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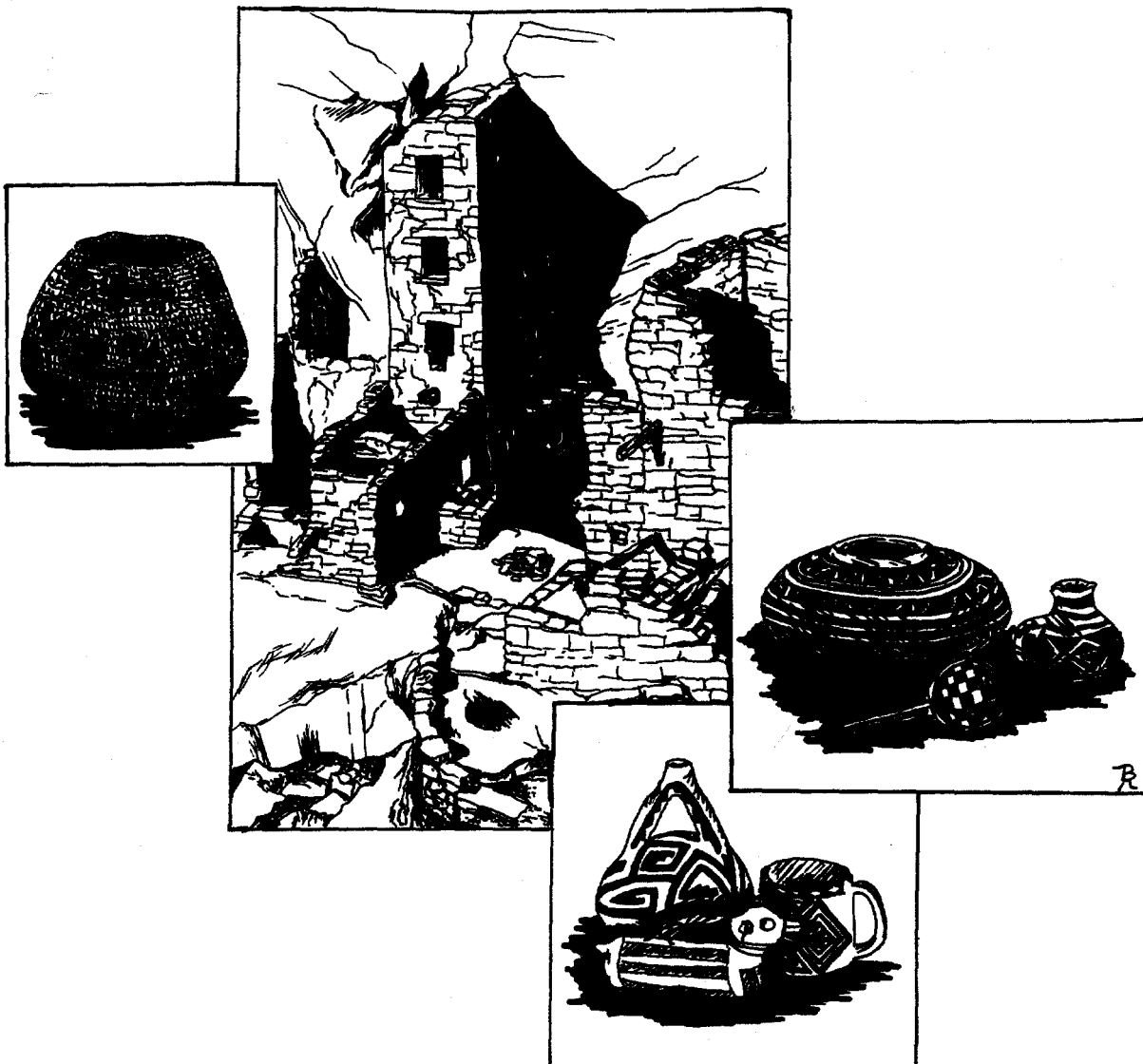
# Interpretive Prospectus

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## MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

Colorado

1993





**A PLAN FOR  
THE INTERPRETATION OF**

**MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK**

**COLORADO**

prepared by the  
**Division of Interpretive Planning  
Harpers Ferry Center  
Harpers Ferry,  
West Virginia**

approved by  
**Regional Director Robert M. Baker  
May 6, 1993**



*"Al Wetherill, one of the brothers who brought these ruins to public attention in the 1890's, commented several generations ago: 'It is strange how unobserving some people are, or what little impression the Mesa Verde leaves upon them.' Its vastness, he believed, contributed to the visitors' failure to grasp the significance of the park. Mesa Verde has not yielded its rich treasures to a quick glance here and there in the rush to reach yet another vacation attraction. The park must be savored and pondered to be enjoyed.*

*It is difficult for us today to understand that the prehistoric world was very different indeed from ours. Failure to appreciate Mesa Verde comes from our inability to imagine what took place here so long ago in these canyons and mesas. Visitors need to renew their curiosity so that they can learn from what they see. Perhaps all of us need to look at it with the wondering, expectant, exploring mind of a child."*

*Duane A. Smith  
Mesa Verde National Park:  
The Shadows of the Centuries  
Lawrence, KS: University  
Press of Kansas,  
1988.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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### **The Park in Perspective**

Mesa Verde National Park lies in extreme southwestern Colorado near the Four Corners area, where the states of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico meet. The entire park, 52,073.62 acres in size, is situated within Montezuma County in Colorado's Third Congressional District. Physiographically, the park lies within the Canyonlands District of the Colorado Plateau Province. It is bounded on the south and west by the Ute Mountain Indian Reservation, on the north by the Montezuma Valley, and on the east by the Mancos River with the entire width of the river included within the park boundaries.

The major physical feature of the park is a plateau or tableland, known as the Mesa Verde. This tableland is an erosional remnant rising 1,500 to 2,000 feet above the surrounding Dolores Plateau. During the erosional process, the Mesa Verde has been intricately dissected by numerous steep-walled canyons. The slope of the uplands conforms to the dip of the resistant sandstone beds that underlie it. Viewed from Park Point on the northern edge, the surface slopes southward in a slightly dish-shaped configuration from an elevation of about 8,600 feet in the north to 6,000 feet in the southern part of the park. Steep cliffs, which descend into the narrow canyons--separating the finger-like projections of the mesa--contain numerous rock shelters, active springs, and seeps. One of the largest concentrations of prehistoric cultural sites lies within the southernmost one-third of the park.

The primary purpose of Mesa Verde National Park as stated in the June 29, 1906, enabling legislation (34 Stat. 616) is to preserve "from injury or spoilation of the ruins and other works and relics of prehistoric or primitive man" within the established boundaries.

Additional lands were added to Mesa Verde by an Act of Congress on June 20, 1913. This act modified the park's boundary to include a number of the larger cliff dwellings that had been left out of the original park bill.

A June 25, 1910, Act (36 Stat. 796) gives the Secretary of the Interior the authority to grant leases and permits for the use of the land or development of the resources within Mesa Verde National Park. Such leases or permits, however, cannot "include any of the prehistoric ruins of the park or exclude the public from free or convenient access thereto."

Under the National Park Service's Organic Act of 1916 (P.L. 235, 39 Stat. 535), the purpose was expanded to "... conserve the scenery, natural and historic objects and wildlife" and to provide for their enjoyment in a manner that would leave them unimpaired for future generations.

On May 2, 1927, the State of Colorado ceded to the United States exclusive jurisdiction over the area included within Mesa Verde National Park [except the rights: to serve civil or criminal process; of taxation; and to vote]. This was accepted by the United States on April 25, 1928 (Ch. 434, 1, 45 Stat. 458).

For purposes of protecting the scenery along the Point Lookout Road, a strip of land including the road was added by executive proclamation (Feb. 26, 1931, Ch. 308, 1, 46 Stat. 1422).

The park theme as stated in the 1970 *National Park System Plan, Part I: History* [by theme, sub-theme, and prime facet] is the "*The Original Inhabitants, Native Villages and Communities of the Southwestern United States.*"

On September 8, 1978, Mesa Verde National Park was designated a World Heritage Cultural Site as part of the World Heritage Convention. The Convention, formed in 1972 is under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [the United States became a signatory to the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage on December 17, 1975]. The purpose of the Convention is to recognize natural and cultural areas around the world which have outstanding value or importance to all humankind. Areas so designated must be preserved as part of the global heritage.

For the purposes of protecting certain areas of the park in a wilderness status, Congress set aside 8,100 acres (P.L. 94-567, 90 Stat. 2692) under the provisions of the Wilderness Act (78 Stat. 890). However, the backcountry of the park has been closed since 1906 for the protection of prehistoric ruins, making this perhaps the only wilderness within the National Park System closed to public use.

The relevance of Mesa Verde National Park lies in the number and remarkable state of preservation of the archeological remnants found within the park. The park contains more than 4,000 archeological sites, ranging from simple single-room pithouses to complex multistoried cliff dwellings containing several hundred rooms. The peak populations within what is now Mesa Verde National Park may have been as many as 4,000-5,000 people. These dwellings, together with the objects of everyday life found in the area, document the continuous cultural development of the prehistoric people referred to as the Anasazi, the "ancient ones", for a nine century period from approximately A.D. 500 to about A.D. 1300.

