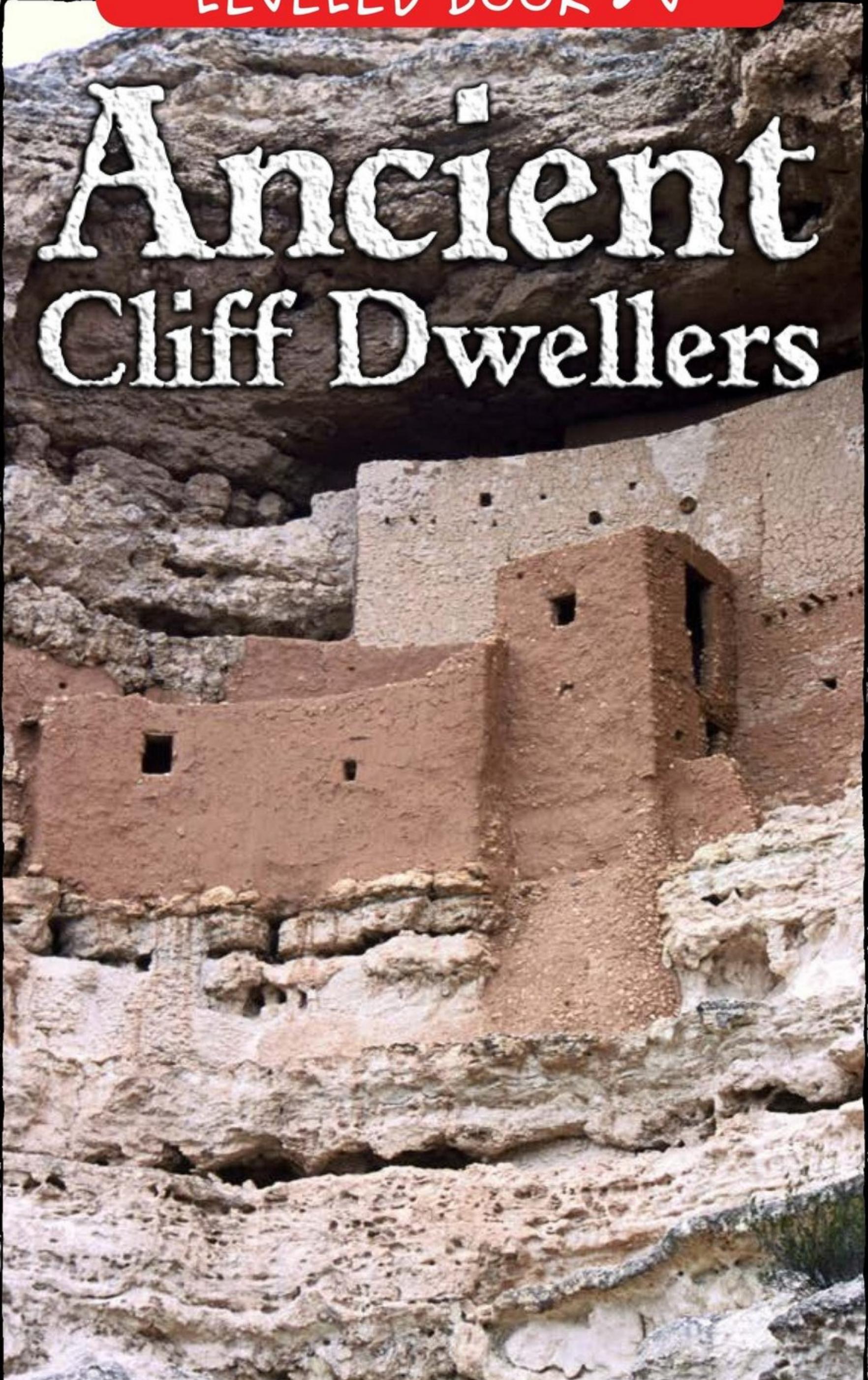


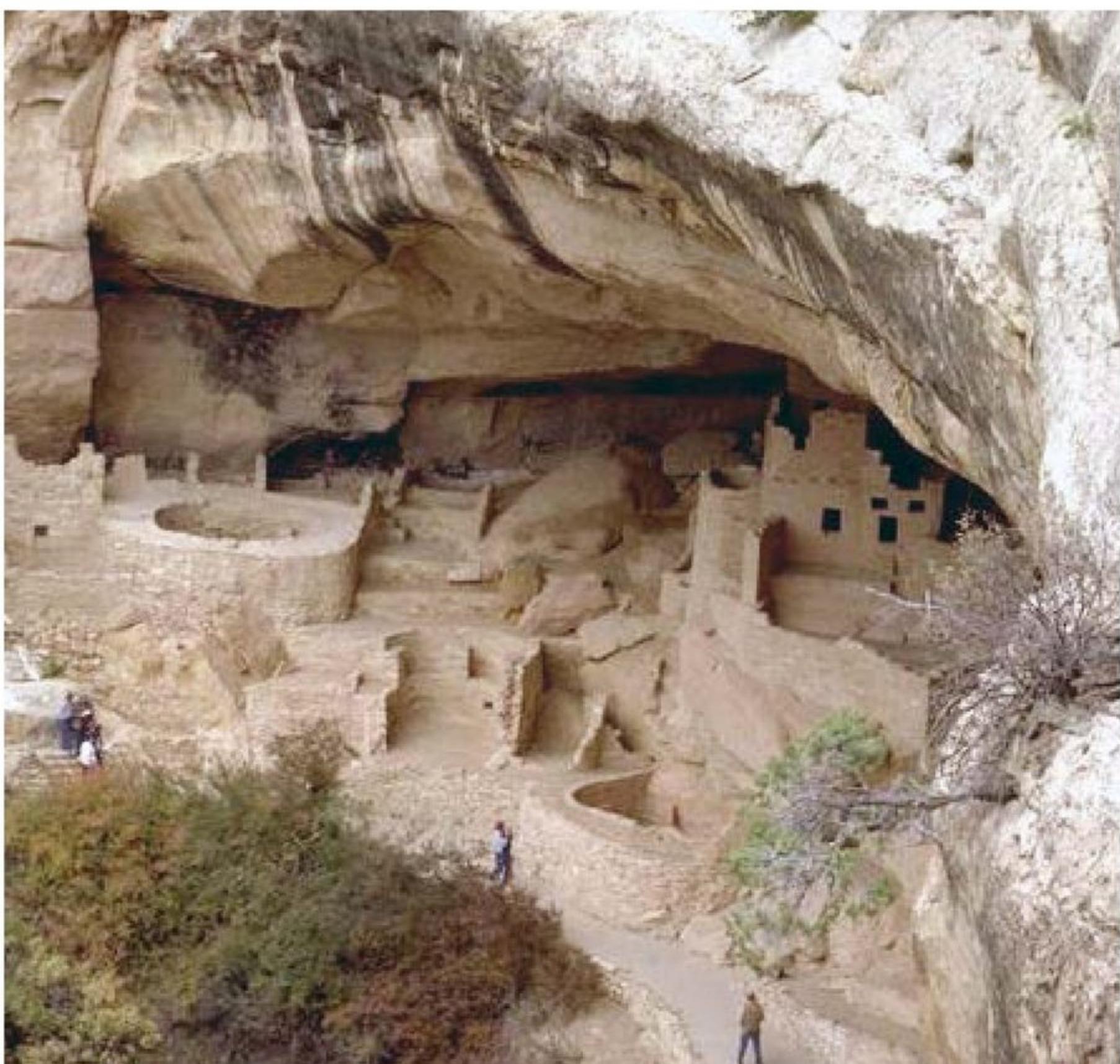
LEVELED Book • V

Ancient Cliff Dwellers



Written by Kira Freed

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Table of Contents

The Four Corners	4
Evidence	5
Paleo-Indians	6
Archaic People	7
Ancient Puebloans	8
<i>Making Baskets</i>	9
<i>Building Larger Houses</i>	12
<i>Moving to the Cliffs</i>	14
<i>Building Dwellings</i>	16
<i>Daily Life</i>	17
<i>Spiritual Life</i>	18
<i>Leaving the Cliffs</i>	19
Modern-Day Descendants	21
Protecting the Cliff Dwellings	22
Glossary	23
Explore More	24
Index	24



The Four Corners

Mesa Verde National Park, founded in 1906, is the first national park in the United States established to honor human accomplishments. Located where the states of Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico meet, the park contains many cliff dwellings that are among the most striking examples of early human architecture in North America. The builders used great skill, creating these unusual dwellings without the aid of modern tools or machines.

Who lived in these structures, and how did they live? Why did they make their homes in the cliffs? Why did they leave, and where did they go? These are some of the questions we will explore.



Do You Know?

Mesa Verde National Park is located in the Four Corners area, the only place in the United States where the corners of four states meet. The marker indicating the point is a tourist attraction.





Petroglyphs at Mesa Verde

Evidence

The early people who lived in the Four Corners area are called **prehistoric** because they left no written records. We know about them because we've found many remains of their culture buried in the ground.

