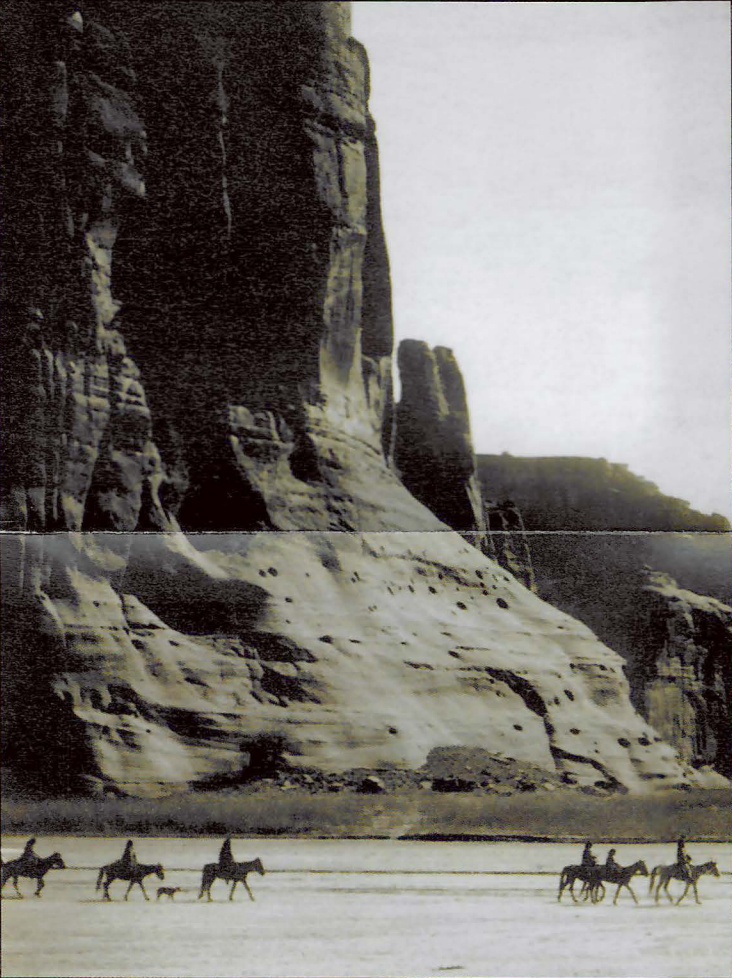




Ancestral Puebloan people built Mummy Cave in Canyon del Muerto (above). They decorated the interior walls with white and green plaster.



Edward Curtis photographed these Navajo riding east into Canyon de Chelly in the summer of 1904 (right).



The Window in Canyon de Chelly (not visible from the rim) offers spectacular canyon views. Navajo still live, farm, and raise sheep here, as they have for centuries.

The Canyons

A red-tailed hawk casts moving shadows on the sheer walls as it floats high above the canyon. A Navajo woman tends her corn on the canyon floor, surrounded by a cathedral of towering red cliffs. A family at Spider Rock Overlook marvels at the 800-foot free-standing spire and the quilt of colors far below. For each there is a different view. Yet, for all, the canyon is quiet—its silence challenged only by the call of a distant raven.

Archeological evidence shows that people have lived in these canyons for nearly 5,000 years—longer than anyone has lived uninterrupted on the Colorado Plateau. The first residents built no permanent homes, but remains of their campsites and images etched or painted on canyon walls tell us their stories. Later, people we call Basketmaker built household compounds, storage facilities, and social and ceremonial complexes high on ledges on the canyon walls. They lived in small groups, hunted game, grew corn and beans, and created paintings on the walls that surrounded them. Ancestral Puebloan people followed. Predecessors of today’s Pueblo and Hopi Indians, they are often called Anasazi: a Navajo word meaning ancient ones. These Puebloan people built the multi-storied villages, small household compounds, and kivas with decorated walls that dot the canyon alcoves and talus slopes.

