



Wupatki Pueblo is the largest pueblo in the park. Like all pueblos, it remains sacred to Indigenous people.



Lomaki Pueblo (center, on horizon) and Box Canyon Pueblos (foreground) sit atop a canyon rim. From here, more structures are visible on nearby mesas.



Materials found on site determined the design and shape of pueblos. Built on a cinder hill, Citadel and several surrounding structures are made mostly of basalt.

CROSSROADS OF CULTURE

The Wupatki Basin was a thriving hub of migration and trade where Indigenous people of many traditions and beliefs converged. At its peak, from about 1100 to 1250 CE (common era), over 2,000 people lived within 50 square miles. They built multistory, multifamily homes—pueblos—of local rock. They practiced special farming techniques to get the most from this difficult land. They wove cotton fabric to trade for items like

pottery, turquoise, shell beads and jewelry, copper bells, and macaws from far away.

But the story doesn’t begin—or end—there. People have been coming to this area for over 13,000 years. For Indigenous people who descend from the builders of these remarkable dwellings, it is part of a larger sacred landscape.

It is not empty. It is living. The pueblos were not abandoned; they are remembered and cared for. People migrated because it was time to do so or because they sought more favorable living conditions.

These sacred lands hold stories of prehuman life, nature’s power, survival, and traditional knowledge. Stories are still being told today as we strive to learn more about this place and its people. Which story will speak to you?

Life in the Basin

Indigenous people mostly passed through Wupatki Basin before the eruption of Sunset Crater Volcano around 1085 CE. They settled here in the early 1100s. The environment was cooler and wetter, but life was not easy. The river and springs provided water. Cinders helped the soil hold some moisture for crops. Dry farming techniques using rock walls and terraces caught water from heavy summer rains and made crops



Four-wing saltbush



Corn



800-year-old cobs



Monsoonal thunderstorm



Cotton



Cotton textile

more successful. Residents may have used the ball court at Wupatki Pueblo as a reservoir. They grew corn, beans, and squash as well as cotton and tobacco. They hunted and gathered to supplement low yields.

Many of the same plants and animals remain in this high-desert environment. Shrubs like four-wing saltbush, broom snakeweed, and Apache plume cover about half the park. Native open grasslands provide essential habitat for pronghorn and jackrabbit.



Black-tailed jackrabbit

Mule deer, coyote, and antelope ground squirrel take cover in the shade of one-seed juniper, more abundant today because of agriculture, grazing, and fire suppression. Golden eagles soar overhead in search of their next meal.



Golden eagle



Pronghorn



Apache plume



Pinkflower hedgehog cactus

240 million years ago

Early reptiles leave footprints in the mud.

6 million years ago

San Francisco Volcanic Field becomes active near what is now Williams, Arizona.

600,000–400,000 years ago

A towering volcano erupts many times. Its remains are San Francisco Mountain (also called the San Francisco Peaks).

13,000 years ago

Indigenous people begin to move into this area.

13,000 years ago–500 CE

Hunters and gatherers move with the seasons to harvest plants and animals.

500–700 CE

Indigenous people settle in Wupatki Basin. They trade food and goods with travelers.

Around 1085

The ground shakes as Sunset Crater Volcano erupts. People living nearby migrate. Some move to Wupatki Basin.

1100 to mid-1200s

In Wupatki Basin, cinders and ash from the eruption help the dry land hold water for plants. Before the eruption, this place was mainly a crossroads for trade. Now people farm the land and build pueblos. Trade expands. The area flourishes.

Mid- to late 1200s

A long drought worsens. Most residents migrate again to find better farmland or to follow cultural traditions.

1300s

The pueblos of Wupatki Basin are uninhabited. Indigenous people continue to travel through the area.

1400s–1800s

European nations and the United States claim Tribal lands and forcibly remove

Indigenous people. Some people loot the pueblos. Everyone competes for land, water, and food. Many Indigenous people die from introduced diseases.

1860s

Diné (Navajo) Peshlakai Etsidi resettles the area with his family after returning from the Long Walk (the forced removal of Navajo from their homeland by the US government).

1896

Jesse Walter Fewkes performs the first systematic archeological surveys of the area.