Mesa Verde is located in a high, flat desert surrounded by mountains. The **arid**, or dry, conditions at Mesa Verde are ideal for preserving skeletons, mummies, dwellings, tools, and trash piles. These remains have helped **archaeologists** to study the lives of the early people who lived in the area. Other remains include **pictographs**, or paintings on stone, and **petroglyphs**, or pictures carved in stone.



Paleo-Indians

To understand the story of the cliff dwellers, we need to go back in time. Scientists believe that at least 14,000 years ago, during the Ice Age, ancient



people crossed a land bridge from northern Russia to Alaska in North America. Hundreds of years later, some of their descendants traveled far enough south to reach the Four Corners area.

The first Four Corners people were called Paleo-Indians, and they survived by hunting and

gathering. Men used large spears to hunt huge herd animals, including elephant-like animals called mammoths and mastodons, and giant bison. Women gathered nuts, berries, and other wild plants. The Paleo-Indians did not have permanent homes. Instead, they moved from place to place following the animals they hunted. They camped in caves or built simple shelters.



Archaic People

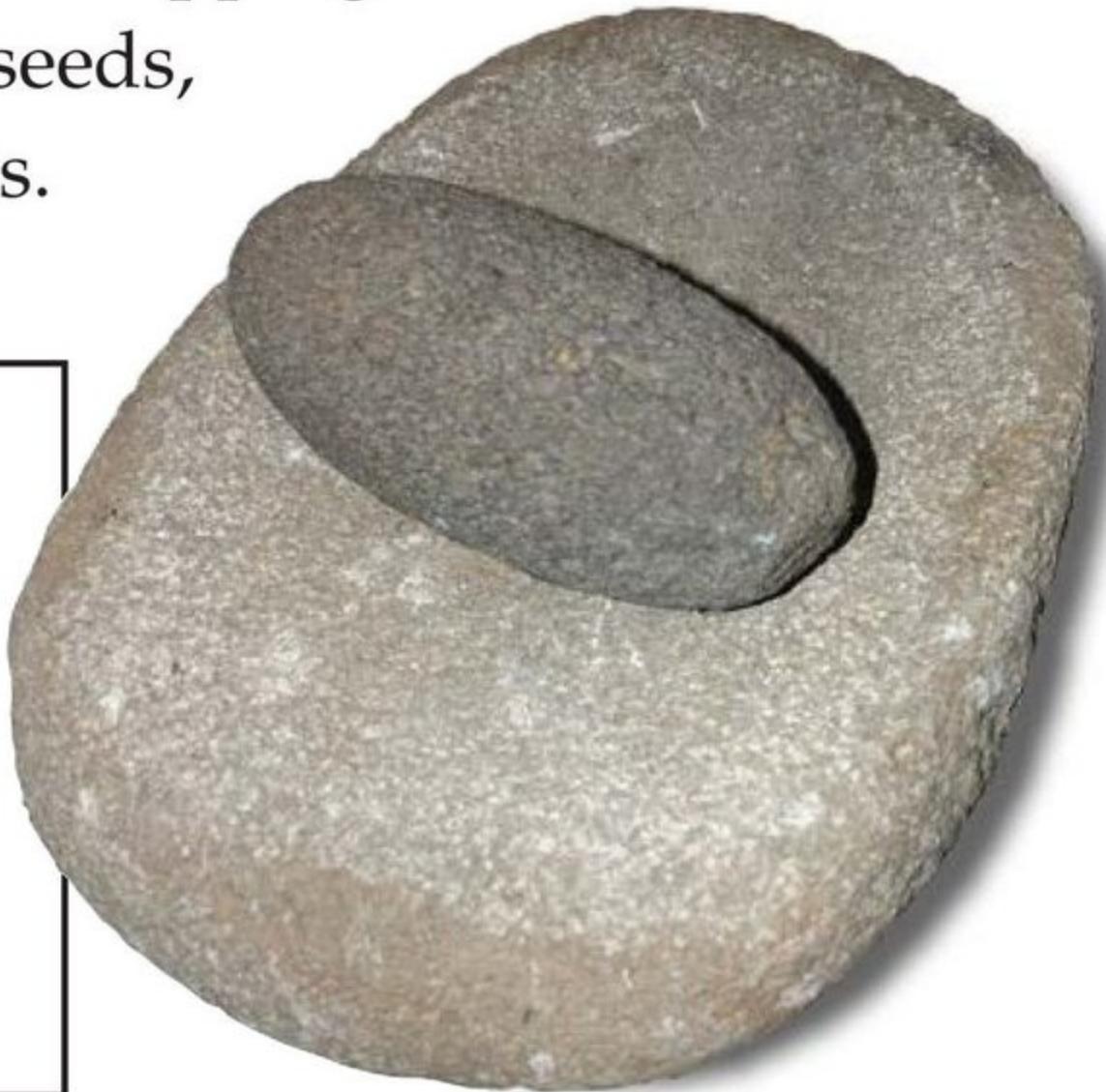
When the Ice Age ended about 10,000 years ago, temperatures became warmer, causing the extinction of many large animals and turning large grasslands into deserts. The Four Corners people had to **adapt** to these changes and find new ways to survive. Archaeologists call these people the Archaic people.

