

100 Years of Preservation and Stewardship: Montezuma Castle National Monument Centennial: 1906-2006

Visitors to Montezuma Castle in 2006 share the same experience with travelers over the past eight centuries: a first sight of this ancient cliff dwelling inspires awe and respect for its architects, the prehistoric Sinagua people of central Arizona.

Montezuma Castle received federal protection as a National Monument on December 8, 1906, following decades of unauthorized excavation that began to undermine the walls and weaken the entire structure. But an equal number of dedicated local residents recognized Montezuma Castle would soon crumble away without protection. Their contributions formed the basis of all preservation work for the next 100 years.

A Thriving Community

Although Montezuma Castle is one of the most dramatic cliff dwellings in the United States, it never existed as an isolated site. Many cliff dwellings and small pueblos dot the surrounding landscape, all within easy walking distance. The early residents of Montezuma Castle were probably members of a much larger community with family relationships and trade connections extending across the Southwest.



Archeologists refer to these indigenous people as the Sinagua, a term that suggests “without water”. The Hopi people of today, descendants of the Sinagua, call their ancestors the Hisatsinom, meaning those of the remote past or ancient times.

Starting in the late 1300’s, these Ancestral Pueblo people began gradually moving out of the Verde Valley, joining other large, established communities to the east and northeast. There could have been many stresses: drought, disease, conflict or not enough fertile soil to support a large

population.

The Hopi confirm this long-term migration of people and explain it was preordained. It was the right time, elders relate, for the people to return to their place of origin and ancestral homelands in northeast Arizona and western New Mexico.

But the Verde Valley and central Arizona were never completely deserted. The ancestors of today’s Yavapai and Apache people became the next caretakers of the land, protecting the remains of these earlier cultures for five more centuries.

Montezuma Castle and other archeological sites are within traditional Yavapai and Apache hunting and collecting areas but there was, and still is, a strong cultural and ethical taboo against disturbing or desecrating any sites from the past. Montezuma Castle and other prehistoric sites were left untouched until the entry of European-American immigrants in the 1870’s.

The late 1800’s

After the Civil War, homesteaders flocked to newly opened lands in the West. In Arizona, the Apache and Yavapai people resisted the new settlers and the US Army was dispatched to round up the protesters and protect the ranchers. Fort Verde, now an Arizona State Park, was first established as an outpost in 1865. Between forays and engagements, soldiers explored the surrounding countryside and a day at Montezuma Castle and Montezuma Well was a popular outing.



Officers from Ft. Verde and their wives enjoy a picnic. Photo from the archives of Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott, Arizona.

Digging in archeological sites for curiosities and antiquities also became a large part of the excursions. As more homesteaders entered the area, the sale of artifacts obtained usually from sites on public lands was another way to support the family.

Unsung Heroes

Two physicians and scientists associated with Fort Verde deserve credit for the early documentation of Montezuma Castle. In 1865-66, Edward Palmer was assigned to the post as assistant surgeon. Dr. Palmer made sketches of the area, collected plant specimens, described geologic features and speculated about prehistoric land use patterns. In 1866, he contracted malaria and required hospitalization, leaving his documents and artifacts for safekeeping at Fort Verde. Dr. Palmer was later told his precious records and collections had been thrown away by the post commander or divided among the troops.

The first scientific treatise on the area was published in 1890 by Army surgeon Dr. Edgar A. Mearns. This is the first published use of the name “Montezuma’s Castle” for the cliff dwelling. Dr. Mearns’s work and photographs, now in the Library of Congress and the American Museum of Natural History, became the foundation for all scientific work conducted in central Arizona over the past 100 years.

Arizona Antiquarian Society

The territory of Arizona continued to grow in population, bolstered by sales brochures and maps with descriptions of endless opportunities and “lost” civilizations. A day trip to visit Montezuma Castle could be made from the territorial capital of Prescott and itinerant photographers began producing images to encourage tourism.

There were no laws to deter excavating in archeological sites and removing the artifacts for sale to collectors.



Montezuma Castle as it may have appeared in 1906. A remnant of the old tin roof installed by the Arizona Antiquarian Society is still visible. The photo was taken by the Putnam Studio, and prints are in the collection of the Bradshaw family of Sedona and in the archives of the Arizona State Museum in Tucson, Arizona.

Prescott residents Dr. Joshua Miller and Frank Reid, among the founders of the Arizona Antiquarian Society, began a large fundraising campaign to salvage Montezuma Castle, on the brink of collapse because of weakened walls. In 1897, Dr. Miller and two assistants were able to repair breaks in the structure, erect a corrugated iron roof over exposed areas, insert iron rods to stabilize the site and repair ladders. Dr. Miller's work and personal collection of artifacts later became the basis for the world-renown Arizona State Museum in Tucson.

