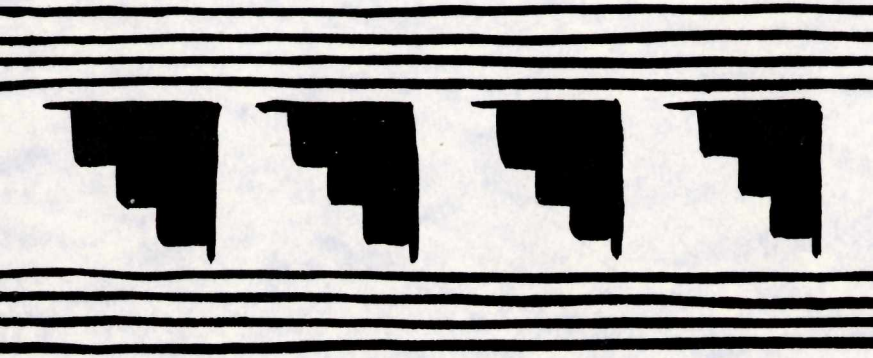
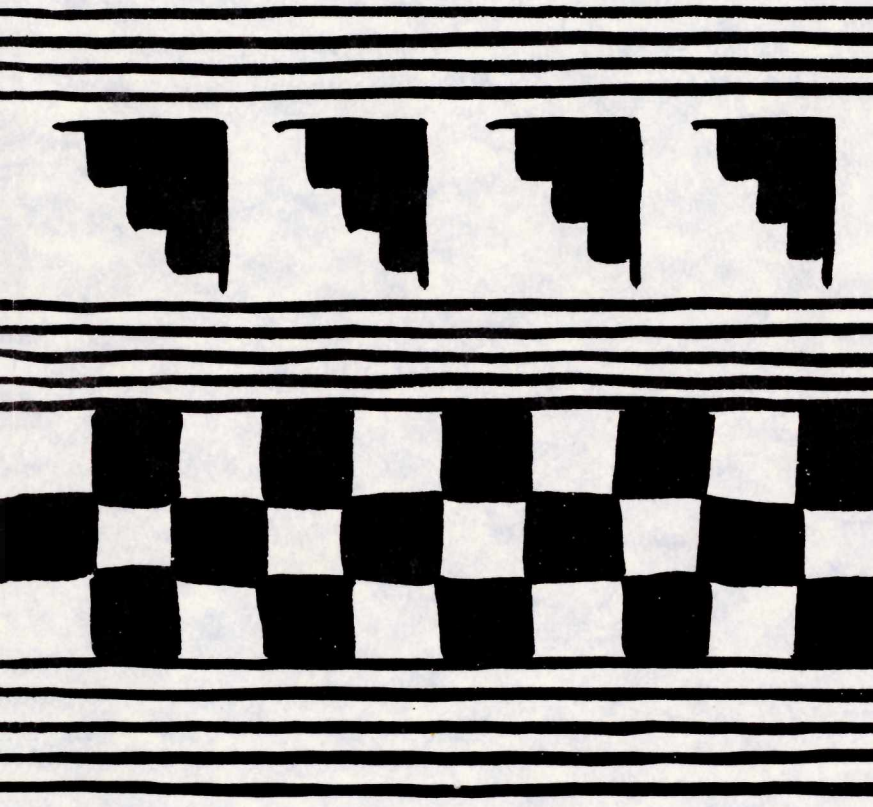


ROADSIDE RUIN

TRAIL GUIDE



Roadside Ruin

Welcome to the Needles District of Canyonlands National Park! This ¼ mile (.5km) loop trail will take you to an Indian granary typical of structures which can be found throughout the park. Not many are in as good condition as this one --- in fact, it really isn't fair to call it a ruin.

Along the way you will see various native plants which were used by the Indians in different ways. They will help acquaint you with a way of life that was quite different from your own.

Who Lived Here - Anasazis or Fremonts?

Around 950 A.D., as population growth in the Mesa Verde area to the southeast grew and expanded, people gradually moved into the Canyonlands area to settle. We call these people the "Anasazi," our adaptation of a Navajo word meaning "The Ancient Ones" or "Ancient Enemy." The Anasazi wre primarily agricultural people. They settled in locations which provided them with adequate water, arable land, building sites, and other necessities of life. One of these locations was the nearby Salt Creek drainage.

The Fremont Indians, who occupied the area around Torrey, Utah, to the west, were contemporaries of the Anasazi. Like the Anasazi, they combined farming and hunting/gathering to make a living. Around the time the Mesa Verde Anasazi were moving into these canyons, the Fremonts were also undergoing a period of population growth and expansion. Whether or not they actually moved into this part of Canyonlands is an unanswered question. No Fremont artifacts have been found here. However, much of the rock art is Fremont in style, indicating that if the Fremonts were not actually present here, they at least had a strong influence on the area's Anasazi inhabitants.

