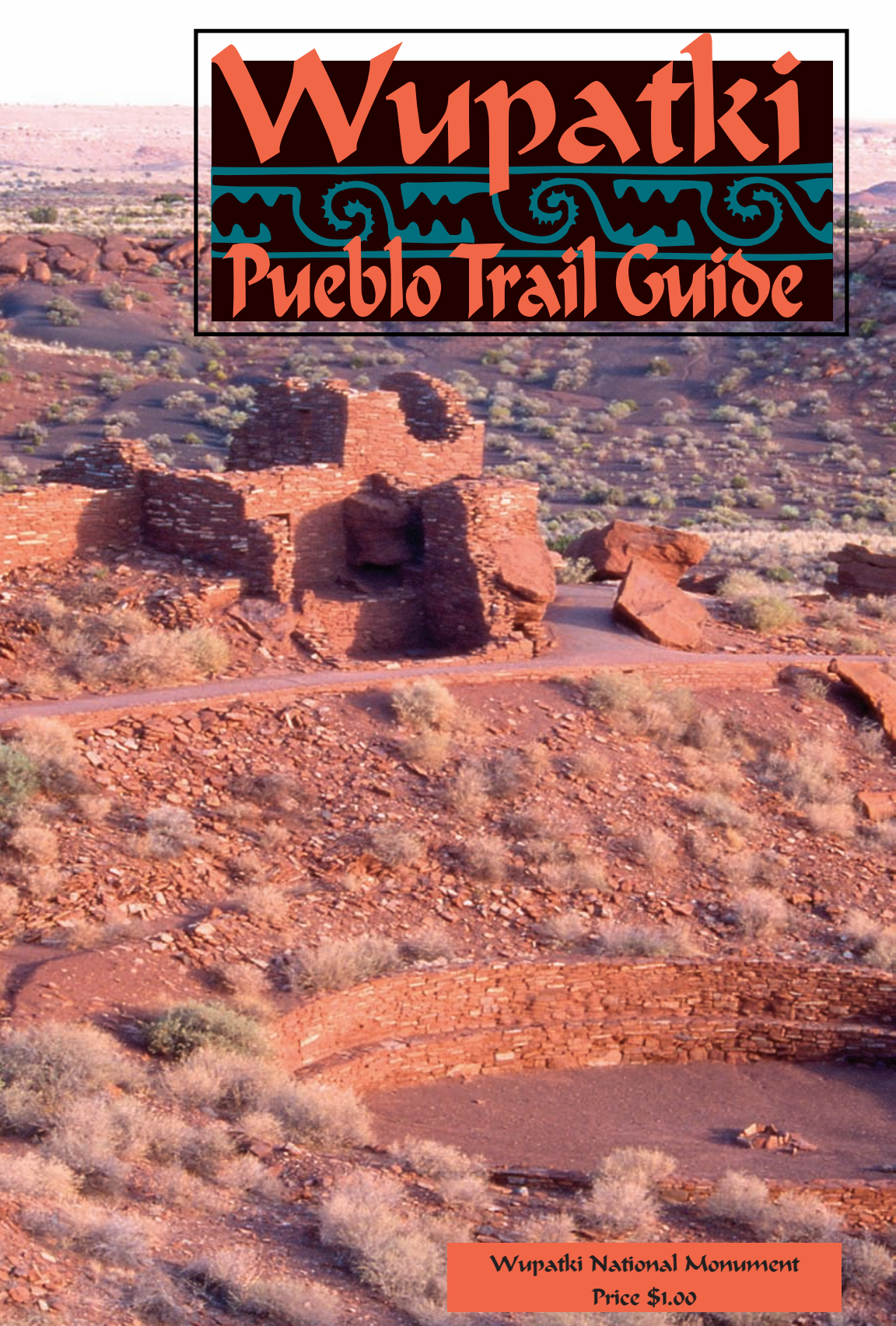
Wupatki
Pueblo Trail Guide



Wupatki National Monument
Price $1.00

Wupatki Pueblo Trail Guide

Description of trail

Length: ½ mile (.8 km) round trip
Time required: 45 minutes
Terrain: Paved with some steps and inclines. Wheelchair accessible to an overlook, beyond with assistance.

Safety

Beware of uneven steps and irregular surfaces. Watch for ice on the trail in winter. Lightning and severe weather can move in rapidly—return or remain inside during summer thunderstorms.

Rules

Stay on the trail.

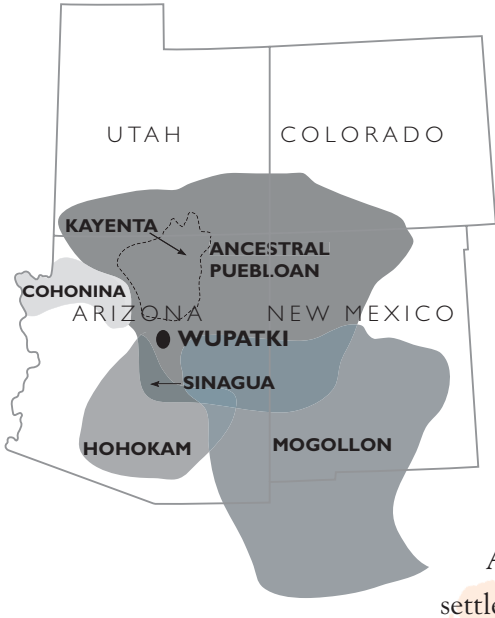
No souvenirs.