The cultural remains within the park demonstrate the cultural evolution of the Anasazi from hunters and gatherers to a point when they could manipulate their environment to produce food to support large populations. They show the development of architecture from one-room shelters to large communities. The development of crafted, decorated useful implements [such as baskets, and pottery from the early crude ware to the finely crafted, distinctive Mesa Verde decorated black on white pottery] was a significant cultural accomplishment. In addition to pottery, these people made fine jewelry and several kinds of baskets and sandals.

Although the architecture, basketry, pottery, and jewelry of Mesa Verde are unique, perhaps one of the most significant and least understood aspects is the complex social and religious organization that would have been necessary to achieve all that was accomplished at Mesa Verde.

## **The Planning Context**

This interpretive prospectus has been written to guide specific media planners and designers in the development and implementation of subsequent media production plans. It will further provide guidance for park managers and interpretive program managers by identifying and delineating the various elements of this

prospectus into manageable phases within reasonable time frames. It is also intended to provide the context and additional details for The Friends of Mesa Verde group who will be involved with fund raising efforts for the proposed new Entrance Visitor Center.

When portions of the plan become feasible and are implemented, appropriate specialists will be involved in the planning process. Accessibility will be specifically addressed. Conservation/compliance concerns for historic structures and artifacts will be addressed.

This prospectus is based on, flows from, and/or is related to the following Mesa Verde planning documents and studies:

- *General Management Plan*, approved by Acting Regional Director Glen T. Bean on May 17, 1979;
- *Statement for Management*, approved by Regional Director Lorraine Mintzmeyer on March 27, 1991;
- *Cultural Resource Management Plan*, revised and approved in September, 1984; however, is currently being revised and combined with the Natural Resource Management Plan; this revised, combined draft plan is currently "in progress" and undergoing review;
- *Natural Resources Management Plan*, approved on July 12, 1983; please see the note above concerning the "in-progress", combined revision park's Natural and Cultural Resource Management Plan;
- *Land Protection Plan*, finalized and approved on June 1, 1985;
- *Park Entrance Comprehensive Design Plan*, approved by Regional Director Lorraine Mintzmeyer on March 18, 1988;
- *Wetherill Mesa Development Concept Plan*, approved by Jack Neckels on November 11, 1988;
- *Scope of Collection Statement*, completed and approved in 1986;
- *Park Collections Management Plan*, completed and approved in June, 1988;
- current *Annual Statement for Interpretation and Visitor Services*, approved by Jack Neckels on March 16, 1990;
- *Visitor Services Project Report 13, Mesa Verde National Park*, issued April, 1988.

However, the most significant factors driving the need for a new parkwide Interpretive Prospectus are the following two documents, which have outdated the park's current Interpretive Prospectus [approved February 26, 1981]:

- the March, 1988 *Environmental Assessment for the Park Entrance Comprehensive Design Plan*;
- the May, 1988 *Wetherill Mesa Development Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment*.

The former has identified the need for a new visitor center near the park entrance to provide visitors with orientation, information, and interpretation immediately upon entering the park instead of driving 15 to 20 miles into the park. The latter opens the 13-mile Wetherill Mesa access road to private vehicular access and specifies increased interpretation, orientation, and visitor services at the tram station or interpretive plaza to serve Wetherill Mesa visitors.

However, the park lacks several completed plans and studies necessary for full implementation of a parkwide interpretive prospectus. Specifically, these are:

- Parkwide Visitor Use Plan;
- Parkwide Transportation Plan;
- Additional Visitor Experience/Expectation Studies, including:
  - Visitor Exit Surveys/Studies,
  - Visitors' Perceptions of Crowding Studies,
  - Needs Assessments for Elderly Visitors;
- Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum Accessibility Study and Plan;
- Visitor Impacts and Carrying Capacity Studies on all ruins open to visitors, especially those on Chapin Mesa [Spruce Tree House, Cliff Palace, and Balcony House], and existing visitor use facilities, especially the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum;
- Several archeological research studies currently in progress at the Cooperative Park Studies Unit at Northern Arizona University, Marty Lee, principal investigator.

## **Summary of Planning Considerations**

Several significant planning considerations, concepts, and constraints have guided and/or influenced the thinking of this interpretive prospectus team and its development of many of the interpretive media/facility prescriptions.

The 1980 Mesa Verde Interpretive Prospectus was outdated by the concepts and provisions of the two 1988 documents mentioned above, the Park Entrance

Comprehensive Design Plan and the Wetherill Mesa Development Concept Plan and they had a major influence on the entire planning process.

Originally, the park was scheduled for a major media rehabilitation plan addressing needed changes and upgrading of media for Far View Visitor Center, a parkwide wayside exhibit system, and the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum. However, the outdatedness of the park's Interpretive Prospectus justified a complete new prospectus for Mesa Verde National Park. In fact, the need was so compelling that park management contributed \$12,000 in extra funding to make the new prospectus possible.

The historic Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum has a special atmosphere, integrity, and ambience. Therefore, all interpretive treatment proposals for this interpretive facility must assure that a special sensitivity be exercised to avoid compromising this museum's essential character, nature, and integrity. Thus a refurbishing of these exhibits, rather than a more extensive rehabilitation, would most likely be the desirable interpretive treatment.

For the most part, Mesa Verde National Park's roles as the first cultural park in our National Park System and as a World Heritage Site have not been adequately interpreted. It is important to address these noteworthy distinctions, in addition to the park's outstanding prehistoric cultural resources.

Of necessity, the team devoted special attention to addressing the need of providing accessibility for disabled visitors to park facilities, features, and resources. Accessibility in Federal facilities is mandated by the 1968 Architectural Barriers Act, which requires physical access in all new construction and renovation projects, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended in 1978), which requires access to agency programs and services. The passage of the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act (although not directly applicable to Federal agencies) has also brought renewed focus to the issue of accessibility.

The problem of providing access while still maintaining the integrity of the park's irreplaceable prehistoric resources, especially the cliff dwellings and the multistoried rim-top pueblos has been compounded by a number of characteristics:

- remote locations;
- for some cliff dwellings, restricted accessibility for any visitor;
- the varied lengths and levels of difficulty of trail approaches;

- multiple, irregular levels within ruins;
- extremely irregular terrain throughout much of the park;
- the vulnerable, fragile nature of these ruins.

The challenge for the team was to adhere to our own National Park Service cultural resources management policy mandate providing the *highest* level of access to these cultural properties with *lowest* level of acceptable impact. The level of concern about meeting this need was great enough to add an Accessibility Specialist to the complement of our team.

The development of the new Entrance Visitor Center, including the development and installation of interpretive media, will be dependent upon a major fund raising effort of approximately \$7 million by The Friends of Mesa Verde group. That amount will need to be supported by an additional estimated \$7 million in appropriated National Park Service funds.

## AREA SIGNIFICANCE AND PARK RESOURCES

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### **Park Significance**

The significance of Mesa Verde National Park is not based solely upon its size and the high visibility of its many cliff dwellings. The park is one of the largest archeological preserves in the United States and contains the greatest concentration of cliff dwellings ever found in a single location. Of the nearly 4000 sites which have been located within the park, over 600 of them are cliff dwellings.

Mesa Verde was one of the focal points of the northern San Juan Anasazi (Pueblo) Culture that existed for over a thousand years in the geographic region which we now know as the Four Corners area. Over a century of archeological investigations have taken place at Mesa Verde. These investigations have varied from simple records kept by the Wetherill family who collected artifacts, to very detailed excavations and technical reports by both scientists from universities and institutions, and National Park Service personnel who have worked in the park for a number of decades.

From the technical excavations with their subsequent studies and reports, anthropologists have been able to reconstruct much of the life of the ancient Puebloan farmers who lived here for over seven centuries in what many would consider a rather harsh environment. These people became so skillful in learning how to survive that they managed to expand from a hunting/gathering culture to a very complex society with thousands of people. Their success was attributable in part to their favorable natural environment [i.e., topography, climate, and flora and fauna]. It was equally attributable in part to their environmental adaptability and their ability to grow domesticated crops such as corn, beans, and squash.

The great significance of the park was further recognized in September 1978, when it was selected as one of the first seven cultural sites in the world to be designated a World Heritage Cultural Site. It was specifically included in this

select group because of the importance of the ancient Puebloan Culture that flourished at Mesa Verde between the 6th and 13th centuries.

## **Cultural Resources**

Although Mesa Verde National Park's significant cultural resources include both prehistoric and historic features, its primary emphasis is archeological.

**Prehistoric Resources.** Mesa Verde's archeological sites are representative of the Mesa Verde Branch Anasazi culture. Within the park, there are more than 4000 archeological sites ranging from simple one-room pithouses to complex cliff dwellings containing several hundred rooms. In addition to the thousands of living rooms and storage rooms, many archeological sites include ceremonial structures known as kivas and great kivas, petroglyph sites, hand and toehold access trails, and possibly complex water storage and distribution systems. *Map 1, Density of Archeological Sites at Mesa Verde National Park*, on page 11, shows those areas of the park with the greatest concentrations of these varied archeological sites. From these sites has come an abundance of wood, stone, bone, clay, and fiber artifacts, which--in combination with human physical remains--have been of inestimable worth to archeologists in deciphering the drama of man's existence here.