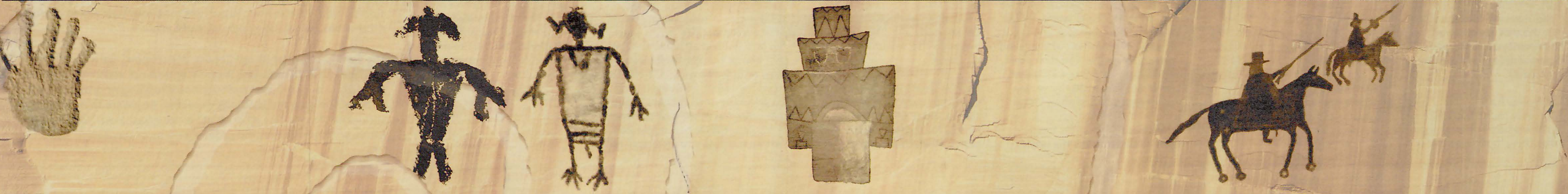
About 700 years ago most people moved away, but a few remained in the canyons. Later, migrating Hopi Indians and other tribes spent summers here, hunting and farming. Finally, at the end of a long journey, the Navajo arrived. They built homes, learned new crafts, and added their own designs to the walls of this ancient gallery.

The labyrinth called Canyon de Chelly (d’SHEY) is really several canyons that include Canyon de Chelly and Canyon del

Muerto. At the canyons’ mouth near Chinle, the rock walls are only 30 feet high. Deeper in the canyons the walls rise dramatically until they stand over 1,000 feet above the floor. Cliffs rise straight up, overshadowing streams, cottonwoods, and small farms below. It has taken millions of years and volumes of water to etch these stone paths through the layers of sandstone and igneous rock as the Defiance Plateau rose. The canyon beckons us today—with its towering stone monoliths and ledges bearing the open windows of ancient people.

Canyon de Chelly National Monument was established in 1931 to preserve this record of human history. Embracing nearly 84,000 acres within the Navajo Reservation, the monument is administered by the National Park Service. But these canyons are home to *Diné*, the Navajo people.

People of the Canyon Through Time



There are many ways to look at the human history of Canyon de Chelly. Archeologists and historians examine physical evidence—artifacts and written accounts—to place humans in a timeline, a chronology that marks events on a calendar. To the Navajo and many American Indians, the passage of linear time is not important. Native histories and the past are explained through traditional beliefs, stories, and images.

Archaic
2500–200 B.C.E.

The earliest inhabitants lived in seasonal campsites located in rock shelters. These small mobile groups embarked on hunting and gathering expeditions, covering familiar territory on the canyon floor and upland plateau. Extremely steep trails, marked by images painted on canyon walls and boulders, connected the ranges.

Canyon de Chelly provided an abundance of food for these first settlers. Fragmentary archeological evidence reveals a diet of deer, antelope, rabbit, and other animals, and over 40 varieties of plants. Through foraging trips these people gained an understanding of the canyon and its sources of year-round water. This knowledge would eventually be used to cultivate a new plant introduced from the south—corn.

Basketmaker
200 B.C.E.–C.E. 750

About 2,500 years ago a fundamental change occurred in how people lived here. Instead of relying on hunting and gathering, a group called Basketmaker—named because of their extraordinary weaving skills—learned how to farm. Fields tucked into corners of the canyon or on the mesas were small and subject to failure. Over time farming techniques improved, leading to a consistent supply of corn, squash, and beans. With agriculture these people became more sedentary. They built communities of dispersed households, large granaries, and public structures.

Basketmaker rock paintings show a society of extended families growing and storing food and engaging in religious and communal activities.

Pueblo
750–1300

About 1,250 years ago the dispersed hamlets gave way to a new kind of settlement—the village. Why this change occurred is unclear. Perhaps rock shelter households became too crowded. Perhaps conflict forced people to band together for defense. Maybe it was simply because they wanted to live closer to their farms. These people raised turkeys for food and grew cotton, a crop that led to new weaving techniques.

Villages offered opportunities for social interaction, trade, and ceremony. These Puebloan people crafted beautiful pottery (see below), and created a landscape that was useful and spiritual.

Hopi
1300–1600

Puebloan life ended here about 700 years ago. Drought, disease, conflict, and possibly the allure of ideas from the south led the people to leave the canyon. They moved south and west, establishing villages along the Little Colorado River and at the southern tip of Black Mesa. In time, these people became the Hopi.

The Hopi describe these events as part of a migratory cycle. Traditional histories and archeological evidence chronicle seasonal farming, pilgrimages, and occasional stays in the canyons. This pattern continued until the Navajo arrived in the 1700s.

Navajo
1700–1863

The Navajo, an Athabascan-speaking people, entered Canyon de Chelly about 300 years ago. They brought domesticated sheep and goats acquired from the Spanish and a vigorous culture tempered by centuries of migration and adaptation. Like those before them, the Navajo used the canyons and the plateau to support a way of life.