No piles, please! Moving artifacts destroys archeological information.

"Every drop of water was precious, and there was never enough. From infancy we were taught to drink sparingly; even then, there were times when we were thirsty...Were the water supply to diminish and the population increase, what would become of the people?"

–Helen Sekaquaptewa, Hopi,
Village of Old Oraibi, from
"Me and Mine"

Introduction



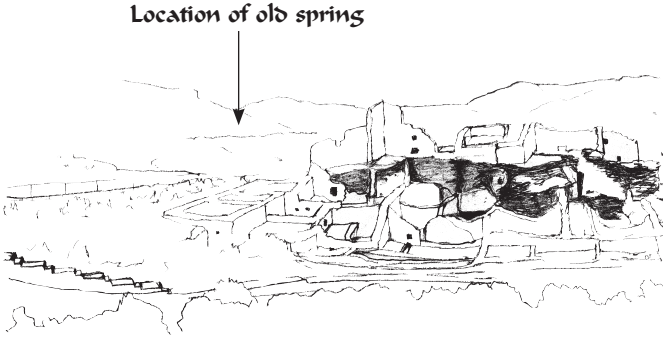
In the history of the Southwest, the farming settlement of Wupatki was unique. To appreciate why, we have to start by thinking big. From roughly 400 to 1700, culture in the Southwest—a 300,000 square mile (777,000 sq km) area—was distinguished by farming, pottery, villages, pueblos, seasonal moves, and large scale migrations.

Across this vast area, major settlement systems were in place by 1100 in Chaco Canyon (to the northeast), in the Phoenix Basin (to the south), and in northern Mesoamerica. With decades of unusually favorable climates for agriculture and room to grow, the Southwest's farming population was reaching a peak.

Until the mid-1100s, the landscape of Wupatki remained a "frontier" between established groups, defined by archeologists as Sinagua, Cohonina, and Kayenta. Then, in one of the warmest and driest places on the Colorado Plateau, life flourished. This became a densely populated landscape supporting a complex society where people, goods, and ideas converged. Today, Wupatki National Monument protects an exceptional record of an extraordinary effort in an improbable place.

“For its time and place there was no other pueblo like Wupatki. It was in all probability the tallest, largest, and perhaps the richest and most influential pueblo in the area.”

As people gathered here during the 1100s, what began as family housing grew into this 100-room-pueblo with a tower, community room, and ceremonial ballcourt. Located near the crossroads of east-west and north-south travel routes, the pueblo evolved to serve a community heavily engaged not only in farming but also in ceremony, trade, and crafts specialization. By 1190, as many as 2,000 people lived within a day’s walk and Wupatki Pueblo was the largest building for at least 50 miles.



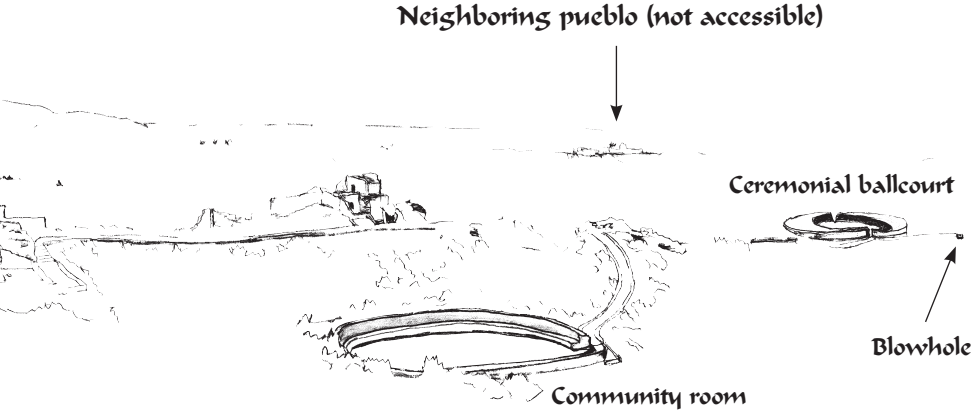
Archeologists are challenged to define a cultural identity for Wupatki Pueblo with its intriguing blend of Kayenta and Sinagua architectural styles and more than 100 pottery types.

A curious place to build a farming community…summers are hot, dry and windy. Yet 800 years ago, agricultural plots would have dotted the landscape, carefully placed in scant pockets of soil.

A farmer’s faith was tested regularly as rainfall came at the wrong time or not at all, and dry winds parched the soil and crops. Each field was at the mercy of where rain fell; no surface irrigation was possible. One field might produce while another withered, so the planting effort was extensive.