As the Mesa Verde Branch developed and changed, its sphere of influence and area of occupation expanded. The greatest distinction of these people lies in the massive, multistoried buildings they constructed, and the excellence of their stone masonry. Their proficiency in crafts, especially in pottery making, was equal to the nearby Chaco and Kayenta branches of the Anasazi culture.

The period from A.D. 1100 to A.D. 1300, which is called the Pueblo III or Great Pueblo Period, was the *Golden Age* of Mesa Verde culture. The largest of the Great Pueblo villages was Cliff Palace, which had approximately 217 rooms including 23 kivas. This village was four stories high in places and may have housed as many as 200 people. Other major prehistoric sites in the park include Long House, Spruce Tree House, Square Tower House, Balcony House, New Fire House, Fire Temple, Oak Tree House, Mummy House, Far View Ruins, Mug House, Step House, Big Juniper House, Badger House Community, Jug House, Kodak House, Spring House, Sunset House, Pipe Shrine House, and Mummy Lake.

Mesa Verde National Park is the one of the largest of the archeological resource areas in the National Park System. These non-renewable resources become scientifically more valuable with the passage of time and with the loss of archeological resources in nearby areas. Examples of the houses, tools, and clothing of the Mesa Verde people are on exhibit in the park. Nowhere else in the United States is the sequence of pre-Columbian architectural development so completely displayed as on the Ruins Road Drive on Chapin Mesa and at the Badger House Community walk on Wetherill Mesa. Nineteen major cliff dwellings and surface pueblos have been excavated, stabilized, and made available for visitation on Chapin and Wetherill Mesas.

**Historic Resources.** Fewkes Cabin, an early park ranger station and museum (1916), was refitted for adaptive use in 1991 as a technical work station for the park's Geographic Information System (GIS) program.

The historic Mesa Verde Ranger Club has been recently renovated and was used during the summer of 1991 for public display of the Nordenskiöld Centennial Exhibit. The refurbished building is now being used to house the collections of the Mesa Verde Research Library.

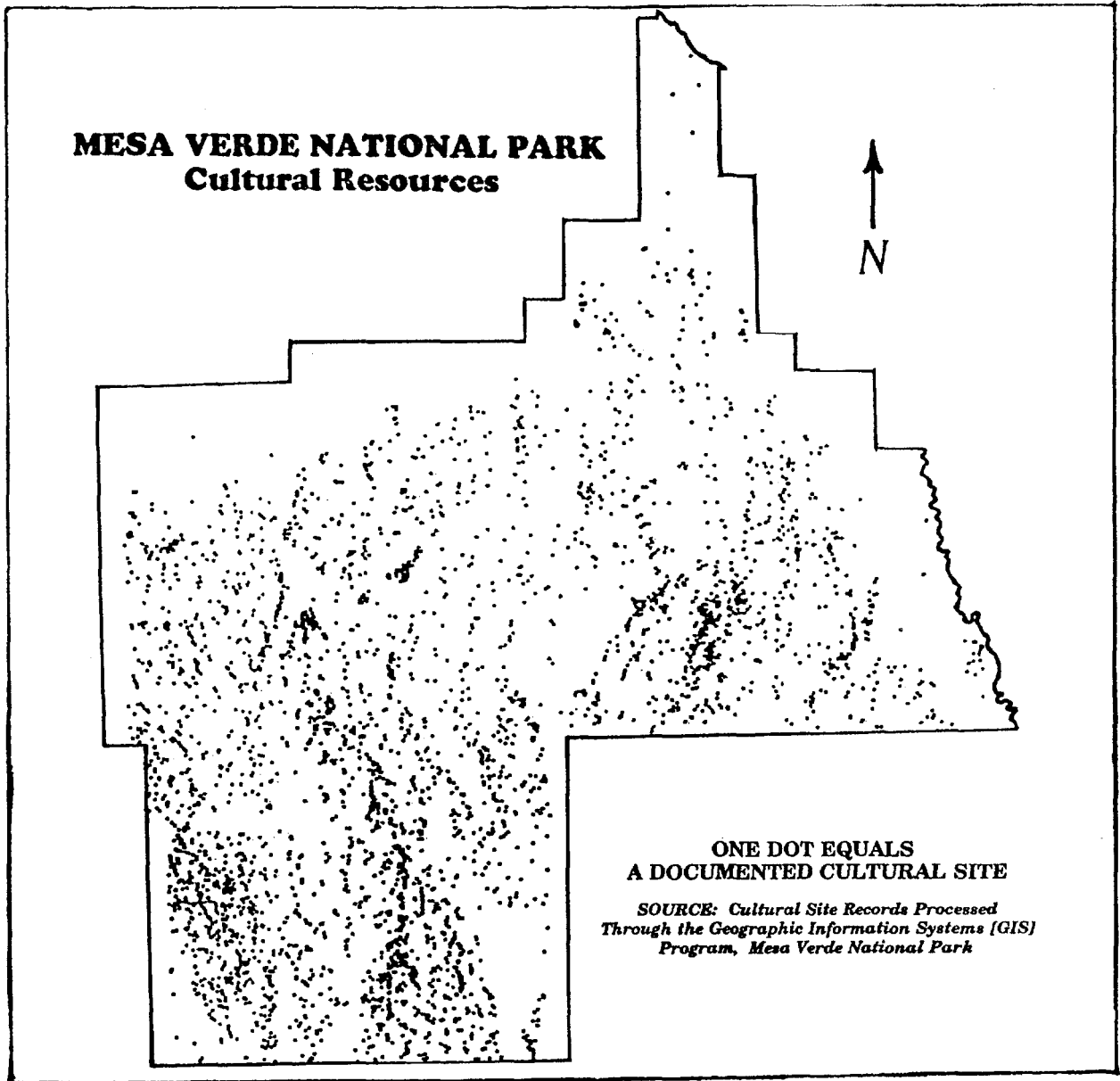
Both of these projects--the Fewkes Cabin and the Ranger Club--follow Mesa Verde's longstanding tradition and philosophy of adaptive use of the park's important historic structures.

All of Mesa Verde's historic buildings are included in the park's List of Classified Structures. The Mesa Verde Administrative Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 28, 1987 [see Map #3, page 37] and is concurrently a National Historic Landmark, includes such structures as: the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, the post office, the Ranger Club, ranger dorms, the former park hospital [now the Spruce Tree Terrace], the old community center building, the Fewkes Cabin, the superintendent's residence, several other park staff residences, and numerous other smaller structures.

**Collections and Libraries.** The park's collections contain over 1.5 million objects, including:

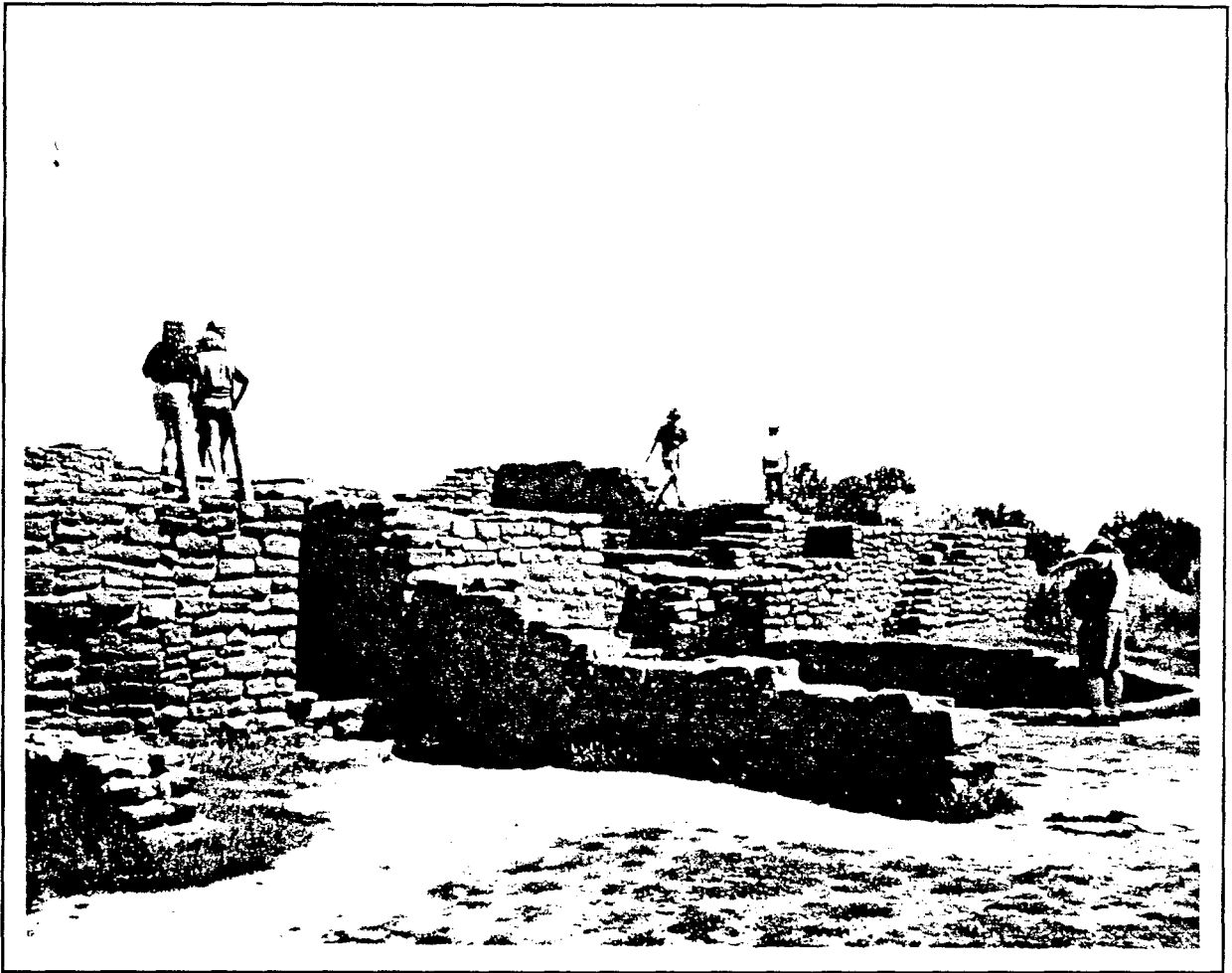
- park collections, such as historic photos and material dating back to the discovery of these cliff dwellings in the 1880's;
- a tremendous assortment of catalogued artifacts such as pottery, pot shards, stone and bone tools, fibrous material, burial artifacts, etc.;