Canyon de Chelly was known throughout the region for its fine corn fields and peach orchards planted on the canyon floor. Small settlements set in clearings gave the landscape a tranquil quality.

Tranquility ended in the late 1700s as warfare erupted between the Navajo, other tribes, and Spanish colonists. Characterized by quick raids and certain reprisal, the conflicts were over animals and land.

The Long Walk
1863–1868

In 1846 a U.S. military force under Stephen Watts Kearny subdued Mexican forces, claiming what is now Arizona and New Mexico as U.S. territory. Kearny offered the Navajo peace in order to end decades of mutual raiding between tribes. For the next 17 years this agreement was tested by continued conflict, broken promises, and military expeditions into Navajo territory.

In 1863 Col. Kit Carson began a brutal campaign against the Navajo. In the winter of 1864 Carson’s troops entered

the eastern end of Canyon de Chelly and pushed the Navajo toward the canyon mouth. Resistance proved futile; most Navajo were captured or killed. Carson’s forces returned in the spring to complete their devastating campaign. They destroyed the remaining hogans and orchards, and killed the sheep.

A bitter, humiliating trial awaited those Navajo who survived the ordeal. Forced to march over 300 miles, called the Long Walk, to Fort Sumner in New Mexico territory, scores perished from thirst, hunger, and fatigue. Their years of internment at Fort Sumner were no kinder. Poor food and shelter and disease brutalized the survivors. In 1868 the Navajo were finally allowed to return home to rebuild their lives.

Trading Days
1868–1925

The Navajo returned home to find their hogans, crops, and sheep gone. Again they faced starvation. Food distribution centers, like the one at Fort Defiance in Arizona territory, helped the Indians recover. These centers and practices taken from Spanish and Mexican traders provided a model for the trading posts that built up in Navajo country.

Trading posts became a focal point for Navajo communities—places where men and women exchanged news, discussed problems, and traded rugs, jewelry, and crafts for food and other staples. Traders set up posts near Canyon de Chelly and in surrounding areas, including Hubbell Trading Post at Ganado. Sam Day’s 1902 trading post at Canyon de Chelly is now part of Thunderbird Lodge’s cafeteria.

Navajo of the Canyon Today

White House (shown below) is not a Navajo structure. Built and occupied centuries ago by ancestral Puebloan people, it is named for a long wall in the upper dwelling that is covered with white plaster.

Within the four sacred mountains lies a canyon that cradles the history and the culture of *Diné*—the Navajo people. To the outside world it is known as Canyon de Chelly. To the people who live here it is *Tsegi* (SAY-ih), a physical and spiritual home.

The smell of wood smoke and the distant sounds of sheep bells, barking dogs, and children playing tell us that *Diné* still live here. Alfalfa, corn fields, and small orchards surround the traditional log hogans on the canyon floor, weaving a tapestry of everyday life.

To *Diné* the canyon means more than a summer home or a place to raise sheep and corn. The *Diné* culture emerged from this land. Our language refers to the landscape, and the people identify themselves by this.

Diné are connected with the landscape of *Tsegi*, deriving meaning, culture, and spirituality from the natural

features that surround them. The land nourishes our people, and it is intrinsic to the activities of daily life.

Our elders are especially close to the land. From their stewardship comes a set of ethics based on experience and tradition. With their teachings, stories, and songs, our traditions are sustained through the generations.

Cycles of the Sun, Earth, and moon, and seasons, ceremonies, and generations are part of the continuity of life in Canyon de Chelly.

Maintaining balance with Mother Earth is key to harmonious life. Each person’s well-being contributes to the health of the family and community. This perspective has helped the Navajo people recover from the trauma of the Long Walk.



A Navajo grandmother braids her granddaughter’s hair.

Canyon de Chelly, then and now, is the epicenter of Navajo culture. People who live here retain that spirit of their ancestors. Traditional beliefs are reflected in everyday life—in how Navajo care for their families, livestock, and homes, and how plants are collected for ceremonial, medicinal, and traditional uses.

