

Official Map and Guide



Keet Seel, the largest Puebloan village in Tsegi Canyon, flourished during the last half of the 13th century. The ruins

of this village and others were discovered and named by Navajos who arrived later, hence the park's name.

1 The doors in this block of rooms (not visible here) opened onto a "street" that ran the length of the village.

2 Sheltered by overhanging cliffs, these ruins are among the best preserved in the Southwest.

3 Granaries had grooved door jambs. The Anasazi placed rock slabs in these openings to keep out rodents.

4 Think of these rooms as the home of a family. At night fires flickered in the windows and figures stirred in the dim light.

5 Pencil-sized cores taken from ancient timbers told archeologists when the trees were cut down.

6 Kayenta masonry was not as well dressed as Chaco's or Mesa Verde's. Rocks were given a rough shape and then set in mud mortar with the smoothest side out.

7 These poles may have been used for hanging everyday items or ceremonial objects.

David Muench

Ancestral Pueblo People

Centuries ago, the ancestors of Pueblo Indians farmed the plateaus and bottomlands of these canyons. Between A.D. 1250 and 1300 they built distinctive villages under natural shelters in the cliff walls and successfully met the demands of a rugged environment. But for these people, periodic migrations were a way of life. After a few decades in the canyons they moved on.

Today, nearby Hopi people are among the descendents of the ancestral Pueblo people, with strong ties to the ancient stone villages at Navajo National Monument. These villages are believed to have been stops along the sacred migration paths of at least eight Hopi clans. Tribal elders annually visit these villages and other sacred shrines in the area. They have also identified paintings on canyon walls as clan symbols. The National Park Service preserves these cultural treasures as part of Navajo National Monument.

The two largest villages are best known by the names given to them by the Navajo people who arrived in the vicinity during the 1800s. In

Navajo, Betatakin means "ledge house," and Keet Seel is from an altered Navajo word meaning "remains of square houses." The villages are also known by their Hopi names, "Kawestima" and "Talaštima." The people who lived here long ago are called "Hisatsinom" by the Hopi and "Anasazi" by the Navajo. Anasazi, which means "ancient ones" or "ancestors of the aliens," is not a precise term; it groups many different peoples under the same name.

Pueblo cultures varied throughout the Southwest. Archeologists use such traits as pottery decoration and architecture to divide the prehistoric cultures of the region into three branches: the Chaco, the Mesa Verde, and the Kayenta. Here, among the Kayenta people, pottery styles became vivid and multicolored. Their buildings were more randomly grouped than those elsewhere, and their social organization was less formal.

The people living here were not always farmers. A thousand years before, they hunted small game, gathered wild plants, seeds, and

berries, and migrated with the seasons. Eventually, traders brought seeds of corn and other food crops into the region from Mexico. Their slowly developing agriculture allowed these people to remain in one place. As they became settled farmers, they replaced their temporary brush shelters with permanent houses. At first, they lived in pithouses—circular, below-ground dwellings common throughout the Southwest. Gradually, they moved into above-ground houses. These were separate family dwellings usually built of stone, but sometimes of sticks covered with mud—a construction method today called "jacal." The need to store the surplus of each year's harvest, often in pottery vessels, led to the construction of storage chambers in the floors of these dwellings.

By A.D. 1200, while Europe echoed with news of the Crusades, the land surrounding today's Navajo National Monument was dotted with the farms of the Kayenta people. Their villages, built as clusters of masonry rooms, stood nearby. The people traded far and wide for items such as cotton, turquoise, sea shells, and parrot feathers. Through their ceremonies they sought balance and harmony with the natural and spiritual worlds.

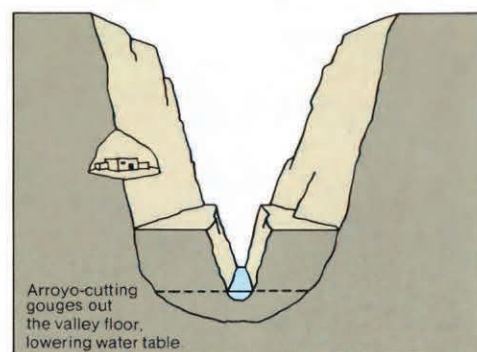
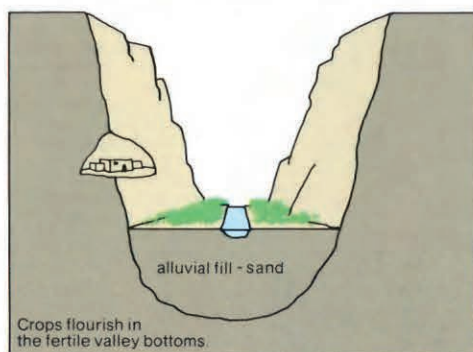
Rainfall was as scarce then as now, but usually enough to sustain their drought-adapted crops. Even so, harder times prompted the people to repeatedly move their farms and villages further upstream as arroyo-cutting (see below) destroyed farm lands. While many communities probably remained in the bottomlands, others took shelter in the cliffs. Among these, Keet Seel and Betatakin flourished for five decades. But ultimately, the people withdrew from their homeland. This may have been caused by many factors working independently or together: drought, erosion, deforestation, overpopulation, social pressures, religious dictates, or other influences not in the archeological record. The villagers joined other peoples in the Southwest in regional migrations, and from this period of change emerged the contemporary Pueblo people.

