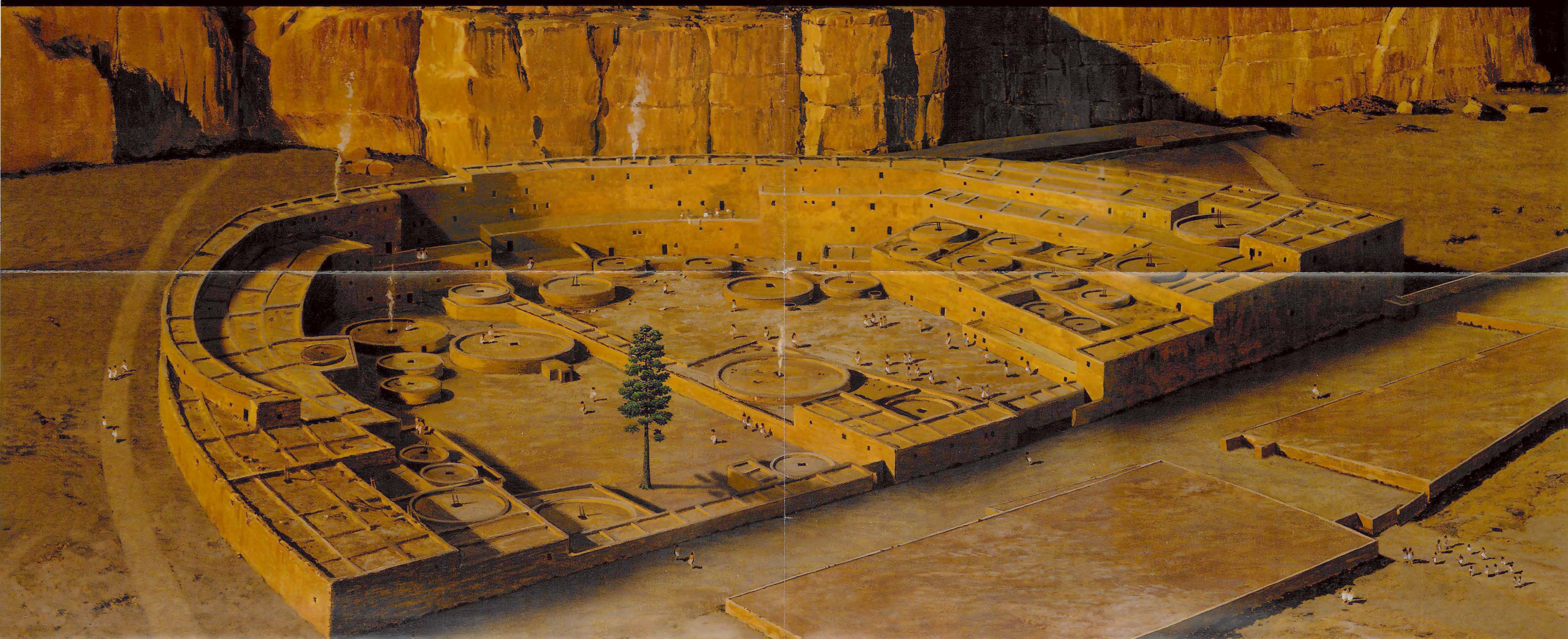




The Center of Chacoan Culture

For all the wild beauty of Chaco Canyon's high-desert landscape, long winters, short growing seasons, and marginal rainfall make it an unlikely place for a major center of ancestral Puebloan culture to take root and flourish. Yet this valley was the center of a thriving culture 1,000 years ago. Its monumental architecture, far-reaching commerce, and complex community life and social organization bear witness to remarkable cultural achievement.

The Chacoan people's cultural flowering began in the mid-800s and persisted over 300 years. We see this in the grand scale of its architecture. Using masonry techniques unique for their time, they built massive, multiple-story stone buildings (Great Houses) with hundreds of rooms—far larger than any they previously had built. Buildings were planned from the start; rooms weren't just added to existing buildings as needed. Construction of some

buildings spanned decades or even centuries. Each great house is unique, but all share recognizably Chacoan architectural features.

In the mid- to late 800s, the great houses of Pueblo Bonito, Una Vida, and Peñasco Blanco were built, followed by Hungo Pavi, Chetro Ketl, Pueblo Alto, and others. They were often oriented to solar, lunar, and cardinal directions. Lines of sight between them enabled communication. Sophisticated astronomical markers, communication features, water control devices, and formal earthen mounds surrounded them. They were set in a landscape surrounded by sacred mountains, mesas, and shrines that still have deep spiritual meaning for their descendants.

By 1050, Chaco was the ceremonial, administrative, and economic center of the San Juan Basin with a large sphere of influence.

Pueblo Bonito, shown here as it may have looked in the early 1100s, was the largest structure in the Chacoan system.

