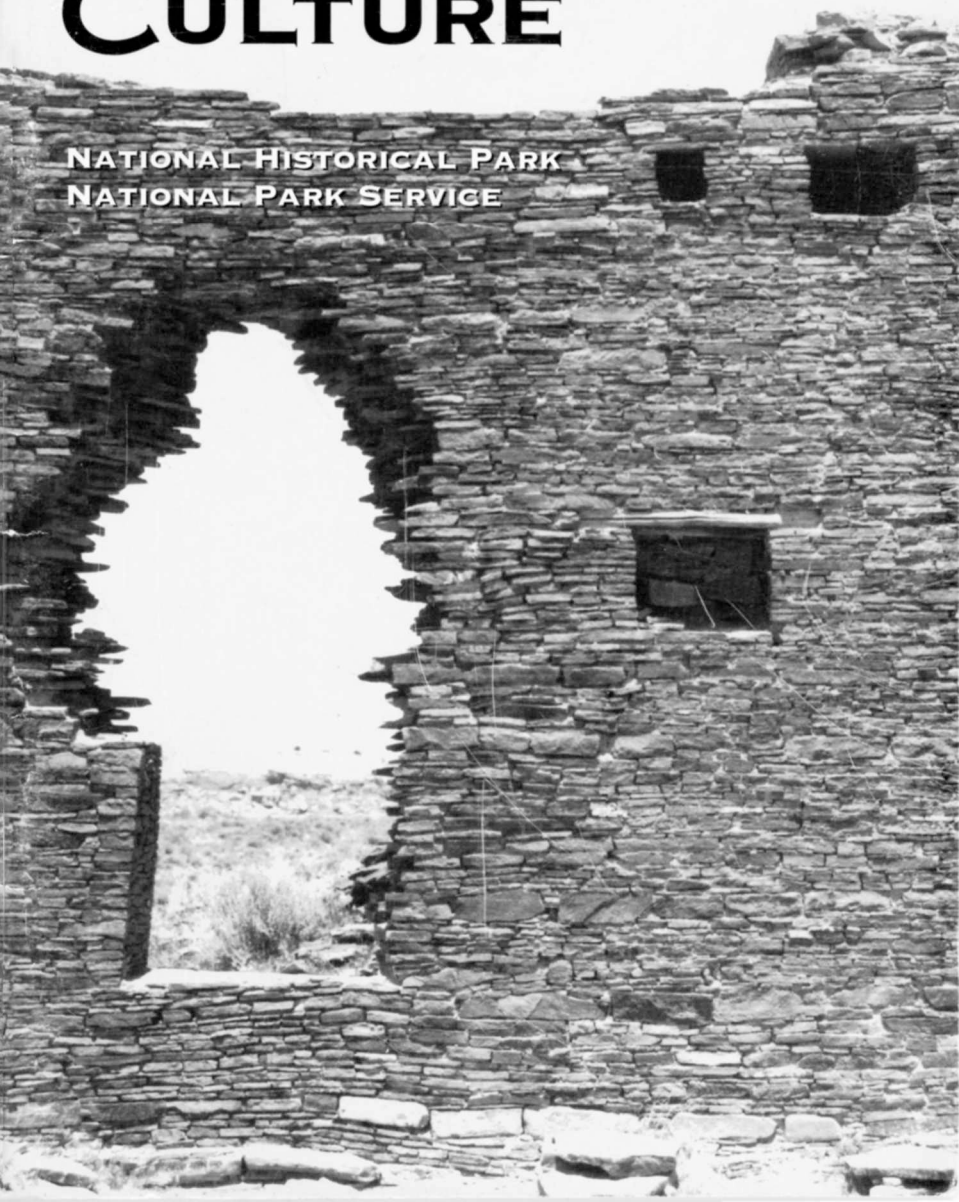


CHACO & CULTURE

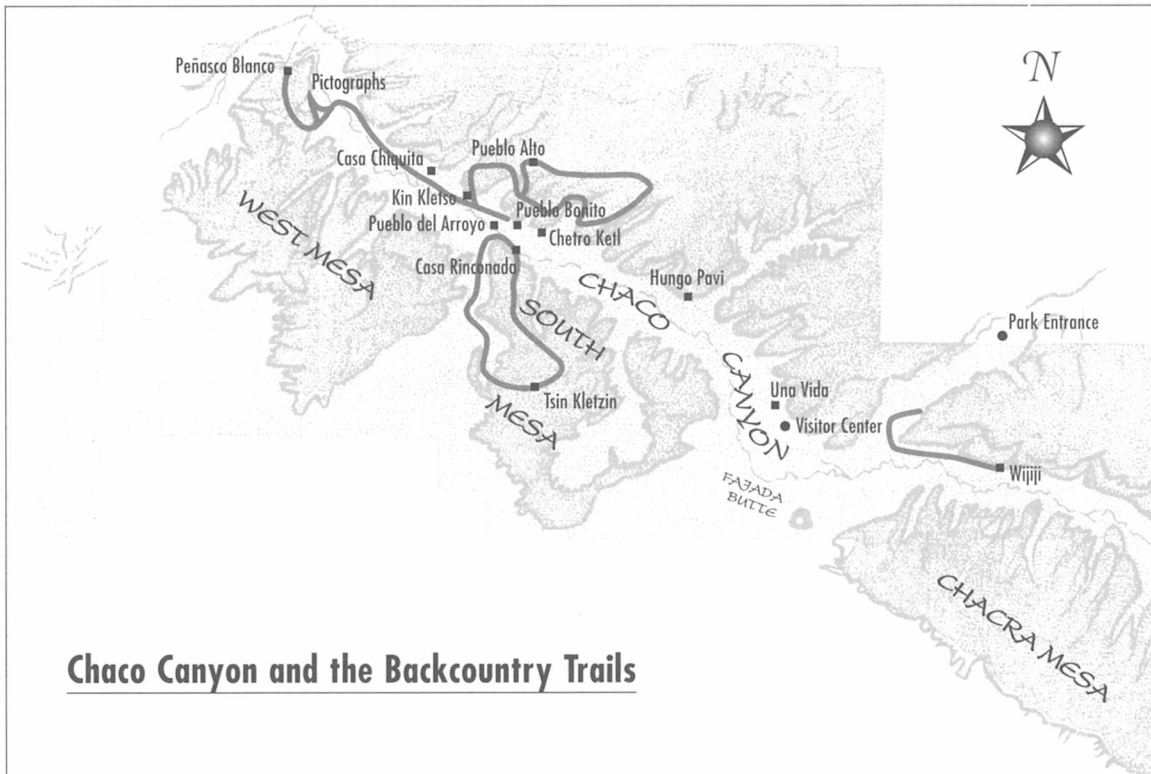
BACKCOUNTRY
TRAIL GUIDE

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



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INTRODUCTION

The backcountry hiking trails of Chaco Culture National Historical Park provide park visitors with a rare opportunity to experience the present-day solitude and sweeping vistas of the canyon and mesa landscape. Visitors will understand the scope and extent of the Chaco world, through impressive great houses, roads, and features in an undeveloped setting.

Chaco Culture National Historical Park preserves a very special chapter in human history, and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, joining a select list of protected areas “whose outstanding natural and cultural resources form the common inheritance of all mankind.”

We hope that you will find meaning, value, and inspiration in visiting, protecting, and preserving the legacy of Chacoan Culture, along with evidence of Archaic, Basketmaker, Pueblo, Navajo, and European-American cultures also found in the park.

THE PAST IS IN YOUR HANDS

Cultural resources are fragile, and require special concerns when we visit them. Every step we take in an archeological site has some impact upon that site. When we walk on centuries-old walls, our footsteps dislodge stones and mortar, hasten the effects of erosion, and lead to the destruction of those walls. The cumulative impacts of 100,000 visitors each year can have a drastic effect on these sites. Once a site is impacted, it is forever altered.