Like their Paleo-Indian **ancestors**, the Archaic people were hunters and gatherers. But the animals they hunted were smaller and provided less meat than the ones their ancestors hunted. The Archaic people began to rely more on plants for food.

The Archaic people made different tools from those of the Paleo-Indians—smaller spear points for hunting deer and bighorn sheep, and nets and traps for catching rabbits and birds. Women used special tools for chopping and grinding roots, seeds, nuts, and wild plants.

Early Tools

The first grinding stones and bowls were made during the Archaic people's time. Similar tools are still used by their descendants in the Southwest.





Ancient Puebloans

By about 2,000 years ago, life in the Four Corners had changed in important ways. People had learned to grow their own food instead of relying on wild animals and wild plants. Agriculture changed their way of life. These people were called the Ancient Puebloans.

The earliest Ancient Puebloans still relied mostly on hunting and gathering. However, growing their own food, such as corn and squash, on the open flat land allowed them to feed a larger group of people. It also gave them a source of food they could depend on.



Making Baskets

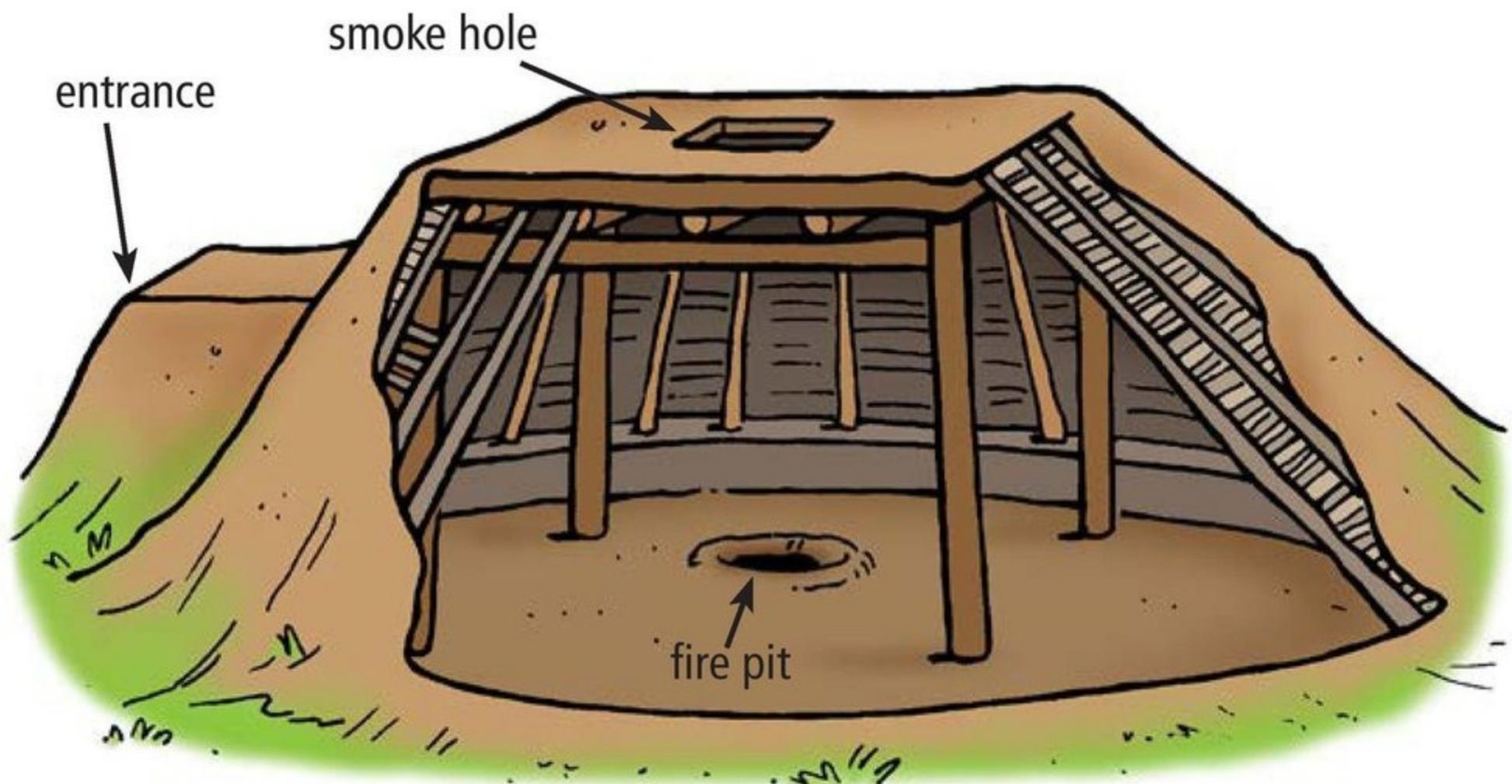
As the Ancient Puebloans grew more food, they found ways to store it. Women began to use plant fibers and tree bark to make baskets. Some baskets held food, while others were woven so tightly that they could hold water. Because baskets could not be placed over a fire, women cooked by placing hot rocks into baskets filled with water. The women also began making sandals from plant fibers.



