



Resources Near and Far



Trade

The people of Aztec Ruins skillfully utilized the raw materials and resources they found in their environment to make tools, process food, fabricate clothing, create art, and build their structures. They traveled long distances and maintained extensive trade networks to obtain resources that were not locally available to them. As you tour the ruins, think about our society and how incredibly dependent we are on trade networks. What plants and animals do you use around your house? What do you need to travel to the store to buy? What do you order online?

What was available locally?



Bighorn sheep, deer, elk, bears, rodents, turkeys, and various other bird species were found in this area and used for a multitude of purposes. Bones were fashioned into awls, scrapers, beads, whistles, needles, and gaming pieces, while feathers and hides were used to make warm blankets, robes, and footwear. Sinew (tendon) was wrapped around the end of reed arrows and knives to prevent splitting.

Limestone, siltstone, and sandstone were locally available. Ancestral Pueblos quarried stones from outcroppings and collected cobbles from river bottoms, and then shaped them into tools such as hammer stones, mauls, axes, manos, and metates. They used stone tools to shape rock for constructing their buildings. Prehistoric mauls and hammers were found here and at sandstone quarries three to five miles from Aztec Ruins.

Juniper, piñon pine, and cottonwood trees were used for a variety of things. For example, juniper was used as fuel and construction materials, and piñon pitch was used to waterproof baskets.

Local native shrubs and plants such as yucca, greasewood, sage, four-wing saltbush, willows, and rushes were used. Yucca fibers were used as cordage, while yucca leaves were woven to make sandals, paintbrushes, and needles. Rushes and willow branches were used to construct arrows.

Hematite, selenite, and crystalized gypsum were collected locally. Hematite was used to make hammers, cylindrical paint sticks, pigments, and beads. Flakes of selenite and gypsum were fashioned into pendants.

What could they obtain nearby?

The people of Aztec obtained obsidian (volcanic glass) from the Jemez Mountain area, about 85 miles southwest of here. They chipped the obsidian into projectile points and sharp cutting tools such as knives, scrapers, and blades.

The ancestral Pueblos also traveled 125 miles to an area just south of Santa Fe to collect turquoise. Turquoise was used to make jewelry such as pendants, ear ornaments, beads, bracelets, and other body ornaments. Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and aspen were hauled by foot more than 40 miles from the San Juan Mountains to build the site.



What did they trade for?

The ancestral Pueblos had extensive trade networks extending to northern Mexico and the Gulf of California. Three skulls, a skeleton, and one feather of a macaw from Mexico (still retaining its blue and red colors) were found here. These colorful feathers were valued for their beauty and rarity and were used in ceremonies. Copper objects such as bells and beads from Mexico were also found here.

Shells were obtained from the Gulf of Mexico and used to make jewelry. Shells of at least nine different species were found here. Walnut shells were used as beads and charms. Walnut trees are not native to this region, but do grow in southwestern New Mexico and Arizona. Twisted and braided cotton cord, as well as cotton cloth found in the site, were likely obtained from southern Arizona and Utah.



Salt was highly valued for its use as a preservative. Similar to modern Pueblos, the people at Aztec likely made pilgrimages to gather salt at salt flats near the present-day Zuni Pueblo or western Arizona.

What did they have to trade?

As mentioned, the people at Aztec acquired needed or desired objects such as salt, cotton, shells, or macaw feathers. What did they trade in return for these objects?