- Please walk only on designated trails in order to lessen our impacts.
- Do not walk or climb on the fragile walls. This will speed their deterioration.
- The sites are sacred to the Hopi, the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico, the Navajo, as well as to neighboring tribes.
- Enter with respect.

WHY NOT TAKE JUST ONE POTSDHERD?

It may seem harmless to take home a piece of pottery, but the effect of thousands of visitors doing this every year will rob present and future generations of a significant part of their heritage. Visitors to Chaco will never again see the sherds that you take. That sherd may be an important clue to enable archeologists to better understand our past and who we are as people. American Indians believe that artifacts belong where they were left centuries before. They believe that sherds are an important part of their people's history and cultural legacy. Will that sherd still have meaning for you years from now, out of its context? Why not instead take a photo of the sherd, sketch the designs, or find a modern replica of the vessel?

The artifacts, plants, animals, and rocks are protected in all national parks. *The Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979* states that it is "illegal to excavate, remove, damage, alter or deface any archeological resources." Stiff penalties accompany the law (up to \$250,000 in fines and 2 years in jail) and **are strictly enforced in this park**. You may examine artifacts in place, but please leave them where you find them.

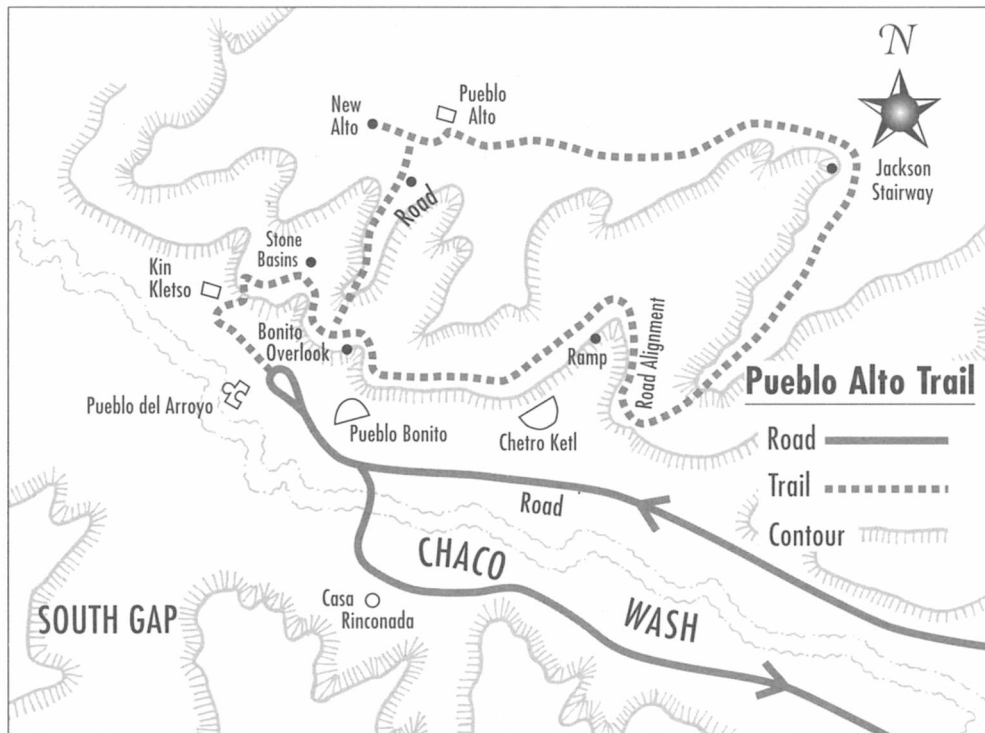
HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Visitor safety and the preservation of the cultural and natural resources found here at Chaco Canyon is every visitor's responsibility. Please do your part, and abide by the following guidelines:

- Permits are required for all backcountry trails. They are free, and are available at the visitor center or from a ranger.
- The trails are open from sunrise to sunset. Hikers must be back at their vehicles by sunset. There is no overnight camping, except in Gallo Campground.
- The trails are marked by cairns (stacked piles of rocks), and, in some areas, by upright wooden posts. If you lose the trail, go back to the previous cairn or post and scan the landscape

for the next one. Walk on sandstone (slickrock) as much as possible to avoid damaging the fragile plant cover, soft desert soils, and microbiotic crusts (communities of algae, mosses, and lichens).

- Be prepared for high-desert hiking at elevations of 6,200 to 6,600 feet. Temperatures can reach 100°F in the summer. Sudden summer thunderstorms can bring soaking rain and drastically falling temperatures. Watch for—and avoid—prairie rattlesnakes from April to October. Hiking boots are recommended. Carry—and drink—plenty of water to prevent dehydration and heat exhaustion.
- Pets are allowed on the backcountry hiking trails as long as they remain on a leash that is no longer than 6 feet. Please keep them from entering the sites, and carry out all pet waste.
- Bubonic plague and Hantavirus exist in northern New Mexico. Rodents are the most common carriers. Keep yourself and your pets away from their burrows and nests as a reasonable precaution.
- Please pack out all your trash, including organic material like apple cores, banana and orange peels, which take years, or even decades, to break down in this arid climate.



ALTO MESA TRAIL

TRAILHEAD: Pueblo del Arroyo (Spanish for “Village by the Wash”) parking area

DISTANCE: Alto Mesa Loop: 5.4 miles (8.7 km) roundtrip

Pueblo Bonito Overlook: 1.6 miles (2.6 km) roundtrip

Pueblo Alto Complex: 3.2 miles (5.2 km) roundtrip

ELEVATION GAIN: 350 feet (107 m)

TIME: 3 to 4 hours to complete the entire Alto Mesa Trail

NOTE: This trail provides overlook views of Pueblo Bonito and the other canyon great houses (monumental public buildings), passes by Chacoan stairs and roads, affords panoramic views of the San Juan Basin, and provides an introduction to the scope of the Chaco world.

Begin at the Pueblo del Arroyo parking lot, follow the trail to Kin Kletso, and look for the Alto Mesa Trail sign between the site and the cliff. The trail ascends the rocky slope to a break in the cliff face, where a natural passageway leads through the crevice to the cliff top.

CHACOAN ACCESS

As you climb through the passageway to the mesa top, you will walk in the footsteps of the Chacoan people, who traveled to and from the great houses of Chaco Canyon along this same route. Throughout the canyon, the people utilized similar natural passageways to connect the great houses by the straight alignments of Chacoan roads. When there were no natural breaks in the cliffs, the people often constructed pecked stone stairs and masonry steps, erected ladders, or built massive ramps with masonry, dirt, and wood to access the mesa top and continue the road alignments to their destinations.

Once you are on top, cairns (piles of stacked rocks) mark the trail. Much of this trail follows the cliff edge. Be careful.

PECKED BASINS

Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile along the mesa top, you'll encounter two small, round basins carved into bedrock. The Chacoans carved many such basins along cliff edges throughout the canyon. Most are round; some are rectangular. They are frequently located on sandstone benches. Some are isolated, but most are found inside stone circles.

TERRACES

Look up at the high sandstone cliffs to the north. A series of terraces can be seen along the ledge below the upper reddish cliffs. These terraces are dry-laid (without mortar), about 6 feet (2 m) tall, and extend for over 1 mile (1.6 km). Some researchers believe that these terraces were associated with agriculture and erosion control, trapping soil and water as they poured over the cliffs during thunderstorms. Other researchers believe that the terraces connected to the Chacoan roads, and were constructed in a similar manner.

STONE CIRCLES

Along these sandstone benches, above the canyon floor, round or oblong rings of rocks 25 to 100 feet (8 to 30 m) in diameter are found. Archeologists refer to these as "stone circles," and speculate that they were used for ceremony. The stone circles always contain pecked basins, and are in view of great kivas and great houses.

PUEBLO BONITO OVERLOOK

This overlook provides an excellent view of this great house, which was placed directly in the center of the Chacoan world. Why did the Chaco people choose this site? Practical reasons such as farming, water, or resources were probably not the explanation. The answer may be found in the sacredness of

this area, which endures in the lives, religion, and history of many indigenous descendants today.

