

Gila Cliff Dwellings

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

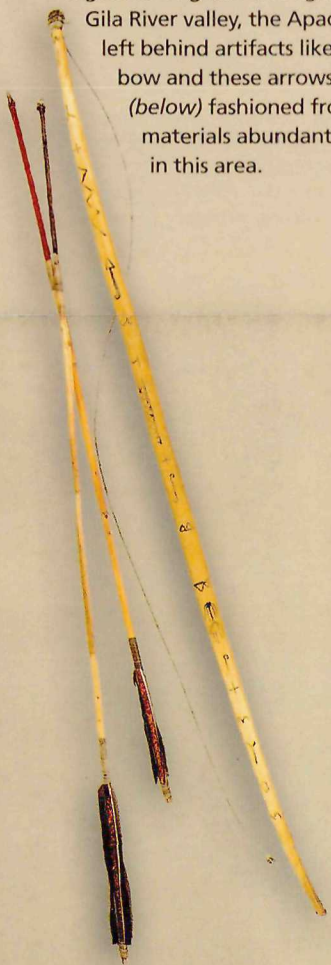
National Monument
New Mexico



MAXWELL MUSEUM
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A unique style of black-on-white pottery bowl (above) from the Mimbres branch of the Mogollon culture was common to this area during the classic Mimbres phase (1100 to 1150). The designs and details of most pottery found in the cliff dwellings are unique to the Tularosa phase (1100 to 1300). With the pottery as just one clue, archeologists believe the Gila Cliff Dwellers came here from near the Tularosa River, 60 miles north of the national monument.

The Mogollon were not the only group to have lived in this area. As mobile hunter-gatherers following herds of game through the Gila River valley, the Apaches left behind artifacts like this bow and these arrows (below) fashioned from materials abundant in this area.



NPS/ANTHONY HOWELL

People of the Upper Gila River

More questions than answers surround the story of people who built structures in natural caves of Cliff Dweller Canyon. Archeological evidence suggests that many different groups of people have inhabited this area over thousands of years. What motivated one group to build *inside* the caves between the late 1270s and 1300? And why was their stay so short?



NPS



NPS



NPS

Approximately 40 rooms were built inside several natural caves in Cliff Dweller Canyon. Artifacts and architectural elements show that these ancient cultures traded not only materials but ideas. The Gila Cliff Dwellers left behind macaw feathers from Central America, and they built T-shaped doorways (above photo) also used by other cultural groups.

The Mogollon

The people who built the cliff dwellings were part of the Mogollon (mo-go-yón) culture. They combined hunting and gathering with farming and traditionally built pit houses or surface pueblos in the mountainous areas of Arizona and New Mexico. The Mogollon found abundant game and fertile soil in the Gila River valley for both native vegetation and their crops of corn, beans, and squash. Breaking with tradition, the Tularosa Mogollon built inside the caves of Cliff Dweller Canyon with rock, mortar, and timbers from trees cut between 1276 and 1287. But by 1300 the Gila Cliff Dwellers had moved on.

With cultivated crops like corn came a more sedentary life. Perhaps in time the area's natural resources, already affected by drought, no longer sustained the Mogollon.



The Chiricahua Apache

After the Mogollon left, no one appears to have lived in this area for over 100 years. Apaches migrated to the upper Gila River about 1500, although some of their oral traditions claim it has always been their homeland. Legendary leader Geronimo was born near the Gila River headwaters in the early 1820s as Mexico challenged Apache control of the area. Thirty years later, with the area under U.S. control, army posts were built to protect new Anglo settlers as area mining towns grew and ranching was established throughout the Gila River valley.

By 1870 the federal government began relocating the Apaches onto reservations. But not until September 1886 were the last Be-don-ko-he—as Geronimo's people were known—led by Geronimo himself, ultimately forced from their ancestral lands.