Yucca plant (right) and sandals made of yucca fibers (top)

As the Ancient Puebloans grew more crops and made more tools and baskets, they moved around less. Even as agriculture became more important to the Ancient Puebloan way of life, men continued to hunt using spears and nets. During this time, they lived in caves along cliffs and canyon walls.





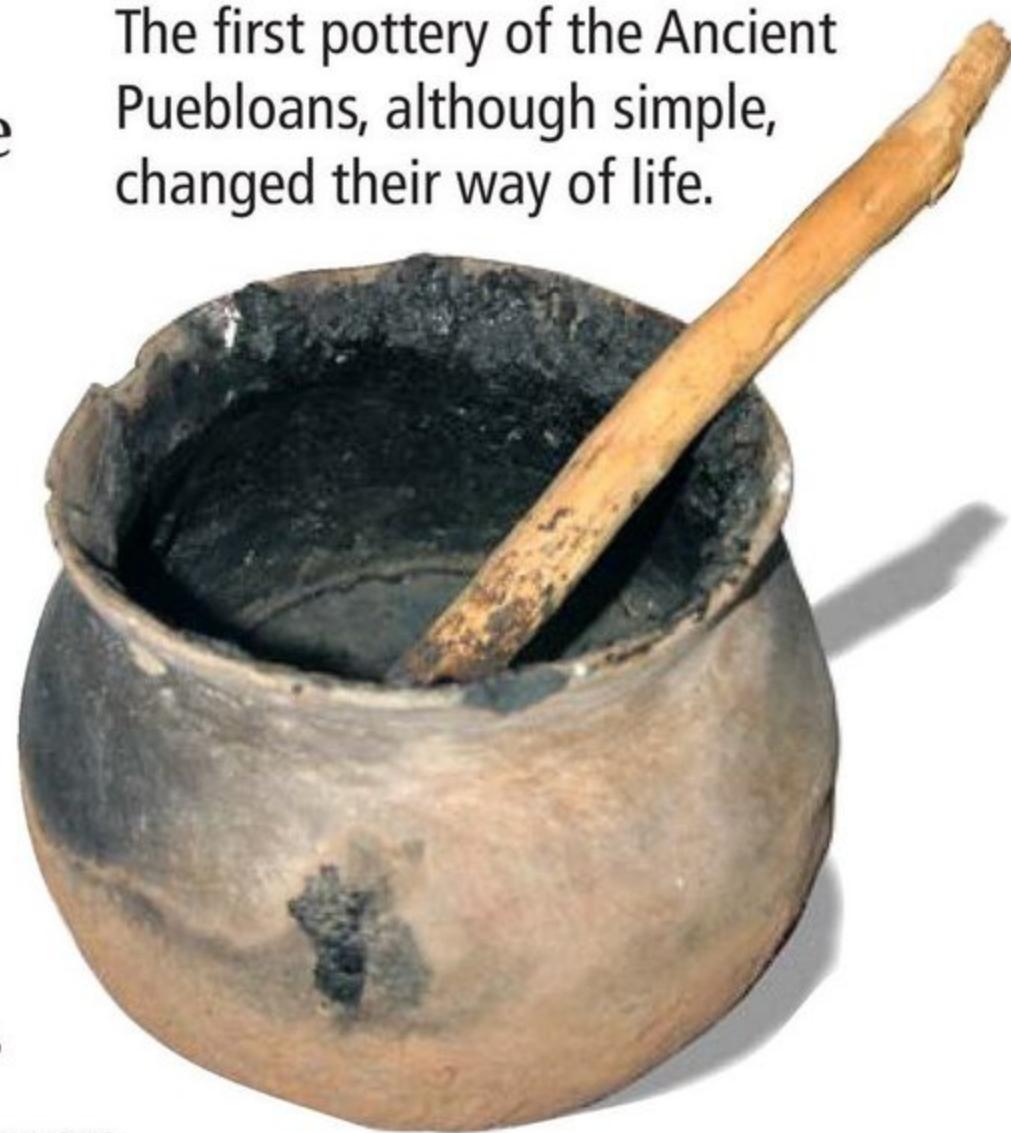
Pit houses could be from 9 to 25 feet (2.74-7.62m) in diameter. The walls were typically made of branches and brush or grass covered in a layer of clay or mud.

Over time, the Ancient Puebloans relied more on agriculture to feed their growing population. By about 1,500 years ago, they grew beans in addition to corn and squash. Having a reliable food source from farming allowed them to stay in one place.

They built temporary houses, called **pit houses**, near their fields. These houses were built on top of shallow pits dug in the ground. The sides and ceilings were constructed of tree branches, bark, and soil. Archaeologists believe the Ancient Puebloans were a peaceful people because no weapons of war have been found. Also, the location of their houses suggests that they did not feel threatened by enemies since houses built in the open are hard to defend.



Another important change during this time was the production of pottery. Tribes from Mexico taught the Ancient Puebloans pottery making. Although women continued to make baskets, using clay pots allowed them to cook over an open fire. Clay pots also stored food better.



Men started using bows and arrows during this time, which was easier and more successful than spear hunting. These changes allowed the population to continue growing as food became more plentiful.

The Ancient Puebloans also used animal hair twisted with cotton string to make warm socks and leg coverings. Sometimes they also wove feathers and string made from yucca plants to make clothing.



Cord made of yucca fibers and feathers



Boot made of turkey feather yarn



Pueblo Bonito



Do You Know?

Chaco Canyon, in northwestern New Mexico, was an important cultural center made up of 12 large pueblos. The largest, Pueblo Bonito, housed about 1,000 people. Archaeologists believe that Chaco Canyon was a trade center for surrounding communities.