Map 1  
Density of Archeological  
Sites at Mesa Verde National Park



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*Illustration 1*  
*Far View Ruin on*  
*Chapin Mesa, with Park Visitors*



- original excavation field notes;
- approximately 300,000 objects collected from the scientific excavations on Wetherill Mesa;
- park photo files;
- historic maps;
- historic Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) archives;
- park herbarium;
- park entomology collection;
- park mammal collection;
- historic Indian arts and crafts items, such as pottery and rugs.

All of the listed collections, including objects from many earlier excavations and collections from other sites in the region, are retained and maintained in the Research Center. The park's photo (print) collections are stored and maintained in the historic Ranger Club, along with the main park library and records/document collection.

The main park library contains over 9000 volumes. A small secondary reference library is located in the park's Research Laboratory, and mainly consists of working documents, such as site reports, field analysis documents from surrounding areas, and all of the park's unpublished manuscripts.

This library serves a wide variety of needs. It is a resource upon which the entire staff has grown to depend. Since a large portion of the library is devoted to relevant general references to Southwest archeology, anthropology, ethnology, and natural history, it is a resource used by a great variety of researchers, regionally and nationally. The library is also the repository for the studies and investigations completed by researchers working on projects within the Mesa Verde National Park. Finally, a smaller number of rare and valuable historic volumes are responsibly stored in the park's museum vault.

## **Natural Resources**

The natural history of the Mesa Verde strongly influenced Anasazi cultural development. Geology, geography, vegetation, climate, and wildlife were daily concerns that were dealt with by means of religious ceremonies, traditions, and relatively simple technology. On the Mesa Verde, the Anasazi apparently were successful in the adaptations to the environment until environmental and perhaps

social conditions changed significantly. One can only speculate about the environmental pressures--perhaps a major drought, other technical reasons, and religious reasons for the abandonment of the Mesa Verde. A reflective observation may be appropriate here. In probing such unknowns as these, perhaps we may find a parallel to our own environmental concerns, an association between the probable impending crisis we face today, and the one apparently faced by the Anasazi nearly 700 years ago. This is the essence of one of the park's key interpretive thrusts.

**Flora.** Generally speaking, vegetation in Mesa Verde is typical of the piñon-juniper zone of the high arid plateau country of the southwest, and is unique for the general area because livestock grazing has been effectively prevented in most areas of the park for nearly 40 years. However, due to the factors of variation of temperature, moisture and soil, three major plant communities exist within the park: the mountain shrub, the piñon-juniper, and the Big sagebrush. Each major plant community possesses distinctly different characteristics and each offers important relationships in the total ecosystem of the area. In addition to these three zones, significant groves of larger trees are found where winter snowfall is heaviest and moisture is more abundant. Groves of Douglas fir stand high along upper canyons, on the steep northern escarpment, and in moisture rich canyon bottoms. Ponderosa pine dot the Morefield Canyon. Aspen grow in isolated groves above 8,000 feet elevation. Climax vegetation varies from the Gambel oak, grasses, and mountain shrub vegetation to a mature piñon pine and Utah juniper forest and Douglas fir groves.

For the most part, the *mountain shrub community* spans the entire width of the park parallel to the park's north rim, and extends several miles downslope to the south. Dominant species for this community are mountain mahogany, serviceberry, fendler bush, and Gambel oak. This zone is a favorite habitat for the Rocky Mountain mule deer during much of the year, but in winter is usually deeply snow covered. Oak and other vegetal materials from the zone provided the prehistoric residents of the Mesa Verde with food and raw materials.

The dominant, most extensive vegetative community of Mesa Verde is the *piñon-juniper forest*, which extends from the 7,800 feet elevation in the north all the way to the park's southern boundary. It covers nearly all the mesas and many of the slopes of the upper canyons. Both of these tree species were extensively used by the Anasazi for house construction support timbers, firewood, a variety of tools, food [piñon nuts and juniper berries], and medicinal purposes. In addition, the

soil of this forest zone, a rich loam containing windblown red loess, is excellent for agriculture. The piñon-juniper forest is comparatively dense with abundant down timber and mutton grass making it especially vulnerable to the plentiful lightning strikes which the Mesa Verde experiences every year.

The final major plant zone is the canyon-bottom dwelling *Big sagebrush community*. The abundant gray-green Big sagebrush, the dominant indicator plant of this community, is also the climax plant of the canyon bottoms and in a few disturbed areas elsewhere on the mesa. Cacti, cheatgrass, and a variety of flowering plants grow interspersed among the sagebrush. The Big sagebrush also grows in and around most large mesatop ruins, such as the Far View Ruins.

A study of the status of rare, endangered, and threatened plant species in the park, conducted in 1979-1980, identified three rare species--Schmoll milk vetch (*Astragalus schmollae*), Cliff Palace milk vetch (*Astragalus deterior*), and false forget-me-not (*Hackelia gracilentia*).

**Fauna.** Mesa Verde, in relatively isolated uplands, has a moderately diversified animal population. For the prehistoric Pueblo residents of the Mesa Verde, these animals constituted a valuable resource from which they could fashion tools and clothing, and harvest food.

Large mammals found in the park include Rocky Mountain mule deer, bighorn sheep, mountain lions, coyotes, bobcats, and gray foxes. Black bear and elk have been occasionally observed. Common small animals include gray rock squirrels, chipmunks, and cottontail rabbits.

Wild turkeys, once native to Mesa Verde, were reestablished in 1990. Presently the birds are located in the upper sections of Morefield and Prater Canyons. The park habitat supports approximately 175 species of birds that are either permanent nesting populations or frequent seasonal residents of the park.

The *Checklist of Birds of Mesa Verde National Park, 1986*, lists two endangered species, the prairie falcon and the peregrine falcon, and one threatened species, the southern bald eagle. A threatened species of the spotted owl has been found nesting in the park.

## PUBLICS AND PUBLIC USE

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### Public Use

In spite of Mesa Verde National Park's international renown for its world class cliff dwellings and other prehistoric ruins, it is still largely an *itinerary park* rather than a *destination park*. That is, it's a planned stop on a vacation trip, and not the ultimate destination. However, a significant number of regional residents from the surrounding Southwestern United States visit the park as a specific goal. Many of these regional visitors make it their actual destination park. Additionally, the park undoubtedly will become a focal point on the planned Pueblo trail.

It also remains primarily a day use area during the summer when both the Morefield Campground and the Far View Lodge are in full operation. During this period, approximately 65% of the visiting public spends less than one full day in the park. The average amount of time spent by summer visitors is approximately seven hours. However, if visitors spend at least a day in the park, they are more likely to spend two days [19% of visitors] in the park than just one day [13% of visitors]. Many of these visitors stay in lodging in neighboring communities to the park. Most campers staying in Morefield Campground use it as a base for park explorations during an extended stay of more than two days, including hiking the available trails.

During the summer, about 25% of the visiting public stays inside the park at least for one night; about 10% of the visiting public stays more than one night.

The park's overnight accommodations are not winterized, and thus are closed in off-season. Therefore from November to April, when 8% to 10% of the annual visitation occurs, the park is solely a day use area. During these winter months, the average length of stay for a park visitor is about 3 to 4 hours.

During this winter season, the percentage of adults [including senior citizens] increases from 70% to 85%, and the dominant group affiliation switches from the nuclear family to couples [35% of all the visiting public in the winter]. International visitation increases from 13% to 30% of total park travel during the winter. However, perhaps the most dramatic change in public use patterns during

the winter is in their use of Interpretive and Visitor Services programs where attendance at personally presented programs jumps from 30% to 70%.