Cultivated crops - corn, beans and squash - were the main source of food for the Indians of the canyons. They supplemented this diet by gathering seeds, roots and fruits in season. They hunted deer and bighorn sheep with spear and bow and trapped or snared smaller animals and birds. Clothing, shelter, domestic utensils and farming tools all had to be obtained from the immediate environment. Life was not easy and they needed many skills to survive. But survive they did, in a land many of us would think uninhabitable.

In the late 1200's climatic changes brought prolonged droughts to this entire region. When farming became too difficult here, the Anasazi moved southeast to areas with more dependable water sources. By the end of the century the canyon country was deserted. Descendants of the Anasazi still live in the Hopi and other Pueblo villages of the Southwest. Where the Fremonts went is unknown.

1. Indian Ricegrass (Oryzopsis hymenoides). The seeds of this grass were gathered by threshing and then cooked or ground into meal.

2. Peppergrass (Lepidium fremontii). The delicate clusters of white flowers ripen into flat, round seeds with a hot, peppery tast. These were ground and used as a spice.

3. Big Sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata). This is one of several species of sage found in this area. This plant furnished a light yellow dye. The seeds or fruit were dried or pounded into meal and eaten. The pounded bark is fibrous enough to twist into weak cordage. Other species of sage were used for seasoning, medicine and tea. Sage can be distinguished from other shrubs by its pungeant odor.

4. Fremont Barberry (Mahonia fremontii). The Hopi Indians still extract a bright yellow dye from the roots of this shrub. The wood is suitable for making various objects. The bright yellow flowers ripen into edible berries.

5. Four-wing Saltbush (Atriplex canescens). The seeds of this shrub were burned and the ashes used as baking powder.

6. Granaries were used to store corn, seeds and nuts. They were often well hidden, sometimes located in almost inaccessible places. The small rectangular doors were covered with slabs of rock. The door of this structure is located on the roof.

A few granaries still contain corncobs, gourd shells, and artifacts. However the contents of most were long ago devoured by rodents or stolen by "pothunters." Usually all we see in ruins today are thick deposits of packrat droppings.

Please do not climb up to this ruin or disturb it in any way. The mortar is very fragile, and even touching it will hasten its collapse.

Whenever you find potsherds, corncobs, arrowheads or any other archeological or historical objects, leave them in place! Removing, damaging, or even just moving an artifact destroys a site's scientific value for future archeological research. It also deprives other visitors of the chance to discover and enjoy the objects.

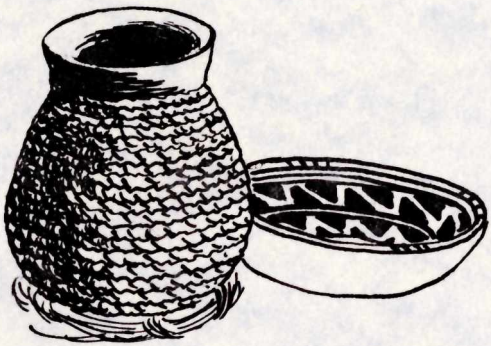
7. Narrow-leaf Yucca (Yucca harrimaniae). Almost every part of this common plant was used. The sharp spines on the leaf tips served as needles. The leaf fibers were made into cord and rope and woven into sandals and mats. The flowers and fruits were eaten. The roots yield saponin, a substance which was used as soap.

8. Utah Juniper (Juniperus osteosperma). The soft fibrous bark of this tree provided diapers and cradleboard padding for Anasazi babies. The berries were made into beads or

9. Pinyon Pine (Pinus edulis). The tasty protein-rich seeds which grow inside the cones of this tree were an important food for the early human inhabitants of this area as well as for birds and rodents. They can be eaten raw or roasted.

10. Pricklypear Cactus (Optunia sp.). This cactus bears a sweet, juicy edible fruit. The pads were eaten after being blanched and scraped to remove the spines. Compresses were made by splitting a cactus pad and applying the cut surface to a wound, as the plant's medical properties were supposed to aid in healing.

We hope this short walk has increased your appreciation of the resourcefulness of the early inhabitants of the canyon country. Do you think you could do as well if you had to make your living in an environment such as this?



Cover design and illustrations are based upon prehistoric pottery found in Canyonlands National Park.

Published by the Canyonlands Natural History Association, a private, nonprofit corporation organized to complement the educational and environmental goals of the National Park Service.