Building Larger Houses

Around 1,300 years ago, the population had grown so much that the Ancient Puebloans were living in larger groups. They built rectangular houses completely above ground. They used tree limbs and bark for a frame, then covered the wood with **adobe** (soil containing clay). Over time, they started building houses with sandstone blocks stacked and held together with adobe. The houses were built side by side, creating large buildings called **pueblos**. *Pueblo* is a Spanish word that means “town” or “village.” The Ancient Puebloans also built underground circular structures called **kivas**, which were used for holding ceremonies.



The Ancient Puebloan culture thrived for several hundred years. The people developed new ways to help their crops grow. They built dams, reservoirs, and terraces to manage water for their fields. Successful crops allowed them to feed their growing population.

The types of pottery they made changed. Women made everyday pottery that was used for cooking and storing food. Everyday pottery was gray with a rough outer texture that helped heat the food inside. They also made pottery that was rubbed and polished to create a smooth surface for decoration or trade. They decorated this pottery with complex, colorful designs using paint made from wild plants.



Corrugation, painted designs, and glossy black interiors show how pottery changed for trade and decoration.



Moving to the Cliffs

Around 900 years ago, the Ancient Puebloans moved from open land to protected ledges on cliffs and canyon walls. The cliff dwellings found at Mesa Verde and other places in the Four Corners area are typical of this time period. These houses were up to five stories tall, providing housing for hundreds of people. The cliff dwellers used ladders and ropes to get to their homes. They also cut finger and toe holds into the rocks for climbing up the walls.

About 600 cliff dwellings are located in Mesa Verde National Park. Cliff Palace, the largest, had 217 rooms and 23 kivas. The smallest rooms may have been storage rooms rather than living quarters.



Cliff Palace



A Safety Issue?

Some archaeologists believe the Ancient Puebloans were being attacked by other tribes and needed homes they could easily defend. Many cliff dwellings could only be reached with ladders. The people in them could pull their ladders inside, leaving their enemies no way to enter. Although this idea makes sense, there is little evidence that this was the reason for the move.



Montezuma Castle

Archaeologists were puzzled by the Ancient Puebloans' move from open areas to cliff dwellings. They believe that as the Ancient Puebloan population grew, more farmland was needed. Moving to cliff dwellings freed more flat land for growing crops. The Ancient Puebloans also may have needed to create new fields to replace old fields that were overused and had lost the ability to grow food well.

Another possible reason for the move might have been for warmth during winter. The weather was getting colder during this time. Most cliff dwellings face south or southwest, where the sun's rays could warm the rock walls of their homes.



Building Dwellings

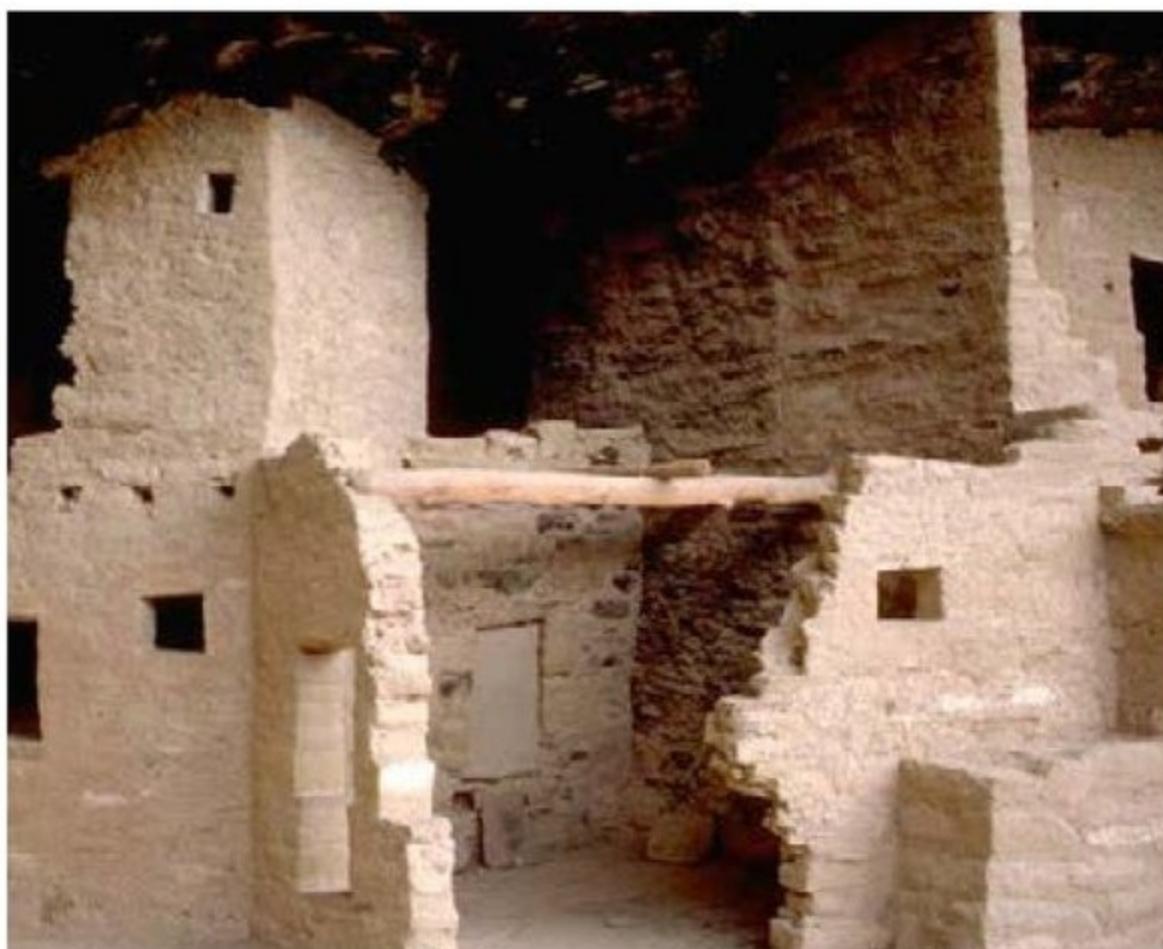
Building the cliff dwellings was a huge challenge for the Ancient Puebloans, who lacked machines and used only stone tools. They were skilled at designing structures that made the best use of the space. The builders made walls from large stones chipped into shape and held together with adobe. They covered the walls with adobe, sometimes painting designs on the insides of the walls.