Additionally, the park staff has noted that **the yearly public use profile for the park recently has been changing. It consistently has resulted in increased public use during the "shoulder months" of April-May and September-October.**

Public use of the park reached a numerical peak of 772,183 in 1988. However, the park's multiplier factor was reevaluated and reduced during 1989, as reflected in that year's reported annual travel of 600,045. Annual public use for the most recent complete year [1990] was 611,375, which represented a 2% increase.

Projected annual visitation for the year 2000, based on a modest 4% annual increase, would be 940,000. That figure represents a 54% increase over the annual public use for the calendar year 1990.

Observations by the park's interpretive staff, as reflected in their 1990 *Statement for Interpretation and Visitor Services*, indicate that about 5% to 6% of Mesa Verde's public use is by organized groups. During the summer season, these are general organized groups who mostly use non-personal media such as wayside exhibits, museum exhibits, and publications. During the Spring *shoulder season*, these organized groups consist mostly of school classes studying the park's prehistoric culture. Senior citizen groups dominate the organized groups during the rapidly increasing fall *shoulder season*.

The 1987 *Visitor Services Project, Mesa Verde National Park* survey helped quantify several other aspects of the nature of the park's public use during the summer use season, as follows:

- members of the public were most likely to visit the park in a nuclear family group of two to four people;
- nearly three-fourths of visitors were making their first visit to the park;
- the dominant places of origin were Colorado [16%], Texas [11%], California [9%], Arizona [5%], and Germany [4%];

The 1987 Visitor Services Project [VSP] also revealed the percentage of all surveyed visitors using each park facility or feature, as follows:

- Cliff Palace on Chapin Mesa, 73%;
- Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, 73%;
- Spruce Tree House on Chapin Mesa, 66%;

- Far View Visitor Center, 62%;
- Balcony House on Chapin Mesa, 49%;
- Mesa Top Ruins Loop Road on Chapin Mesa, 47%;
- Long House on Wetherill Mesa, 16%;
- Badger House Community on Wetherill Mesa, 15%;
- Step House on Wetherill Mesa, 13%.

The 1987 VSP further confirmed staff observations about public use of the Far View Visitor Center as the initial stop for park visitors. Less than one-half of all visitors, only 41%, stopped first at Far View Visitor Center.

Park staff notes that automobile *gridlock* commonly occurs during peak summer public use in the immediate vicinity of the Cliff Palace parking lot and the park headquarters area on Chapin Mesa.

As would be expected, the consequence of overflowing parking lots and *gridlock* along park roads is an undesirable overload of park resources and facilities. These overloads, in turn, seriously impact both the quality of visitor experiences and the park's irreplaceable prehistoric resources. Therefore, park management is beginning to explore effective ways of limiting park visitation.

## Special Populations

Public use by members of the public with impairments is reported to be relatively limited. It is estimated that approximately 1% of the visiting public during the summer season is disabled, yet that constitutes a group of over 6000 people. During the winter, reported public use by disabled individuals is nearly nonexistent.

Children, youths and young adults constitute 30% of all public use during the summer season, but only 15% of public use during the winter months.

Identified minority public use represented 4% of total visitation during the summer season, and only 1% of all visitors during the winter months.

Undoubtedly, the most notable characteristic of special populations public use is international visitation, especially those from Germany. During the summer

season, 17% of all visitors were international in origin, which increased to 30% during the off-season winter months.

Based on the 1987 Visitor Services Project findings, the park's international visitors came from Canada and ten different European countries including Germany. In addition to Germany, significant visitation originated in the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, and Austria. It is significant to note that, unlike a number of other National Park System areas in the American West, few Japanese nationals visit this park.

During 1990, based on the current Statement for Management, four percent of all visitors or approximately 24,000 persons were from Germany.

According to the 1987 Visitor Services Project findings, nearly 50% of all foreign visitation during the summer season came from Germany. During the winter months, the percentage increases to approximately 60% of all foreign visitation. Park staff believes that such a high incidence of visitation by German nationals is based largely upon the following factors:

- the strength of the German Deutsche Mark;
- the intense German interest in things scientific;
- the German fascination with the many facets of the American West story.

## **Conclusions for Interpretation**

Development should provide for the particular needs for as wide a variety of Mesa Verde National Park's visitors as possible. Interpretation needs to be developed for the extended-stay visitors and the repeat visitors as well as for first-time visitors [especially those one-time visitors staying in the park for only part of one day]. Those in the first group primarily will need both basic orientation and context-setting interpretive media and services. Visitors in each of the last two groups additionally will need *in-depth* interpretive media and services.

The need for an effective initial orientation/interpretation center has been verified by the 1987 visitor survey and confirms the need for a new visitor center at or near the park entrance, as proposed in the 1988 *Park Entrance Comprehensive Design Plan*. This situation results in visitors driving a minimum of 15 miles into the park without information on available services and points of interest. This is especially problematic during the winter months when the entrance gate is not

staffed and the visiting public must drive 21 miles to get orientation information, including information on seasonal closures of sites and facilities.

Primary interpretation/orientation facilities must be provided for visitors year-round. Therefore, the proposed new Park Entrance Visitor Center also must be planned, developed, and staffed. Its operation must be augmented by continued year-round staffing and operation of the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum.

Interpretive/information media will be needed to help mitigate the impacts of the overload of visitors on park resources and facilities. Many of these impacted features and facilities are located on Chapin Mesa. The most heavily impacted areas on Chapin Mesa, often with traffic patterns resulting in *gridlock*, are:

- the vicinity of the Cliff Palace parking area;
- the trail to and through Cliff Palace ruin;
- the public parts of the Park Headquarters developed area, especially the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum and its immediate environs.

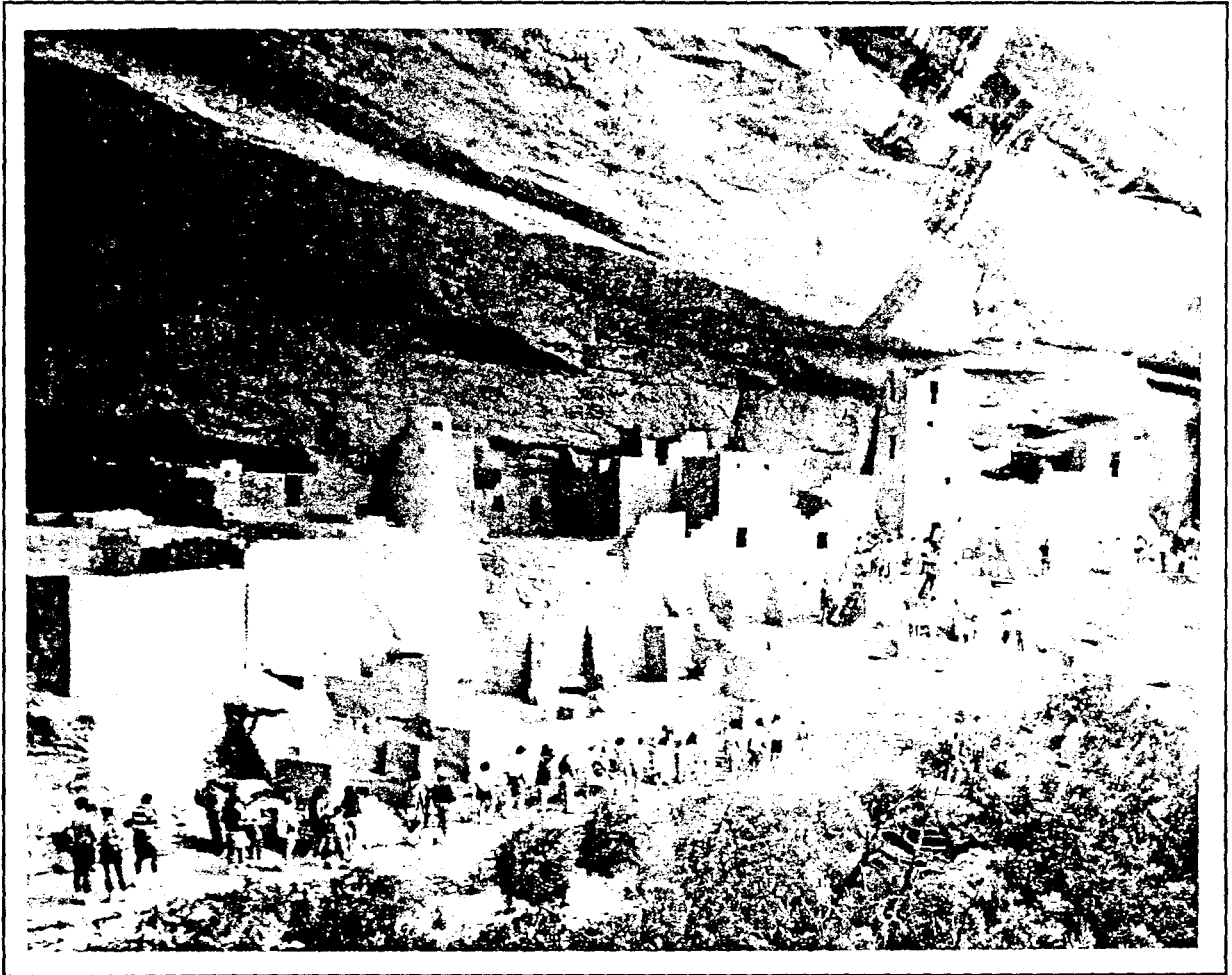
Interpretive media will be needed to help:

- divert visitors to alternate experience sites, including other developed archeological sites outside the Mesa Verde National Park boundaries, when visitor overload conditions exist;
- visitors understand the serious consequences of visitor use of features and facilities in excess of established carrying capacities.