1924

President Calvin Coolidge proclaims Wupatki a national monument. This protects the cultural sites but forces most Indigenous people to leave their homelands.

1924–2000s

Some Diné residents continue to live and graze their animals in the park through NPS agreements. Most move away by the 1960s, leaving Peshlakai family members as the only Diné residents.

2000s

Scientists begin to study how animals and plants adapt to climate change as wildland fires and storms increase.

In 2020–21 scientists uncover eight times the number of known fossil sites, including carbon plant impressions and bone fossil fragments not previously recorded here.

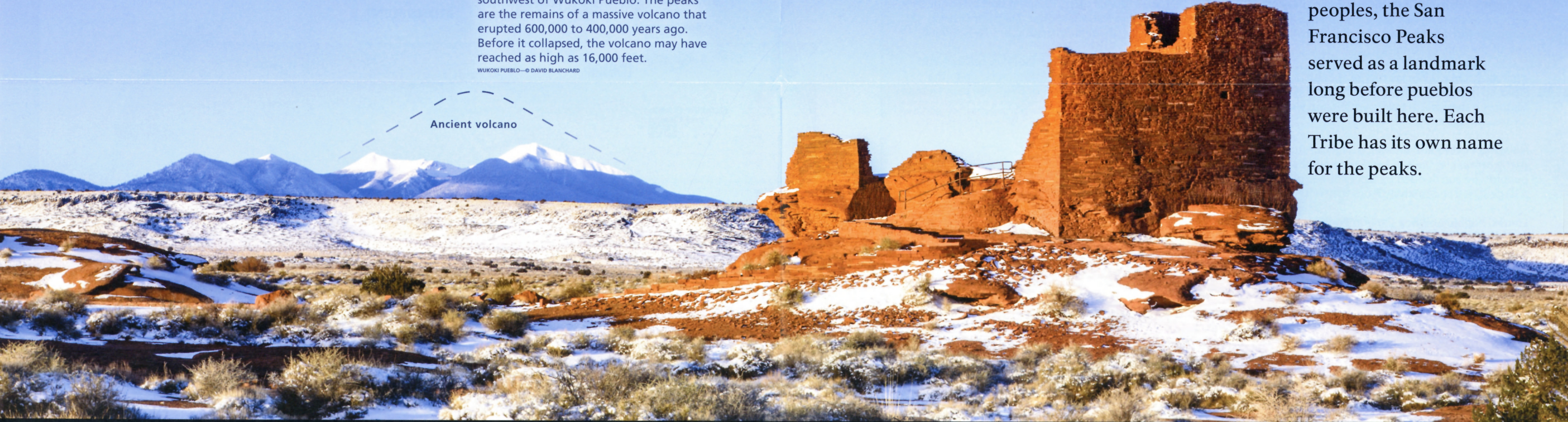
Thirteen traditionally associated Tribes maintain deep ties to Wupatki. Tribal members celebrate this area as a sacred place and remain in the region.

The San Francisco Peaks are visible to the southwest of Wukoki Pueblo. The peaks are the remains of a massive volcano that erupted 600,000 to 400,000 years ago. Before it collapsed, the volcano may have reached as high as 16,000 feet.

WUKOKI PUEBLO—© DAVID BLANCHARD

Ancient volcano

Sacred to Indigenous peoples, the San Francisco Peaks served as a landmark long before pueblos were built here. Each Tribe has its own name for the peaks.



Researching the Past; Preparing for the Future

Every day we learn something new about this area—about the Indigenous people who built the pueblos and those who remain connected, the animals that inhabited these lands before dinosaurs, or the environment’s response to changing land use and climate. Traditional knowledge teaches us about Ancestral Puebloans and their stewardship of this land. Research, begun in the late 1800s and continuing to this day, adds to our understanding.

There’s much we do know. Pottery, shells, minerals, and other items provide evidence of trade and the meeting of many cultures. The park and surrounding area include over 2,600 archeological sites. Scientists recently found carbon plant impressions and bone fossil fragments not recorded here before, expanding our knowledge of the early to middle Triassic environment (about 240 million years ago).