The geometry, symmetry, and massive size of Pueblo Bonito are apparent from the overlook. The plaza area is divided in half by room blocks that are aligned to true north. Other wall alignments suggest integration of the building with astronomical events such as solstices and lunar standstills (18.6 year cycles), as well as with other great houses throughout the canyon.

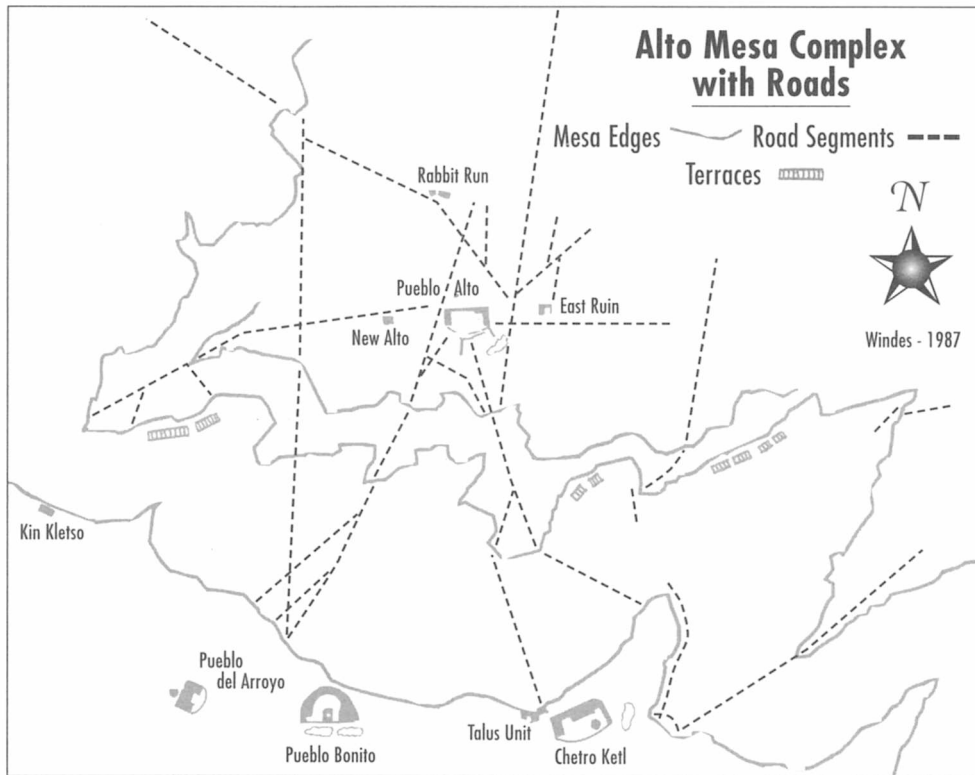
The site was designed and planned from the beginning. The builders maintained the original design plan over a 300-year period (A.D. 850 to 1150). Massive blocks of rooms and kivas were erected during several major building episodes, until the site assumed the configuration we see today. Evidence suggests that this site had a very small resident population. Pueblo Bonito may have drawn people to the area from distant communities to participate in annual events, ceremonies, and trading.

Chacoan roads converged on this site from all directions. Although engineered, surveyed, and carefully constructed, these road segments were never completely linked. Some segments ended at natural landscape features. Most are developed as they approach great houses, and may have served as architectural elements. These roads may have served to symbolically connect Chaco to other communities, and to sacred mesas, lakes, and mountains. The roads may have been sacred corridors, where pilgrims traveled for ceremonies at the center of the Chacoan world.

Looking across the canyon, the break in the mesas is called South Gap. Several roads entered the canyon through this natural feature, and arrived at the core area of Chaco Culture—centered at Pueblo Bonito and the other integrated great houses of Chaco Canyon.

If you are hiking the entire loop trail, return to the trail junction and follow the sign to the Pueblo Alto Complex, located $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (1.2 km) ahead to the north.

Alto Mesa Complex with Roads



CHACOAN STEPS

One of several Chacoan roads leading from the Pueblo Bonito area to Pueblo Alto crosses the trail at this point. The Chacoans constructed masonry steps at this point to climb the sandstone bench. The steps were excavated in 1971 to reveal this feature. Please do not walk on the steps.

The rocks above this area are covered with modern graffiti. This is an example of how vandalism and desecration of cultural sites forever alters these important places. Please do your part to preserve the past.

Looking back, you may notice a slight depression in the sand dune below. This is the remnant of the Chacoan road.

CHACOAN ROAD

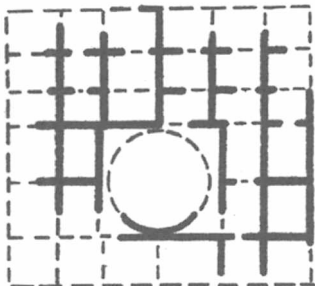
In 1971, archeologists cleared a segment of Chacoan road that connected Pueblo Bonito and Pueblo Alto. They removed the accumulation of wind-blown sand to reveal the Chacoan road features. This exposed segment now shows Chacoan engineering—rocks cleared away from the road surface and placed along the sides of the road to form a “curbing” or berm. Please help preserve this unique, fragile feature by staying on the designated trail and behind the barricade.

PUEBLO ALTO COMPLEX

The Pueblo Alto Complex consists of Pueblo Alto, New Alto, East Ruin, and Rabbit Ruin. The great house of Pueblo Alto is the largest structure in the complex, and the only one that has been excavated (partially). Between 1976 and 1979, National Park Service archeologists tested sections of Pueblo Alto, excavating portions of the plaza and 14 rooms, leaving 90 percent of the site undisturbed. The findings of the investigations dramatically changed our interpretation of Chaco Culture.

NEW ALTO

Built around A.D. 1100, New Alto is contemporary with the later occupation of Pueblo Alto, however, its architectural style differs. It is a two-story McElmo-style building. This later style of construction uses a compact Chacoan great house plan with a different type of masonry (pecked blocks of massive light-colored sandstone). Smaller than Pueblo Alto, New Alto has 58 first- and second-story rooms arranged symmetrically and compactly around a kiva. It has been stabilized but not excavated.



New Alto Layout

THE SACRED LANDSCAPE

Pueblo Alto is located at 6,440 feet (1,963 m) in elevation. The view provides a panorama of landscape features: the Jemez Mountains to the east; the great house Tsin Kletzin on South Mesa; Hosta Butte and Mount Taylor to the south; the Chuska Mountains to the west; and Huerfano Mesa and the San Juan and La Plata Mountains to the north. These areas are considered sacred to many of the indigenous cultures of the Southwest. Archeologists believe that the Chacoans used many of the prominent mesas, buttes, and mountains for signaling stations. The people could have communicated great distances instantly—as far away as Mesa Verde and Chimney Rock, in Colorado—using fires or reflectors.

THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

Roads from the core area of Chetro Ketl, Pueblo Bonito, and Peñasco Blanco intersect at Pueblo Alto. There are dozens of roads that run northward from Pueblo Alto, including the Great North Road. This road is aligned within one degree of true

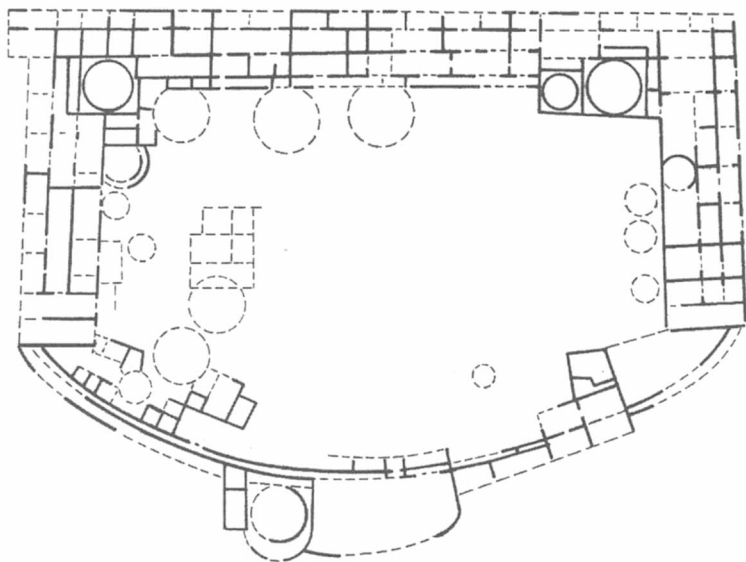
(celestial) north, and appears to terminate at Kutz Canyon just west of Angel Peak, about 40 miles (64 km) away. Some evidence suggests that other road segments extend north from Kutz Canyon to the great houses of Aztec and Salmon, and Chimney Rock.