Ultimately, interpretive media may also be called upon to provide surrogate experiences, if and when even the alternate destinations are saturated.

The findings of the 1987 visitor services survey have also shown that neither the 1972 opening of Wetherill Mesa nor the opening of the Wetherill Mesa Road to private vehicles has relieved the intensive public use pressure on Chapin Mesa. As previously pointed out, intensive public use pressure degrades the quality of visitor experiences and impacts the park's irreplaceable prehistoric resources. Therefore, orientation/interpretation media must try to mitigate and diffuse this undesirable intensive public use pressure. However, it seems unrealistic to expect orientation/interpretation media to solve the complete problem.

*Illustration 2*  
*Cliff Palace, on Chapin Mesa,*  
*with Constant, Heavy Summer Seasonal Visitor Use*



Adequate facilities for group use at a new entrance visitor center must be considered, such as dual theaters, each with a seating capacity of 110, and a multipurpose room.

Continued provision of facilities and services, both by physical and alternative media programs accommodation, for special populations will need to be considered, especially those for mobility impaired and non-English speaking visitors.

The scope and quality of interpretive media and services should reflect the highest NPS standards. This is especially important considering the park's role in our global heritage as one of the first properties in the United States to be designated a World Heritage Cultural Site, as a part of the World Heritage Convention.

## INFLUENCES AND CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING INTERPRETATION

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As the first and best known of the Cultural World Heritage properties in the United States, Mesa Verde National Park has significant influences and considerations, both internal and external, which affect this plan for the park's interpretive media and services.

### **External**

The cultural heritage and resources of Mesa Verde National Park occupy a key role in the interpretation of the overall Anasazi story and need to be so considered in this document. Such consideration also needs to address the park's relationship to the nearby Hovenweep and Yucca House National Monuments, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's Anasazi Heritage Center at Dolores, Colorado, and consider its possible role and relationship with the proposed Anasazi National Monument.

This plan needs to continue to address the park's concern about the deteriorating air quality of the region surrounding the park.

The relationships with the immediate neighboring Ute Mountain tribe and the affects of its business enterprises, located immediately off the park's Cliff Palace/Balcony House Loop Road, need to be considered within the total scope of the visitor experience.

### **Internal**

This prospectus recognizes that the approach to the interpretation of the Mesa Verde story has been dictated by the fact that material culture is all that remains within the park.

Therefore, we must rely on interpretive assumptions developed from ethnographic extrapolations, which in turn are based upon surviving elements of material culture. In the process of developing those extrapolations, we need to recognize the existence of several possible interpretations of Anasazi lifeways. The planning team has chosen an interpretive strategy that assumes that we start with the time of the earliest contact by European chroniclers with these Puebloan peoples. From that base we suggest using ethnographic comparisons to speculate upon prehistoric Anasazi cultures, especially for those who lived on the Mesa Verde.

This document also recognizes that the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum indeed is essentially, as the name states, a museum rather than a visitor center. It also emphatically recognizes the need to maintain its essential historical character, nature, and integrity. To retain and maintain that character and integrity, the museum should receive a treatment specifically addressing the following:

- correct textual errors;
- organize the existing exhibit elements in a more logical way;
- develop new mounts to eliminate or reduce physical stress on the display artifacts;
- provide any needed conservation of display artifacts;
- develop a readable type size and style, based on the best of the type faces currently used in the museum;
- facilitate better accessibility to the exhibits;
- redesign exhibit cases to protect vulnerable artifacts;
- remove artifact damaging materials from display cases;
- alter the lighting system to protect sensitive artifacts and enhance viewing.

The document needs to particularly treat the need to portray Mesa Verde's natural history through interpretive media because large, extensive concentrations of archeological resources throughout the park have closed much of the park's backcountry to visitors. To our knowledge, it is the only national park with a Congressionally designated Wilderness Area which is closed to the public. However, those limited trail corridors give a small number of park users a special opportunity for extended interaction with little seen park resources, both natural and cultural.

This prospectus definitely acknowledges that the closure of the backcountry to the public also exerts concentrated public use pressures on many of the developed areas and cultural sites open to the public. The park's interpretive staff and

interpretive media share the problem of general human impact on cultural sites, especially cliff dwellings.

Mesa Verde Museum Association, Inc., is a major partner with the park in providing interpretation and orientation for park visitors. The document recognizes the need to provide for the association's sales and storage requirements.

There would be definite ramifications and impacts upon the park's interpretation and interpretive media caused by any failure to positively provide for the adequate, environmentally controlled storage of the park's museum collections as well as some form of adequate environmental controls for exhibited artifacts in each of the park's exhibit facilities.

The planning team acknowledged a need to be particularly cognizant of a necessity to provide more alternatives for visitors with visual impairments, such as the use of tactile models and reproduction artifacts in museum exhibits.

In the interest of assuring that a new entrance visitor center will not necessarily hold visitors a long time, the team also acknowledges a need to plan and design interpretive media which will facilitate a smooth, but rather rapid visitor flow through the center [such as an AV production limited to 10 minutes or less, and exhibits which will interpret key concepts in a manner conducive to a relatively brief visit].

This plan will also need to address alternative experiences for those visitors who, because of time constraints, either may not be able or simply choose to spend at least four hours in the park to actually visit at least one the park's ruins.

There is a clearly defined need to interpretively treat the impact of the recurring cycles of fire on the area's environment and people, both historic and prehistoric.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS, WITH A SUMMARY OF MEDIA PROBLEMS AND NEEDS

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### Existing Conditions

The current visitor experience at Mesa Verde National Park includes a variety of facilities and options, including nearly identical prehistoric resources open for visitation on both Wetherill Mesa and Chapin Mesa. Unfortunately, basic information/orientation services are not immediately available upon entering the park. *Map 2: Existing Interpretive Media at Mesa Verde National Park*, on page 31, shows the location and extent of the existing interpretive media within the park.

Upon entering the park, visitors receive the park unigrid folder and other appropriate written information at the entrance/fee collection station. The park's Travelers Information System [TIS], a low power AM radio broadcast transmitter located near the park entrance, is also available to assist the traveling public. This TIS continuously broadcasts current park travel information, such as: road and weather conditions, facilities and features open to the public, and schedule of visitor services and activities.

Seasonally, two other limited information/orientation facilities are available to visitors at or near the park entrance. From early March to late November a pair of park entrance stations, operated primarily for fee collection, secondarily provide rudimentary information/orientation services [including dispensing park folders after hours from brochure racks]. Additionally, a small ranger station at Morefield Campground, randomly operated during the summer months, provides some park information.

Even during the summer season [early May through late September], visitors cannot obtain detailed park orientation information until reaching Far View Visitor Center about 15 miles. Because of the park's winding, ascending entrance road, it takes 30 to 40 minutes of driving time to reach Far View. During the park's seven-month off-season, the only opportunity for detailed park orientation/

information is at Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, located 21 miles and about a one hour drive from the park entrance. Since many off-season visitors fail to stop for information dispensed from racks, even though they are urged to do so by a large sign reading "Stop for Information", visitors often miss much the park has to offer under these conditions. Consequently, many uninformed visitors spend that hour driving only to find visitor facilities closed.

The circular Far View Visitor Center, open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. from early May to late September, provides the visiting public with:

- an orientation center for the park;
- an introduction to Wetherill Mesa;
- a Mesa Verde Museum Association display/sales area;
- a brief video on the park's Air Quality/Acid Precipitation monitoring project;
- a non-resource related ethnographic exhibit area.