Ruins of adobe walls

Builders made upper floors by laying large wooden poles across the tops of walls and placing

smaller poles across the beams. Next a layer of sticks or bark was piled on. Then they added a thick layer of adobe to hold it together.



This dwelling once had two floors.

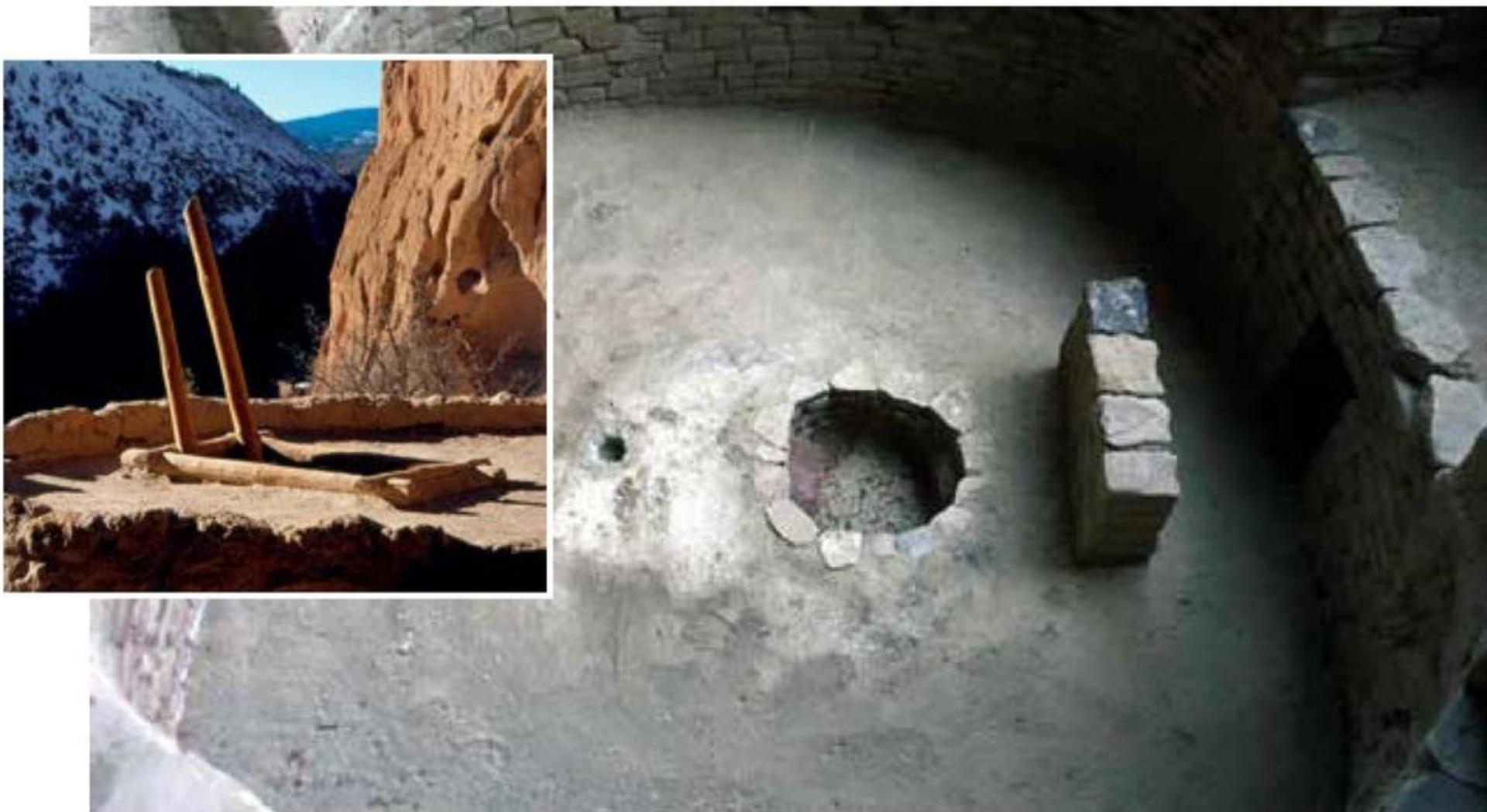


Daily Life

The Ancient Puebloans probably spent most of their time outside working together in groups. Women cooked, ground corn, carried water, and made pottery and baskets. Men wove cloth, farmed crops, hunted, and made tools out of stone, wood, and plant fibers. Children worked alongside their parents, learning adult roles by watching and practicing. They also took care of turkeys and spent time at play. During the winter, some work was done inside the dwellings. Archaeologists believe that rooms were used year-round for sleeping.

Trade with other tribes was an important aspect of Ancient Puebloan life. The map below shows some of the items they traded and where the items came from.





Inset: the outside of a kiva Above: inside a kiva

Spiritual Life

Because modern kivas are still used by the descendants of the Ancient Puebloans, we know they were used for religious ceremonies. They were probably also used for family gatherings, as guest rooms, and as workspaces in winter.

People entered kivas with ladders. Each kiva had a fire pit in the center and a shaft providing fresh air. Half of the Mesa Verde kivas also had a small hole in the floor called a **sipapu**. The hole represented a doorway between the spirit world and the real world. Archaeologists think that the Ancient Puebloans, like their modern descendants, believed that all living things have both a spirit self and a physical self. They also believed in life after death.



