

Cedar Mesa

Cedar Mesa is 80 miles west of Mesa Verde and 45 miles from Blanding, Utah. Archaeologists have studied a stretch of habitations from Bullet Canyon on the northwest to McLoyds and North Road Canyons on the southeast. Perfect Kiva (Bullet), Moon House (McLoyds), the Citadel (N. Road), and Fallen Roof Ruin (S. Road) show various aspects of habitations, granaries, storage places, and kivas associated with canyons during Pueblo III life at Grand Gulch and Cedar Mesa.

Cedar Mesa contains evidence of an intermittent Anasazi habitation for 1100 years from 200-1300 A.D., including Basketmaker II to Pueblo II/III styles. Various dominant living styles are found in an elevation range of 600 feet (6000-6600). Basketmaker II occupation was well spread across both mesa top and canyon (see map below). A unique environment, existing sites, and use of burial locations give this mesa top/canyon setting added importance in overall Basketmaker II settlement pattern. On the contrary, Pueblo III was mostly defensive canyon dwellings such as Moon House and the Citadel.

Moon House

Moon House, hidden in a remote canyon, is a late Pueblo III site. Tree ring dates suggest only 18 years of occupation, beginning 1250 and ending 1268A.D.



This Moon House HDR image is a six shot panoramic capture. It covers a 12 EV range. It was processed with Photomatix Pro using Details Enhancer settings to bring out the actual ruin. Highlights were enhanced in Adobe Photoshop CS3.

Inside the long wall, living quarters are typically Anasazi. The huge overhang made a roof. A dado with white dots and a plaster panel reminds us of other ruin markings. I do not know if the wall was protective or to maintain consistent temperatures. Nevertheless, it provides a small area outside individual rooms for grinding corn and children playing.



Fallen Roof Ruin

Fallen Roof is a small ruin whose roof is an unusual pattern caused by segments of the roof falling away to reveal cracks, seeps of chemically laden waters, and a combination of white and orange patterns the eye finds extraordinarily appealing!



The clay layer to the right of this ruin is a highly regarded marker by the Anasazi building standards. From that layer they could create mud to put in the matrix of the rooms they built. I have noted this horizon in nearby canyons where larger

ruins exist - notably Citadel and Moon House. Rock fragments lying on the floor may have fallen since the Anasazi departed circa 128x. Would you not believe the women would insist on a neater front yard?

Citadel

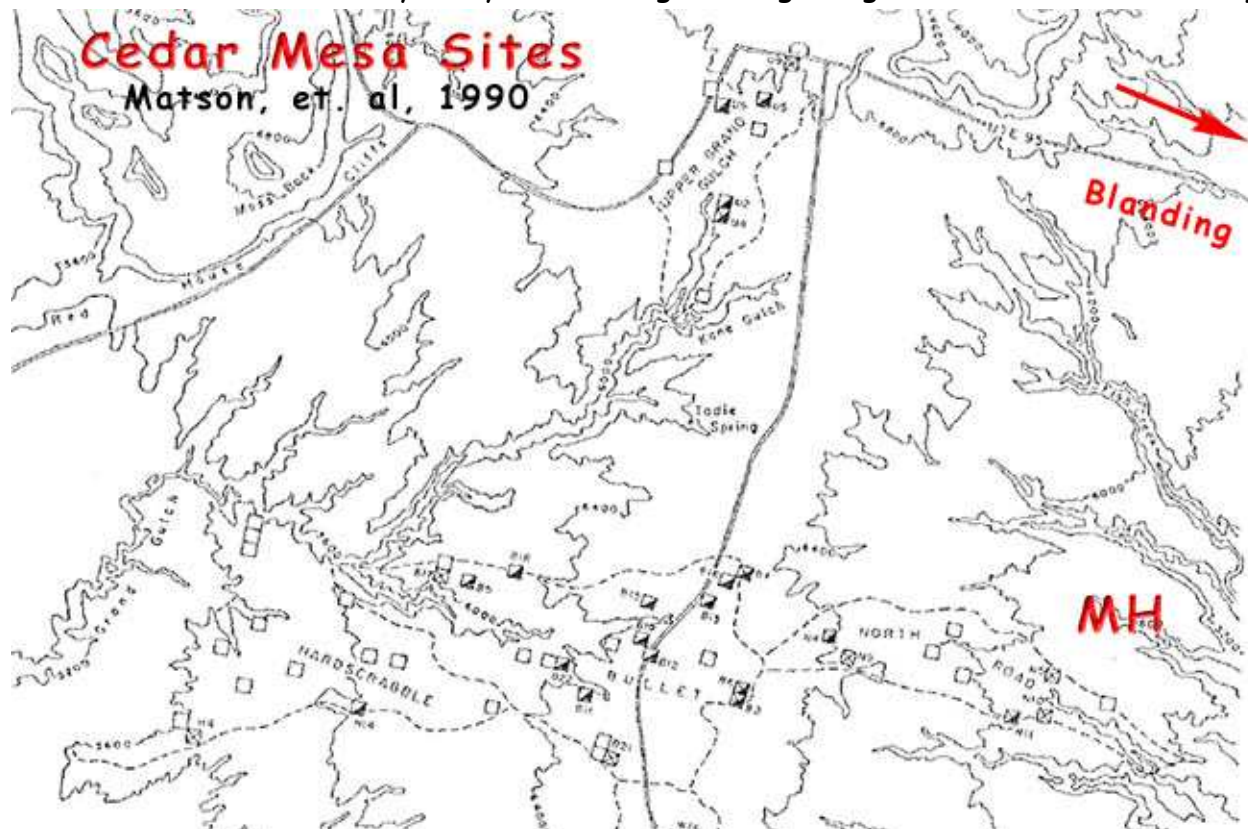
Several miles down canyon, Citadel sits on the same north side of the canyon. But, rather than a simple, small ruin, Citadel sits out on a long, narrow neck between two canyons, guarded by the overhanging brow beneath the mesa top.