Then, as now, water was limited. Across the area, a few seeps and springs existed; catchments held water for a time, and the Little Colorado River provided a seasonal water source.

Still the abundance of storage pots suggests water had to be acquired and managed to be available when needed. Perhaps, as Hopi believe, people derived strength from this challenging land.



The name Wupatki derives from Hopi words that translate literally into "it was cut long," and recalls an event in the histories of Hopi clans. It is said that people prospered here. In time men began gambling and ignored their crops and prayers for rain. Concerned, their leader severed a ritual object and then went into exile. When he returned the people awoke from their decadence.

Knowledgeable Hopis feel the proper place name of this area is Nuvaovi (the place of the snow) and the site known today as Wukoki was Wupatki.

Ties to the Present

For today's Hopi people, the villages of Wupatki remain among the most important "footprints" of the ancestral clans. It was on this landscape, in the shadow of the San Francisco Peaks, that a number of migrating clans met and merged. Significant events, and new traditions and ceremonies resulted. The Zuni and other Puebloan groups (Acoma, Laguna, and Rio Grande) share Wupatki's history as they share a belief in a common origin that begins with their ancestors. Stories of Wupatki also exist among non-Puebloan groups (Havasupai, Yavapai, Hualapai, Southern Paiute, and Navajo) whose ancestors interacted with Puebloan ancestors. The dates for these interactions are unknown.

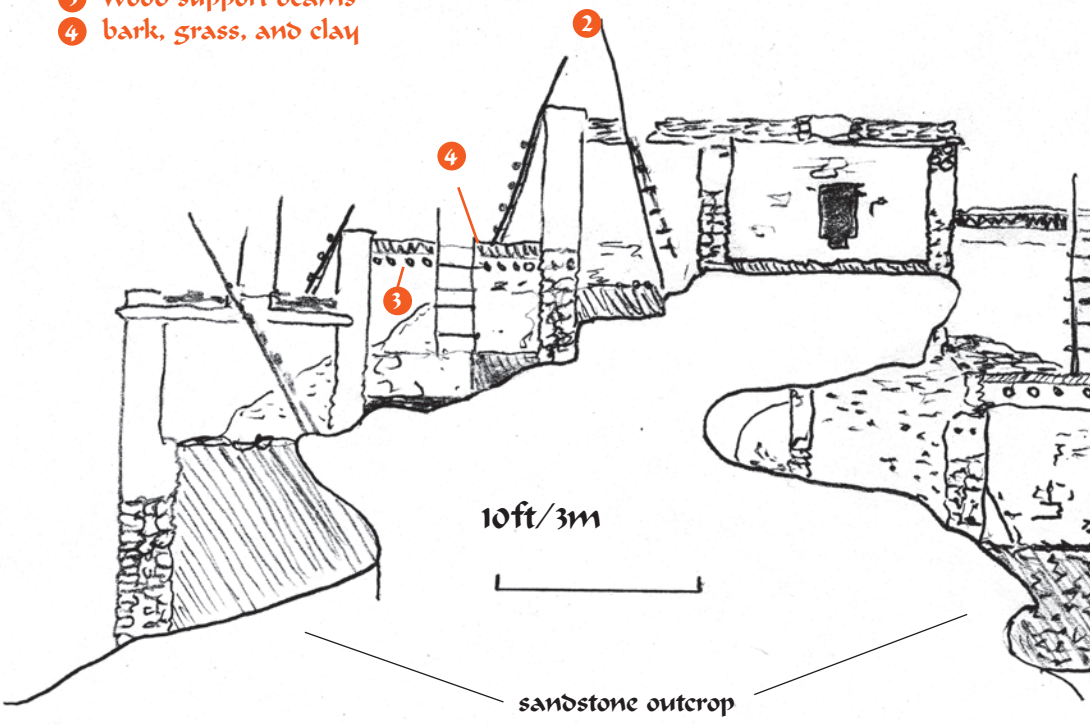
The black cinders blanketing the ground around you remain from the eruption of nearby Sunset Crater volcano some time between 1040 and 1100. The settlement of Wupatki followed but it's uncertain if there was a direct cause and effect.

People may have been drawn by the eruption and stayed. Or, perhaps those displaced by the eruption moved to this lower elevation. However, as many as three generations may have passed before anyone decided to live here.

We do know that ash from the eruption, in a thin uniform layer, retained precious soil moisture providing a window of improved farming potential in this semi-arid landscape.

Can you find a small petroglyph along the trail between the two benches? Don't touch! What does it look like?