By studying low-angle aerial photographs, researchers have discovered many road segments, which have been later verified by ground surveys. The plants growing in prehistoric roads are clues, as are constructed features such as ramps, stairs, and berms (mounded earth and rocks piled along the sides of roads). Unusually straight alignments of slightly depressed land can often be seen on the landscape. Pieces of broken pots are sometimes found along the roadways; however, there is very little artifactual evidence associated with them. Most Chacoan buildings have road segments radiating out from them or connecting them to other buildings. To date, more than 400 miles (640 km) of Chacoan road segments have been identified.

PUEBLO ALTO

The first construction phase at Pueblo Alto paralleled the construction at Chetro Ketl, beginning between A.D. 1020 and 1060. Three rows of rooms in the northern section were built first, where the core-and-veneer construction (walls with a rock and mud center, with carefully selected facing stones on each side) is still visible. During subsequent building stages the east and west wings were added, as well as several “housed-kivas” (round subterranean rooms built within square enclosures). As with other great houses, the last major addition was an arc of rooms to enclose the south-facing plaza. Pueblo Alto shares the size and architectural plan typical of other great houses in Chaco Canyon, but, unlike most great houses, it was only one story high with unusually high ceilings (14 feet/4.3 m).

Less than 5 percent of all rooms show evidence of habitation. The fire hearths excavated in Pueblo Alto were shallow



Pueblo Alto Layout

heating pits, showing temporary use—not the substantial stone-lined hearths typically found in habitation rooms. This suggests that Pueblo Alto may have held a small core population, whose numbers increased seasonally. There is additional evidence from the Pueblo Alto midden (sacred refuse area) that supports this theory.

Pueblo Alto's midden (also an architectural mound) is huge—one of the largest found in Chaco. This usually indicates a long-term year-round occupation, but the stratigraphy (layering) of this midden indicates intermittent rather than continuous deposits. When archeologically tested, enormous quantities of broken pottery and animal bone were found. The midden was so remarkable that archeologists suggested Pueblo Alto was used for ceremonies that included feasting and the ritualized

breaking of pots (a modern Pueblo practice for presenting offerings). Many modern Pueblo people hold middens sacred. They are considered places where living things return to the earth and complete their natural cycles. **Do not enter this area.**

JACKSON STAIRWAY

The trail leads east along the top of Alto Mesa, and passes above the Jackson Stairway—named for William Henry Jackson, the photographer who accompanied the U.S. Geological Survey of 1877. This is the most impressive stairway in Chaco Canyon. The wide, deep steps are carved into the sheer cliff at the head of this *rincon* (box canyon), and provided access from the canyon floor to the mesa top. The stairs connected Chetro Ketl and other canyon great houses with more distant communities to the northeast. **Do not climb the Jackson Stairway.** The stairs are fragile, as well as dangerous.

From the Jackson Stairway the trail descends south toward the canyon floor, passing above Chetro Ketl.

CHACOAN ROAD SEGMENT

Evidence of Chacoan roadways can be seen along this trail. This includes areas where rocks have been cleared to the left side of the slickrock bench. These rocks are the remains of masonry berms that were constructed as curbing along the sides of the roads.

RAMP

As you approach the head of the side canyon, look across to see the remains of a constructed ramp—part of the road segment that connected Chetro Ketl to the Jackson Stairway and other communities. The ramp consists of a dirt mound, stabilized with masonry walls to create a ramp structure that permitted access to the cliff top.

CHETRO KETL OVERLOOK

This great house is very different from Pueblo Bonito in design, and possibly in function. Some archeologists believe that each of the great houses played a different role in the Chacoan culture, although all were integrated. The Hopi, the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico, and the Navajo have stated that their oral histories link different clans to different great houses.

Chetro Ketl covers a large surface area (3 acres/1.2 ha). The plaza area sits more than 12 feet (3.7 m) above the surrounding valley floor. The Chacoans constructed this plaza by hauling tons of dirt and rock to create an artificially raised platform. Other impressive features at this site include an elevated kiva, a great kiva, and a colonnade wall that may reflect Mexican influences.

After you leave the Chetro Ketl Overlook, the trail follows the sandstone bench back to the Pueblo Bonito Overlook and the return trail to the trailhead.

You began your walk in the center of the Chacoan world, walked in the paths of the Chacoans, saw a glimpse of the extent of the Chacoan world, and visited remnants of this remarkable world. The work and the vision of the Chacoans continue to touch us today in diverse ways: in architecture, in art, in agriculture, in astronomy, and in history. The cultural traditions that developed in Chaco Canyon a thousand years ago still live on in the American Indian descendants today. We ask your help to protect, preserve, and honor these places so they will always remain special places of inspiration for all the people of the world.

PEÑASCO BLANCO TRAIL

(Spanish for “White Rock Point”)

TRAILHEAD: Pueblo del Arroyo (Spanish for “Village by the Wash”)

DISTANCE: Peñasco Blanco Loop & Pictograph Panel 6.4 miles (10.3 km) roundtrip

ELEVATION GAIN: 150 feet (45 m)

TIME: 4 to 5 hours to visit Peñasco Blanco and return

NOTE: This, the longest backcountry trail, is relatively level and provides many opportunities to view how several cultures have used the canyon and left their mark upon it. Numerous Chacoan and Navajo petroglyph symbols and historic European-American messages are found along the way. Peñasco Blanco is an unexcavated great house, unique in design, and connected to several Chacoan roads to the west.

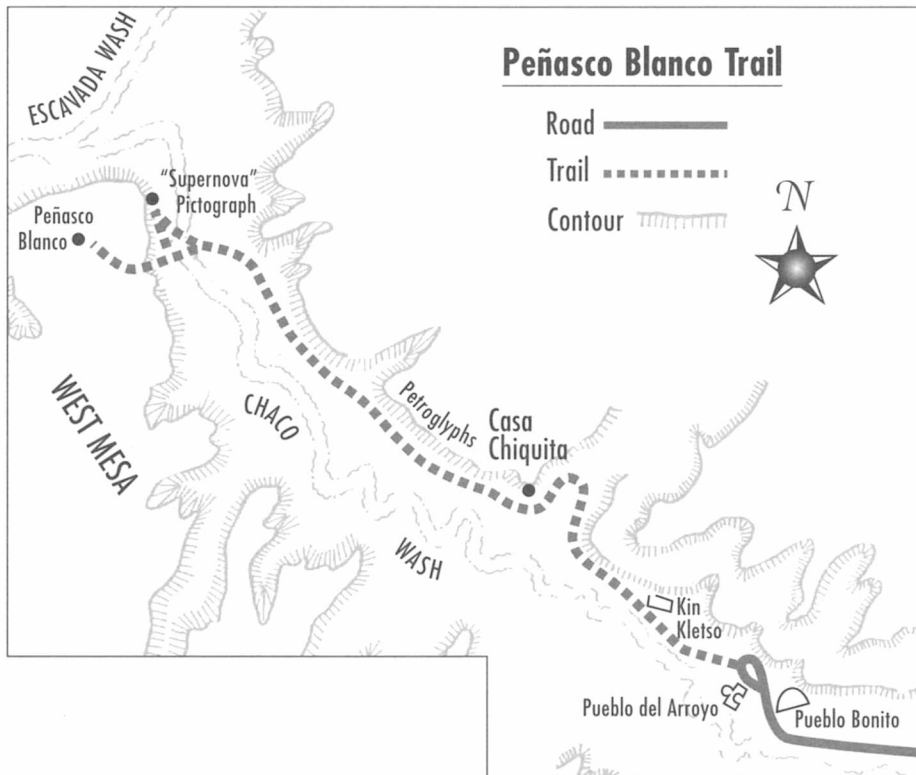
Begin at the Pueblo del Arroyo parking lot, follow the trail past Kin Kletso.