Illustration derived from an original painting by L. Kenneth Townsend. Digital revisions based on data from John Steir, Dabney Ford, and Richard Friedman. Original painting from *Mysteries of the Ancient Americas*, ©1986, The Reader's Digest Association, Inc.

Roads linked dozens of Chaco Canyon great houses to over 150 great houses in the region. We don't think great houses were traditional farming villages with large populations but probably impressive examples of public architecture used for ceremony, commerce, and trading when temporary populations came to the canyon for these events.

What lay at the heart of this great social experiment? Pueblo descendants say that Chaco was a special gathering place where many peoples and clans converged to share ceremonies, traditions, and knowledge. Chaco is central to the origins of several Navajo clans and ceremonies. It is also an enduring enigma for researchers. Was Chaco the hub of a turquoise-trading network set up to get macaws, copper bells, shells, and other commodities from distant lands? Did Chaco distribute food and resources to

growing populations when the climate failed them? Was Chaco the so-called "center place," binding the region together with a shared vision? We may never know Chaco's full significance.

In the 1100s and 1200s change came to Chaco. New construction slowed and Chaco's role as regional center shifted. Its influence continued at Aztec, Mesa Verde, the Chuska Mountains, and other centers to the north, south, and west. But in time the people shifted away from Chacoan ways, migrated to new areas, reorganized their world, and eventually interacted with foreign cultures. Their descendants are the modern Southwest Indians. Many Southwest Indian people today see Chaco as an important stop on their clans' sacred migration paths, and a spiritual place to be honored and respected.

Clues to the Past

Road System

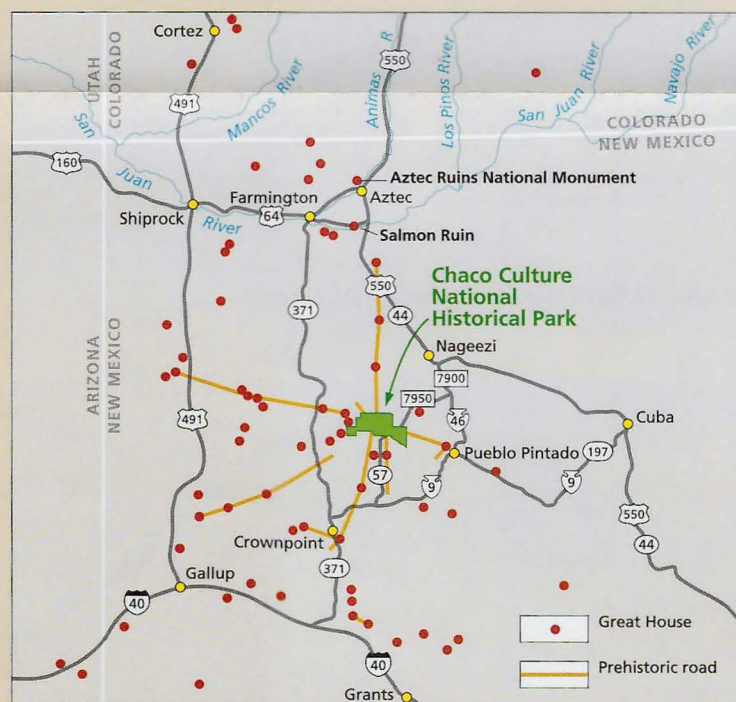
Over 400 miles of prehistoric roadway are known. This impressive system not only carried goods, but it linked Chaco to outlying communities and resource areas and connected those outlying communities. Some segments appear to lack a clear destination: One of the longest headed north toward the prehistoric communities of Salmon and Aztec.

These were not mere foot trails but planned and engineered roads that required significant labor to build and maintain. Many archaeologists now think that some road features were not just utilitarian but reflected the puebloan world view.

The road system is most elaborate near great houses, where double and quadruple road segments may have related to ritual and ceremony. Roads bound together the culture by reflecting these ancient people's social organization and cosmography.

Trade

Chaco was the center of a far-reaching trade network in its Classic period, from 1020 to 1120. Goods were traded within the Chacoan system but also with groups as far south as Mexico. Chaco's distinctive Cibola black-on-white pottery (right) may have originated in outlying towns to the south and west. One



Chaco Culture and Related Great Houses

expert estimates that only 20 percent of the pottery used here was made here.

Turquoise was highly valued in the Chacoan world. Great quantities of ornaments, offerings, and work-site debris were found in Chaco Canyon. Raw turquoise, imported from distant mines, was exquisitely crafted into beads, necklaces, and pendants. Quantities of the jewelry may have been traded to the regional centers in northern Mexico.

The small frog (above right) found in Pueblo Bonito is carved from jet, with inlaid turquoise eyes and collar.

The many seashells (often strung into necklaces), copper bells, and remains of macaws and parrots also indicate the vast trading system. The latter two items suggest more contact with Mexico, perhaps with the ancient Toltecs.



AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Masonry

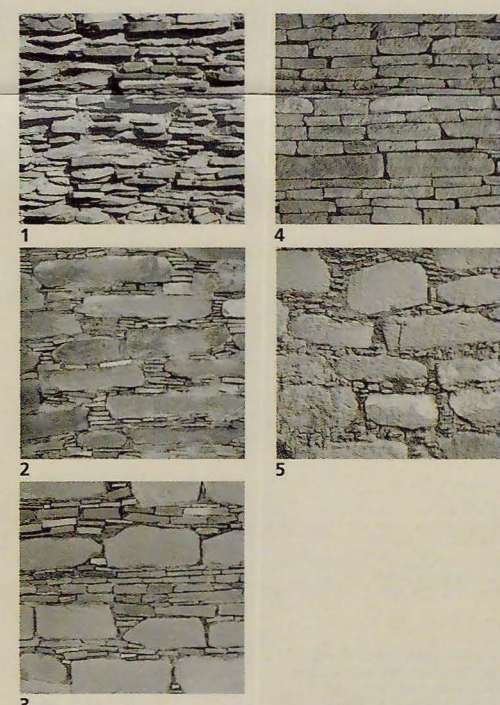
Chacoans were skilled masons. Using stone tools, they erected vast communal buildings that still compel admiration. Their techniques evolved over centuries. The earliest dwellings were built with simple walls one stone thick and bonded with generous courses of mud mortar. The oldest walls in Pueblo Bonito used this type of masonry (1).

As Chacoans began to build higher and more extensively, they used walls with thick inner cores of rubble and thin veneers of facing stone. These tapered as they rose, showing the planning that went into large-scale building in Classic

times. An early example (2) has large tabular sandstone blocks chinked with smaller stones set in mortar.

Half of Pueblo Bonito's ground floor was built in masonry styles (3) and (4) (late 1000s), used at roughly the same time. The patterns are attractive as is, but Chacoans covered most stonework with plaster.

The last distinct style, McElmo (5), appears in Kin Kletso and other early 1100s architecture. Kin Kletso's walls had thin inner cores of rubble and thick outer veneers of shaped sandstone resembling masonry of the Mesa Verde region.

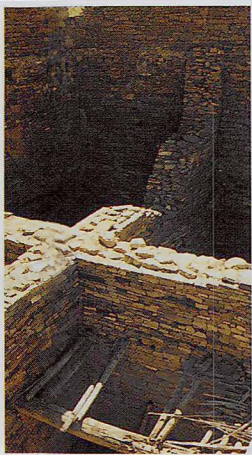


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A Guide to Chaco Culture



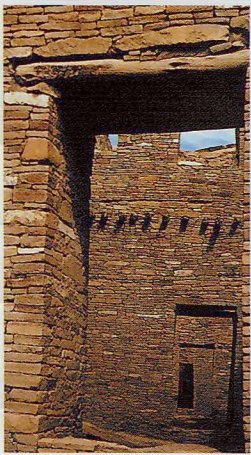
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Pueblo del Arroyo is a D-shaped great house that rose three and four stories high in the rear, and stepped down to one story

in front. Abutting the rear wall is a tri-walled structure, one of a handful known in the Southwest.

This feature was built sometime after 1100, late in the building's construction history.

The flooring in Pueblo del Arroyo was carefully built of layers of beams, poles, sticks, bark, and adobe mud.

New Alto, on the north mesa, is a compact structure with rooms of uniform size around a central kiva. It was built in the

early 1100s in a style called McElmo. Its builders may have been influenced by architectural trends from the north.

The Chacoan masons worked with precision and great care, as these Pueblo Bonito doors show.

Chetro Ketl, one of the largest Chaco structures, flourished about 1050. Note its Great Kiva, named for

its size and design, and three elevated kivas. The remains of a colonnade (filled in during later remodel-

ing) along the north side of the plaza suggest influences from Mexico.

Casa Rinconada, a Great Kiva, is one of the largest kivas in the Southwest. Built in the 1100s, it is in

the central area of the canyon and may have served communal needs.

Chaco's Ancient Architecture

Begin your sightseeing at the visitor center. Its exhibits help you understand Chaco and its people. Rangers answer your questions and help you make the most of your time. To see Chaco best, go on a ranger-conducted walk. Find out about these tours and evening campfire programs at the visitor center.

The great house closest to the visitor center, Una Vida, is a short walk from the parking lot. Construction was underway by the mid-800s and went on until the mid-1100s, at the same time Pueblo Bonito and Peñasco Blanco were being built. The structure has about 150 rooms and five kivas. It is an excellent example of a mostly unexcavated site.