This image imbues afternoon Magic Hour with grace; Bears Ears, sacred Ute mountains in the background, and Citadel, a very isolated Pueblo III Anasazi Ruin, create a unique mountain scene on Cedar Mesa.

Cedar Mesa Archaeology

Cedar Mesa was surveyed by archaeologists beginning in the 1970s, with many



reports since then. A working field map is shown below. Forgive its limited nature.

Grand Gulch is in the southwest edge, Bullet Canyon comes up to 261 which transects Cedar Mesa, and Moon House (MH) are shown for reference. North Road is North Road Canyon. Blanding, Utah, is 45 miles east. Filled squares are habitations. X'd squares are limited activity sites.

Maize: Food since Basketmaker II Time

A central divide runs north - south on the mesa at an average elevation of 6000 feet. From here the mesa slopes to Grand Gulch in the west and Comb Wash in the east, with lower elevations of the mesa top at approximately 1700m. The surface of Cedar Mesa is cut by a number of deeply entrenched canyons. Only permanent sources of water on the mesa are found in these canyons. The mesa is composed almost completely of Cedar Mesa Sandstone which is a good aquifer, with a number of springs in many of the canyons. Natural tanks in the slickrock on the mesa's surface also hold limited amounts of water after a rain shower.

Although the Anasazi were farmers through much of this time, rainfall farming could have its climactic shortcomings. Such shortcomings are shown by irregular occupation of Cedar Mesa, in southeastern Utah. On Cedar Mesa, Anasazi were limited to about 600 feet of relief, since piñon-juniper soil capacity limited the ability to properly raise corn and other types of agriculture.

At Cedar Mesa, the mesa top is covered by a fine sandy loam which can be quite deep near the central divide (>3m), but thins significantly towards mesa edges. The higher, deep soil mesa areas are dominated by piñon-juniper forest mixed with a few sage flats near canyon heads. These deep aeolian sandy silts were important prehistorically for dry-farming. On mesa tops, flood water irrigation on broad, low lying washes created prime farming land. Dry farming at upper rainfall elevations made another farming niche.

Precipitation on Cedar Mesa increases with elevation. Annual precipitation for the higher elevations averages approximately 12", whereas the lower areas of the mesa receive less than 10" annually.

Maize As a Staple

From studies of coprolites, stable isotopes, and middens (trash heaps), it's become clear maize was a staple in Anasazi diet for 1000 years. At the Sand Canyon Pueblo, 60 miles east, turkeys were another family staple. Moon House and Sand Canyon were built about the same time.

Family survival depended on farming maize in diverse environments on Cedar Mesa and Canyons of the Ancients, under variable rainfall and climate then following moisture changes and soil where ever best growth was.

Accessing Moon House & Citadel

Access to Moon House requires both trekking and climbing. Our image does not show 200 feet of knobs above and 400 feet of canyon walls below. Yet, I've watched a man with acute acrophobia negotiate that trail, capture some great images, then share his stories and excitement with us about such a pristine ruin.

Citadel requires more care; while the narrow access route is easy to negotiate, getting to the causeway and climbing the chimneys to the ruin require some skill.

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