1. stone walls with clay mortar
2. roof entrances and ladders
3. wood support beams
4. bark, grass, and clay



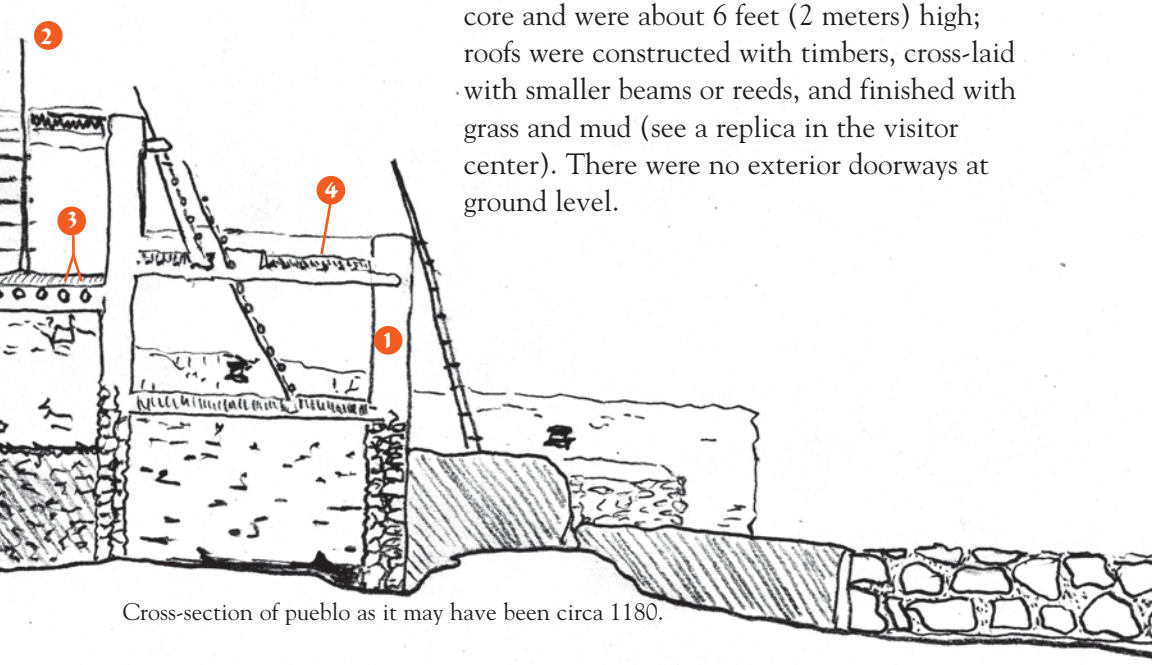
Notice how people shaped their lives to this land. Sun, water, wind, and earth influenced decisions. Using the red sandstone outcrop as a backbone, and its naturally fractured blocks as bricks, masons laid stone rooms up and down the length of the formation. High walls on the north and west sides blunted prevailing winds. Terraced rooms to the south and east bathed in winter sun. Flat roofs served as water systems, collecting precipitation and directing it to storage pots.

Built out in the open, Wupatki is far more typical of 12th century structures than a cliff dwelling. Cliff dwellings make up only a fraction of known southwestern archeological sites.

"…The family, the dwelling house and the field are inseparable, because the woman is the heart of these, and they rest with her. …The man builds the house but the woman is the owner, because she repairs and preserves it."

–A Hopi view of the community, presented to "the Washington Chiefs," 1894

Wupatki Pueblo stood three stories high in places. Double walls were filled with a rubble core and were about 6 feet (2 meters) high; roofs were constructed with timbers, cross-laid with smaller beams or reeds, and finished with grass and mud (see a replica in the visitor center). There were no exterior doorways at ground level.



Cross-section of pueblo as it may have been circa 1180.

Compare the pueblo to this photo using the tall corner wall on top of the rock as a reference. These rooms were buried beneath rubble cleared during excavations beginning in 1933.

5 When occupied, this mud and stone building would have required periodic maintenance. Once people departed, natural forces prevailed-mortar eroded, roofs collapsed, walls tumbled. What you see today is an excavated building, heavily stabilized to postpone deterioration.

The modern iron beam and plate above you support the upper walls. The low wall in front of you exhibits Portland cement, used from the 1930s to 60s, and newer stabilization mortars that more closely duplicate original materials. Although walls stand in their original location, virtually all the mortar you see is modern. Stabilization has compromised the historical architecture, but helps an excavated building withstand natural and human-induced erosion. You are one of hundreds of thousands of visitors—please, do not lean, sit, or walk on any walls.