Water Was Life

The presence—or absence—of water profoundly influenced the lives of the people here. Water seeping through sandstone formed the cliff shelters in which they built their homes. When the water met an impermeable layer of rock, it spread sideways, eroding alcoves in the cliffs. Many alcoves had good living spaces and springs, and those facing south were much warmer in winter.

A different form of erosion destroyed farming in the canyon bottom. In the

mid-1200s, arroyo-cutting (gulleying), perhaps caused by climatic changes and clearing of the land for farming, lowered the water table. Flash floods also cut deep gullies through the sandy soil. Farming became impossible and the people left. Soil slowly refilled the canyon bottomlands, but about 1890 another round of arroyo-cutting began, probably triggered by overgrazing livestock. Conditions in the canyon today are much like those that led people to leave 700 years ago.



Ancient Artists

It is misleading to judge a culture solely by its technology. The prehistoric Pueblo people had a successful social order and crafted products we admire today. Geometric designs of grace and balance decorated their vessels, and the patterns in their finely-woven fabrics grew from the same esthetic principles. At right are two examples from the Kayenta world. The bowl was originally a

household item, perhaps used to serve or store food. The painted image on a rock face near Betatakin has been identified by Hopis as a clan symbol.



George H.H. Huey



Navajo

Visiting the Park

To reach park headquarters, follow U.S. 160 50 miles northeast of Tuba City or 20 miles southwest of Kayenta. A 9-mile paved road, Ariz. 564,

takes you from U.S. 160 to the park. There are exhibits, audiovisual programs, and books on sale at the visitor center. Indian craftwork is available

in the arts and crafts shop next door. The visitor center and restrooms are accessible to visitors with limited mobility. 

Campground and General Information

A campground (open year-round) and picnic area are nearby. Both are offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Wood fires are not allowed. The nearest food and fuel are at Black Mesa Trading Post at the junction of

Ariz. 564 and U.S. 160. The road that continues beyond the park is unpaved and not recommended as a shortcut to Page, Ariz. Keep pets on a leash at all times. They are not allowed in buildings or on trails.

Sandal Trail This trail (1 mile round-trip) leads to an overlook with a spectacular cross-canyon view of the ancient village of Betatakin. Allow 45 minutes. This trail is not recommended for wheelchairs.

Aspen Forest Overlook Trail This trail (0.8 mile round-trip) branches off the Sandal Trail 400 feet from the visitor center and descends steeply (300 feet in elevation) to view a surviving ancient forest of aspen and fir. Allow 45

minutes. Ruins are not visible.

Betatakin Tours You may visit this ruin only with a park ranger. Guided tours are conducted from May through September. Ask at the visitor center for

times and schedule. The strenuous, round-trip hike takes about 5 hours. The elevation is 7,300 feet, and the climb out of the canyon is equivalent to walking up the stairs of a 70-story building. Wear sturdy shoes and carry

ample water. **If you have heart or respiratory problems, don't attempt this hike.**

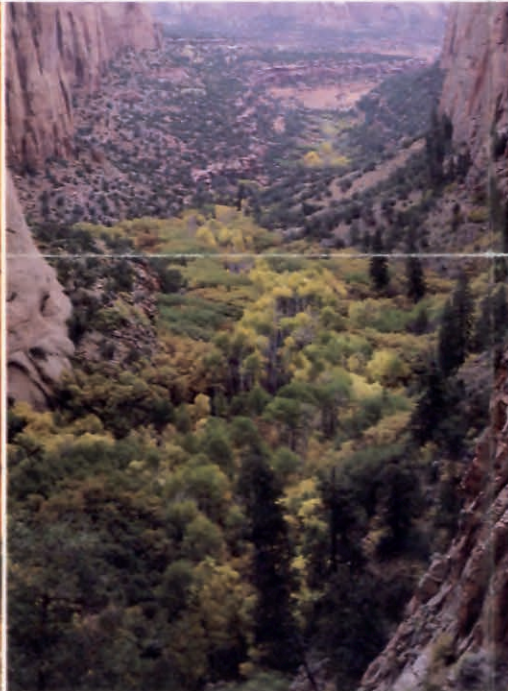
Keet Seel Permits To visit Keet Seel you must reserve a backcountry permit at the visitor cen-

