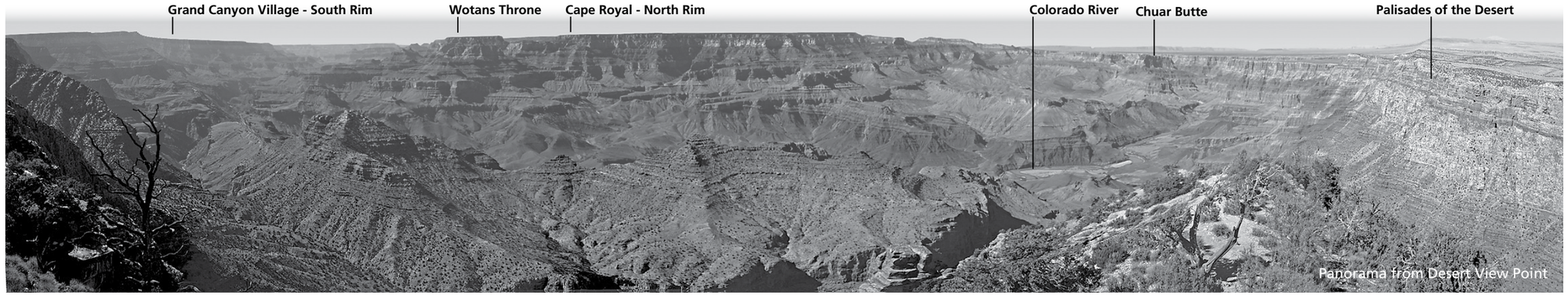


Panorama from Desert View Point

Inspired Architecture

Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter added a dramatic thread to this tapestry when she designed and supervised the construction of the Watchtower and adjacent kiva (1) in 1932. She described it as a "re-creation" of various towers in other Southwestern locations. She added the "ruin" beside the tower so that visitors could experience the current state of such towers as preserved in Hovenweep National Monument.

The Fred Harvey Company employed Colter to build a view and rest area for the visitors at Desert View. She, in turn, used the railway engineers and bridge builders to erect the steel framework upon which the masonry walls stand.

Colter envisioned the building as part of its surroundings. "One that would create no discordant note against the time-eroded walls of this promontory." The foundation ties the building into the cliffs. "The color and texture of this weathered surface rock naturally matched our terrain as none other could, but we were at the necessity of using it in just the shape it was found, as any tool mark became a conspicuous scar on the face of our walls. So we were obliged to select carefully for size and shape every unit of stone built into our masonry."

Miss Colter insisted on personal attention to every detail. One day while she was away from the site for a time the masons completed two layers of stone thinking that she would be pleased. One stone was not to her liking and she made them disassemble and rebuild the layers.

Search for some of the intentionally designed flaws, cracks, and partially finished decorative patterns that are visible on the exterior. Inspiration for the massive foundation stones came from a similar wall at Wupatki National Monument. Can you find Balolookong, the Pueblo Indian snake spirit, on the exterior wall?

Step inside. The entry and sales room reflects the architecture of kivas used as ceremonial chambers by the ancestral Puebloan people and many of their descendents today. Glance up at the wood cribbing on the ceiling. Carpenters salvaged the wood from the old Grand View Hotel. In the center of the room is a symbolic fire ring and ladder to the world above indicative of kiva architecture. Notice that along the side of some of the large windows are reflector scopes. What happens to your perception of the canyon when you look into these scopes?

Paintings by Hopi artist Fred Kabotie (left) decorate the first floor. The stories told by these paintings reflect meaningful aspects of his heritage. Notice the incised petroglyphs created by Chester Dennis, another Hopi artist.

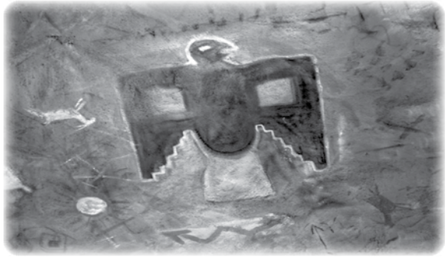
Climb the stairs to see the work of Fred Geary, Fred Harvey Company artist. He painted the walls and ceilings on the second and third floors, copying designs from original sites in the Southwest. The upper level ceiling (right) displays an adaptation of rock paintings found at Abo Caves, New Mexico.