CASA CHIQUITA

One mile from the trailhead is Casa Chiquita, a compact great house dating to the A.D. 1060s—possibly earlier—and thought to have been built in one construction episode. This site features a nearly square block of rooms surrounding an elevated kiva. The entire site was built into and on top of a natural hillside.

This great house shares features in common with nearby Kin Kletso. Both sites are built in the McElmo style. This later style of construction uses the Chacoan great house plan with a modified type of masonry (pecked blocks of massive light-colored sandstone). Both sites also feature one-story high walls that run parallel to the south walls. This narrow wall space was divided into several rectangular rooms about 2 feet wide (.6 m) and 4.5 feet (1.5 m) long, running along the front of the building.

Peñasco Blanco Trail



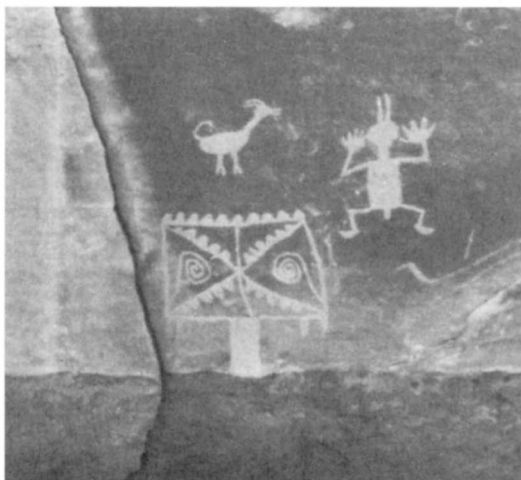
As you walk beyond Casa Chiquita, the walls of Peñasco Blanco are visible on the western horizon.

Beyond Casa Chiquita, the trail parallels an historic Navajo wagon road along the Chaco Wash that leads to the Tsaya Trading Post (near Lake Valley), and then north to the Hatch Brothers Trading Post at Waterflow (on the San Juan River, west of Farmington). This road was improved around the turn of the century, when Richard and Marietta Wetherill operated the Pueblo Bonito Trading Post and regular shipments of goods entered and left the canyon.

PETROGLYPHS

The Peñasco Blanco trail passes by the largest concentration of petroglyphs (rock carvings) in Chaco Canyon. Pecked, or carved, into the canyon wall, these images include Chacoan, Navajo, and European-American engravings. Please do not touch these petroglyphs or add to them. Touching dislodges sand grains, and skin oils stain the images. Defacing the panels changes

Petroglyphs along the Penasco Blanco trail, about 300 feet (91 m) beyond Casa Chiquita and 30 feet (9 meters) up the canyon wall.



them and destroys their meaning forever. These expressions represent over a thousand years of human occupation here in Chaco. Please help preserve them for future generations.

About 300 feet (91 m) beyond Casa Chiquita, look for a particularly well-preserved Chacoan petroglyph panel, 30 feet (9 m) up the canyon wall. It includes a human figure, a bighorn sheep, and a rectangular geometric design. Just below it and to the right, look for another finely pecked mountain sheep, two connecting spirals, and a series of pecked rectangles.

The study of these images by archeologists reveals that certain images and styles are associated with different cultural areas and regions, as well as periods of time. Many symbols and images were widespread in their distribution, indicating region-wide visual languages that still have significance today.

Hopi and Pueblo Indian descendants often recognize the Chacoan images as meaningful symbols. Some petroglyphs represent clan symbols, which can affirm ancient and ongoing associations to the sites, and mark the paths of the clans' sacred migrations.

Navajo petroglyphs include lightly incised depictions of social gatherings and dances, the holy people, and scenes of horse riders, buildings, trains, and automobiles.

Some carved historic messages ("Jean, I cannot get no feed I cannot wait for you") reveal poignant moments of human drama from the past. Other inscriptions document early visits to Chaco by travelers, traders, sheepherders, archeologists, and survey parties.

CHACO WASH

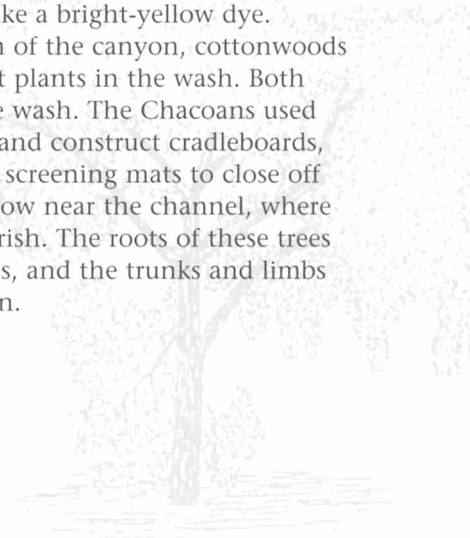
The wash has always been a lifeline for the people and wildlife that have settled the canyon, but its appearance has changed dramatically in historic times. The present-day steep embankments and deep gully have existed only since the late 1800s.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, huge herds of sheep and cattle were moved from Chama, New Mexico into the Chaco

area for winter grazing. The effects of grazing so much livestock resulted in the loss of grasses and groundcover, which slow erosion. Without the protective blanket of vegetation, spring winds stripped off the topsoil. Violent summer thunderstorms cut channels deeper and deeper into the stream beds, and hastened the development of the present-day steep walls and downcut arroyo (gully) in Chaco Wash. The loss of topsoil and the dropping of the groundwater table left behind the highly alkaline soils that support the hardy greasewood and saltbush. In 1947, the NPS fenced the park to excluded grazing, and native grasses and shrubs have returned.

Greasewood and four-wing saltbush now dominate the vegetation on the canyon floor. While most of the plants you see today were also present in Chacoan times, the distribution of these native species may have been drastically altered by historic livestock grazing activities. Some native plants have spread far beyond their former range, and many have been reduced in number or eliminated from the natural scene. The Chacoans used saltbush to make planting and digging sticks and for firewood, and the seeds were eaten. Saltbush is used today by Navajo weavers to make a bright-yellow dye.

During Chacoan occupation of the canyon, cottonwoods and willows were the dominant plants in the wash. Both species are still found along the wash. The Chacoans used willow to weave sleeping mats and construct cradleboards, for prayer sticks (*pahos*), and as screening mats to close off doorways. Cottonwood trees grow near the channel, where they find enough water to flourish. The roots of these trees were used for carvings and tools, and the trunks and limbs were used in house construction.



Today tamarisk (salt cedar) dominates the wash. This salt-tolerant shrub is an invasive non-native species common along drainages throughout the Southwest. The fast-growing plant from the Near East was planted in the 1930s to control erosion brought on by 50 years of heavy grazing. While tamarisk helped stabilize drainages, it crowded out native species, because its deep taproot soaks up the majority of the water. The dense thickets of tamarisk inhibit the stream channels from meandering back and forth, and the channels become entrenched. The downcutting of the wash results in steep-walled gullies and the lowering of the groundwater table. Tamarisk is now considered to be a major invasive pest on western waterways.

CHACOAN DAM

The Chaco Wash meets the wide and sandy Escavada Wash ½-mile downstream and the two join to become the Chaco River. Marietta Wetherill stated that near this confluence, a Chacoan masonry dam was occasionally visible at the turn of the century. When the Escavada Wash flooded, the dam was uncovered, until windblown sand once again buried the structure. Perhaps the flat bottomlands in this area were once extensively farmed by the Chacoans.