New studies will further expand this knowledge and help us understand how to manage and protect cultural

and natural features. For example, scientists are studying the long-term effects of weather and climate on the pueblos to help preserve these and other sites in the Southwest.

For as much as we’ve learned already, there is still much more to learn. The park’s undeveloped setting provides a baseline that will allow us to measure, monitor, and manage change in the future. What discoveries lie ahead?

Make learning part of your park experience. Take in starry night skies, natural

sounds, and views that extend over 60 miles. Join park rangers on hikes into remote areas. You’ll find archeological sites, petroglyphs, geology, plants, and animals that help make Wupatki National Monument a special place.



Macaw skull
DENIS FINNIN / AMNH H/6452A



Red ochre
NPS / ANGIE FAULKNER



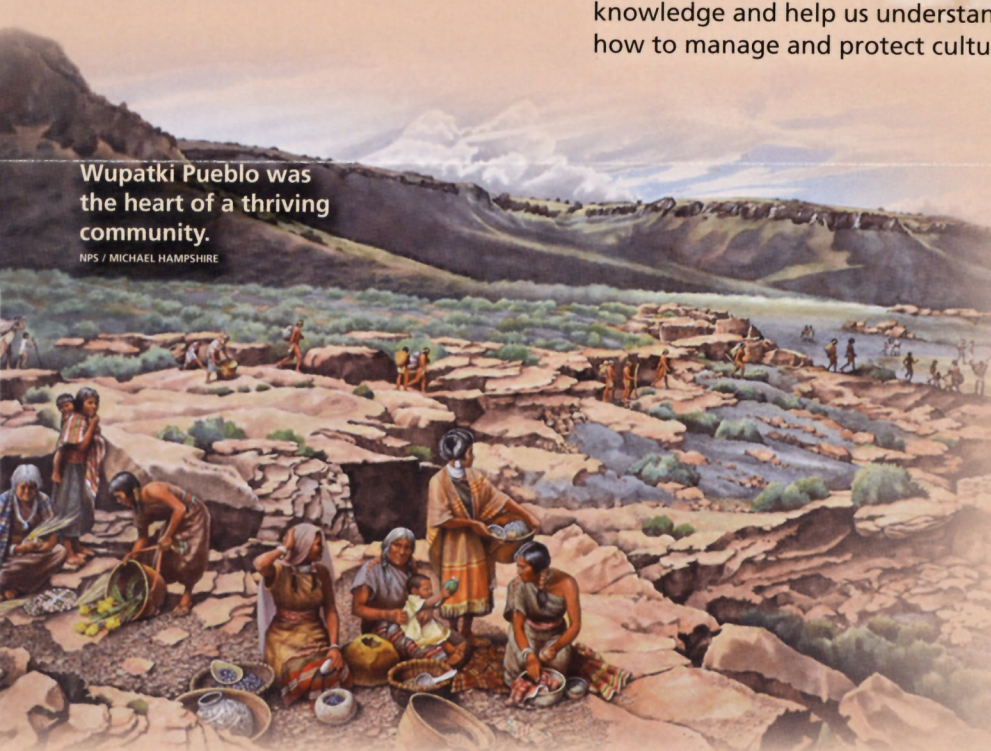
Copper bells
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY



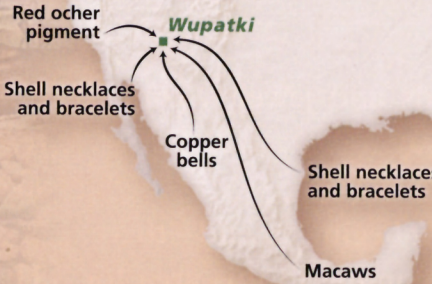
Shell bead necklace
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY



Shell bracelet
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY



Wupatki Pueblo was the heart of a thriving community.
NPS / MICHAEL HAMPSHIRE



This area was once a major trading center. It was located along natural travel corridors and near several springs. Residents traded items they made for others that originated hundreds or even thousands of miles away (examples on map). Shell beads and bracelets came from the Gulf of California and Gulf of Mexico; macaws from Mexico.

Trade helped residents meet their needs, enriched their lives, and possibly increased their social status.