Apache leader Goyahkla, known as Geronimo

NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Exploring the Cliff Dwellings and Wilderness



LEFT: SILVER CITY MUSEUM RIGHT: © LAURENCE PARENT

From Early Settlement to the Gila Wilderness

Led by Juan de Oñate, Spanish colonists settled east and south of this area in 1598. The Spanish stayed close to main travel routes and the Rio Grande valley and by the early 1800s had not penetrated the Gila River country as far as these cliff dwellings.

After an 1878 prospecting trip, miner H.B. Ailman documented the cliff dwellings. When archeologist Adolph Bandelier came here in 1884, the cliff dwellings had been looted by earlier visitors. They took many artifacts

and obliterated much of the archeological record. In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed the national monument to prevent further damage and vandalism.

Settlement of this region by miners and ranchers (*above left*) accelerated after the Apache Wars ended in 1886. Boom towns for mining, like Pinos Altos and Mogollon, cropped up. Ranchers homesteaded the land for raising cattle and sheep. Forests of the highcountry began to be cut for timber.

Across the United States wild lands were disappearing fast. Many people wondered how our wilderness heritage could be preserved. The pioneering ecologist Aldo Leopold (*right*) was assistant district forester for the Southwest national forests early in his career. He persuaded his agency to establish the Gila Wilderness in 1924, the nation's first designated wilderness area. Now the Gila Wilderness protects the upper Gila River watershed (*above*). This is the longest undammed stretch of river in the contiguous 48

states. Leopold's vision helped inspire the 1964 Wilderness Act that now preserves the wildness of over 109 million acres of federal public lands.



ALDO LEOPOLD FOUNDATION ARCHIVES

Planning Your Visit

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument lies 44 miles north of Silver City on NM 15. Allow two hours driving. No public transportation serves this area. Stop first at the multi-agency Gila Visitor Center for information, exhibits, a short film, and bookstore. Staff will answer questions and help plan your visit. Parking for the cliff dwellings is at the trailhead (see *large map*), a two-mile drive from the visitor center. Service animals are welcome.

Cliff Dwellings Trail The one-mile loop trail to and through the cliff dwellings climbs 180 feet above the canyon floor. Allow one hour round-trip. Views of the cliff dwellings are possible after a ¼-mile hike in the canyon bottom. The trail that continues to the dwellings is steep and rocky in places. Wear sturdy shoes, pace yourself (use the benches), and take water. Find information about guided tours and programs at the trailhead, visitor center, or Monument website. The short **Trail to the Past** from Lower Scorpion Campground leads to a small dwelling and a pictograph panel.

Safety and Regulations All plants, animals, artifacts, and structures are protected by federal law. Please enjoy the natural and cultural resources while staying on the trail at all times. For the safety of others, do not throw or roll rocks into the canyon. Watch children closely. Food, tobacco products, pets, and

drinks other than water are not permitted on the trail. Free kennels are available at the contact station. For firearms regulations check the park website or ask a ranger.

Hours and Fees The Monument and the Gila Visitor Center are open daily. Contact the Monument or check its website for hours of operation of the visitor center and the cliff dwellings trail. *Note:* New Mexico is in the Mountain Time zone and observes daylight saving time, while Arizona does *not* observe daylight saving time.



Fees Fees are collected (exact change required) at the trailhead's self-pay station. Contact the Monument for admission fee information. The federal park passes are accepted at the trailhead and sold at the visitor center.

Area Information The 533-acre national monument is surrounded by the 558,000-acre Gila Wilderness, part of 3.3 million acres of public forest and range land within the Gila National Forest. Campgrounds and picnic areas are available on national forest lands throughout the valley. Lodging, an RV campground, and basic food items are available in Gila Hot Springs, four miles from the Monument.

More Information
National Park Service, Gila Visitor Center
HC 68 Box 100, Silver City, NM 88061-0100
575-536-9461, www.nps.gov/gicl

Forest Service, Wilderness Ranger District
HC 68 Box 50, Mimbres, NM 88049
575-536-2250, www.fs.fed.us/r3/gila

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities.

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