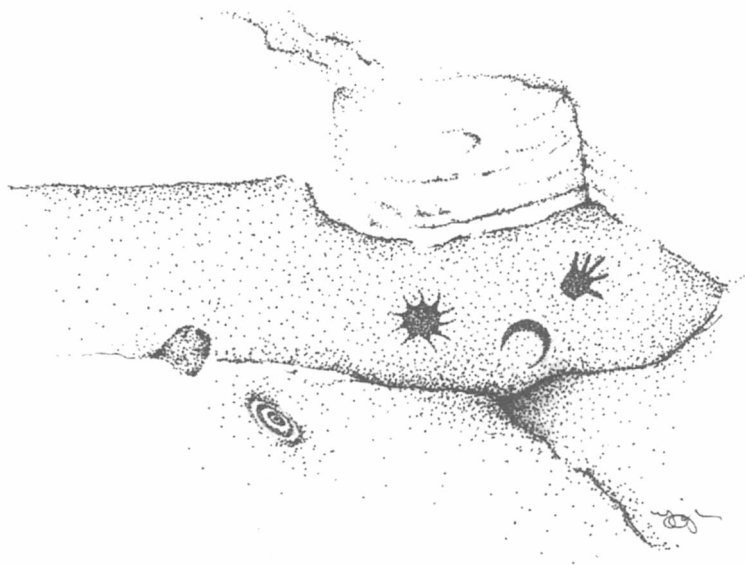
Geologists note that a naturally occurring sand dune near the confluence may have dammed the Chaco Wash in the past. The dam may have created a lake and allowed the downcut walls of the wash to fill in upstream. When the stream flow breached the dam, the lake would have drained. This may have happened on several occasions. The Chacoans may have incorporated their masonry dam into the sand dune. They may have tried to actively manage the dune/dam, the filling and draining of the lake, and the filling and downcutting of the wash. Large Chacoan-constructed dams, ditches, and water-control devices are found throughout the canyon.

To go directly to Peñasco Blanco, follow the trail that crosses the wash. If the wash is flowing, do not cross it. The banks can be very muddy and slippery.

“SUPERNOVA” PICTOGRAPH (*Rock Painting*)

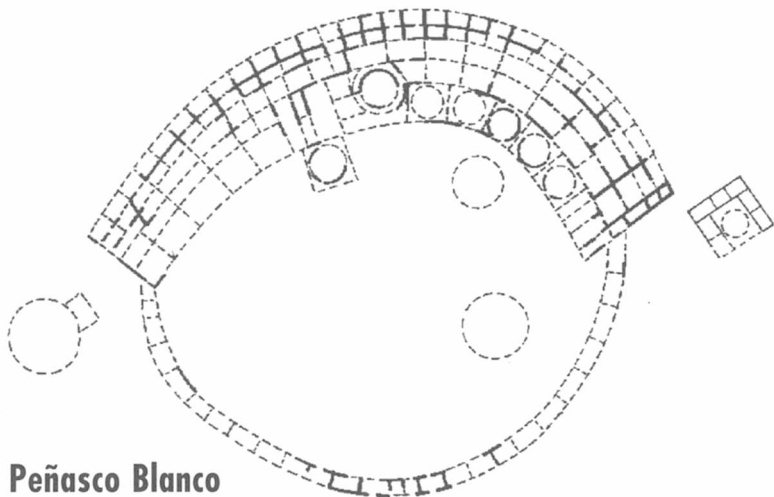
To visit the pictographs, take the trail to the right before crossing the wash. Follow the cairns for approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile and you will reach a rock barrier and shallow overhang along the cliff wall with the pictographs and some faint petroglyphs.

Directly above these images, on the ceiling of the overhang, is a concentric circle painted in red and yellow, along with paintings interpreted as a star, a crescent moon, and a human hand. In A.D. 1054, Chinese and Japanese astronomers recorded a supernova, or exploding star, the remains of which we call the Crab Nebula. This supernova lighted the night sky for a



month, and was visible in the daytime throughout the world. Did Chacoan sky-watchers also record the supernova? Some researchers believe this pictograph may depict that event.

To return to the main trail, follow the trail along the base of the cliff to the junction of the trail to Peñasco Blanco.



Peñasco Blanco Layout

PEÑASCO BLANCO

When you enter the site, please walk only on designated trails to lessen impacts on this fragile site. **Do not enter the midden area.** This fragile area is easily impacted by foot traffic.

Navajo names for Peñasco Blanco translate to “house around which the wash bends” and “table-land-tapering-to-a-point house.” These names aptly describe the location of the great house on the northern extension of West Mesa overlooking the confluence of the Chaco Wash and the Escavada Wash.

The design of Peñasco Blanco is unique. Unlike any other Chacoan great house, this site has an oval plan. The site was constructed from A.D. 850 to 1130, approximately paralleling the construction and use of Pueblo Bonito and Una Vida. All three sites are located along an 8-mile-long axis line and line of sight. Peñasco Blanco is at the connecting point for several major Chacoan roads at the western entrance to Chaco Canyon. Una Vida is located at the terminus of the major roads at the eastern entrance to the canyon. Pueblo Bonito is at the center axis, where the north-south roads and the east-west roads converged.

Two great kivas are located within the unique oval plan of the enclosed plaza, and two more great kivas are found outside the plaza. The great kiva on the southwest is adjacent to an easily seen Chacoan road segment that is 30 feet (9.1 m) wide. The other kiva is located to the north.

A unique grouping of rooms was constructed outside the plaza, atop a massive artificially constructed platform. The platform is much larger than necessary to accommodate the small grouping of rooms and a kiva. These rooms are built in the later McElmo-style of masonry, similar to Casa Chiquita, Kin Kletso, and other later sites. Chacoan construction often involved the creation of earthen mounds and elevated platforms associated with the great houses. The Chacoans were concerned with large-scale engineering, and with molding their vision of the world onto the landscape they inhabited.

At the turn of the century, Richard Wetherill and Navajo workers searched some rooms looking for turquoise, but Peñasco Blanco remains essentially unexcavated. Peñasco Blanco will not be excavated for the foreseeable future for several reasons: Leaving sites in their natural states of preservation, covered with blown sand and native vegetation, is the best means of preserving them. Removing the sand and clearing the rooms expose the walls to rain and freeze-thaw cycles and hastens

their destruction. They also create a difficult, costly, and ongoing maintenance problem of preserving the exposed walls. An important concern is the belief of many American Indians that these sites should be left to naturally return to the earth without being disturbed.

The Chacoan builders of Peñasco Blanco and the other great houses left their unique mark upon the landscape. Chacoan walls have fallen; sand and plants have covered over the sites, and they now blend into the landscape. The abandoned wagon roads of the Navajos and traders are slowly merging into the landscape. Native grasses and shrubs are returning to the former rangeland.

Today we come to Chaco Canyon to learn about our shared past and to honor the spirit and vision of the Chacoans, the Navajos, and the European-American settlers who came here to live. We ask you to help in the efforts to preserve these special places for all time.

