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Hovenweep National Monument

Colorado National Parks

**US Dept of Interior (NPS) Hovenweep National Monument Square
Tower Group: Hovenweep Memorandum**

National Park Service of the United States

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To the person visiting Hovenweep for the first time, the unusual towers are the feature of striking interest. Just as important archeologically are the numerous inconspicuous ruins of small villages. Some of these pueblos are on the canyon rims; more often, they are on the talus slopes of the canyon below the caprock, located under the high towers.

The Square Tower Canyon cluster has 19 different buildings. The largest, Hovenweep Castle, is a pueblo with walls that measure 60 feet long and 20 feet high. Besides towers and large rooms, this building has two circular kivas, or ceremonial rooms, on the east end, identical in construction with those in ruins on the Mesa Verde National Park. Square Tower, Twin Towers, and Stronghold House are other imposing buildings of this group.

In the Holly and Hackberry Canyon groups there are several defensive towers, together with comparatively large pueblos and a cave dwelling. The Cajon group, in contrast to the other four groups, has been considerably injured by vandalism, and does not present the interesting and instructive appearance that it did several years ago. The Cajon group consists essentially of two defensively-sited pueblos.

The prehistoric Indians who built and occupied the intriguing and spectacular towers of the Hovenweep area, and the adjoining rim pueblos and talus villages, were farmers who raised corn, squash, and beans on the mesas, building their homes and strongholds around springs in canyon heads to protect their water-resources in a period of difficulty caused by decreasing water-supply. Abundant pottery, charred fragments of corn and other plants, and other remnants of Pueblo Indian life have been found at these sites.

The culture here is nearly identical with that of the Mesa Verde people who lived in cliff dwellings and great pueblos 50 miles to the eastward in Mesa Verde National Park, and elsewhere in this general region. These people occupied southwestern Colorado, and adjacent portions of Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona, up to about 1300 A.D. when this whole "Four Corners" region was abandoned by the Pueblo Indians. The defensive structures of the Hovenweep area seem to represent a special local phase of the last part of this period. The pueblos of the Hovenweep area could have housed several hundred people altogether, probably as large a population as this region could have supported.