Yet, *Diné* thrive on new experiences. In *Diné* philosophy, it is

important for the health of people to maintain traditions while adapting to changes in the physical world. Adhering to this belief makes *Diné* a truly bicultural society. Navajo people lean on traditions during times of contemporary demands to help preserve their way of life. As a Navajo Nation leader once said, “We will be like a rock a river has to go around.” Ailema Benally, Navajo

Plants of Canyon de Chelly—Tséyi'déé'nanise'altaas'ei

Tradition says that *Haashch'eeh diné* e, the Holy People, created plants from the air, water, light, and soil to beautify the land and to provide for *Diné*, the Navajo people. The Navajo respect plants as a perpetually renewing gift and as being connected with all things on Earth.

For centuries *Diné* have raised crops and collected plants for food, medicines, dyes, and ceremonies. Traditional plant use continues today. Farmers plant corn in the canyon as their ancestors did before them. *Hataalli*, chanters (medicine men and women), collect wild plants to use for medicines and ceremonies. Here are a few of the plants you may see at Canyon de Chelly, along with some of their uses.

Narrowleaf yucca
Tsá'ászi ts'óóz



Narrowleaf yucca
Long, stiff leaves with sharp ends grow from a central clump. A single stalk of white flowers reaches four feet. *Ceremonial*: soap from root cleanses hair; fibers used for weaving baskets. *Other*: dyes; edible fruit.

Yucca root
Tálawosh



Prickly pear cactus
Hoshniteeli



Sumac
K'ii'



Prickly pear cactus
This sprawling cactus with flat, waxy pads (leaves) grows throughout the canyon area. Flowers emerge along top edges of pads, forming plump, red fruit. *Medicinal*: peeled pads reduce bleeding. *Food*: edible fruit and pads. *Other*: fruits make bright red and pink dyes; stems make glue.

Sumac
K'ii'



Snakeweed
Ch'ildiiyēsii yāzhi



Snakeweed
This short shrub has a dense halo of yellow flowers that bloom from July through September. *Medicinal*: heals cuts and bites. *Ceremonial*: used to make purifying incense.

Sagebrush
Ts'ah



Juniper
This evergreen tree grows to 25 feet. The blue, fleshy berries are its cones. *Medicinal*: relieves headache and flu symptoms. *Ceremonial*: cleanses and purifies. *Food*: adds flavor and potassium and other minerals. *Other*: dried berries used to make necklaces.

Planning Your Visit

Take time to enjoy this place of magnificent beauty. You may tour the Rim Drives or hike the White House Trail on your own. You can also experience the canyon by taking a tour with an authorized Navajo guide.

Visitor Center
Start here for information, exhibits, and a bookstore. The visitor center is open every day except December 25. There is no entrance fee.

Guided Tours
Canyon tours are available through Thunderbird Lodge, a park concession. Private hiking, backcountry camping, horseback, and 4-wheel-drive vehicle tours are available with authorized Navajo guides. Prices vary according to the type, length, and difficulty of the trip. For information ask at the visitor center. **Permits are required; only NPS-authorized Navajo guides and NPS personnel are allowed to lead canyon tours.**

White House Trail
This 2.5-mile round-trip trail is the only place where you may enter the canyon without a permit or

an authorized Navajo guide. Allow two hours for the round-trip hike. You descend 500 feet to the canyon floor, cross Chinle Wash, and view the cliff dwellings. Chinle Wash may contain water during the spring snowmelt or rainy periods. Pit toilets are available at the bottom. There is no drinking water—you must carry plenty of fresh water. Temperatures are cold in winter and extremely hot in summer. Stay on the trail. Please respect the fragile environment and the privacy of Navajo people. Do not enter dwellings or disturb historical or natural features.

Camping
Cottonwood Campground has camping year-round, first-come, first-served. Group sites require reservations. Grills, tables, and restrooms are available. There are no showers or hookups. RV's longer than 40 feet cannot be accommodated.

Accommodations
Chinle has lodging, food, and supplies. Thunderbird Lodge, in the park, has lodging, food, gifts, and canyon truck tours.

North Rim Drive—34 miles round-trip
Some of the most beautiful cliff dwellings are along this drive. In addition to the well-known dwellings, watch for small sites that dot the alcoves and blend in with the canyon walls.

• **Antelope House Ruin** is named for the illustrations of antelope attributed to Navajo artist Dibe Yazhi (Little Sheep) who lived here in the early 1800s. Excavated in the 1970s, this site has an unusual circular plaza built in the 1300s.

• **Navajo Fortress** is a historic landmark used as a refuge by early Navajos.