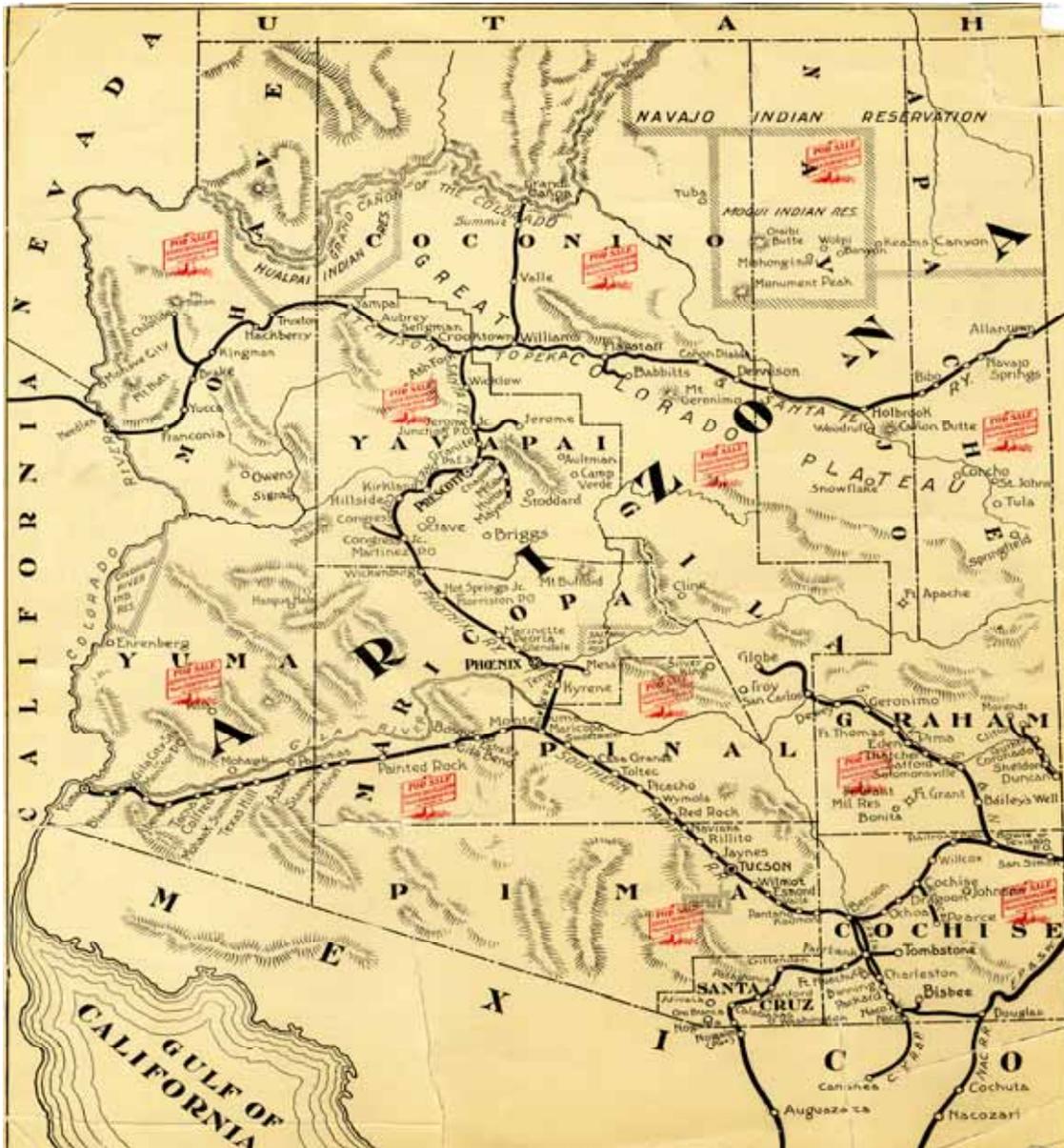
National Monument

The dedicated and impassioned pleas to save Montezuma Castle and other "sites of scientific and historic importance" came together with enactment of the Antiquities Act of 1906 on June 8 that year. Previously, an individual caught digging on public lands and selling the artifacts might be charged with trespassing, but little else.

President Theodore Roosevelt signed the bill establishing Montezuma Castle National Monument on December 8, 1906 along with the designation of El Morro in New Mexico and Petrified Forest as national monuments on the same day.