After climbing the 85 steps to the top floor, rest and reflect on the lives of those who inhabited the canyon long ago.

Desert View Point

As you journey along the rim, you follow the footsteps of many people from a variety of cultures. People have called this area home for at least 12,000 years. A broken spear point tells of ancient hunters tracking giant sloths. A 4,000-year-old split-twig figurine carefully placed in a nearly inaccessible cave hints at another culture's beliefs. Ancestral Puebloans and people from other cultures built villages throughout this region 800–1,000 years ago. Spanish explorers, priests, trappers, prospectors, and tourists have all passed this way. Imagine how each must have perceived this natural wonder.

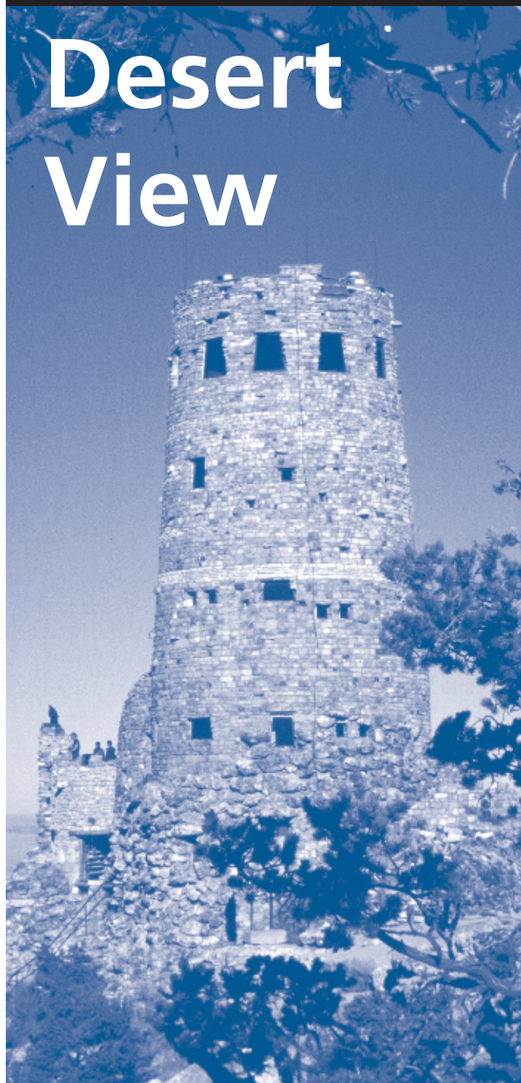
From ancient nomadic hunters to today's visitors, human experience has shaped Desert View's cultural landscape. Your experience today is another thread in this rich cultural tapestry.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park

