



Mesa Verde: The History of the Ancient Pueblo Settlement

Charles River Editors, Jesse Harasta

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*Includes pictures.

*Includes footnotes and a bibliography for further reading.

When the Spanish came into contact with different tribes in the Southwest, they were so intrigued by the structure of the communities that they gave the natives the name Pueblo, a term they used to measure certain sizes for their own settlements.. Thus, while most Americans have heard of the Pueblo and Navajo, many remain unfamiliar with distinctions within the tribes.

The Spaniards' interest was understandable, because the Pueblo fascinated those who came across their settlements, especially those located in desert regions and the sides of cliffs that involved the use of adobe mud, stone, carving homes out of cliffs. One such settlement, Oraibi, was created around 1100 A.D. and remains one of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements in North America, but the most famous of the cliff dwellings can be found at Mesa Verde, which was turned into a national park in the early 20th century, about 1500 years after the Ancient Pueblo established the settlement.

Today's Puebloan tribes are descended from tribes known as the "Ancestral Puebloan People", one of which was the Anasazi, but anthropologists believe that the Anasazi were a common ancestor of every Pueblo group, so the Ancient Pueblo are often referred to simply as the Anasazi. The name Anasazi came from their enemies; it is a Navajo word that means "enemy ancestor". While that name understandably continues to offend the descendants of the Anasazi, it also underscores that there is still a lot of uncertainty regarding the history of the Anasazi. In fact, it is still unclear what the Anasazi called themselves, and though they resided near the "Four Corners" area of Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico for more than 700 years, they mysteriously abandoned their settlements shortly after they truly began to flourish around 1050-1150 A.D.

Despite the mystery surrounding the Anasazi, it's widely agreed that they occupied Mesa Verde and its unique structures for a period of nearly 700 years, beginning as early as the 7th century. Thanks to its occupants taking advantage of the surrounding geologic formations, Mesa Verde is an amazing collection of cliff dwellings, as well as houses that utilize caves and rock overhangs, and structures consisting of adobe and sandstone. Unfortunately, the natural conditions that make Mesa Verde so special also likely played a role in its abandonment, with overpopulation and drought forcing inhabitants out near the end of the 13th century.

Mesa Verde: The History of the Ancient Pueblo Settlement covers the establishment of Mesa Verde from its origins until its establishment as a national park. Along with pictures, footnotes, and a bibliography, you will learn about Mesa Verde like never before.

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