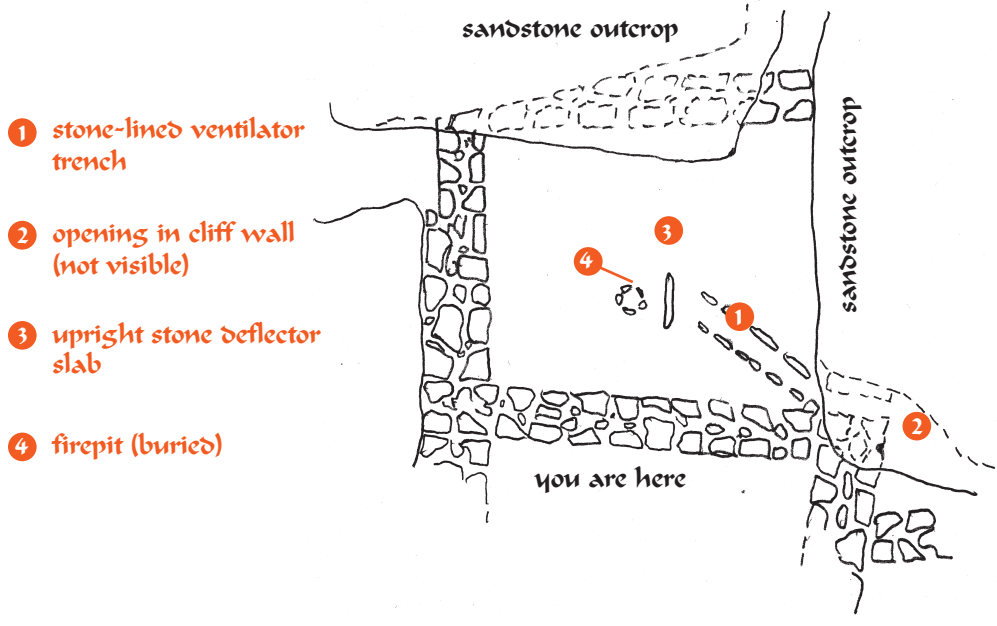
6 Numerous storage rooms within the pueblo attest to a constant preparedness for crop failure. People likely had some of last year's corn on hand at this year's harvest. Perhaps this room served for storage and food processing.

Imagine corn stacked like cordwood, or gathered foods such as piñon nuts, rice grass seeds, and juniper berries secured in clay seed jars. Water jars undoubtedly sat here too. Hours spent at these grinding stones reduced corn and seeds to flour.

Look for a Wupatki water jar on display in the visitor center.

In this room, someone designed an innovative air circulation system to allow for an indoor fire. (Dirt fill in the room makes it hard to see, so use the diagram below). Can you locate the stone-lined ventilator trench on the floor? It connected to an opening in the base of the cliff wall to your right (not visible).

The upright stone slab at the end of the ventilator trench deflected incoming air so that the draft would not pass directly across the firepit. Smoke would exit through a roof opening.



Note how preservation efforts have changed this building: original floor surfaces, as with this room, are much lower—dirt placed in the rooms after excavation protects floor features and keeps walls from collapsing.

Throughout the dwelling you'll see a variety of modern drains that keep water from standing in rooms. In some cases the architecture has been altered. For example, the square and round holes in this front wall were placed for drainage, and the large masonry column built in the back corner supports the upper wall.

This section of the pueblo remains unexcavated. These rooms represent an opportunity to learn more about the past, but that knowledge comes at a cost. Excavation disturbs the site and, potentially, the people and artifacts buried there. Collected materials require elaborate conservation and storage methods; in the ground, this arid climate preserves artifacts almost indefinitely, free of charge.

In the past, few people challenged the purposes of archeological investigation, but today many voice concerns about disturbing sites. Should rooms be excavated, unearthing pots and other items? Possessions were intended, by those who buried or left them behind, to remain as placed, acted upon by time and the elements. Excavation represents a curiosity foreign to American Indian culture and often considered culturally offensive. Do objects from the past serve as legitimate educational tools, or is that notion unimportant or even wrong?

Look for a wall that fell intact with the stone courses retaining their original positions.

The reconstructed circular structure below you resembles a great kiva, a special room used for rituals and ceremonies. However, excavators found no evidence of a roof or other floor features typical of a kiva. Archeologists speculate that this open-air community room could have served as a central gathering place. Imagine voices carrying to others assembled on the pueblo roof tops.

People may have come from nearby and distant villages to participate in ceremonies held here. Maybe rituals focused the community and solved problems, or served to redistribute materials and food.

Excavation of community room, 1933. Photo courtesy of Museum of Northern Arizona.

These 1930s reconstructions were removed in 1950.

Other people have come and gone since the original occupants. During the late 1800s, Basque sheepherders stayed here briefly, enlarging this doorway and occupying the room beyond. Local prospector Ben Doney pothunted Wupatki, amassing an impressive collection of artifacts.

Rooms on this end of the pueblo were excavated and reconstructed to serve as an office and museum. The National Park Service now has a policy of stabilizing buildings in their existing state.

Concern over looting at Wupatki led to its protection as a national monument in 1924. Later expansion of the monument included some land historically used since the mid-1800s by Navajo *naat'áanii* (headman) Peshlakai Etsidi and his descendants. These Diné families grazed sheep here, moving seasonally between numerous camps, leaving behind more than 60 residential sites. Their history is intertwined with that of the monument. They remain intimately tied to the Wupatki landscape.

Continue down the trail to the ballcourt and blowhole; or skip the ballcourt and continue to your left, back to the visitor center. The spur to the right takes you into the community room.

11

The extent of this community is not obvious, but hundreds of small family dwellings surround us forming a cluster. Another cluster exists on the uplands to the west (where you may visit Citadel and Lomaki Pueblos). We don't know if the Wupatki and Citadel communities were autonomous, cooperatives, or competitors.

