

Gila Cliff Dwellings

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
New Mexico

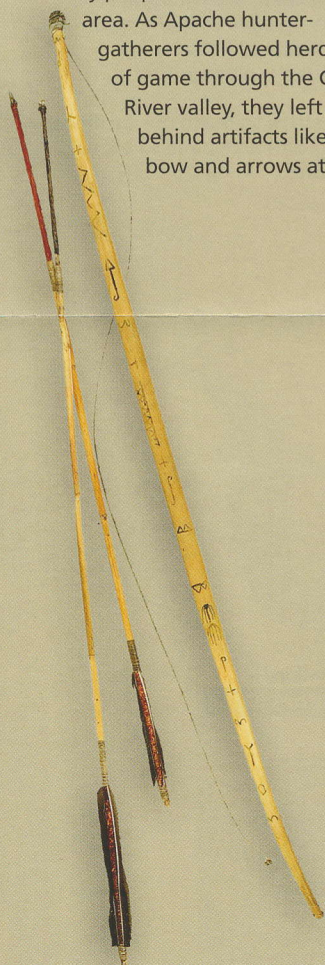




MAXWELL MUSEUM
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

Archeologists have traditionally organized ancient Puebloan culture by geographic areas and time periods. People in the Mimbres region (its heart lies to the southeast of the Gila Cliff Dwellings) produced a unique style of black-on-white pottery (*above*) from 1000 to 1150. Most pottery found in these cliff dwellings is of a different style. Archeologists connect it to the Tularosa phase of the Mogollon area, 1100 to 1300. Its makers likely came here from the Tularosa River region (60 miles to the north).

Ancient Puebloans were not the only people who lived in this area. As Apache hunter-gatherers followed herds of game through the Gila River valley, they left behind artifacts like the bow and arrows at left.



NPS / ANTHONY HOWELL

People of the Upper Gila River

More questions than answers surround the story of people who built structures inside Cliff Dweller Canyon's natural caves. Archeological evidence suggests that many different groups of people inhabited this area over several thousand years. What motivated this group to build *inside* the caves? And why did they stay for only a few decades?



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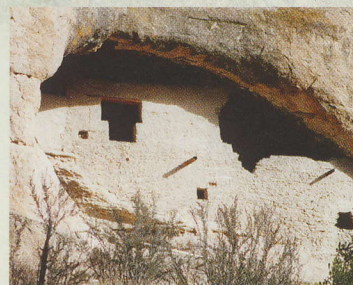
Puebloans of the Mogollon Area

The ancient Puebloan people who built these cliff dwellings belonged to a larger tradition that included part of what is now Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and northern Mexico. Archeologists call this the Mogollon (mo-go-yón) area. Its pottery styles and buildings differ slightly from those of the ancestral Puebloan area farther north.

The Puebloans who once lived here grew corn, beans, and squash, foraged the fertile Gila River valley and surrounding forests for native plants, and hunted the area's game. Departing from traditional regional dwelling forms (first pit houses and then surface pueblos), they built their pueblo inside the caves of Cliff Dweller Canyon with rock, mortar, and timber felled between 1276 and 1287. The pottery found in the caves suggests that they came from the Tularosa River region to the north. During a time of many migrations in the Southwest, they moved on by around 1300.

The Chiricahua Apache

Evidence suggests that the Apache migrated to the upper Gila River in the 1500s (though some of their oral traditions say that it has always been their homeland). Legendary leader Geronimo was born near the Gila River headwaters in the early 1820s, when Mexico challenged Apache control of the area. Thirty years later, the United States asserted its authority in the area. It built army posts, and by 1870 the federal government began to relocate the Apache to reservations. But not until September 1886 were the last Be-don-ko-he—as Geronimo's people were known—forced from their ancestral lands, led by Geronimo himself.

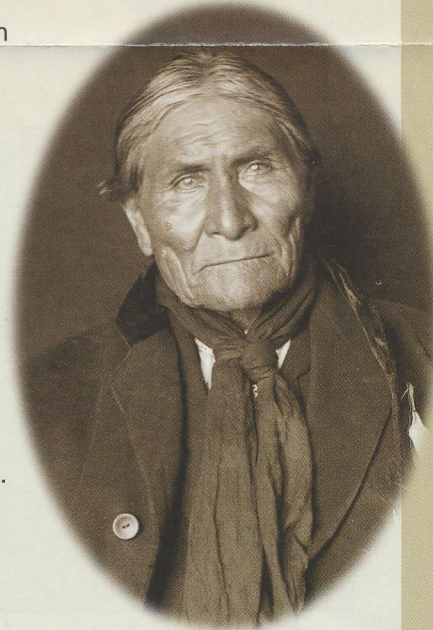


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About 40 rooms built inside five natural caves here yielded evidence that people traded both materials and ideas: macaw feathers probably from Mexico and T-shaped doorways like those found in other areas of the Southwest and northern Mexico.

With cultivated crops like corn came a more sedentary lifestyle. But migrations appear to be one way that ancient Puebloans coped with the cycles of drought common in the Southwest.



Apache leader Goyahkla, known as Geronimo

NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Exploring the Cliff Dwellings and Wilderness



From Early Settlement to the Gila Wilderness

LEFT: SILVER CITY MUSEUM RIGHT: © LAURENCE PARENT

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, H.B. Ailman documented the cliff dwellings. Archeologist Adolph Bandler arrived in 1884, but looters had already stolen many artifacts and destroyed much of the archeological record.

Settlement of the region by miners and ranchers (*above left*) accelerated after the Apache Wars ended in 1886. Towns like Pinos Altos and Mogollon sprang up in response to the mining boom. Homesteaders emigrated to the area to raise herds of cattle and sheep. Still others cut highcountry forests for timber. In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument to prevent further damage and vandalism to the cliff dwellings.

As wild lands across the United States began to vanish, a wilderness preservation movement arose.

Pioneering ecologist Aldo Leopold (*right*) was assistant district forester for the Southwest national forests early in his career. In 1924 he persuaded the US Forest Service to establish the Gila Wilderness, the nation's first designated wilderness area. Now the Gila Wilderness protects the upper Gila River watershed (*above*). 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 Gila Visitor Center for information, exhibits, a short film, and store. Staff will answer questions and help plan your visit. Parking for the cliff dwellings is at the trailhead (*see large map*).

Cliff Dwellings Trail The one-mile loop trail climbs 180 feet above the canyon floor. It is steep and rocky in places. Allow one hour round-trip. Or you can see the cliff dwellings after a ¼-mile hike in the canyon bottom. Wear sturdy shoes and take water. Find information about guided tours and programs at the trailhead, visitor center, or park 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. • Stay on the trail. • Do not throw or roll rocks into the canyon. • Watch children closely. • Food and drinks (except water) are prohibited on the trail, as are tobacco products and pets; free kennels are available at the contact station. • For firearms regulations check the park website or ask a ranger.

Hours and Fees The monument is open daily. Check the park website for visitor center and Cliff Dwellings Trail hours. New Mexico observes mountain daylight time (MDT). Arizona does not. • Pay entrance fee (exact change required) or register your federal park pass at the trailhead.

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 rangeland within the Gila National Forest. Campgrounds and picnic

areas are available on national forest lands throughout the valley. Find lodging, an RV campground, and basic food items 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
www.nps.gov/gicl
575-536-9461

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

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.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all; call or check our website.

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