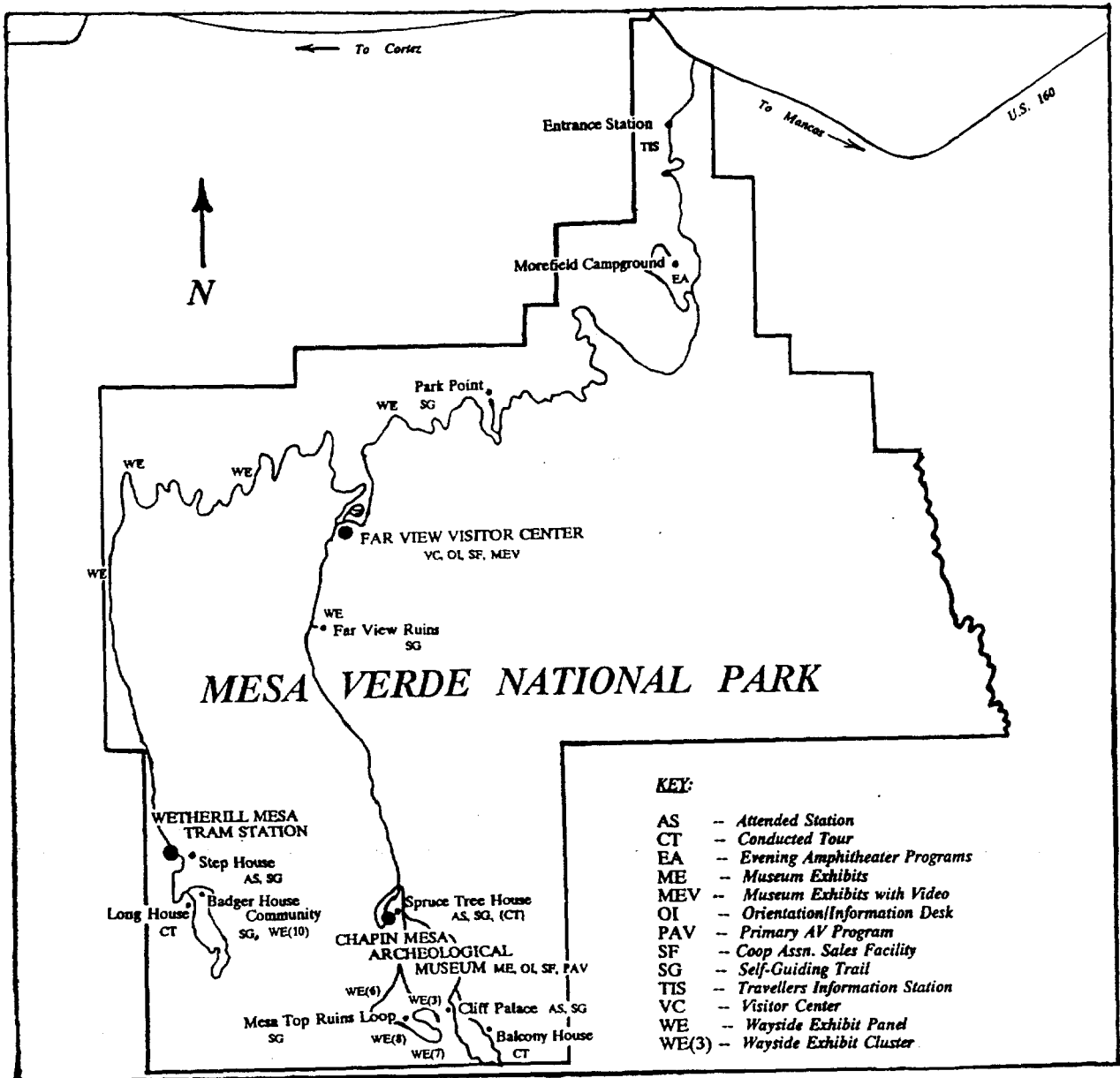
Park records indicate that only 35% of the park's summer visitors take advantage of the information, orientation and interpretive services offered at Far View Visitor Center. Therefore, it is only partially successful as Mesa Verde's orientation center, for a variety of reasons. The chief among the reasons for its limited success are:

- that adequate parking is not apparent to many visitors, even though ample parking is located across the busy entrance road with pedestrian underpass access to the visitor center;
- a great lack of site specific, resource related exhibits.

For the past five summer seasons, the 13-mile Wetherill Mesa Access Road has been open to private automobile traffic. From the terminus of that access road, the Service provides access to the concentrated archeological resources area on Wetherill Mesa via a loop tram system from Memorial Day through the second week of September. The park's interpretive division operates a tiny visitor contact kiosk at the temporary tram stop facility from 8:45 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. daily.

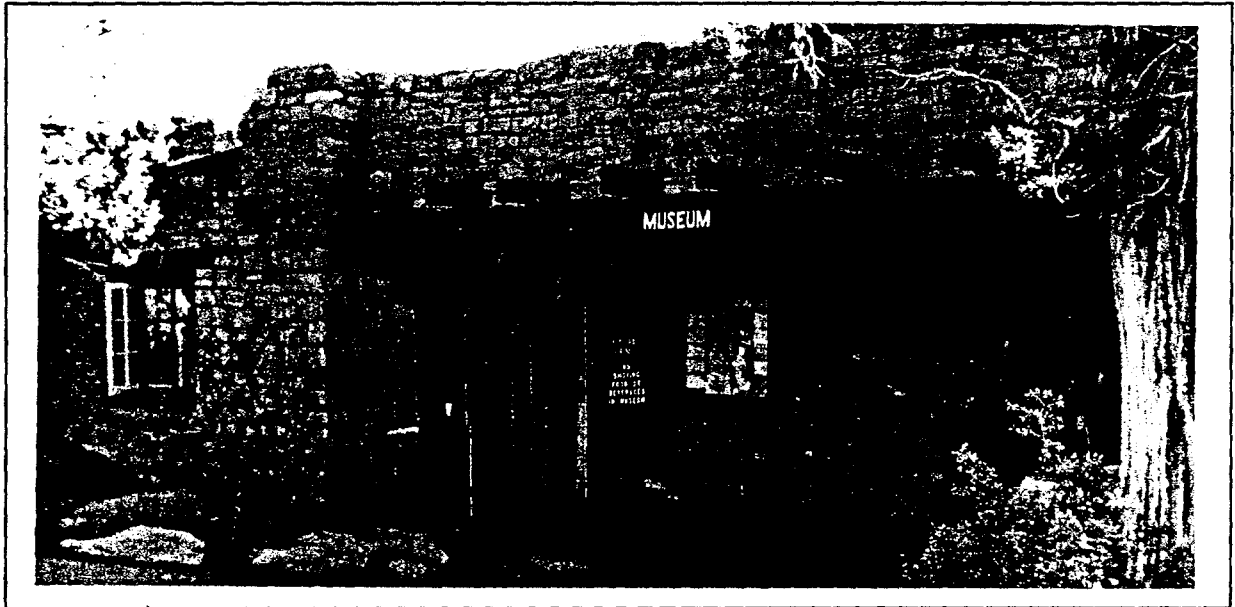
Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, in the heart of the park's Mesa Verde Administrative Historic District, serves as the park's primary visitor information/orientation/interpretation facility and its only major year-round visitor center. The museum is open at least 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. year-round, with extended hours to 6:30 p.m. during summer season. The structure housing this museum, built between 1924 and 1937, features ceiling vigas and thick stone to blend in

Map 2  
Existing Interpretive  
Media at Mesa Verde National Park



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*Illustration 3*  
*Historic Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum*



*Illustration 4*  
*Interior of Chapin Mesa*  
*Archeological Museum on a Typical Summer Day*



with [but not necessarily replicate] the construction motif of the park's prehistoric dwellings. The public area of the building includes eight rooms:

- the lobby/information desk area;
- a diorama corridor;
- a large multipurpose auditorium, used to show an interpretive audiovisual program during the off-season only;
- four archeological exhibit rooms, all with different floor levels;
- a Mesa Verde Museum Association (MVMA) display/sales room.

The building also contains administrative/management spaces both on the main level offices and in a partial basement. Housed in these spaces are:

- offices for the Chief Park Interpreter, the headquarters interpretive staff, and the Chapin Mesa District Interpreter;
- offices for the Mesa Verde Museum Association, along with a book vault and a caged area for Association sales stock;
- a vault for the valuable books of the park library;
- a slide collection.

Mesa Verde also contains two amphitheaters:

- the 1800-seat main park amphitheater in Morefield Campground, which is used for evening audiovisual programs;
- the older, smaller capacity amphitheater on the rim of Chapin Mesa, with a panorama of Spruce Canyon as an open backdrop, which is used for special programs and concerts rather than regular evening programs.

The park's currently approved *Annual Statement for Interpretation and Visitor Services* places in proper perspective vital extended personal interpretive services with both existing and needed media. The activity-by-activity summary of the Interpretation and Visitor Services Program yields insight into some of the most important specifics, which are as follows:

- **Staffing Orientation/Information Desks:** Please see sections above on Far View Visitor Center, Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, and Wetherill Mesa Visitor Contact Kiosk;
- **Daily Conducted Tours:** Summer Season--Balcony House - 19, Long House - 17; Off-Season--Spruce Tree House, 3;
- **Attended Stations, Summer Season:** Spruce Tree House [10 1/2 hours daily], Cliff Palace [10 hours daily], and Step House [8 hours daily];

- **Evening Interpretive Programs, Morefield Amphitheater:** presented nightly during the summer season, approximately 100 programs per summer [Memorial Day to Labor Day];
- **Interior Patio Programs, Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum:** Occasional to frequent unscheduled use for small group special events, such as storytelling about the Mesa Verde story for interpretation for children.

The park's wayside exhibits represent a "mixed bag" of several generations of wayside exhibits, with only the beginning of a continuity of style and design. Please see *Appendix "A", List of Existing Wayside Exhibits* [page 129] for a tabular listing of all existing wayside exhibits by location, subject, source of origin, and expected future and/or disposition [e.g., keep? replace? remove upon installation of other waysides?]. Each wayside typically covers some aspect of Mesa Verde's geology, archeological prehistory, or history, and is usually mounted in single or double panels at various overlooks. The older exhibits have substandard graphics and hardware, and in many cases cannot be effectively duplicated or rehabilitated in case of wear or damage.

A unified interpretive approach and design has been established for a series of approximately 39 new wayside exhibits mostly for the Chapin Mesa Ruins Road [16 wayside stops] and the Badger House Community Trail and Wetherill Mesa [13 wayside stops].

