

Chaco Culture National Historical Park, NM

World Heritage

Site Regarded as central to the ancestral Puebloan culture, Chaco Culture National Historical Park is located in a canyon that contains the largest excavated ruins in the Southwest. The area features hundreds of small sites and 13 major ruins, most of which are accessible by car or on foot. The Park preserves the monumental architecture and complex community life of a major center of ancestral Puebloan culture (Anasazi) that took root and flourished for a thousand years.

Culture and History

The Chacoan culture began to flourish in the canyon in the mid-800s with continual habitation and building lasting for another 300 years. The ancient Puebloan people constructed massive stone buildings, called great houses. These great houses were multiple stories in height and much larger than what had previously been built. Construction on some of these buildings spanned decades and even centuries. These structures were often aligned with solar, lunar, and cardinal directions and placed within a landscape surrounded by sacred mountains, mesas, and

shrines. The buildings in the canyon are believed to be "public architecture" that were used periodically by the people for times of ceremony and commerce.

By 1050, Chaco had become the political, economic, and ceremonial center for the Chacoan culture. Roads connected the canyon to over a 150 other great houses, including Aztec Ruins and Salmon Ruins to the north. Chaco became the trade center for turquoise, parrots, macaws, copper bells, and other precious commodities.

By the mid-1100s the canyon began to decline as the regional center as new building ceased and influence moved to Aztec Ruins and other great houses. In time, the people moved away from the area and culture to reinvent themselves. Today the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico claim to be the descendants of the ancient Puebloans.

Chacoan Great Houses / Outliers

As its name implies, Chaco Culture National Historical Park includes more than just Chaco Canyon. While Chacoan Culture was centered within the canyon with its spectacular great houses and dense concentration of monumental architecture, Chacoan influence extended much further, throughout the San Juan Basin and beyond. The whole region contains outlying great houses, which show many of the same features as the great houses in Chaco Canyon (core-and-veneer masonry, large-scale planning, exaggerated size relative to other buildings in the immediate area), though generally on a smaller scale. These outlying great houses show clear evidence of the spread of the Chacoan system throughout a remarkably wide area.

Chacoan Roads

In addition to these outliers of great houses is an extensive system of engineered roads both within Chaco Canyon and extending out a considerable distance to the outlying great houses throughout the San Juan Basin and beyond. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Chacoan roads is their straightness. The roads are generally aligned very precisely, and continue for considerable distances with the same alignment without curving or adapting to the landscape as modern roads and trails usually do.

Facilities

Gallo Campground, located one mile east of the Visitor Center, is open year-round. Tucked among the fallen boulders and cliffs of Gallo Wash, the campground offers camping in a rugged environment, surrounded by petroglyphs, a cliff dwelling, inscriptions, and a high desert landscape. There is no shade. The campsites are available by reservation. Sites 36-49 are for tent camping only. Most of the other sites are open to RVs or tents. Car camping is allowed.

Each site has a picnic table and fire grate (with a grill). Bring your own firewood or charcoal. Gathering wood is prohibited and no firewood is available in the park. Most sites include a tent pad. Pets are permitted, but must be kept on a leash at all times. The campground has water (non-potable) and restrooms with flush toilets. The restrooms are closed from the day after Veterans Day through the end of February. PortaPottys are available during this time.

Additional Information

- [Google Map & Directons](#)
- [Chaco Canyon in Google Map](#)
- [Chaco Culture National Historical Park, NPS](#)
- [Solstice Project](#)



Supporting Documents



[Chaco Park Map 274.32 KB](#)

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