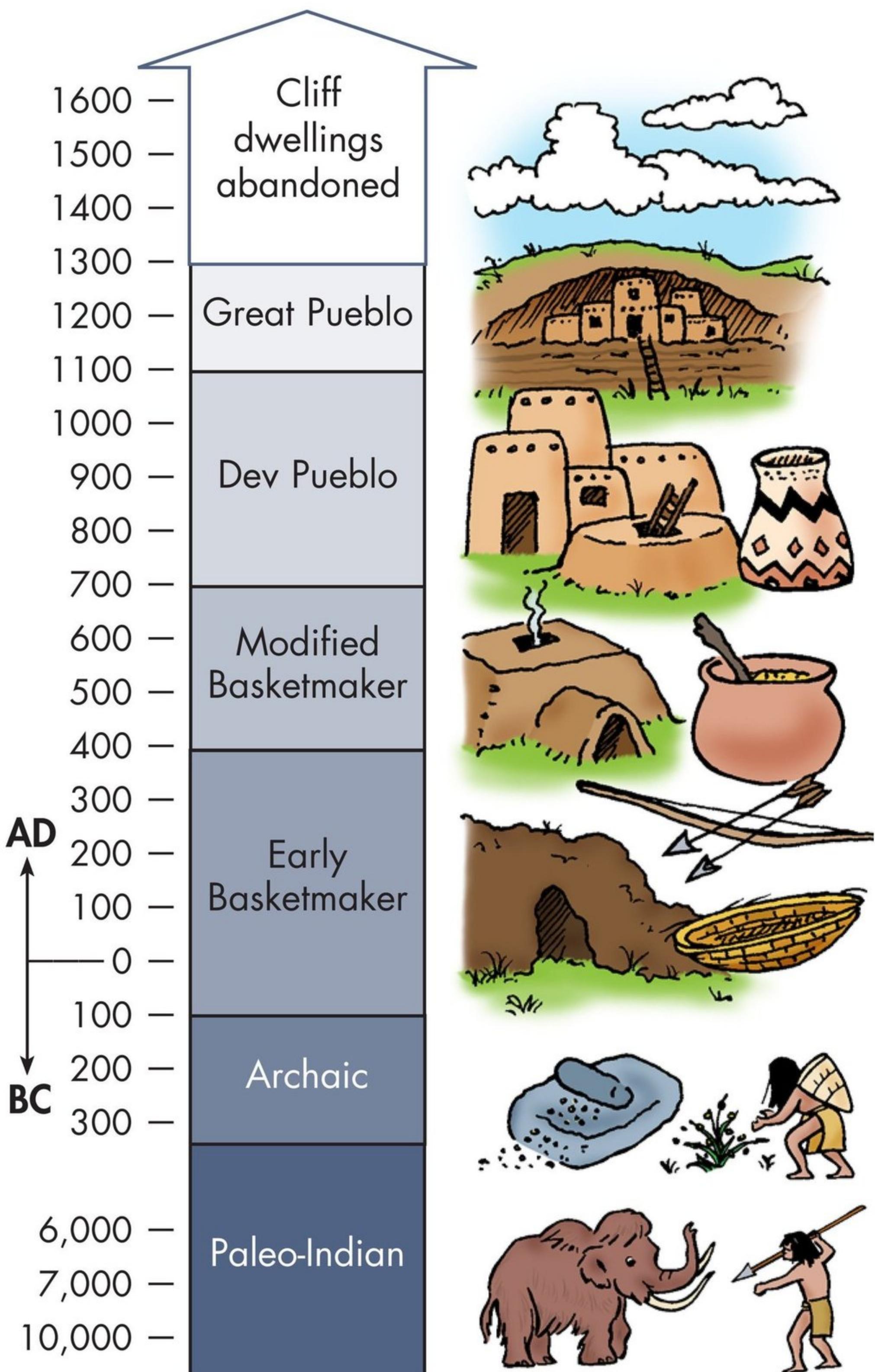
Leaving the Cliffs

Between 1280 and 1295, the Ancient Puebloans left the cliff dwellings and moved south to New Mexico and Arizona. No one knows for sure why they moved, but archaeologists believe that the climate kept changing and that this played an important role. It got colder, causing a shorter growing season for crops. Watering crops became harder because there were long periods of time with little or no rain. In addition, the soil may have been so overused that growing enough food for the large population became impossible.

Perhaps by the time the Ancient Puebloans left Mesa Verde, they had cut down most of the trees for firewood and for building pueblos. Hunters may have killed so many wild animals that the meat supply was gone.

Some people think that enemy tribes drove out the cliff dwellers. However, that is unlikely, because there are no remains of other cultures at Mesa Verde after the Ancient Puebloans left. Archaeologists find older remains deeper in the ground and newer remains closer to the surface. If enemies drove out the cliff dwellers, evidence of their culture would be found on top of the Ancient Puebloan remains.





Modern-Day Descendants

When the ancient cliff dwellers left Mesa Verde, some moved south, settling along the Rio Grande River in New Mexico. These are the ancestors of the modern Pueblo tribes. Others moved to Arizona, eventually forming the Zuni and Hopi tribes.