The core of the Chacoan complex lies farther down the canyon. The largest of its great houses is Pueblo Bonito, the center of the Chacoan world. Planned and then built in stages, Pueblo Bonito was lived in from the mid-800s to 1200s. It eventually towered four stories high, with over 600 rooms and

40 kivas. Pueblo Bonito, one of the most extensively excavated and studied sites in North America, is sacred to many American Indian groups.

Begun about 1020, Chetro Ketl saw major building within 30 years and then modifications in the 1100s. An estimated 500 rooms and 16 kivas are here. An immense elevated earthen plaza rises above the landscape.

Pueblo del Arroyo was built in stages over a relatively short time. Its central part was begun about 1075, with north and south wings added between 1101 and 1105. The plaza and tri-walled structure were built around then, too. The building had about 280 rooms and over 20 kivas.

Kin Kletso seems to have been built in two stages, the first from about 1125, the second from 1130 or later. A great house with about 100 rooms and five enclosed kivas, it may have risen three stories on the north side.

Casa Rinconada, on the canyon's south side, is the largest known Great Kiva in the park. The trail to this structure passes several so-called "small house sites" contemporary with Casa Rinconada and the great houses but very different in construction and function.

Hiking trails (see *map*) lead to several other sites. Pueblo Alto Complex, atop the mesa, is important as the junction of several prehistoric roads. Tsin Kletsin and Peñasco Blanco can be reached by hiking from the central canyon. Wijiji, built in one stage in the early 1100s, is noted for its symmetrical layout and rooms of uniform size. You can get hiking permits, required for these trails, at the visitor center.

About Your Visit

Chaco Culture National Historical Park is in northwestern New Mexico. *The recommended access route is from the north, via US Hwy 550/44 and County Roads 7900 and 7950.* Turn off US 550 at CR 7900, 3 miles east of Nageezi and 50 miles west of Cuba (at mile 112.5). Follow the signs south on CR 7900 for 5 miles (paved), then turn right on CR 7950 (16 miles, with 13 unpaved) to the park boundary.

Two roads access Chaco from the south, both from Navajo 9, running between Crownpoint, Pueblo Pintado, and Cuba. Signs direct you to the park via Pueblo Pintado and via Seven Lakes: At Pueblo Pintado turn north on Navajo 46 (for 10 miles), left on CR 7900 (7 miles), and left on CR 7950 (16 miles) to the park entrance (33 miles over rough dirt). At Seven Lakes (3 miles north and 12 miles east of Crownpoint), turn north on N.M. 57 to the park entrance (20 miles, rough dirt). *All routes have sections of infrequently maintained dirt roads that may be impassable in inclement weather. Call 505-786-7014, ext. 221 for road conditions.*

No lodging, gasoline, repair services, or food are available in the park. The nearest town is 60 miles away. You can buy staples at the convenience store on US 550/44. The National Park Service's Gallo Campground, a mile from the visitor center, has tables, fireplaces, and central toilets. Water is available only at the visitor center; no firewood is available in the park. Trailers over 30 feet long cannot be accommodated. Camping is limited to 14 days.

For Your Safety and the Park's Protection
The park staff is here to help you understand and enjoy the park and to protect all cultural and natural resources. The 1906 Federal Antiquities Act and 1979 Archeological Resources Protection Act prohibit appropriation, injury, destruction, or removal of any object of antiquity, or the excavation, injury, or destruction of any ruin on federal land.

As you explore here, remember that the past belongs to everyone. Cultural sites are fragile, irreplaceable, and significant for our global cultural heritage. They are part of the sacred

homeland of the Hopi, the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico, and the Navajo, who still respect and honor them. To help us protect and preserve them, follow these regulations:

- Do not collect pottery or other protected artifacts, plants, or rocks.
- Do not deface, add to, or alter petroglyphs, pictographs, or rocks.
- Do not walk, climb, sit, or lean on fragile walls.
- Pets are not permitted to enter cultural sites.
- Stay on designated trails.
- All trails close at sunset.
- Watch out for rattlesnakes.

More Information
Chaco Culture National Historical Park
P.O. Box 220, Nageezi, NM 87037-0220
505-786-7014; www.nps.gov/chcu

This park is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities please visit www.nps.gov.

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Hiking Chaco's Trails
All backcountry hiking trails require a free permit, available at the visitor center or trailheads. • Stay on designated trails for your safety and to preserve the park's resources.

- Camping and fires are not permitted in the backcountry.
- All trails and the Chacoan cultural sites close from sunset to sunrise.
- Pets are permitted on backcountry

try trails on a leash. Pets are not permitted at cultural sites.

- The park's elevation is 6,200 feet. Winters are cold and summers hot, with little shade.
- Brief, violent thunderstorms occur in summer.
- Trails are steep, uneven, and icy in winter.
- Wear hiking boots and appropriate clothing and be sure to drink plenty of water.
- Prepare for extremes.