SOUTH MESA TRAIL

TRAILHEAD: Casa Rinconada (Spanish for “Corner House”)

Trail at Stop No. 10

DISTANCE: 4.1 miles (6.6 km) roundtrip

ELEVATION GAIN: 500 feet (152 m)

TIME: 3 to 4 hours roundtrip

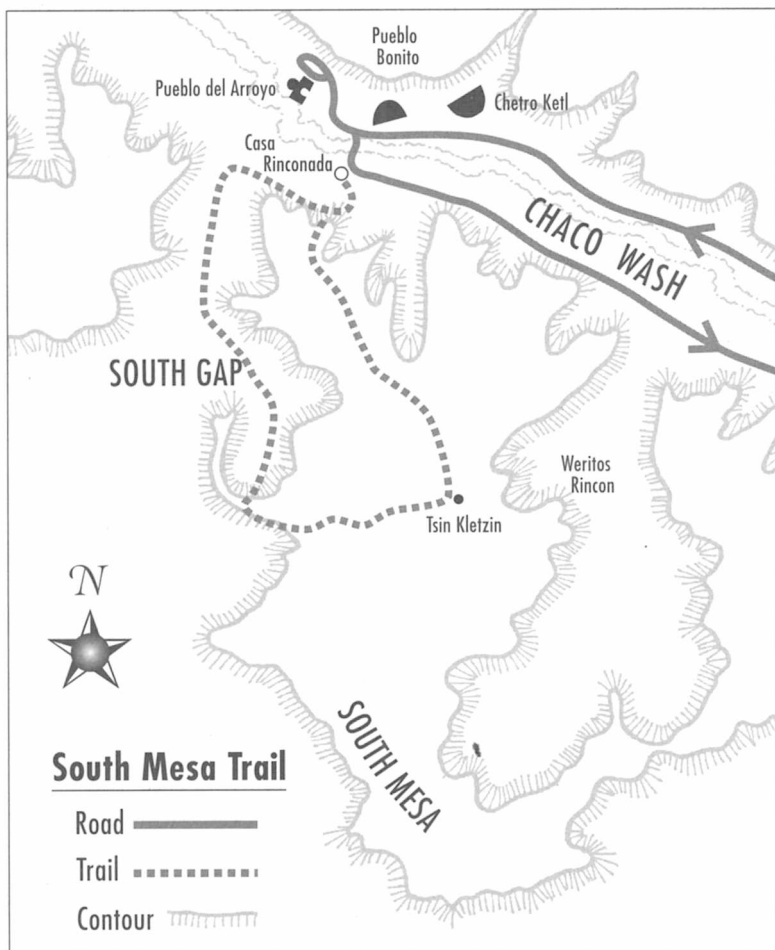
NOTE: This trail leaves from Casa Rinconada, climbs to a high point on South Mesa, and leads to the great house Tsin Kletzin (Navajo for “black wood” or “charcoal house”). Spectacular views of the landscape are visible at the site. The loop trail descends into South Gap, follows the Chacoan South Roads, re-entering the canyon near Casa Rinconada.

The trail begins at Stop No. 10 on the Casa Rinconada Trail, and climbs up the rocky slope of South Mesa.

On the way up, there are great views of the canyon and the hub of the Chacoan world: Pueblo Bonito, Pueblo del Arroyo, and Chetro Ketl on the north side of the canyon; and directly below, Casa Rinconada. From most points along the trail you can see the high walls of New Alto silhouetted on the northern horizon, and just beside it, the long, low mound of Pueblo Alto.

THE SACRED LANDSCAPE

Near Tsin Kletzin, the view broadens to a panorama of the San Juan Basin. This landscape was an integral part of the Chacoan world, and traditional American Indian descendants still utilize the ancient sacred shrines scattered through the mountains, canyons, and mesas of the landscape. The events in the creation stories of the Pueblo, Navajo, and Ute people are set within this landscape—their sacred homelands.



Looking to the northwest, the long dark feature on the horizon is the Chuska Mountains. These mountains run north and south. They separate the San Juan Basin from Canyon de Chelly and the Hopi Mesas to the west. The mountains are a likely source for some of the ponderosa pine logs used by the Chacoans to roof their rooms and kivas. The trees appear to have been cut on logging expeditions. The cut trees were left to dry out and reduce their weight; the bark was peeled off. The logs were then carried to Chaco Canyon and other Chacoan areas. More than 225,000 logs were used at Chaco.

On the far northern horizon, the peaks of the San Juan Mountains and La Plata Mountains are visible. The mountains are sacred to the Pueblo, Navajo, and Ute people. Hesperus Peak in the San Juan Mountains is one of the Four Sacred Mountains of the Navajo people. Dinétah (the Navajo homeland) is located to the northeast.

The mesa to the northeast capped by three small buttes is named Huerfano (Spanish for “orphan”) Mesa. The Navajo name for Huerfano Mesa is *Dzilh-na-o-dith-hle*, “revolving mountain,” because the mountain appears the same when viewed from any direction. The views atop this mesa offer spectacular lines of sight to Tsin Kletzin to the south and the Mesa Verde region to the north. Some archeologists believe that shrines atop Huerfano Mesa are signaling stations. Communications by fires or reflectors would have connected Chaco to distant areas and communities. Messages could have been quickly relayed to and from the great houses in Chaco Canyon.

TSIN KLETZIN

Several prehistoric roads connect Tsin Kletzin to the core canyon area. One appears to lead to a stairway just east of Casa Rinconada, which can be seen from the “Stairway” pullout on the loop drive, shortly after you leave the Casa Rinconada parking lot.

Tsin Kletzin contained more than 70 rooms. Three roof beams provided tree-cutting dates near A.D.

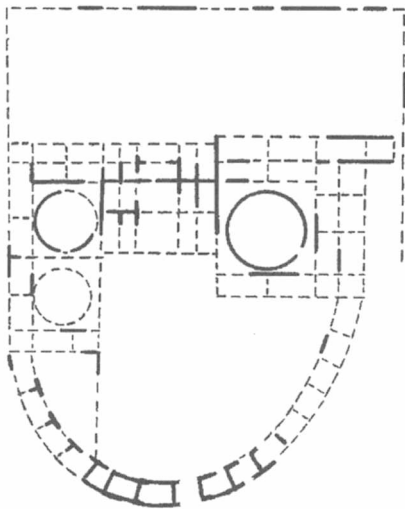
1112. The architectural plan, with its D shape, row of rectangular back rooms, and enclosed plaza, is like most great house constructions in the late A.D. 1000s.

Typically, those buildings were built with the core-and-veneer masonry (walls with a rock and mortar center, with carefully selected facing stones on each side) used at Pueblo Bonito, Una Vida, and other great houses. At Tsin

Kletzin, the great house plan was combined with a later masonry style (McElmo). The more readily available, light-colored sandstone blocks became the norm. The large rocks were quarried, pecked, shaped, and sanded. Other structures using this new masonry style include New Alto, Kin Kletso, and Casa Chiquita.

Some archeologists suggest that McElmo great houses were built by northern immigrants from the Mesa Verde and the Montezuma Valley areas. Others suggest that the Chacoans may have evolved the style themselves, incorporating influences and ideas from those areas.

Most Chacoan architecture is thought to be purposely positioned to connect one building to another building, to important places in the landscape, and to celestial events (solstices and lunar standstills). Chacoans positioned many buildings



Tsin Kletzin Layout

along a straight line axis. A straight line (with a true north-south alignment) connects Pueblo Alto and Tsin Kletzin. This great house was likely built here because this location is an intersection of several lines of sight that were likely used in communication and ceremonies.

Archeologists have documented two kivas in the northern section. Both kivas are two stories tall and may have been purposely positioned in this location to afford views to neighboring great houses. The view from the roof of tallest kiva would have included Kin Klizhin to the west, Bis sa'ani to the northeast, Peñasco Blanco and Casa Chiquita to the northwest, and Kin Kletso and the Pueblo Alto complex to the north. The line of sight between these structures would have allowed for communications with torches or reflectors.

You will notice few pottery sherds. Tsin Kletzin, like all great houses, was probably not a permanent daily residence, but rather a form of “public architecture” that was used by nearby communities during times of ceremony, trading, and public gatherings. If you continue along the South Mesa, you will descend into the head of a small *rincon* (box canyon). The rock-walled trail leading to the canyon floor was built in the late 1800s as a livestock trail for sheep grazing.

THE SOUTH ROADS

After you hike the length of the *rincon*, you will enter South Gap. This natural geologic break separates South Mesa from West Mesa. The Chacoans used this natural passageway for the location of the South Roads, which departed from Pueblo del Arroyo and went some 30 miles (48.3 km) due south, leading to the Dunton Plateau near Hosta Butte. The straight alignment of these roads linked Chaco to distant communities and to landscape features. The study of the South Roads revealed that portions of the roads contained sections with four and eight parallel road segments. These features were not needed for

practical purposes like foot traffic or commerce. Some researchers believe the roads to be ceremonial corridors where pilgrims to Chaco would have traveled.

