



# GILA CLIFF DWELLINGS

## ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument is a 44-mile drive north from Silver City on New Mexico Highway 15. The suggested route for RVs and trailers over 20 feet is New Mexico Highway 35. The driving time is about two hours. There is no public transportation to the Monument, which is open all year except December 25.

Your first stop should be at the Visitor Center. Here you will find information, exhibits, a short video, and a bookstore. Staff can answer questions and help you plan your visit. Hours at the Visitor Center and Cliff Dwellings vary seasonally. Call for information: 505-536-9461.

The Cliff Dwellings are a short drive from the Visitor Center along the West Fork of the Gila River. Park your vehicle in the parking area. The self-guiding Gila Cliff Dwellings Trail begins at the trailhead Contact Station. At the trailhead is a self-pay station; admission to the Monument is \$3 per person or \$10 per family. Trail guides (small fee) at the trailhead describe sights along the trail.

The one-mile loop trail leads to and through the Cliff Dwellings, about 180 feet above the canyon floor. The trail is steep in places and is not wheelchair accessible. You should take water, wear good walking or hiking shoes, walk carefully and watch your step. The round trip takes about one hour.

## ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICE

Campgrounds and picnicking areas are available. For information on their locations and use, inquire at the Visitor Center. Although there are no accommodations or food within the Monument, the nearby community of Gila Hot Springs has overnight lodging and a convenience store that sells basic camping supplies and gasoline.

## FOR YOUR SAFETY

You are entering a natural/cultural area preserved in as natural a condition as possible, which can be potentially hazardous. Although every effort is made to provide for your safety, you must remain alert and exercise individual caution.

## WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU

Please leave all natural and cultural objects undisturbed; all are protected by federal law. *Hunting* is not permitted within the monument. *Pets* are not allowed within the monument; kennels are available at the trailhead free of charge. The *speed limit* within the area is 25 miles per hour, and five miles per hour in the parking lot. Drive carefully and enjoy the scenery. *Trash containers* are not available; please pack out your trash and leave the places you visit clean for those who follow you.

## GILA WILDERNESS

The Gila Wilderness, the nation's first designated wilderness area, is administered by the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. The wilderness area offers hiking, horseback riding, camping, and other activities in rugged country.

**More information** Stop at the Visitor Center or contact the U.S. Forest Service. Write: Wilderness Ranger Station, HC 68 Box 50, Mimbres, NM 88049. Call: 505-536-2250. Internet: [www.fs.fed.us/r3/gila](http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/gila).

## GILA CLIFF DWELLINGS NATIONAL MONUMENT

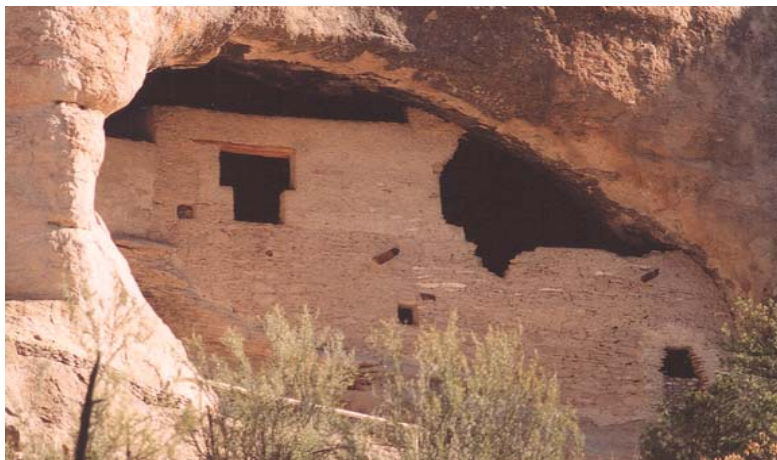
The Monument preserves and protects the dwellings of the Mogollon people who lived here from the 1270s through the early 1300s.

**More information** Stop at the Visitor Center or contact the National Monument. Write: Superintendent, Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, HC 68, Box 100, Silver City, NM 88061. Call: 505-536-9461. FAX: 505-536-9344. Internet: [www.nps.gov/gicl](http://www.nps.gov/gicl).

