

Montezuma Castle Tuzigoot

National Monuments
Arizona

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Photographs by William A. Bake

Ancient Farmers of the Verde Valley

These parks preserve remnants of two distinctive cultures that once flourished in the Verde Valley. The first permanent settlers here were the Hohokam (Pima for "those who have gone"). They were a skillful farming people who moved into the valley shortly after A.D. 600. They grew crops of corn, beans, squash, and cotton and watered them by irrigation. They lived in one-room houses made of poles, sticks, and mud, which they built on terraces overlooking their fields in the bottomlands.

Another people also lived in this general area. They were the Sinagua (Spanish for

"without water"), who inhabited the nearby foothills and the plateau beyond the valley. The Sinagua were pithouse dwellers and dry farmers, dependent on rain for their crops. They moved down into the valley about 1125, occupying land vacated by some of the Hohokam who migrated north to lands made fertile by the ashfall from the eruptions of Sunset Crater in the mid-1060s. The move altered Sinagua culture in two important ways: they adopted the irrigation system of the Hohokam, and they began to build above-ground masonry dwellings, an idea they may have borrowed from the Anasazi to the north.

About 1150 the Sinagua began building their large pueblos, often on hilltops or in cliffs. This was a time of concentration in the valley center, probably in response to drought and ensuing strife. The villages at Montezuma and Tuzigoot reached their present size in the 1300s and were occupied for another century. In the early 1400s, the Sinagua abandoned the entire valley. No one can say why: perhaps too much pressure on the land, perhaps conflict with the Yavapai, who were living here when the Spanish entered the valley in 1583. Whatever the reason or reasons, the survivors were probably absorbed into pueblos to the north.

Daily Life of the Sinagua

The Sinagua of the Verde Valley were peaceful village dwellers. They lived principally by farming but supplemented their staple crops by hunting and gathering. Far from austere, their surroundings supplied them with more than the essentials of life. There was abundant water in the central valley, fertile land in the bottoms, and sufficient game—including deer, antelope, rabbit, bear, muskrat, turtle, and duck—to augment a diet that leaned heavily on corn. The Indians here were comparatively well off in the important commodity of salt. There was a deposit a few miles from the present town of Camp Verde, and evidences of mining there by the Sinagua are vivid.

The Sinagua were fine artisans. They made stone tools of the usual variety: axes, knives, hammers, and manos and metates for grinding corn. They turned bone into awls and needles, wove handsome garments of cotton, and



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The Sinagua Room in the Tuzigoot Visitor Center gives us a glimpse of everyday life in Puebloan times. Family tasks included grinding corn, weaving cloth from locally grown

cotton, drying skins, and making baskets. Two items suggest the trading network of the Sinagua: macaws were traded in from Mexico, and some decorated pottery came from the north.

fashioned ornaments out of shells, turquoise, and a local red stone for personal decoration.

Pottery was not a craft at which this people excelled. They mostly turned out a reddish-brown plain ware in many sizes, which was probably used for cooking and storage. The decorated ware found here in great quantities was traded in from neighbors to the north and east.

The Sinagua were obviously daring builders, if not as skillful with masonry as their Anasazi contemporaries. The quality of the local rock may have had something to do with this. It is fairly soft and of a type that splits unevenly. Walls at Tuzigoot are massive but poorly balanced. Yet Montezuma Castle, which admittedly is well protected, was so securely built that it has stood for over 600 years and is one of the best preserved prehistoric structures in the Southwest.

The potters at Tuzigoot principally made undecorated ware (left) of not especially good quality. Their vessels were often coarse in

texture and porous and weak. The best looking pottery found here probably originated in the Hopi country and was traded in. The

pitcher and bowl below are good examples. The bowl is of a type called Jeddito Black-on-Yellow. Designs on Jeddito bowls are

imaginative and almost convey a sense of a story. A characteristic detail is a line around the inner rim that is sometimes broken at one point.



Visiting the Parks



Photographs by William A. Bake

Montezuma Castle

Sinagua farmers began building this five-story, 20-room dwelling (above) early in the 12th century. It stands in a cliff recess about 100 feet above the valley. Early settlers marveled at the structure and thought mistakenly that it was Aztec in origin. A short distance west is Castle A. It was once an imposing six-story apartment with about 45 rooms; it is now badly deteriorated. This dwelling was built against the base of the cliff. The Sinagua probably thought this was a good place to live. The creek was a reliable source of water, and there was fertile land on the nearby terrace.

Montezuma Well

Montezuma Well has all the surprise of a lake and fairly lush vegetation in the midst of desert. The well is a limestone sink formed long ago by the collapse of an immense underground cavern. The springs that feed it flow continuously. Both the Hohokam and Sinagua irrigated crops with its waters. Traces of their irrigation ditches, thickly coated with lime, can be seen. The Hohokam pithouse on view was built about 1100. The Sinagua dwellings here vary in size from large pueblos of 55 rooms to one-room houses. Between 1125 and 1400 about 150 to 200 Sinagua lived here.

Tuzigoot

Tuzigoot (Apache for "crooked water") is the remnant of a Sinagua village built between 1125 and 1400. It crowns the summit of a long ridge that rises 120 feet above the Verde Valley. The original pueblo was two stories high in places and had 77 ground-floor rooms. There were few exterior doors; entry was by way of ladders through openings in the roofs. The village began as a small cluster of rooms that were inhabited by about 50 persons for a hundred years. In the 1200s the population doubled and doubled again as refugee farmers, fleeing drought in outlying areas, settled here.

Location Montezuma Castle National Monument and Montezuma Well are about 50 miles south of Flagstaff, Arizona, off I-17. Tuzigoot National Monument is about 50 miles south of Flagstaff via U.S. Alt. 89, the scenic road through Oak Creek Canyon.

Activities Both Montezuma Castle and Tuzigoot have visitor centers with exhibits on the prehistoric Sinagua people who lived in this region. All three sites have short, hard-surfaced walking trails.

For a Safe Visit Stay on established trails.
• Be alert for snakes.
• Avoid overexposure to sun and heat.

Related Sites Other National Park Service sites illustrative of the Sinagua people are Walnut Canyon National Monument just

outside Flagstaff; Wupatki National Monument, 45 miles north of Flagstaff on U.S. 89; and Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument, also on U.S. 89, the site of volcanic eruptions that significantly influenced Sinagua culture.

More Information Montezuma Castle and Tuzigoot National Monuments are two of more than 380 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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