Ideas flowed through here too. The Hohokam-style ball court at Wupatki Pueblo, which was built in the Ancestral Puebloan Kayenta tradition, demonstrates this exchange of ideas.



Tribal members and park staff work together to protect cultural features like petroglyphs.
NPS

Fort McDowell Yavapai

Havasupai

Hopi

Hualapai

Kaibab Band of Paiute

San Carlos Apache

Yavapai-Prescott

Navajo

White Mountain Apache

Tonto Apache

Zuni

Yavapai-Apache

San Juan Southern Paiute

Navajo lived in traditional hogans in Wupatki Basin and other places in the Southwest.
MUSEUM OF NORTHERN ARIZONA



The names above are of Tribal Nations whose associations with this area go back centuries. This is the place of their ancestors and of continued personal connections.

People from many Indigenous cultures interacted and lived here. Some left because migration was part of their culture. Others left in search of better farmland after an extended drought depleted resources.

Each Tribe has stories about their experiences here that are similar and yet different. Some of those stories are shared. Others remain private.

Compare this place we call Wupatki National Monument with your own home. What creates beauty where you live? What questions do you ask about the night sky? About weather? About forces beyond your control? The desire to understand our world connects us all, past and present.



Rabbitbrush
ADOBE STOCK / MELANIE

Navajo blanket
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION / NMAI 24/3075



Wholeleaf Indian paintbrush
NPS



VISITING THE PARK

The park road is always open; trails are open daily sunrise to sunset. The visitor center has exhibits, a movie, and a park store; check the website for hours.

This part of Arizona is on Mountain Standard Time year-round, but the Navajo Nation observes daylight saving time. Cell phone times may change while in the park.

Cell service is unreliable or nonexistent.

Things to Do From the visitor center, take the self-guiding tour of Wupatki Pueblo. Drive and take short trails to reach the other pueblos.

Wupatki Pueblo 0.5 miles roundtrip; accessible to overlook. Over 100 people lived in this three-story, 104-room structure, the largest freestanding pueblo in northern Arizona. It includes a community room and Hohokam-style ball court. Experience a blowhole, where air flows in and out of fractured rocks, at the end of the trail.

Wukoki Pueblo 0.2 miles roundtrip; partly accessible. Situated high on a sandstone outcrop, this pueblo features a three-story tower, wide-open views, and rooms you can enter.

Nalakihi Pueblo and Citadel 0.2 miles roundtrip; partly accessible. Built of sandstone and basalt, these pueblos are surrounded by traces of agriculture. View a large limestone sinkhole from the trail.

Lomaki Pueblo and Box Canyon Pueblos 0.5 miles roundtrip; partly accessible. Made mostly of limestone, these pueblos sit on small box canyons overlooking an earth crack. Nearby rocks have fossils of gastropods and mollusks.

Drive the **35-mile Loop Road** through the park to Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument (regional map). One entrance fee covers both parks; buy a pass at www.recreation.gov or either visitor center.

Take a **ranger-led hike** October through April (reservations required). Check the website for details.

Be Safe and Protect the Park Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park. • No off-trail, unguided hiking allowed. Stay on trails to protect yourself, cultural sites, fragile plants, and animals. • Always have water with you and in your vehicle. • Storms can form quickly. Take cover in a building or vehicle if you hear thunder. • Roads are narrow and winding with soft shoulders. Stop only at paved pullouts. • Pets are only allowed in parking areas. Keep them on a leash six feet or shorter. Do not leave them in cars even for a few minutes; they can die of heatstroke. • Using remotely piloted aircraft like drones is prohibited. • For firearms regulations check the park website.

Emergencies call 911

Services Flagstaff has lodging, food, and other services. The US Forest Service offers camping nearby. For details contact Coconino National Forest, Flagstaff District, at www.fs.usda.gov/detail/coconino or 928-526-0866.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

More Information Wupatki National Monument flag_information@nps.gov www.nps.gov/wupa

Follow us on social media. Use the official NPS App to guide your visit; download the park to use offline.