## ADMINISTRATION

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, containing 533 acres, was established on November 16, 1907. Administration of the Monument was transferred from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the U.S. Department of the Interior on August 10, 1933. The Visitor Center is jointly operated by the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U. S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR



Seven centuries ago, the people who traveled to the area that is now Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument did so on foot, following trails across mesas and mountains, and along the streams. Until recently, the routes we use today were still little more than trails, and the few people who made the trip to the Cliff Dwellings did so on foot, on horseback, and by 4-wheel-drive vehicle. Today, you can drive to the Monument over a paved road, which ends at the Monument.

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument is surrounded by the Gila National Forest and lies within the Gila Wilderness, the nation's first designated wilderness area. This designation means that the intrusions of roads or other evidence of human presence will not alter the wilderness character of the area.

#### THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED HERE

The Monument offers a glimpse of the homes and lives of Native Americans who lived here from the late 1270s through the early 1300s. The surroundings probably look today very much like they did when the cliff dwellings were inhabited. There is evidence that this area may have been more savannah-like.

The earliest type of structure found within the Monument are pithouses constructed from about AD 100 to 400. Built in the open, these circular dwellings have a narrow, east-facing entrance. People of this period, referred to by archeologists as the Mogollon, were both farmers and hunter-gatherers. They made plain brown pottery and were skilled in crafts making such things as nets and snares, baskets, and wooden tools.



The Monument also is the site for later structures, those prevalent in the area until about AD 1000. These rectangular structures, unlike their predecessors, were built entirely above ground. In constructing the buildings, the Mogollon usually used masonry, although some were made of wattle (interwoven twigs and layered mud). It was around this time that they developed their style of white pottery with black designs. They continued to be both farmers and hunter-gatherers.

The Cliff Dwellings, built by the Tularosa Mogollon, date to the late 1200s. Seven natural caves occur high in the southeast-facing cliff of a side canyon, and five of the caves contain the ruins of dwellings --- a total of about 40 rooms. Walls of the dwellings were constructed of stone from the formation in which the caves were formed, the Gila Conglomerate. The timbers in the dwellings are the originals and tree-ring dates obtained from them range from the late 1270s through the 1280s.

Probably not more than 40 to 60 people lived in the Cliff Dwellings at any one time. The dwellings were only used for about one generation.

The people continued farming on the mesa tops and along the river, raising squash, corn, beans and other crops. They supplemented their crops with animals that they hunted or snared, and with wild plant foods gathered from the surrounding area.

They were excellent weavers and skilled potters, producing handsome brown bowls with black interiors and black-on-white pottery.

Materials obtained by trade with other peoples included pottery, cotton, obsidian for arrow points, turquoise for beads, and shell for ornaments.

What was their appearance? The women averaged 5 feet, 1 inch and the men about 5 feet, 5 inches in height. They were slight of build, yet muscular. They had dark hair and eyes and brown skin.

Women’s clothing consisted of small cotton blankets worn around the shoulders, “skirts” or “aprons” of yucca cord, and sandals plaited of yucca, agave leaves, and bark. The men wore headbands, small cotton blankets draped over their shoulders and probably sometimes tied around their waists as kilts, breechclouts of woven cotton, and plaited sandals. Both men and women probably wore their sandals only while walking on rocky hillsides. Few objects of adornment, such as bracelets and beads, have been found here.

And so these people lived in their cliff houses and riverside villages, planting their fields with digging sticks, grinding their cornmeal with

mano and metate, fashioning their pottery and cloth, carrying on trade with peoples of other communities, hunting, and gathering wild plants and fruits. For generations, the sounds of their voices and laughter echoed in the canyons. And then there were only the sounds of the streams and birds.

The cliff dwellers had abandoned their homes and fields by the early 1300s. Why they left and where they went are as yet unknown. Perhaps they joined other pueblos in surrounding areas.

The area may have been uninhabited for a period of years after the cliff dwellers left. In any case, nomadic bands of Apaches then made it their homeland. Later, Spanish colonists settled in the areas to the east and south of the Monument, and many of their descendants still reside in the vicinity.

After acquisition of the region by the United States under the terms of the Gadsden Purchase, the Apaches resisted the encroachment of American settlers into their homeland. In the late 1800s the United States Government established a small military camp at Gila Hot Springs to guard local homesteaders and miners.

