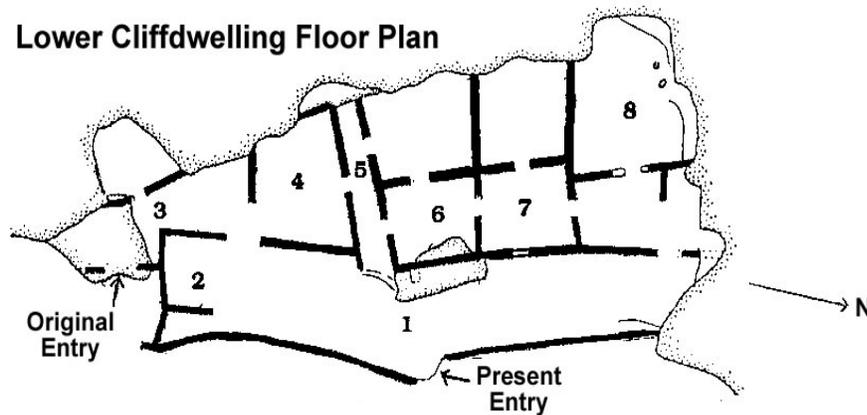


Lower Cliffdwelling Floor Plan



A thousand years ago, the vast area of the American Southwest became a melting pot of cultures. From this, the Salado of Tonto Basin emerged, displaying identifiable characteristics such as pottery and architecture. Eventually, thousands lived in the Tonto Basin. Around AD 1250, some began building in the caves. You are able to visit one of these "cliff dwelling" homes today.

To keep this area open for visitors, we must protect it. Please do not touch, sit, or lean on the fragile walls.

You are about to experience a rare, extraordinary visit. The Lower Cliff Dwelling is not just old stones, sticks, and mortar. It is the skeleton of a small village - a place where people were born and died, lived and worked. Here children played, grew up, loved and were loved.

To get the greatest value from your visit, try to picture it seven hundred years ago - busy with people going about their lives.

Numbers refer to locations on map above.

1: This wide-open space was once the site of many two-story structures. These homes, each a single room, were less protected, and have eroded away.

Their flat roofs may have been a place where the old ones of the village, crippled from injury or arthritis, warmed themselves on sunny days. Those folks, in their forties, could expect to live only another season or two. Other people would be on the roof as well, making tools, grinding corn, and weaving. Small children played, protected from falling by the parapet, a low wall built around the perimeter of the roof.

2: Walk to the left to enter what remains of the housing complex. In the two-story room on your left you will see a small hole in the second-floor wall. From there one could watch the original ladder entry into the village. Note the holes high in the wall, marking where the second story roof was, and the parapet above them.

3: Go up the three stone steps and turn left. The V-shaped notch in the rugged wall was the only way to enter the village, making it easy to defend. People climbed up an outside ladder, often balancing heavy water vessels or loads of corn or squash.

Facing the opening, you will note a small room with a half-T doorway on your right. The half-T prevented strong drafts and provided a ledge for balance while stooping through the door. The original builders used a natural recess in the cave to create this room that needed no roof. Do you think this room was used for living or for storage?

4: There was a family living in this room. Walls were built of stone and mud. The central upright post supported the main roof beam. Smaller roof poles were laid across the beam. A layer of saguaro ribs and a few inches of clay completed the roof. This sturdy construction formed the floor above, where other people lived. Clay-lined fire-pits were usually located a couple of feet inside the doorways. The Salado tended their fires carefully to avoid setting roofs on fire.

5: This hallway shows how the village grew. We have just left the newer parts of town and across the hall to the back is one of the oldest rooms. Look inside and imagine living in this small, dark room. Residents slept and stored some goods there, but spent most of their days out of doors, in community work areas, or on the rooftops. Notice the hatchway they used to reach the roof.

The Salado adults were about 5' to 5'6" (152 cm to 167 cm) tall --they too had to stoop to go through these doorways. However, the smaller the doorway, the less heat loss.

6: When the Salado moved in, the large boulder that is now part of the wall was too large to move. The residents simply incorporated it into their architecture. When modern man discovered these dwellings, the doorway at the back of the room had been blocked. Since this room is newer than the one behind, the doorway was probably filled in for privacy when this addition was built.

Note the blackened walls and ceilings throughout the village. Salado homes were often smoke-filled and stuffy. Residents probably became accustomed to this and welcomed the warmth on winter nights. We can see, however, where they replastered their rooms.

Was that only to maintain wall stability or did they also seek to cover the old blackened spaces with fresh, brighter clay? Were the fingerprints we see in the hardened plaster throughout the village made by men or women? Might older children have helped with this muddy work?

7: Look into the closed room to see parts of an original clay floor. The people living here cleared the room of cave debris, leveled it with dirt, and then covered it with clay. When dry, this floor provided a smooth, flat surface for sleeping, food preparation, and storage of household items.

Similar floors were used throughout the village but have worn away or been destroyed.

Notice the mano and metate (grinding stone and basin). Adults, probably women, spent hours grinding corn and other seeds. Grit from these stones became part of their daily diet and wore down their teeth. They probably endured painful toothaches and abscessed gums during much of their lives.

8: This large, open room probably functioned as a community workplace and village square. Here women could gather to grind seeds (note the two circular mortar holes) and prepare meals while visiting with their neighbors and watching small children. The recesses at the back were a good place to store goods.

Folks could also assemble here to discuss village matters, trade goods and ideas, and take part in group activities. Like Pueblo people of today, the Salado may have had a deeply rooted religion, woven through all phases of daily life. If they did, this room might have been used for religious functions.

People lived in this cliff village for over 100 years. They traded with neighboring nations, traveled, prospered, grew in numbers. Long before Columbus came to America, certainly by 1450, the Salado had dispersed, leaving behind their homes in this mountain basin.

Common Desert Plants Used By the Salado

Plant	Parts Used	Use
Yucca	stalks, buds leaf tips leaf fiber root	food sewing needles clothing, sandals, mats, cordage soap
Prickly Pear	leaf pads, seeds	food
Mesquite	bean pods, seeds	food
Saguaro	fruit ribs	food ceiling cross pieces
Agave	leaves hearts	cord, sandals, nets food

Interesting exhibits about Salado life -- their farming, hunting, clothing, and crafts -- are in the Visitor Center. We invite you to enjoy these exhibits.