Roosevelt was making a statement in choosing these sites: Petrified Forest was of scientific importance, El Morro of historic significance and Montezuma Castle honored the heritage of prehistoric cultures.

This early victory in preservation efforts led to a new dilemma. With little to no budget, who would serve as caretaker to the property and enforce the regulations? Officials soon discovered there were no resources to protect these new monuments.



This map of 1904 Arizona was designed as a real estate sales brochure for new immigrants to Arizona. The number of for sales signs underscores the importance of the Antiquities Act legislation passed only two years later, in 1906. From the map collection of Sharlot Hall Museum, Prescott, Az.

Preservation

Many local residents and concerned officials would not allow Montezuma Castle to crumble away and be irreparably damaged. In particular, Taylor Gabbard of Camp Verde, superintendent of the Indian School, wrote persistent letters to the General Land Office in 1911 documenting the need for repairs to the site. He added that assigning a custodian was just a token gesture without including funding for preservation efforts.

When the GLO sent inspector Roy Mead to the site in 1914, he noted many door lintels had been removed, surfaces were defaced, holes burrowed under support units and a section of the front wall was poised to collapse at any moment.

Mead suggested an initial investment of \$100 to correct the damage already done to the Castle and recommended the hiring of a custodian, noting in his report that a new road from Prescott to Camp Verde was bringing in more visitors. The now rotting wood ladders erected by Dr. Miller in 1897 had become, he added, a major safety issue.

By 1916, the significant decline of Montezuma Castle was noted by special agent W.L. Lewis, and in his report he accused the agency of gross negligence. Lewis strongly believed in the educational benefit of national monuments and made the first recommendation to have interpretive materials and trail guides available to the public.

At the same time, a new branch of the Department of the Interior was being established through the National Park Service Act, signed on August 25, 1916. The vision for this new agency, developed by Horace Albright and Stephen Mather, focused on developing national parks and, later, national monuments as tourist attractions.

In 1917, the first repairs under a special \$425 appropriation were begun by Camp Verde resident Alston Morse, a retired Forest Service ranger deeply interested in history. Morse constructed new ladders, cleaned the ruins, scrubbed graffiti and established a visitor registration book. His employment ended when he was called to duty in World War I.

The Pinkley Years

Fortunately for Montezuma Castle and other national monuments in the Southwest, a charismatic and forceful advocate named Frank Pinkley was employed by the National Park Service in its formative years.



“Boss” Pinkley was custodian of Casa Grande and Tumacacori National Monuments, but by 1919 he also included Montezuma Castle and Petrified Forest in his inspection reports. Two years later, Pinkley appointed Martin Jackson of Camp Verde as custodian for the salary of ten dollars a month.

The next 16 years under the Jackson family were a time of many improvements. Both Jackson and Pinkley were noted for spending their own money on a site if an improvement was not funded. They interacted with visitors, gave tours, and tirelessly lobbied for more resources.

“Boss” Pinkley was also willing to pitch in and do the repairs himself. He and Jackson spent the summers of 1923-1925 on top of scaffolding and ladders hauling mud and stone; a job deemed so hazardous no local contractor would submit a bid! The work completed by Jackson and Pinkley laid a foundation for preservation today: the old corrugated roof was removed; they rebuilt the tower or ‘addition’ section; replastered the front walls; removed hundreds of names and other graffiti and restored doorways, lintels and roofing.

Excavations

The Jackson family eventually moved into a two-room cabin built on what is now the main parking area. Mrs. Ada Jackson sold postcards, refreshments and curios and Mr. Jackson began a small museum. Their son, Earl Jackson, became Montezuma Castle’s first full time park ranger, but left to pursue a degree in archeology from the University of Arizona.

In the 1920’s and 1930’s there was growing interest and research in the archeology of central Arizona. Responding to the Depression, an excavation of “Castle A” down from the main site began in 1933-34 as a Civilian Works Administration (CWA) project. The team, under University of Arizona graduate students Sallie Van Valkenburgh and Earl Jackson, excavated seven rooms, restored walls and ceilings and improved trails to the site.

An additional CWA project in 1933-34 hired 43 men to construct a new parking lot away from the area directly in front of the Castle, install electricity and a telephone and eventually build the revetment wall along Beaver Creek to protect against flooding.

NPS engineer Walter Attwell initially hired workers laid off from the copper mines at Clarkdale but was unhappy with their performance, stating in his report several were there just to get a check and refused to work.

Attwell hired a new crew from the Camp Verde area and noted the dependability of this local work force. His report singled out five American Indian employees from the town, commenting that they were among the best he had ever worked with on a project. The revetments stand today, a legacy of these men and the efforts to contain the floodplain of Beaver Creek.

