



Foundation Document Overview

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument

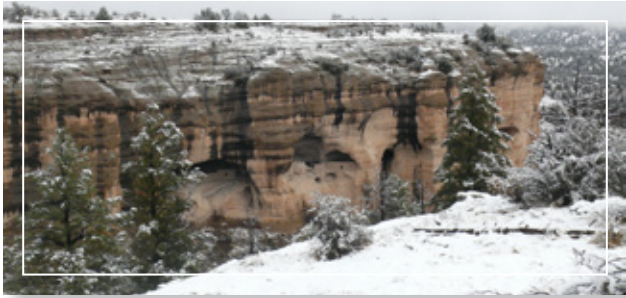
New Mexico



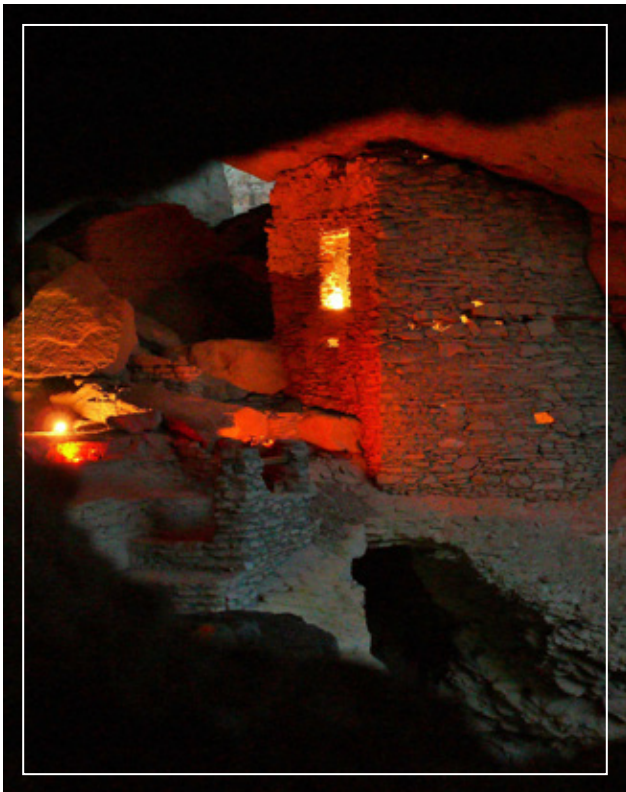
Contact Information

For more information about the *Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument Foundation Document*, contact: gicl_superintendent@nps.gov or (575) 536-9461 or write to:
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Purpose



As the only unit of the national park system dedicated to the Mogollon culture, the purpose of GILA CLIFF DWELLINGS NATIONAL MONUMENT is to protect, preserve, and interpret the cliff dwellings and associated sites and artifacts of that culture, set apart for its educational and scientific interest and public enjoyment within a remote, pristine natural setting.



Significance

Significance statements express why Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument protects the largest known Mogollon cliff dwellings site and interprets for the public well-preserved structures built more than 700 years ago. Architectural features and associated artifacts are exceptionally preserved within the natural caves of Cliff Dweller Canyon.
- The TJ site of the monument includes one of the last unexcavated, large Mimbres Mogollon pueblo settlements and was occupied intermittently by multiple cultures for approximately 1,000 years (400 CE–1400 CE). The TJ unit of Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument offers outstanding research potential due to the high integrity of its unexcavated condition.
- The combination of springs, rivers, narrow canyons, and unique caves, and the resulting biodiversity in and around Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, enticed and sustained human cultures for thousands of years. The cultural resources of the monument are preserved within their natural setting due to their remoteness and location within the Gila Wilderness—the world’s first designated wilderness area.
- Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument provides visitors an unparalleled opportunity to step back in time by walking through well-preserved structures built by Mogollon people more than 700 years ago. The pristine natural setting, particularly in Cliff Dweller Canyon, surrounded by profound wilderness, provides opportunities for visitors to experience a wide range of emotional and personal connections.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Archeological Resources**
- **Scientific Value**
- **Setting and Natural Resources**
- **Opportunities to Connect to Resources**

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Wilderness**
- **Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Connections**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Exploring the caves and rooms of the cliff dwellings provides uniquely intimate opportunities for firsthand discovery and contemplation of what life was like for the people who once lived here, and the chance to compare and contrast their way of living to our lifestyles today.
- Immersion within the diverse natural resources and wild, rugged beauty of the Gila River headwaters area heightens awareness of the interdependent relationships of people to this land, and the important values of the natural environment and wilderness to the human experience—from survival to cultural identity to recreation to stewardship.
- Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, the only NPS unit that protects Mogollon Culture sites, possesses a great diversity of archeological sites and the human stories that may come from artifacts and structures. This provides a multitude of opportunities to discover, interpret, and share 2,000 years of Mogollon history and cultural development.
- Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument offers a near-perfect natural laboratory for scientists and visitors to learn about changes in landscape and climate that happened in the past as well as those currently occurring. Findings may have a powerful effect in helping people understand the importance of protecting the environment to reduce and mitigate human-caused impacts.



Description

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument was established in 1907 to preserve the remains of a remarkably intact group of cliff dwellings within the Gila National Forest. A 1-mile loop trail brings visitors through Cliff Dweller Canyon and into several natural caves containing about 40 rooms built more than 700 years ago.

Although best known for its namesake dwellings built by the Tularosa-phase Mogollon in the late 13th century, the monument contains a total of 45 precontact sites within its 533 acres, the majority of which are not open to the public. The monument consists of two separate units; the larger includes the cliff dwellings, and the smaller TJ unit, added in 1962, preserves one of the last known unexcavated Mogollon pueblos of its size from the Classic Mimbres phase. Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument is the sole unit of the National Park Service established to protect and interpret remains of the Mogollon culture, one of the three major precontact cultures of the southwestern United States.

The cultural resources of the monument comprise a collection of archeological sites that include Archaic rock shelters, Early and Late Pithouse and Classic Mimbres Pueblo period structures, cliff dwellings, Salado building foundations, and several small Apache sites that together represent at least 2,000 years of human occupation of the Gila River headwaters area.

The rich diversity of natural resources that supported Archaic, Mogollon, and Apache people in the past continues to thrive in an area free from encroaching development along the banks of New Mexico's last free-flowing river.

The hunter-gatherer Apaches became prominent later and their legendary warrior, Geronimo, was born near the Gila River headwaters in the early 1820s. Many current Apache bands remain interested in the management of the area.

Located in southwest New Mexico within the 3.3 million-acre Gila National Forest, the monument is in the heart of the 560,000-acre Gila Wilderness. An interagency agreement provides for National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service use of area roads and facilities, and both agencies have managed the monument throughout its history. Management of the monument was the responsibility of the U.S. Forest Service from 1907 to 1933, at which time it was transferred to the National Park Service. Under a 1975 memorandum of understanding, management of the monument returned to the U.S. Forest Service. Since 2003, Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument has again been under NPS management. Monument staff are responsible for managing 533 acres. Approximately 47,000 people visited the monument in 2015.