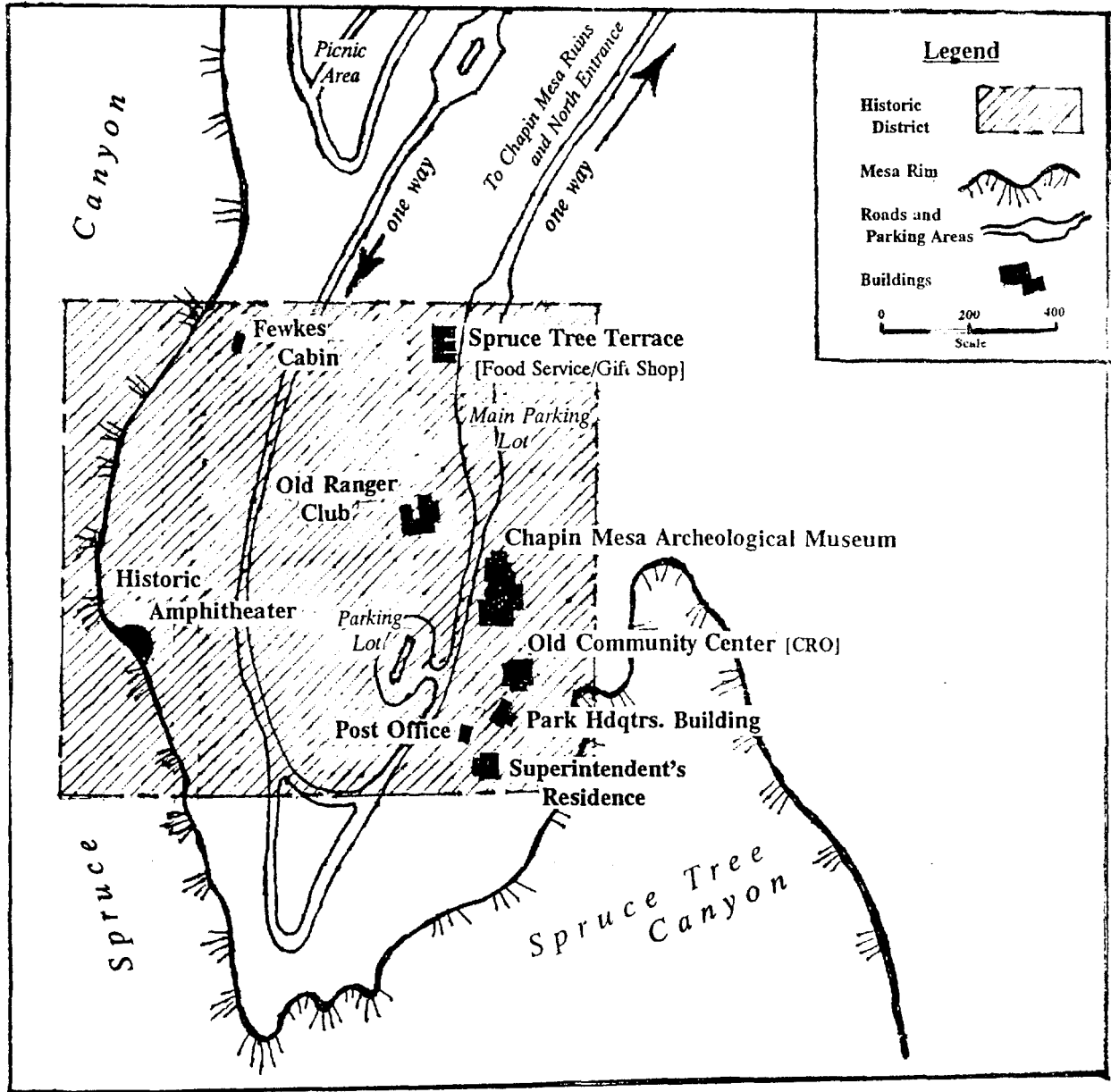
Because of the extremely fragile nature of the park's prehistoric resources, as well as the existence of several staffed facilities, this park must rely quite heavily on personal interpretive services. Personal interpretive services at Mesa Verde are primarily assigned for the following:

- staff for Far View Visitor Center, Chapin Mesa Museum, and Wetherill Mesa Contact Station/Tram Stop;
- conducted tours of Balcony House and Long House;
- assigned station interpretive duty at Cliff Palace, Spruce Tree House, and Step House;
- Evening programs at Morefield Campground amphitheater.

With the integral and able assistance of the Mesa Verde Museum Association, the park has developed a fairly extensive publications program, including the following:

Map 3

## Mesa Verde Administrative Historic District, Mesa Verde National Park



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*Illustration 5*  
*Visitors on a Conducted*  
*Tour at Long House, Wetherill Mesa*



*Illustration 6*  
*Family Group at Badger House, Using the*  
*Badger House Community Self-Guiding Trail on Wetherill Mesa*



- a series of self-guiding booklets: *Far View Ruin*, *Cliff Palace*, *Spruce Tree House*, *Mesa Top Ruins*, *Balcony House*, *Wetherill & Step House*, *Badger House Community*, *Petroglyph Trail*, and *Park Point*;
- general summary pamphlets about Mesa Verde National Park, published in the German, French, and Spanish languages;
- several miscellaneous publications, as follows: *Mesa Verde* [information site bulletin], *Summer Activity Schedule*, *Junior Ranger* [brochure], *Winter Activities at Mesa Verde National Park*, *Wetherill Mesa Planning Information Sheet*, *Trail Information* [sheet], *Checklist of the Birds of Mesa Verde*, *Mesa Verde Picture Taking Tips* [brochure], *Ranger Club* [site bulletin], *Acid Deposition/Air Quality Studies* [sheet], and *Four Corners Monument* [sheet].

As related previously in this document, hiking trails open to the public at Mesa Verde National Park are limited because of an abundance of extremely fragile prehistoric archeological resources. Park trails open for public use are [listed in order from the park entrance to the farthest trailheads on Chapin and Weatherill Mesas]: [Note: Almost all of these trails are closed during winter months because of inclement weather and significant snowfall accumulations]

- Three trails leaving from Morefield Campground trailheads: Knife Edge Trail [1 1/2 miles], Prater Ridge Trail [7.8 miles], and Point Lookout [2.3 miles];
- Park Point Trail, 1/2 mile round trip off the Park Entrance Road on the Mesa Verde North Rim;
- D-Cut Trail to Geologic Overlook [also known as North Rim Overlook], 1/4 mile round trip off the Park Entrance Road on the Mesa Verde North Rim;
- Far View Ruins Group Trail, a 3/4 mile round trip, with self-guiding booklet;
- Prehistoric Farming Terraces Loop Trail, 1/2 mile round trip, near Cedar Tree Tower on Chapin Mesa;
- Spruce Tree House Trail, 1/2 mile round trip, by conducted tour during winter months, and by self-guiding tour booklet during the remainder of the year;
- Two trails sharing a common trailhead along "exit portion" of the Spruce Tree House Trail on Chapin Mesa: Petroglyph Point Trail, a 2.8 mile trail round trip, with self-guiding booklet for 3/4 mile of the trail with numbered stops; and Spruce Canyon Trail, 2.1 mile trail round trip (without a booklet);
- Cliff Palace Trail, 0.5 mile loop trail, with self-guiding booklet;

- Balcony House Trail, a 1/2 mile loop trip, by conducted trip only;
- Soda Canyon Overlook Trail, 1 1/2 mile round trip, near Balcony House on Chapin Mesa;
- Step House Trail, 0.8 mile round trip with self-guiding booklet, located on Wetherill Mesa;
- Long House Trail, a 0.6 mile round trip, by conducted trip, located on Wetherill Mesa;
- Badger House Community Self-Guiding Trail, a 3/4 mile loop trip with self-guiding booklet, located on Wetherill Mesa;
- Trail to Overlook of Nordenskiöld's Ruin #16, 1 mile trail, located on Wetherill Mesa;
- Trail from the information kiosk at Wetherill Mesa to the Badger House Community trailhead.

Three historic buildings within the Mesa Verde Administrative Historic District should be considered as locations for additional interpretive presentations. These three structures--the former Ranger Club, the historic Fewkes Cabin, and the "Old" Community Center (now the Chief Rangers Office/Chapin District Ranger Station)--are not now being used on a full-time basis for interpretive services but could become available after the development of a new administrative area near the park entrance.

At the time of the team's visit in mid-July of 1991, the former Ranger Club housed the temporary centennial exhibit about Gustaf Nordenskiöld and his exploration, and now houses the park library. It could be considered as a space for natural history exhibits in the future.

Each of the other two buildings eventually could be converted from administrative to interpretive use. The historic but relocated Fewkes Cabin is now occupied by the park's Geographic Information Systems staff, but might be better used to interpret the park's own rich history. The "Old" Community Center, with its balcony porch overlooking Spruce Tree House and its adjacent location to the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, will become available and might be used to present an alternative access video tour of Chapin Mesa cliff dwellings for mobility impaired visitors and as an exhibit facility to interpret contemporary Pueblo cultures.