> "We found...all the prominent points occupied by the ruins of stone houses of considerable size...They are evidently the remains of a large town, as they occurred at intervals for an extent of eight or nine miles, and the ground was thickly strewed with fragments of pottery in all directions."
>
> –Journal entry, Sitgreaves Expedition, October 8, 1851

From this point, you can see two other nearby homes. These sites are not open to visitation. Please do not wander off designated trails.

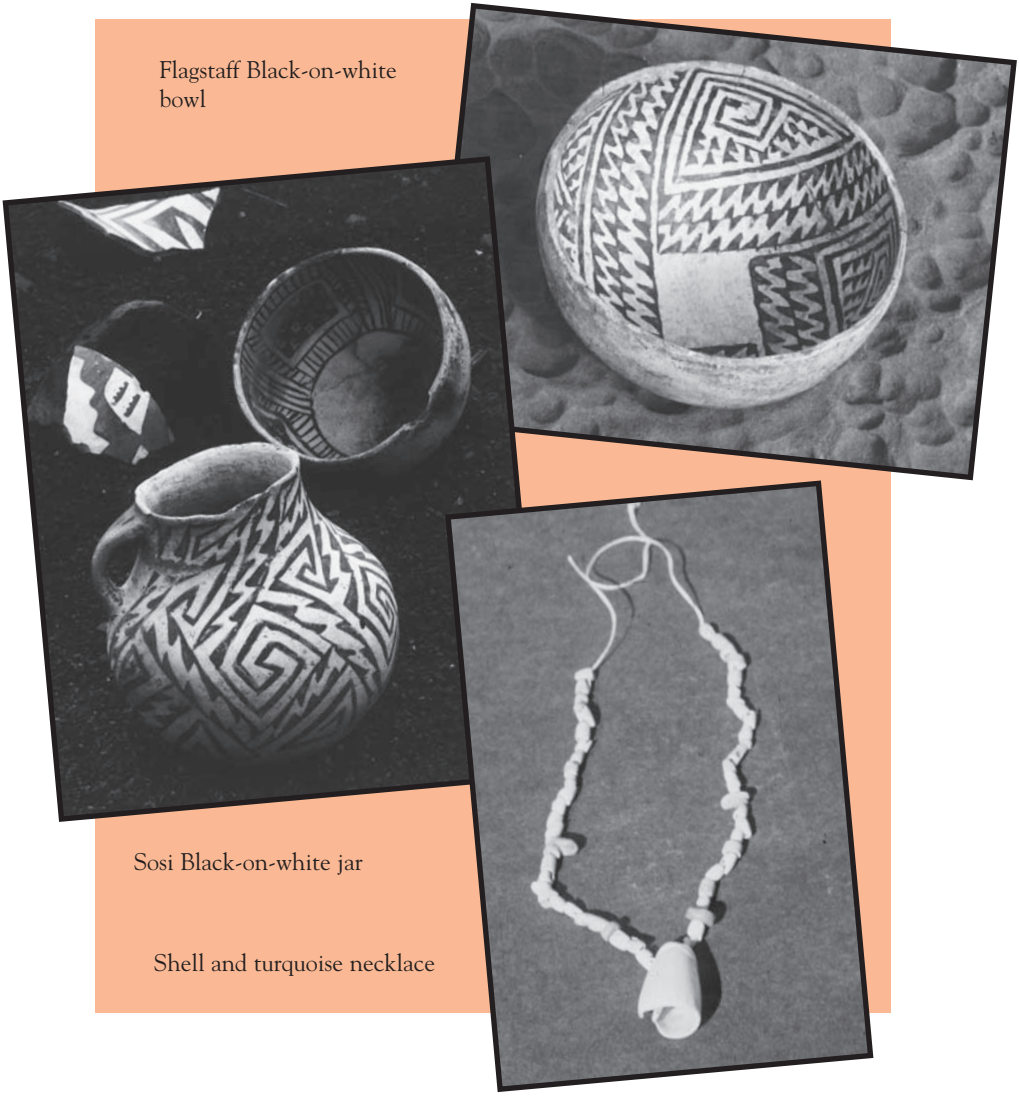
Look, "Swiss cheese" rocks! The grains in this sandstone are cemented with calcite which dissolves with rain water. Weathering pits form, which collect more water, enlarging the pits. The dissolved calcite moves downward into any porous rock or soil. Concentrations build, then moisture creates capillary action which draws the solution to the surface where it precipitates out, creating the white deposits on soil and rocks.

12

The reconstructed ballcourt below you was an unusual structure. Known ballcourts in the Southwest were not masonry. This court may have had multiple functions: a place where special ceremonies were held, where competitive games took place for socialization, or where children played a game with a stick and ball, similar to hockey. After rains, it likely served as a reservoir.