RE-ENTERING CHACO CANYON

As you return through South Gap and enter Chaco Canyon, you will soon see Pueblo Bonito and the other buildings emerging from the landscape. The setting has changed dramatically since the Chacoans occupied this canyon and vast areas of the Southwest.

In this core area of Chacoan culture, the people created a unique vision of their world, and molded and shaped that vision onto the landscape they inhabited. The great houses and the roads that once dominated their environment—today—blend into the landscape. These sites remind us that this was the focus of a remarkable culture for over 300 years.

Why did they choose this area? What forces unified the Chacoan world? Why did the people eventually change from the Chacoan ways? Scientific research may never be able to answer these questions. That knowledge lies with the Chacoan people themselves, and with their descendants—people who continue to honor the spirits of their ancestors at places like Chaco Canyon.

WIJIFI TRAIL

TRAILHEAD: Wijifi parking area is located just past the campground turn-off (1.25 miles/2 km) east from the visitor center.

DISTANCE: 3 miles (4.8 km) roundtrip

ELEVATION GAIN: Mostly level

TIME: 1½ to 2½ hours roundtrip

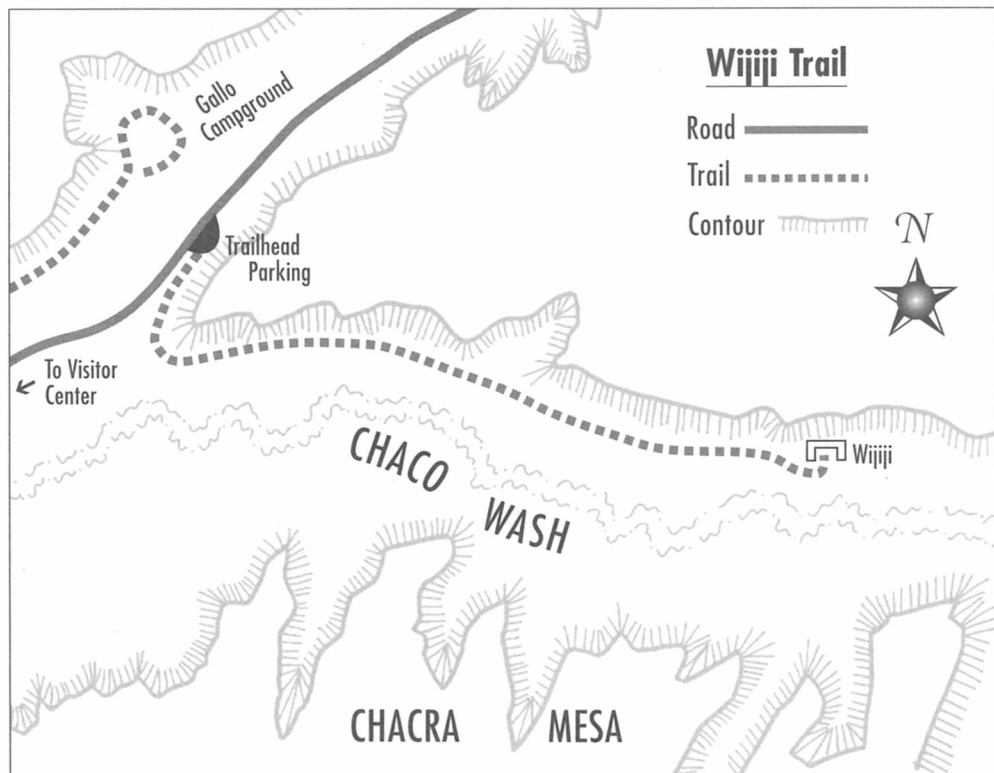
NOTE: This trail provides a short easy walk to a Chacoan great house, and it introduces the hiker to the historic Navajo settlement and culture of the area.

Wijifi (from the Navajo word “diwozhii,” or greasewood) is within the former home territory of the Chaco Navajos. Their oral history traditions include this great house, as well as others. Many of the currently used place names for the Chacoan sites, mesas, canyons, and landforms are derived from Navajo place names. Other areas with Spanish, English, or Puebloan place names have corresponding Navajo place names.

The Chaco Navajo have a rich oral history tradition that is usually shared in the winter months and is not generally written down. Many events in the Navajo creation story occurred in Chaco Canyon. Other Navajo stories talk about people, events, and the associations of the Chaco Navajos with the canyon and the cultural sites.

In the early 1700s, Pueblo neighbors took refuge with the Navajos for protection from Ute and Commanche raiding, and from Spanish reprisals following the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. During this time, many Pueblo and Navajo groups interacted and shared cultural traditions.

Archeologists have found the remains of many Navajo communities and wagon roads that date from the mid-1700s through the early 1900s atop Chacra Mesa (to the south), and throughout Chaco Canyon.



WIJJI

Wijiji exhibits the most perfect symmetry of all the great houses in Chaco Canyon. The building contained about 225 uniformly sized rooms, arranged compactly around two kivas. The rear row of rooms was three-stories high. Most of the other rooms were two-stories high, except the rooms surrounding the plaza, which were one-story high.

The very uniform masonry at Wijiji consists of the darker, thin-bedded sandstone that was quarried off the top of the cliffs behind this site. The walls were built upon a layer of clay and sand, not the normal foundation of stones. When wet, the clay expands and causes structural problems in walls and room corners. The builders did not effectively tie together many of the walls, and some have separated at the corners, threatening collapse.

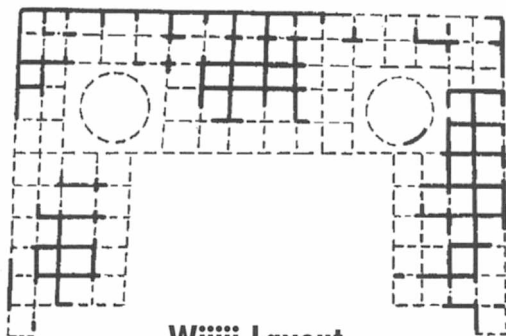
Because Wijiji is unexcavated, only one tree-ring date (A.D. 1110) has been recovered. The uniform construction at this great house suggests it was built in a single, brief construction surge between A.D. 1110 and 1115.

Several features typical of Chacoan great houses are missing at Wijiji. No great kiva has been found in the plaza, although one is located $\frac{1}{2}$

mile away. Wijiji

lacks a midden.

Another typical great house feature missing at Wijiji is the arch of connected rooms enclosing the plaza. Some archeologists suggest the people did not complete Wijiji,



Wijiji Layout

which would explain both the lack of refuse deposits and the failure to enclose the plaza.

The low earthen ridges that you encounter surrounding the site are modern, built throughout the canyon in the 1940s to divert runoff and slow erosion.

About 12 miles (19.3 km) east of Wijiji is another Chacoan great house—Pueblo Pintado (“painted village” in Spanish). This was the first Chacoan site seen by the expanding forces of the United States. American soldiers explored, mapped, and sketched the features of the Chaco region in 1849 as part of a campaign against the Navajo people. Lt. James Simpson, a topographer, documented this site and others in Chaco Canyon. He recorded local Navajo place names, and gave Spanish names to others.

Soon, the forces of the United States government would wage a devastating war on the Navajo people, relocating the people to Bosque Redondo at Fort Sumner on the plains of eastern New Mexico. A forced internment of 4 years ended in 1868 when the people were allowed to return to their homeland, and the Navajo Reservation was created.

Today, the Navajo people live on the land surrounding the park. They are park employees, neighbors, and park visitors. Chaco Culture National Historical Park celebrates their culture, contributions, and history.

For thousands of years, diverse people and cultures have been drawn to Chaco Canyon. Each culture found the canyon to be a special and important place for different reasons. Each culture learned from the past and built upon it. As you return to the beginning of your walk, we hope that you, too, have learned from the past, and from the wisdom of other cultures. We hope that you will share your desire to honor these places, protect them, and preserve them for all time.

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