white bands on either side of their gray wedge-shaped tails. They are often seen perched on telephone wires above cultivated fields. You may also flush them out of the brush as they are feeding on the ground. Doves are hunted during the fall months.

MAMMALS

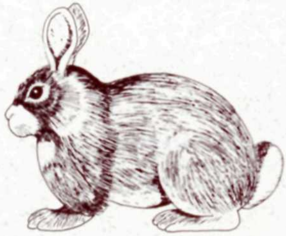
BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT

(body 18-24"/ears 5-7")



These hares are easily identified by their long black-tipped ears. Their coloring is brownish-gray on the back and off-white on the belly. Most active in the late afternoon and evening, the jacks feed on grasses, cacti, weedy plants, shrubs, and alfalfa. Their hind legs are long and powerful. They are fleet-footed, obtaining speeds up to 40 mph. When threatened jacks rely on their coloration as camouflage and sit perfectly still. Rabbits were a food source for the Anasazi. Fur hides were used to make blankets.

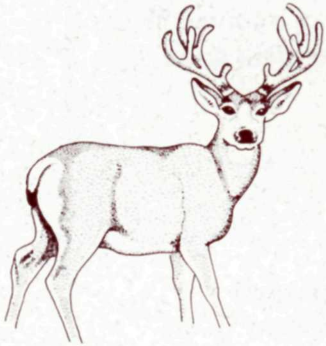
COTTONTAIL RABBITS (body 14-19")



Cottontails are much smaller than jackrabbits. Their body coloration is brown. The belly, chin, insides of the legs, and underside of the tail are white. When chased this rabbit runs in large circles within its home territory. When startled it will freeze. The cottontail is most active at dawn and dusk. It may use abandoned burrows of other animals but prefers to sit beneath grass clumps or in thickets. The diet of the cottontail is similar to that of the jackrabbit. The Anasazi ate rabbits and used their furry hides for blankets.

MULE DEER

(body 5-6' long/3-4' tall at the shoulder)



The mule deer is gray with large ears. The belly, chest, rump, and tail are white. The tip of the tail is black. Deer browse at dawn, dusk, and at night. They usually bed down during the middle of the day. The deer drift between high summer ranges and low winter ranges. The males tend to separate themselves from the females and shed their antlers each year. Mule deer were heavily utilized by the Anasazi. Hides were used for clothing. Bones and antlers were made into tools. Meat and marrow were eaten. Mule deer are still hunted today in the fall of each year.

ROCK SQUIRREL (body 20")

The rock squirrel is generally dark gray with a large bushy tail. The chin and belly are off-white. The squirrels build their dens in rock crevices, among tumbled rock, or in tunnels. When threatened the rock squirrel whistles and heads quickly for its den. The squirrels have sharp teeth and strong claws. Their diet consists of fruits, nuts, berries, grains, meat and eggs. The Anasazi probably hunted rock squirrels for food.

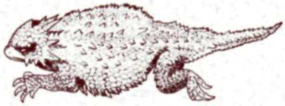
PORCUPINES

(body 35"/tail 6-12"/weighs 6-15 lbs.)

These rodents feed on piñon pine bark and needles. They cut through the outer bark to the sweet inner cambium layer, often causing severe damage to the tree. When attacked the porcupine lowers its head and strikes out with its tail, embedding the quills in the enemy. The quill is a modified hair with a hollow shaft and a solid barbed tip. Porcupines are primarily nocturnal and they use rocky ledges, hollow trees, or underground burrows for dens. Porcupine remains have been found in prehistoric sites in the McPhee area.

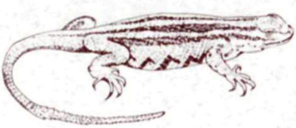
REPTILES

HORNED LIZARD (body 4-5")



Commonly referred to as 'horny toads', these lizards have a broad body, a short tail, and horns on their head. They rely on their reddish-brown coloring for camouflage. Horned lizards are most active during the warmth of midday. At night they burrow into the soil. Their diet consists primarily of ants.

SAGEBRUSH LIZARD (body 5-6")



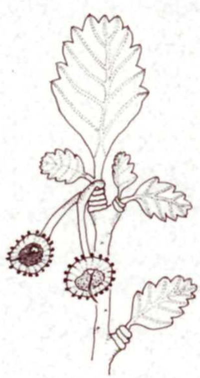
This lizard is commonly found in drainages associated with piñon, juniper, and oakbrush forests. They are active during most of the day. They prefer shade to open rocky areas.

WESTERN RATTLESNAKE (body 16-64")
These poisonous rattlesnakes are generally not aggressive unless they are provoked. If you see one along the trail avoid it and report the location to the Heritage Center staff. Rattlesnakes can be found on rocky outcrops, talus slopes, in canyons, and near prairie dog towns. In the early spring they are often found sunning themselves on warm rocks. Their diet consists of small mammals and lizards.

PLANTS

Signs describing the piñon pine, juniper, gambel oak, yucca, squawbush, rabbitbrush, sagebrush, and prickly pear cactus may be found along the trail. Please do not eat any of the plants you see.

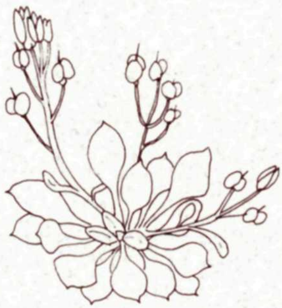
UTAH SERVICEBERRY (shrub 4-10′ tall)
The serviceberry is a member of the rose family. Clusters of small white flowers which bloom in May produce a small bluish fruit. The leaf looks very much like that of the Mountain Mahogany. It is smoother and more serrated along the edge. Remains of serviceberries have been found on archaeological sites in the McPhee Reservoir area. Raw and dried fruit were used as food. The wood was used for bows and arrows.



MOUNTAIN MAHOGANY (shrub 5-10′ tall)
The mountain mahogany is a member of the rose family. Its leaves have a waxy appearance on the front side and are hairy on the back. They produce a fruit with a hairy curving tail. Remains of these shrubs have been found in excavations in the reservoir area. The wood was used in the construction of sweathouses, for weaving tools, arrows, and as prayersticks. The root was used as a dye.

FENDLERBUSH (shrub 5-10′ tall)

The fendlerbush is in the saxifrage family. This shrub is covered with showy white flowers in May. It is eaten by deer. Fendler has narrow pointed leaves and the flowers have four petals.



THE MUSTARD FAMILY (3-15″ tall)

The most common member of this family to be seen along the trail is the bladderpod. It is 3-4″ tall, has a rosette of silvery-gray leaves, and a small yellow flower. It produces a twin-chambered pod. Another member of this family is the wallflower. It has showy heads of yellow flowers with four petals. The leaves are located near the base. Mustards bloom in spring and early summer. The seeds and leaves of some members of the mustard family are edible. Various parts of the plant are used for dyes.

WOOD BETONY (2-6″ tall)

This plant is in the figwort family. The leaves are fernlike and arranged in a rosette around the base of the plant. They have a purplish-green coloring. The wood betony blooms in early spring and produces several tubular white flowers with purplish tips.

CANADIAN THISTLE (4-36″ tall)

This prickly plant is a member of the sunflower family. The leaves, stems, and flower heads are very spiny. It produces purplish flower heads. It is considered a noxious weed in this area.

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