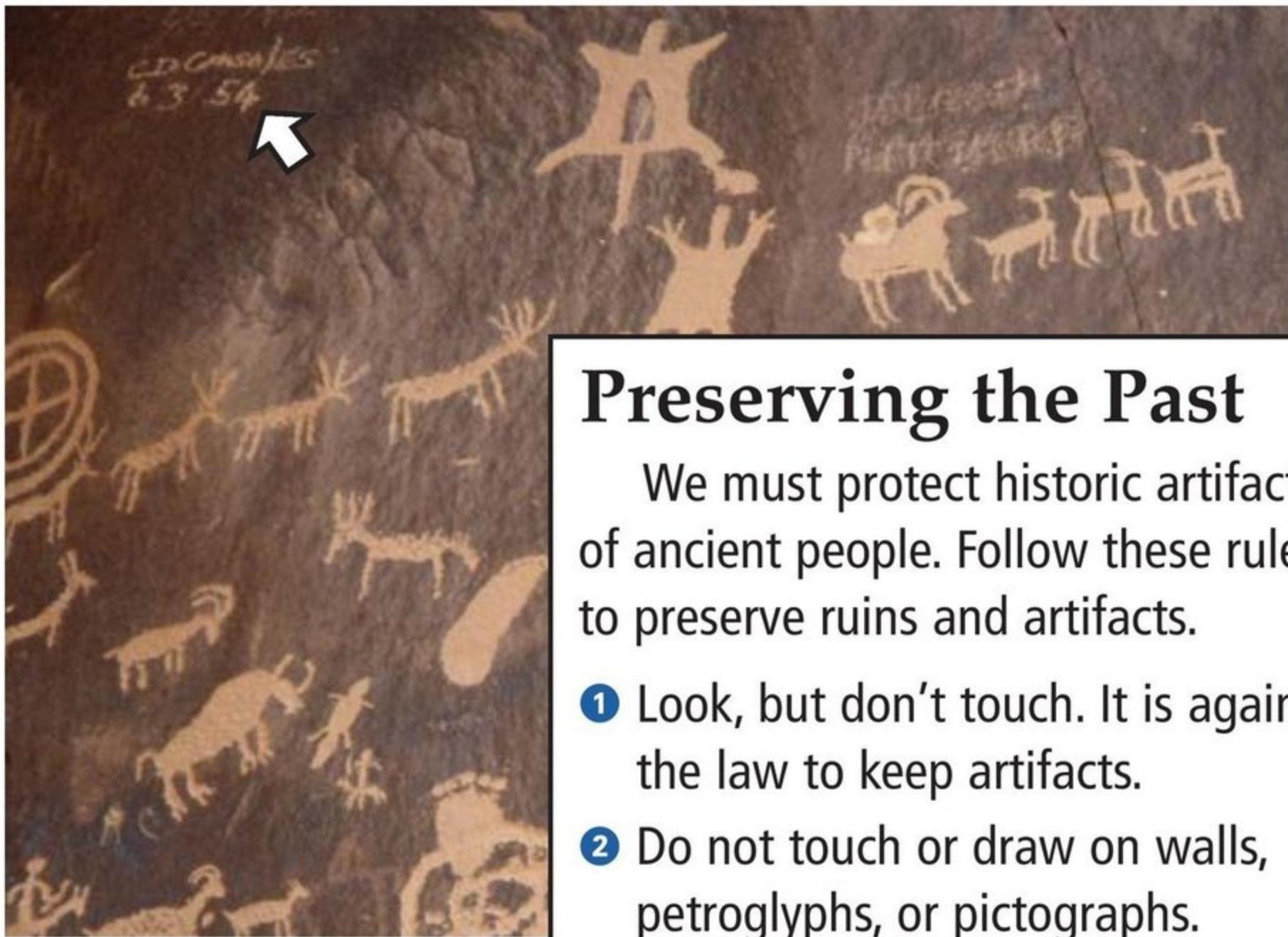
Estella Loretto works on a clay figure.



Ray Tafoya is known for his pottery.

Modern tribes have continued many of the traditions of the ancient cliff dwellers. The Pueblo, Zuni, and Hopi peoples continue to farm, conduct ceremonies, and perform rituals. They still honor their connection with the land and the spirit world. They are among the finest artists in the world, creating exquisite pottery, jewelry, baskets, carvings, and weavings.





Someone damaged this wall with graffiti.

Preserving the Past

We must protect historic artifacts of ancient people. Follow these rules to preserve ruins and artifacts.

- ① Look, but don't touch. It is against the law to keep artifacts.
- ② Do not touch or draw on walls, petroglyphs, or pictographs.
- ③ Do not climb on walls. Many walls are fragile and easily damaged.

Protecting the Cliff Dwellings

In the late 1800s, many people visited the cliff dwellings—some photographed, drew, and described the sites, but others took **artifacts** from the dwellings to sell. Over time, people became concerned about protecting the cliff dwellings from damage and looting. The concern led to the creation of Mesa Verde National Park in 1906. The National Park Service protects the cliff dwellings, as well as allowing visitors to enjoy them. Educational exhibits at Mesa Verde and other sites in the Southwest teach people about the Ancient Puebloan way of life.



Glossary

adapt	to adjust to new conditions (p. 7)
adobe	a dark, heavy soil containing clay (p. 12)
ancestors	someone from whom an individual is descended (p. 7)
archaeologists	scientists who study past human life and activities as shown by fossils and tools left in the ground (p. 5)
arid	dry, lacking moisture (p. 5)
artifacts	objects, or remains of objects, made by humans (p. 22)
kivas	circular, underground rooms used for ceremonies (p. 12)
petroglyphs	pictures carved in stone (p. 5)
pictographs	paintings on stone (p. 5)
pit houses	houses built atop shallow pits, with walls and ceilings made of tree branches, bark, and soil (p. 10)
prehistoric	from a time in human history before recorded events (p. 5)
pueblo	Spanish for town or village; also, a type of multistoried building occupied by Puebloan peoples, accessed by ladder, with adjoining houses and a flat roof (p. 12)
sipapu	a hole in the floor of a kiva that is a doorway between the spirit world and the physical world (p. 18)



Explore More

On the Internet, use *www.google.com* to find out more about topics presented in this book. Use terms from the text, or try searching for glossary or index words.

Some searches to try: *Ancient Puebloan, Mesa Verde, or Pueblo pottery*

Index

- agriculture, 8-10, 13, 15, 17
- Anasazi, 2
- baskets, 9, 11, 17, 21
- Chaco Canyon, 12
- cliff dwellings, 4, 14-16, 22
- Cliff Palace, 14
- crops, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19
- dwellings, 4, 6, 10, 12
- enemies, 10, 15, 19
- Four Corners, 4-8
- Hopi, 21
- hunt, 6-9, 19
- Ice Age, 6, 7
- kiva(s), 12, 14, 18
- Mesa Verde (National Park), 2, 4, 5, 14, 19, 21, 22
- North America, 4, 6
- northern Russia, 6
- petroglyphs, 5
- pictographs, 5
- pit house, 10
- pottery, 11, 13, 17, 21
- tools, 4, 5, 7, 9, 16, 17
- trade, 12, 13, 17
- turkeys, 17
- Zuni, 21



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Front cover: Montezuma Castle was a “high-rise apartment building” for ancient cliff dwellers. It’s now a national monument.

Back cover: Newspaper Rock State Historical Monument is a petroglyph that records about 2,000 years of human activity in southeastern Utah.

Note about terms: The ancient cliff dwellers used to be referred to as Anasazi, a Navajo word meaning ancient ones or enemy ancestors. However, the preferred name for the early Four Corners inhabitants is Ancient Puebloans, a name chosen by the modern Pueblo peoples.

Mesa Verde is pronounced “MAY-suh VAIR-day.” *Mesa*, which is Spanish for “table,” also refers to raised, flat-topped land. *Verde* is Spanish for “green.”

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