ter. Daily visits are limited to 20 persons, from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day only. The 8½-mile trail is primitive, and the arduous hike takes at least a full day. Ask at the visitor center about horseback trips.

These ruins are a fragile part of our national heritage. Please help us preserve them by not disturbing them, removing anything, or entering them without a ranger.



David Muench



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Betatakin

Tree-ring dating has revealed much about Betatakin. About A.D. 1250, a few people temporarily used the cave. By 1267, settlers had established at least three stone-walled households on its bedrock ledges. Though agricultural fields lay a mile down-canyon, the alcove was attractive to settlers: It was deep enough for shelter and, because it faced south, was warmed by the winter sun. While crops ripened in the late summer of 1269, villagers cut and stockpiled many roofing timbers. They apparently planned for others to join them—perhaps

those farming where arroyo erosion threatened their crop lands.

In a burst of activity during A.D. 1275, builders retrieved the stored timbers to roof the many rooms being added by growing families and new arrivals. When the last household space was built in 1286, about 100 persons populated the settlement. The community at Betatakin waxed and waned within just 50 years; the village lay vacant after 1300.

Keet Seel

Keet Seel was occupied much longer than Betatakin. Tree-ring dating and pottery found below the dwelling show that some people settled here by A.D. 950. Those early houses are completely gone, but a few timbers and some stones were reused in building a second village, beginning A.D. 1250. Unlike Betatakin, where people apparently arrived as a group, at Keet Seel there were continuous arrivals and departures. This is reflected in the appearance of the village: there were more kivas and room

design varied more than at Betatakin. Thus, different groups probably built the two villages.

In 1272 there was a surge in building activity at Keet Seel and new pottery styles emerged, suggesting a new group of people. These newcomers, added to the settlement's natural population increase, soon taxed the capacity of the alcove, so more rooms were built nearby. The population may have approached 150 before the settlement went into decline. As families

began to leave, some who remained converted the abandoned rooms into granaries, apparently storing food against hard times. About 1300, these last residents also departed, but not before sealing the doorways of many rooms containing pottery jars of corn. Perhaps they planned to return someday.

The Hopi

Today the Hopi live about 50 miles due south of the monument headquarters, on a reservation enclosed by the Navajo Nation. Religious societies still gather in kivas, where ceremonies celebrate the balance between the physical and spiritual worlds, ensure ample harvests, and sustain the well-being of the community and the world. The Hopi preserve oral histories of their ancestors and honor many ruin sites as sacred ancestral shrines.

The Navajo

The Navajo followed the Pueblo people into the Southwest. They are Athabascan people who emigrated from northern Canada in the late 1500s, some of them perhaps earlier. They hunted and lived alongside the more settled Pueblo Indian farmers. Relationships with their neighbors were characterized by times of peace and trading and times of raiding and counterraidering. Upon acquiring the horse and sheep from the Spanish they became a powerful nation.

After the United States displaced Mexico as the dominant power in the region, Navajo raids were met with counterraids and all sides suffered greatly. To end the conflict, the U.S. Army in 1863-64 invaded the Navajo homeland under a "scorched earth" policy, killing people and livestock, destroying homes and crops, and taking much of the tribe captive. Soldiers marched the survivors nearly 300 miles to a reserve in eastern New Mexico, near Fort Sumner. But the Army plan to change the

Navajo into sedentary farmers failed. Under a treaty four years later, the Navajo were allowed to return to their own land with enough sheep to start anew. The "Long Walk" remains a tragic ordeal in Navajo memory.

Today, there are about 200,000 Navajos living on or near reservations. New ways enrich their traditions as the Navajo continue to adapt to the changing world.



Related Sites

Ancestral Pueblo cultures developed in three important centers: Kayenta (represented by this park), Mesa Verde (at Mesa Verde National Park), and Chaco (at Chaco Culture National Historical Park). This map locates these and other parks associated with Pueblo cultures, including Canyon de Chelly, Aztec, and Wupatki.