Closing the Castle

After World War II, the greatest challenge facing Montezuma Castle was a spiraling increase in visitation, impacting the site and its facilities. Under Superintendent Homer Hastings there was an enlarged staff of two park rangers and the first Park Service archeologist at Montezuma Castle :Albert H. Schroeder.

Interest was growing: in the late 1940’s the National Park Service began negotiations to acquire Montezuma Well from the William Back family of Rimrock, Az.

Because of World War II, there was a delay in appropriations but in 1947, Montezuma Well became a detached unit of Montezuma Castle National Monument.

Superintendent Hastings expressed concern for the safety of the public and in 1947 urged NPS officials to close the Castle interior. The agency had discussed the situation for years but felt an interpretive substitute had to be in place before the Castle closed. An interim solution was to limit visitors to 18 people per hour; many waited in long lines.

The Castle was officially closed to guided tours on October 1, 1951. One year later Superintendent John O. Cook unveiled the new diorama and encouraged park rangers to interact more with the visitors to compensate. The diorama remains a popular attraction fifty years later and many visitors have memories of seeing the diorama as a child. In 1954, the NPS regional director decided to begin charging a per person fee of 25 cents to view Montezuma Castle.

Mission 66

In the mid-1950's, the National Park Service began an ambitious program of improvements designed to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the agency to be observed in 1966.

Superintendent Cook and later superintendents Foy Young and Albert Henson developed plans to build a new Visitor Center at Montezuma Castle and improve visitor use facilities at Montezuma Well.

On September 18, 1960, Senator Barry Goldwater gave the principal address dedicating the 2500 square foot visitor center, complete with offices, a patio, improved walkways and modern restrooms. The state of the art visitor center also had a museum and area for bookstore sales.

Mission 66 funding also enhanced the visitor experience at Montezuma Well. An excavated pithouse was stabilized and covered by a roof. The Swallet Cave site was excavated and stabilized by NPS archaeologist Ed Ladd, a member of the Zuni tribe in New Mexico. New trails and interpretive signs were developed.

After the opening of the new visitor center, improvements to Montezuma Castle over the next years were primarily in response to a problem or need. The periodic flooding of Beaver Creek always required repairs to the picnic area and trails. In 1970, Superintendent Edward Nichols had to contend with the diorama being washed 100 feet down the trail!

Both Monuments

Another 1930's Civilian Works Administration project, excavating the site of Tuzigoot near Clarkdale, Az., was designated a national monument by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1939.

In 1975, the superintendent of Tuzigoot, Glen Henderson, was placed in charge of both Verde Valley monuments. The combined administration of Montezuma Well, Montezuma Castle and Tuzigoot helped improve the interpretive story between the three cultural sites.

Under Superintendent Henderson, a new visitor contact station was built at Montezuma Well and the Visitor Center Museum at Montezuma Castle was completely renovated and updated. A comprehensive archeological survey of the monument and an architectural survey were also completed.

In 1994, erosion of the exterior wall plaster at Montezuma Castle, accelerated by the burrowing activity of carpenter bees, was noted and much of the deteriorating plaster was replaced.

Future Plans

Biologist Kathy Davis was named Superintendent of Montezuma Castle/Tuzigoot in 2002, ushering in an era of scientific research and more improvements to the facilities. An addition is planned for the contact station at Montezuma Well, and the interpretive displays at Tuzigoot and Montezuma Castle are being refurbished and expanded.

One year after Montezuma Castle was designated a national monument, President Theodore Roosevelt warned, "We are prone to speak of the resources of this country as inexhaustible; this is not so".

As visitors from around the world reflect on the significance of these Ancestral Pueblo sites, the protection of Montezuma Castle for the next century is assured by those who share the same passion and respect for the past that inspired Dr. Mearns, President Roosevelt, and countless others who joined forces 100 years ago and would not permit this ancient cliff dwelling and its legacy to crumble to dust.

References and acknowledgments: The work by Tucson historian Josh Protas remains the definitive history of Montezuma Castle National Monument. "*A Past Preserved in Stone: a History of Montezuma Castle National Monument*", published in 2002, represents years of meticulous research and scholarship with support from the public history program of Arizona State University, Tempe., Az.

Historian Hal Rothman has written many books about the development of the American West and the National Monuments, including "*America's National Monuments: The Politics of Preservation*".

National Park Service historian Ronald Lee's book on the Antiquities Act of 1906 is available electronically at www.cr.nps.gov. This website also features a wealth of information about history, cultural and natural resources around the country.