

Grand Canyon National Park
Cell Phone Tour Narrative – Stop 14 (by Kolb Studio)
The Original People at the Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon, with its many layers of the Earth's history exposed, encourages us to think about the passage of time, and times before our own. One thing seems evident: there is always a past world that the present builds upon. The scale of geologic time is almost unimaginable; however, there is a human scale of time for us to consider. The principle of time passage and a changing world applies to human life and culture as well as to the Earth.

If you follow the Bright Angel Trail down with your eyes, or if you walk it on foot, you will come to a green oasis where the canyon starts to widen and the trail levels out. The oasis is known as Indian Garden. Who were the original inhabitants of this place? And what changes happened in their lives here?

People called the Havasupai, meaning People of the Blue-Green Waters, lived in this area of the Grand Canyon prior to the establishment of the United States. They speak a language of great antiquity in the New World, the Hoka language family. While the main Havasupai home is in a large side canyon miles to the west, several Havasupai families lived at Indian Garden during the summer months. We know the names of some of those families, and though they were forced to leave the canyon in the nineteen-twenties, after the National Park was established, some of their descendants have remained in the canyon on the reservation and here on the South Rim. They now have homes in an area located west of Grand Canyon Village called Supai Camp, and in 2010, new housing was constructed for their use.

What was life like for the Havasupai in the past? They practiced agriculture in the summer, and were proud of their abundant crops produced by the diversion of perennial streams. They gathered wild seeds, and the edible flowering spears and hearts of agave plants, a major wild crop. They roasted the gathered agave hearts in earth and stone ovens, which provided plentiful food in the spring. They had the endurance and skill to hunt bighorn sheep, deer, and pronghorn antelope on foot. Like all indigenous people, handwork in arts and crafts filled their time and provided them with the utensils and comforts needed for everyday life. They had time for rest and relaxation, time for games, and a good sweat bath in a public sweat lodge. In the winter they relocated to the rim and plateau above for hunting, and to have access to plentiful firewood and snow-melt water. Traveling around the region, out of the

confines of the canyon, was another reason to relocate in the winter. They had celebrations, and attended events and councils with neighbors, and traveled far to the east to the Hopi villages to enjoy trade, friendship, and to observe Hopi ceremonies.

Life could be dangerous, with accidents or illness, raids by enemies, and occasional resentments, jealousies, and accusations of malicious shamanism. But in general it was a vigorous, adventurous life with real pleasures and rewards. The Havasupai people continue to lead rich lives today, both on the rim and in their ancestral homes in the canyon.