Some archeologists think valuables changed hands through ritual events such as ball games. People living to the south (Hohokam tradition) had shells, salt, cotton, and a ballcourt in every town. People to the east in the Chaco region (Ancestral Puebloan tradition) had Mesoamerican macaws, copper, and turquoise to trade. A ballcourt at Wupatki could function as a link between distant regions. Trade valuables from both regions ended up here.

Sandals trod far and wide, maintaining trade networks that helped meet mutual needs and improved the quality of life. When materials, innovation, and ideas came to communities, all knew what others had to offer.



Flagstaff Black-on-white bowl

Sosi Black-on-white jar

Shell and turquoise necklace

Be sure to check out the blowhole next to the ballcourt. Ask at the visitor center if you'd like to learn more about this intriguing geological feature.

People were often buried in rooms such as this; consequently, graves and beliefs were inadvertently violated when this site was excavated. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA), asserts that the present day American Indian tribes affiliated with archeological sites have rights and beliefs to be protected. This Act helps ensure that decisions about these places reflect the values and wishes of those who were here before.

As tribes exert more control over their heritage, diverse opinions about appropriate treatment of archeological sites emerge. As an example, most Puebloan groups believe if human creations were made to last forever and not let to die, "the world would get filled up, and the purpose of living would disappear." This philosophy challenges National Park Service mandates to preserve and perpetuate the physical remains of the past.

Look for a doorway filled in with stones. Why would the occupants close off a doorway?

This open plaza area may have been the hub of village life and work. Ethnographic evidence suggests most activities were gender specific, and everyone contributed. Children learned by watching, listening, then doing. Surely there were no idle hands.

Women worked clay into necessary utensils. They mortared the pueblo, knowing clay as they did. As the herbalists, gatherers, and protectors of stored crops and seeds, women were vital to the community.

> "…the man cultivates the field, but he renders its harvest into the woman's keeping."
>
> –A Hopi view of the community, 1894

Men hunted and farmed. The entire growing season may have been spent away from home tending fields. Winter brought with it time to weave. Fine cotton textiles and abundant tools suggest weaving was an important, highly developed skill at Wupatki.

Along this side of the pueblo, people repeatedly dumped their trash, forming a midden. Refuse tells us much of what we know about past life. Each layer of food debris yields facts about diet, nutrition, and changing reliance on resources throughout the history of the village. Broken pottery and worn out tools reveal relative dates of occupation and technological changes through time.

When Wupatki was excavated, artifacts and food remains were collected and stored but not studied for years. Today, rather than excavating new material, we study old collections to learn how people altered or managed plant and animal populations to their advantage.

This midden has not been excavated. Walking off trail here, or through any midden, mixes the upper layer of trash with lower levels, destroying the context that is so important to understanding past lifeways. Please, stay on the paved trail.

"No woman ever sat at the Hopi looms. The men were expert weavers; they wove diligently all winter long in the various kivas. Hopi woven items were known far and wide, and people of other tribes came to barter for them."

–Helen Sekaquaptewa, from "Me and Mine"

Above left: Disc spindle whorl.
Above right: Reverse twill weave cotton cloth

Fragment of a carrying strap

16

You may enter this room. The rock outcrop around you provided an almost ready-made room, initially used for household trash. Roughly 5 feet (1.5 meters) of debris accumulated here before the first floor was laid and the space used as a living room. Can you tell where a second story room began?

This room provides a special opportunity to experience the pueblo in an intimate way. Generally, you should not enter rooms unless invited. Everyone has a responsibility to know the "ground rules" when visiting an archeological site.

17

Park rangers once lived in this pueblo. The two rooms above you were reconstructed to house employees Jimmy and Sallie Brewer, and Davy and Corky Jones during the 1930s. They hauled water from the nearby spring, but had the luxury of cooking with propane. Jones excavated a small adjoining storage room to house a gas refrigerator; commercial electricity did not arrive until 1959. The government, of course, charged them rent—$10 per month!

Like other reconstructions, these walls and roofs were removed in the 1950s.

