



Foundation Document Overview

Natural Bridges National Monument

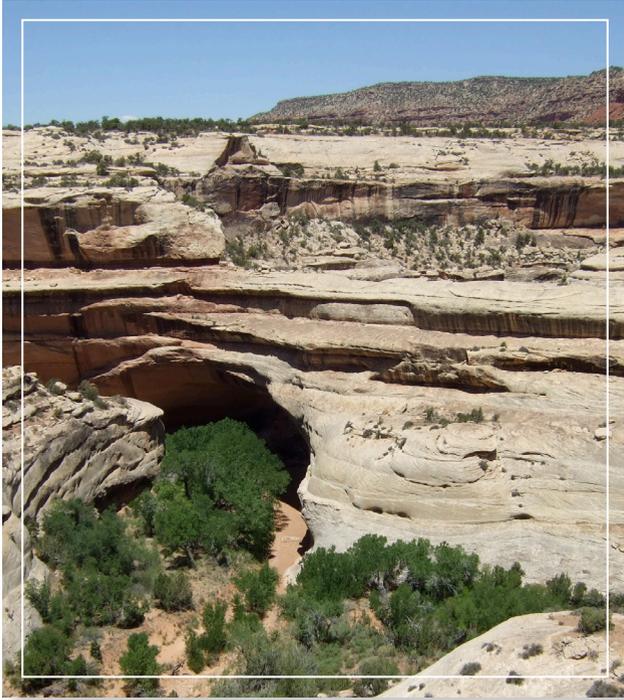
Utah



Contact Information

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Purpose



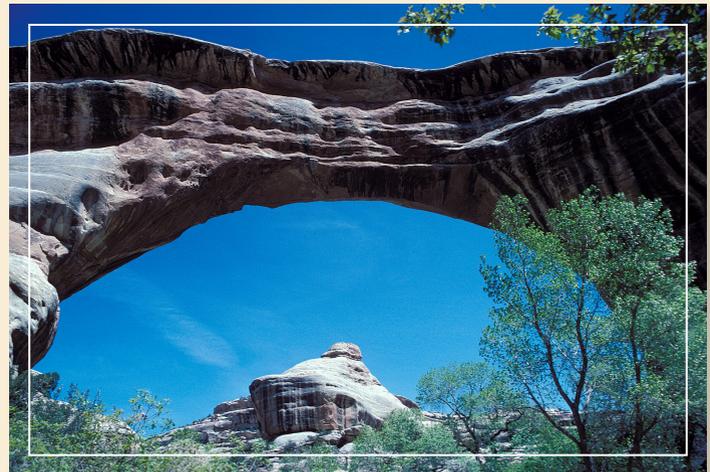
The purpose of NATURAL BRIDGES NATIONAL MONUMENT is to preserve and provide for public enjoyment of three of the world's largest stream-eroded natural bridges, and Ancestral Puebloan and other cultural sites in their settings.



Significance

Significance statements express why Natural Bridges National Monument's resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Nowhere else on Earth are three large natural bridges found in such close proximity to one another.
- Natural Bridges National Monument contains some of the most significant intact or semi-intact prehistoric structures with wooden features in the American Southwest, as well as archeological sites and resources associated with ancient peoples and their activities. Scientific investigations of wood specimens have contributed significant insights into the timing of Ancestral Puebloan settlement, resettlement, and abandonment in the Colorado Plateau region.
- Natural Bridges National Monument is recognized internationally for the exceptional natural quality of its night sky and was the first designated International Dark Sky Park.
- Deep, moist canyons and associated diverse biotic assemblages of Natural Bridges National Monument are regionally significant due to a long history of protection that has maintained these systems in their natural condition.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The three natural bridges—Sipapu, Kachina, and Owachomo.** Natural Bridges National Monument is the one place where three natural bridges (stream-carved features) are found in close proximity. Sipapu, Kachina, and Owachomo exemplify natural geologic and hydrologic processes that form and modify natural bridges over great spans of time.
- **Cultural resources.** The entire monument has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Natural Bridges Archeological District, which includes 507 contributing resources. These resources contribute to the broader knowledge of the full range of prehistoric occupation on Cedar Mesa and include both simple lithic scatters as well as multi-room pueblos with stratified deposits.
- **The remote and undeveloped setting.** Natural Bridges National Monument exists away from significant development, allowing for night skies, soundscapes, and air quality to be maintained in their natural condition.
- **Moist canyon habitats.** Protected natural hydrologic processes, geomorphic processes, and biotic processes are necessary for maintaining the natural condition of canyon habitats and associated biotic assemblages.

Natural Bridges National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Museum Collections.** The park's museum collections contain three-dimensional objects and natural history specimens and artifacts that are representative of the resources within the park's boundaries. Archives also are a component of museum collections and document park and resource management history.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park— they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from — and should reflect — park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Geology.** The deeply incised canyons, entrenched meanders, and natural bridges of the region are a result of powerful geologic and hydrologic processes operating over great spans of time.
- **Life and Landforms.** The climate, geology, and riparian habitats of Natural Bridges National Monument form a rich, interconnected ecosystem.
- **Wildness.** The remote nature of Natural Bridges National Monument provides opportunities for visitors to discover and enjoy wildness and solitude.



- **Prehistoric Cultural Resources.** Structures, sites, artifacts, and rock art from ancient peoples found in Natural Bridges National Monument serve as windows into the region's rich human history and help foster better understanding and appreciation of the lives of these prehistoric people and their relationships with the land.
- **Remote and Undeveloped Setting.** In a remote natural setting essentially unchanged since Puebloan time, Natural Bridges National Monument protects and preserves the same dark night skies, natural soundscapes, and clean air that the ancestral Puebloans observed and valued hundreds of years ago.

Description

Natural Bridges National Monument (Natural Bridges) is located 43 miles west of Blanding, San Juan County, Utah, and contains 7,636.88 acres within its boundary. The land area surrounding the park ranges from the desert canyons along the Colorado River to the forested mountains of the Abajo Mountains. Elevations on the Colorado Plateau vary approximately from 4,200 to 10,000 feet. As is common in the southwestern United States, precipitation is minimal, averaging only 13 inches per year.

Repeatedly occupied and abandoned during prehistoric times, Natural Bridges was first inhabited during the Archaic period, from 7000 BC to AD 500. Only the rock art and stone tools left by hunter-gatherer groups reveal that humans lived in this area. Around AD 700, ancestors of modern Puebloan people moved onto the mesa tops for dryland farming and later left as the natural environment changed. Around AD 1100, new migrants from across the San Juan River moved into small, single-family houses near the deepest, best-watered soils throughout this area. In the 1200s, farmers from Mesa Verde migrated here, but by the 1300s, the Ancestral Puebloan people migrated south. Navajos and Paiutes lived in the area during later times, and Navajo oral tradition holds that their ancestors lived among the early Puebloans.

The three natural bridges found here are among the world's largest, having formed in a classic entrenched meander stream system in Cedar Mesa sandstone. They represent three different stages of bridge development. Sipapu—a Hopi word meaning “place of emergence”—is a massive, mature bridge with a smooth, symmetrical opening. The second bridge, Kachina, is named for the rock art at its base that resembles symbols often associated with Kachina dolls. Kachina is a youthful bridge. Low and broad, it is still growing, widened by episodic flooding and rockfall. Its abandoned meander is easily recognizable. The last bridge, Owachomo, named for the rock mound on its east abutment, is an old bridge nearing collapse. The stream that formed it has long since changed course and no longer flows beneath it, making Owachomo seem like a relic