• **Mummy Cave Ruin**, one of the largest ancestral Puebloan villages in Canyon de Chelly, was occupied to about 1300. The east and west alcoves are comprised of living and ceremonial rooms. The tower complex resting on the central ledge was built in the 1280s by people who migrated from Mesa Verde.

• **Massacre Cave** refers to the Navajo killed here in the winter

of 1805 by a Spanish military expedition led by Antonio Narbona. About 115 Navajo took shelter on the ledge above the canyon floor and were discovered by Narbona's men. Shots fired from the rim killed all people on the ledge.

South Rim Drive—37 miles round-trip
This drive offers panoramic views of the canyons, the Defiance Plateau, and the Chuska Mountains to the northeast. Watch for changes in vegetation and geology as the elevation rises from 5,500 feet at the visitor center to 7,000 feet at Spider Rock.

• **Tsegi Overlook** provides views of Navajo farmlands on the canyon floor.

• **Junction Overlook** has views of Chinle Valley and the confluence of Canyon del Muerto and Canyon de Chelly.

• **White House Ruin** was built by ancestral Puebloan people and occupied about 1,000 years ago. It is named for the long wall in the upper dwelling that is covered with

white plaster. The 2.5-mile round-trip White House Trail begins here.

• **Spider Rock** is an 800-foot sandstone spire that rises from the canyon floor at the junction of Canyon de Chelly and Monument Canyon. From here you can see the volcanic core of Black Rock Butte and the Chuska Mountains on the horizon.

For Your Safety
Please be aware of these conditions and regulations:

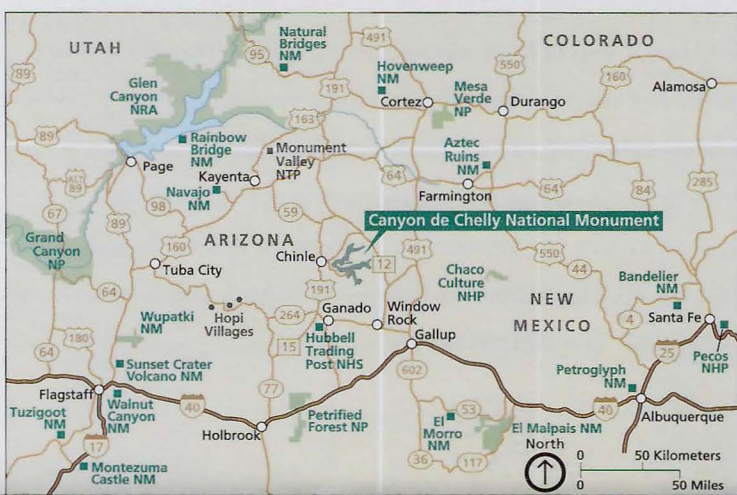
- The canyons are deep with very steep, vertical walls—falls can be fatal. Use extreme caution at the canyon rims. Stay on established trails and stay behind the protective walls. Keep control of your children and pets at all times.
- Watch out for snakes, stinging insects, and thorns. Do not put your hands or feet into any place that you cannot see.
- Pets must be on a leash at all times; they are not allowed on the White House Trail or in the canyon.
- Thefts can occur wherever you travel. Lock your vehicle at overlooks. Secure valuables out of sight or take them with you.
- Alcohol is prohibited within the park and anywhere on

the Navajo Reservation. • Do not harm, feed, or harass wildlife. • All cultural and natural features are protected by federal and tribal law. Disturbing archeological sites or collecting artifacts is strictly forbidden. • Do not pick or disturb plants; many are used by Navajo people and grow in traditional plant collecting areas.

Emergencies: Contact a ranger or call 911.

More Information
Canyon de Chelly National Monument
P.O. Box 588
Chinle, AZ 86503
928-674-5500
www.nps.gov/cach

Canyon de Chelly is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.



Visiting Navajo Land
The Navajo Reservation observes daylight-saving time, but the rest of Arizona and the Hopi Reservation do not. During that period clocks on the Navajo Reservation will read one hour ahead of clocks off the Reservation, like at the Grand Canyon.

The Navajo Tribe has its own police department. Drive carefully and obey speed limits. This is open range land; watch for livestock on roads. Ask permission before photographing or drawing people or their homes; a fee is usually expected. Be aware that this is private land. Do not hike or drive off established roads without permission. Please respect the property rights of the Navajo Nation.