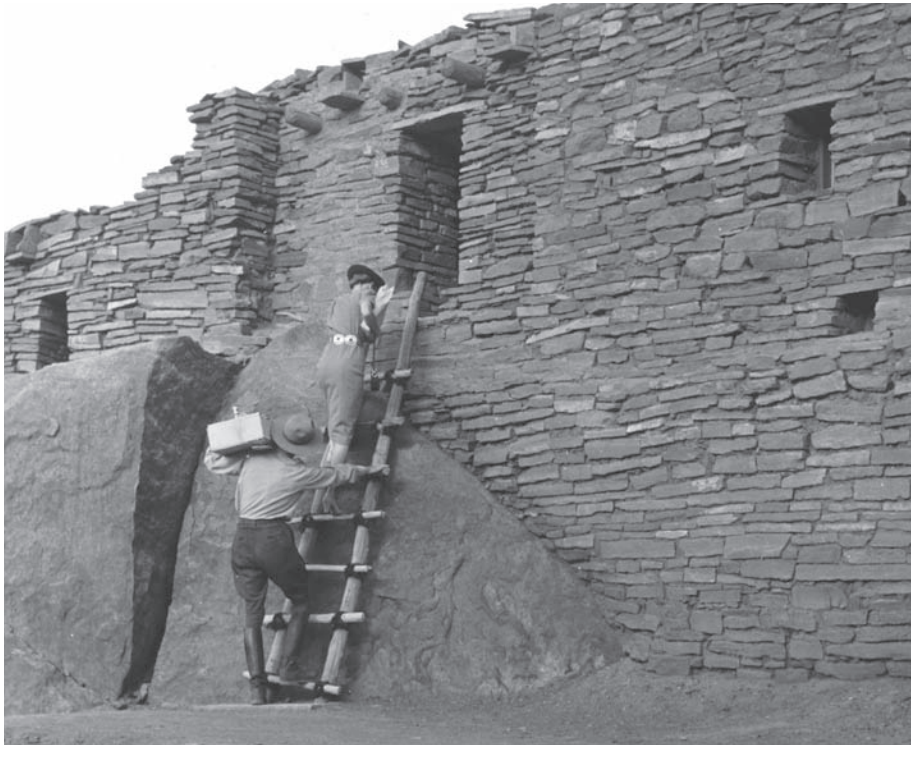


photo courtesy of Tad Nichols

"Those were the two rooms we were to live in. At the top of the ladder was the room used as a bedroom and office, and (to the right) the beautiful sunny little kitchen. The water was in a barrel behind a niche in the kitchen wall. …Davy pumped the water in once a week, fifty-five gallons, and that sufficed for everything. We took our baths there unless it was a special occasion, when we would go down to where the spring ran out to the sheep troughs. There was more water that way, but there were apt to be sheep and Navajos, too."

–Corky Jones (above), from
Letters From Wupatki

Reconstructed rooms may help us to visualize the past and identify more closely with the inhabitants. But, the mental images we construct and conclusions we draw likely mirror our present rather than reflect the world in which they lived.

Reconstructions lead us to believe we know the past, when in reality, so much will never be known.

The two beams at the rear of the room above you have been in place for 800 years. Tree-ring dates obtained from various beams in the pueblo span from A.D. 1106 to 1220 but cluster around three periods: 1137, 1160, and 1190. This suggests specific periods of construction, or at least beam cutting. Wall abutments also indicate the pueblo grew by accretion. Perhaps the various building phases mark the arrival of clans, each bringing something different to the community, resulting in the "cultural brew" that makes Wupatki so unusual.

Some archeologists see cultural traditions, such as Sinagua and Kayenta, not as "people" or mutually exclusive genetic or ethnic groups, but rather as inhabited geographic regions experiencing dynamic ebb-and-flow of populations. Migrations brought people together creating cultural dominance in some areas, and shared cultural traits in others. Seen this way, specific traditions such as black-on-white pottery and T-shaped doorways could have been maintained over centuries by peoples of different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

This large room, on the southeastern corner of the pueblo, contained no household tools or utensils. The size and features, including the ventilation system, suggest it may have been a kiva. Smaller "ceremonial" rooms such as this one may have maintained the private aspects of ritual while the larger, open community room served public ceremonies. Today, rectangular clan kivas persist in Hopi villages, while larger, round community kivas endure in the eastern Pueblos. Kivas are an integral part of Puebloan society and remain a cultural trait that can be traced from past to present.

Villages like Wupatki were purposely settled and left for reasons we may never fully understand. After roughly 150 years here, maybe life ceased to be good. Perhaps the rumor of a better life in another village was worth investigating. Maybe, as some Hopi believe, the people stayed too long here and failed to lead moral and responsible lives. Ensuing social and environmental catastrophes were signals to resume migrations to find and settle the place where Hopi live to this day.

By 1300, across the region people moved into villages even larger than Wupatki. Those living here joined others at places like Homol'ovi along the Little Colorado River (near present day Winslow, Arizona) or at villages south of Walnut Canyon. According to clan histories, some went directly east to the Hopi Mesas. A few undoubtedly chose to stay behind.

Today this village rests silent but not forgotten. Though it is no longer physically occupied, Hopi and Zuni people believe those who lived and died here remain as spiritual guardians. Descendants visit periodically to enrich their personal understanding of their clan histories. Wupatki is remembered and cared for, not abandoned.

"…for us life is shrouded in mystery and the world defies explanation…humans do not need to know everything there is to be known. The human past, we feel, is a universal past. No one can claim it, and no one can ever know it completely."

–Rina Swentzell, Pueblo Santa Clara

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Consultation provided by: Hopi Tribe Cultural Preservation Office; Navajo Traditional Culture Program, Historic Preservation Dept., Navajo Nation.

Cover photograph courtesy of Bernard A. Natseway, NPS archeologist.

Introductory quote from Report of Findings Prestabilization Documentation for Wupatki Pueblo, E. Brennan and C. Downum


ballcourt
blowhole
North
12
11
13
10
14
9
community room
8
15
7
16
17
6
1
follow the numbered markers
18
5
Visitor
Center
19
4
2
20
3