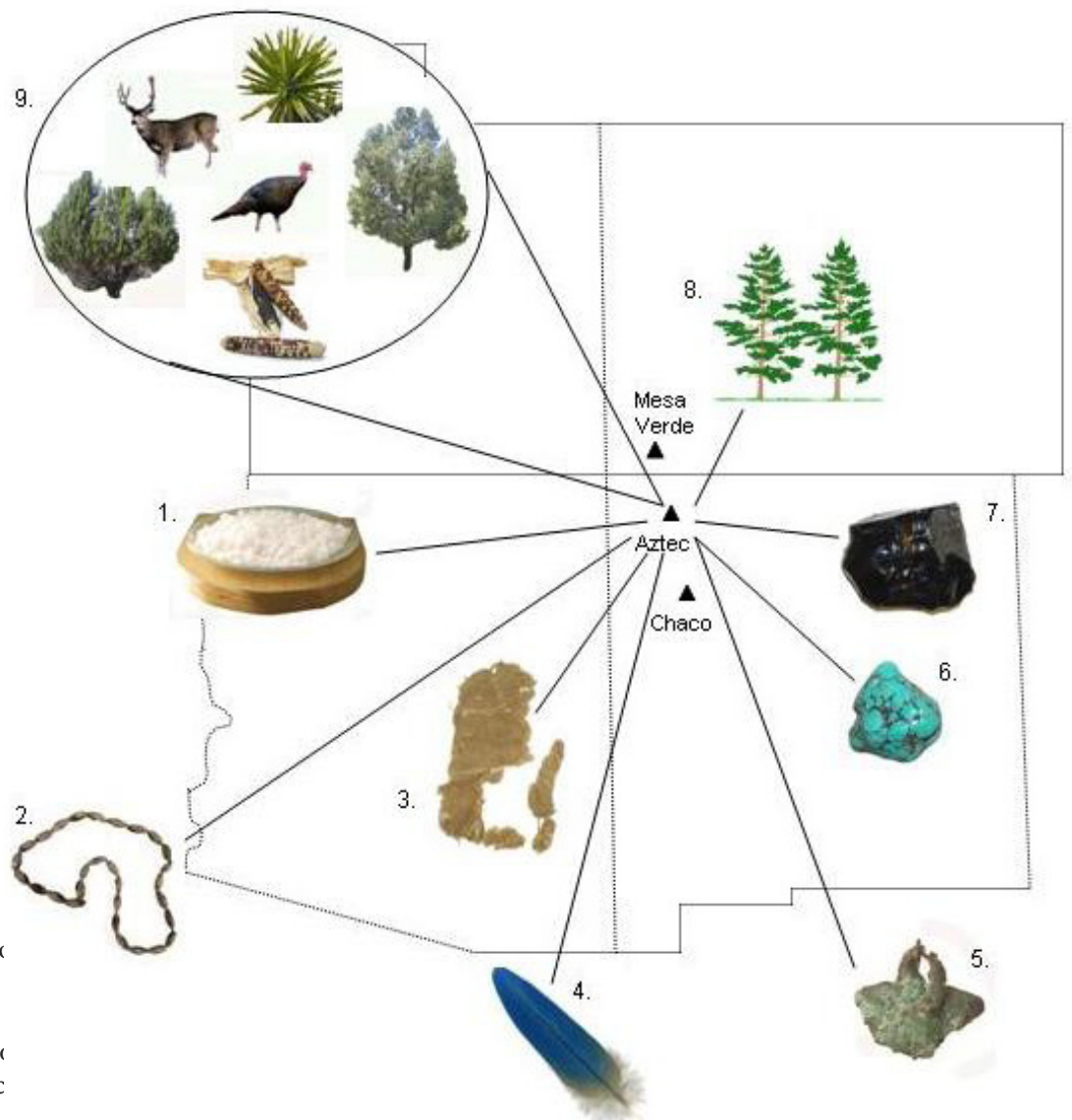
Aztec lies within a stone's throw of the Animas River and close to the confluence of three rivers, enabling access to numerous water sources and relatively fertile land. With the addition of hand-dug irrigation canals, it became an excellent area for farming. Corn, squash, and beans were grown and traded to others for goods not available locally.

Clay was also more readily available in this area. Consequently, elaborately decorated pottery was manufactured here and traded to outsiders.



Extensive trade networks

Just as our modern society maintains extensive trade networks within our own country and around the world, the ancestral Pueblos at Aztec utilized resources near and far. The diagram to the right shows areas from which they obtained certain goods, illustrating the extent to which the Pueblos interacted and traded with people within the Four Corners region and farther.



1. Salt (approx. 300 miles away)
2. Shells (approx. 500 miles away)
3. Cotton (approx. 250 miles away)
4. Macaws (from northern Mexico)
5. Copper bells (from northern Mexico)
6. Turquoise (approx. 125 miles away)
7. Obsidian (approx. 85 miles away)
8. Lumber for construction (approx. 400 miles away)
9. Materials locally available: corn, yucca