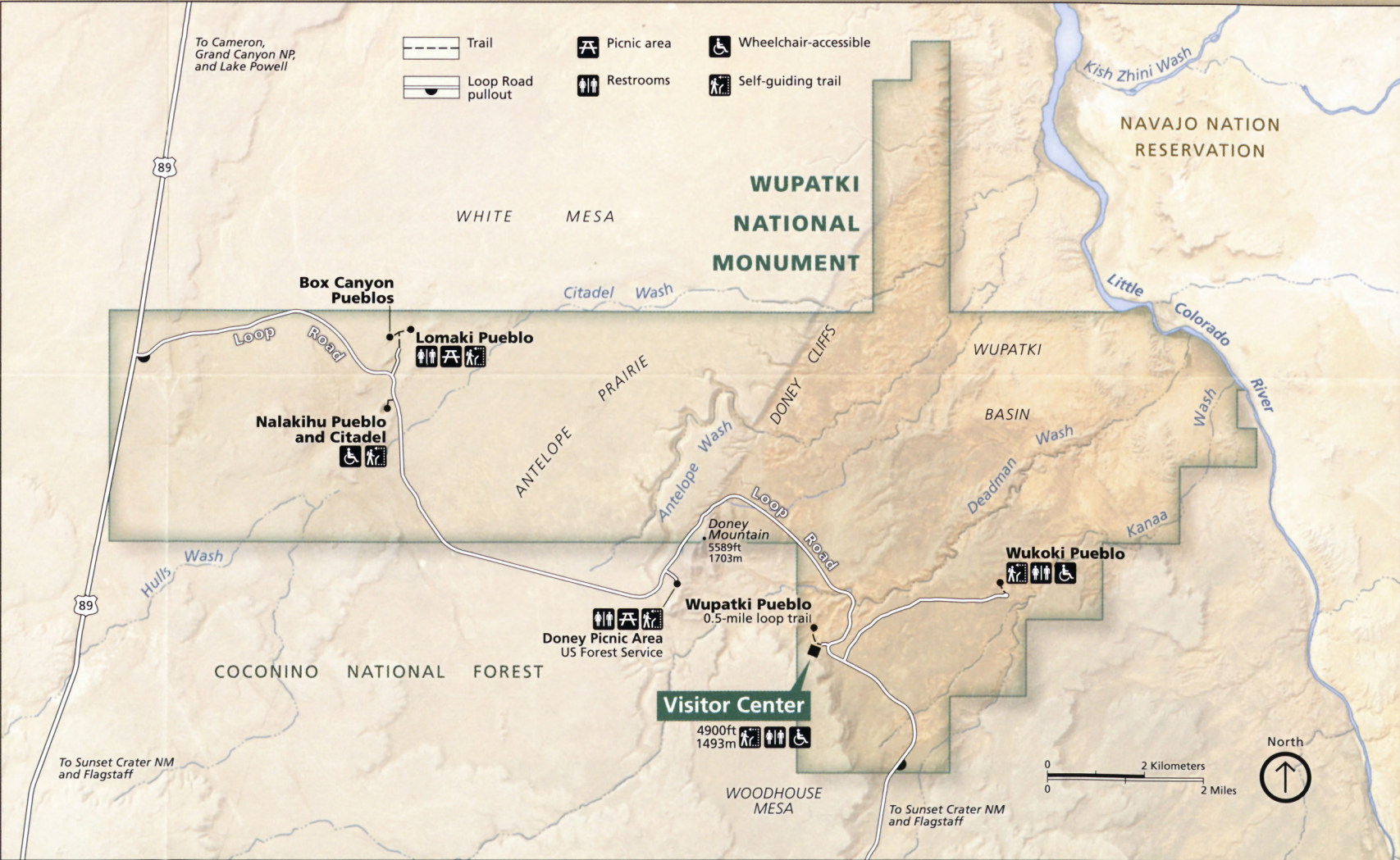
Wupatki, Sunset Crater Volcano, and Walnut Canyon national monuments are administered jointly.

Flagstaff Area National Monuments
6400 N. Hwy. 89
Flagstaff, AZ 86004
928-526-1157

Wupatki National Monument is one of over 425 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation. Join the park community. www.nationalparks.org

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Hopi pottery
© ARTEMIS GALLERY