

Canyons of the Ancients

Our newest National Monument, Canyons of the Ancients is also America's most fragile, a checkerboard of ancient artifacts scattered among modern bean and a hayfields across southwest Colorado and northwest Utah. There are at least 100 sites per square mile.

This area - not the more intact cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde - was the epicenter of ancient Anasazi communities. Several towns had hundreds of rooms each with ceremonial centers to match. Imagine a plain, more densely inhabited and farmed than what you see today - then, you can imagine the true scope of Anasazi habitation and culture from 600-1300 A.D..

The enormous Monument is a difficult place to interpret, much less navigate. There are really just a few areas ready for the public; the rest is un-signed, un-mapped, and un-excavated. This is an area to discover on your own, if you're prepared. You may find tiny rock walled granaries tucked up on canyon ledges or mounds of rubble that outline the shadow of an enormous, ancient village.

Anasazi Heritage Center

The Anasazi Heritage Center, 3 miles west of Dolores, is the Visitor Center for the Canyon of the Ancients National Monument. The center has accurate maps on the Monument, including access and interpretive information on two principal sites: Painted Hand Pueblo and Sand Canyon. Painted Hand is a lovely standing tower perched on a boulder. Sand Canyon is one of the largest town complexes in this area with more than 400 rooms, a kivas, and one large 'great Kiva'. Two 12th-century sites are also on the local grounds.



Archaeology and Research

Two federal agencies and a nonprofit organization have poured considerable effort into deciphering what ancient Anasazi life held.

Crow Canyon Archaeological Center - Village Project (CCAC)

Canyons of the Ancients lacks dazzling cliff dwellings, yet cliff dwellings do occur. Rather, it's famous for meticulous research and a large database which characterizes the archaeology process of gathering artifacts, tree ring data, arrow points, then cataloging and eventually modeling data to reach conclusions such as "After 600 years of heritage, why did the Anasazi abruptly leave some 800 years ago?"

In seven centuries between 600 and 100 and A.D, Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, a nonprofit organization, has estimated 197,000 people lived in their study area. The Village Project aids our understanding of long history of Anasazi peoples in the Mesa Verde region. First, it provides new population estimates for a densely occupied portion of the northern Southwest.

The Village Project is about 1800 km² with Cortez, Colorado, at its southeast boundary. Peak population was estimated to be 11 people per km². I have not seen a similar estimate for Mesa Verde; outliers along Cedar Mesa showed a much smaller population.

The peak population estimate covers only a portion of larger San Juan -Mesa



Verde areas, thus suggesting a still higher regional population.

The Great Tower at Yellow Jacket is depicted above.

©2008, Chopawamsic LC, All Right Reserved

BistiArt@Smugmug.com

www.BistiArt.Smugmug.com