Desert View

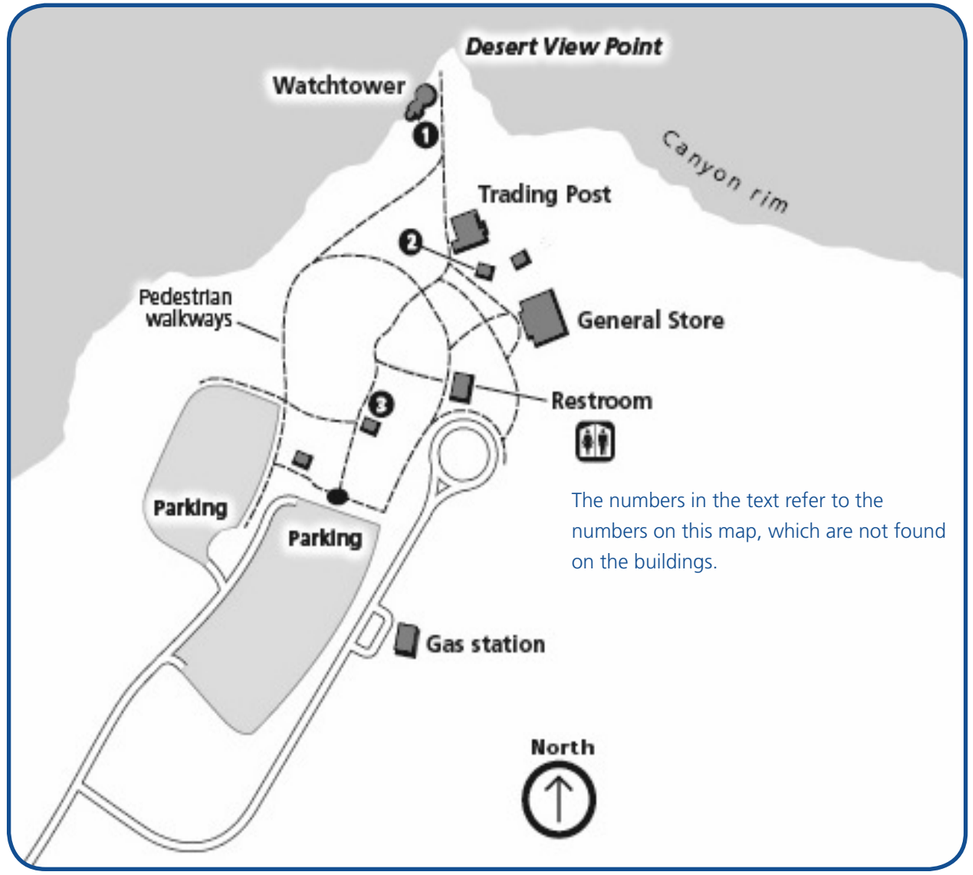


Desert View

A tapestry of people and time.

The evolution of Desert View weaves a rich tapestry of human history. As you walk away from the rim, many strands left by early residents and later developers give life to the stories told. A short ¼-mile (½-km) walk leads past historic buildings. Each thread ties you to the rich cultural heritage of the area.

The tapestry continues to evolve. We have a responsibility to ensure that generations to come will have a Grand Canyon National Park to enjoy and respect. Help protect and preserve the artifacts and stories woven into the fabric of this rich cultural legacy.



Fred Harvey buses at Desert View ca. 1938

Harvey Car Adventures

The first accommodation on the South Rim, the Grand View Hotel, was built in the late 1890s near Grandview Point, 15 miles (24 km) west of Desert View. Visitors paid $20.00 (equivalent to approximately $500.00 today) to experience the bumpy all-day stagecoach ride from Flagstaff to the Grand View Hotel.

In 1901, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway arrived at Grand Canyon Village providing a less expensive and easier way for visitors to reach the South Rim. The three hour train trip from Williams, Arizona cost only $3.95.

The Fred Harvey Company, the hospitality partner of the railroad, provided gracious dining facilities, good service, and genteel manners. Harvey Girls in their starched black and white uniforms presented a welcome sight to weary travelers.

By 1915, visitors could board a Harvey Car in Grand Canyon Village and ride the 32 miles (52 km) to Desert View over rough, dirt roads for a "grand adventure." To provide services for these adventurous visitors, the Fred Harvey Company and Santa Fe Railway developed Desert View.

Civilian Conservation Corps

As you walk the path up the hill, reflect back to the men of the Civilian Conservation Corps (ccc) who lived and worked at Grand Canyon from 1935 to 1942. While living in barracks, they completed more than twenty projects at Desert View including trails, rock walls (below), roads, and buildings. Ccc crews built the stone-walled building on your left (2) in 1941 as a restroom. The crews' attention to detail shows the pride they had in their accomplishments.

CCC "boys"at Navajo Point; note the Watchtower on the horizon

Life must have been a lonely for these men, far from any towns, but they persevered through hot summers and cold winters. Most of their wages went home to their families to help support them through the hard times of the Great Depression. Picnics and sports enlivened the long days.

Developing Desert View

On the left farther along the path, the house with two chimneys (3) (below) is the oldest building at Desert View. Originally constructed near the rim in 1927, it served as a place for visitors to rest, eat, and view the canyon. Following the construction of the Watchtower, it was moved to its current location and functioned as the caretaker's cabin. It retains some of its original glass and exterior siding and stone work, and today is used as an office. Imagine all of today's visitors trying to enter this building for tea!

Caretaker's Cabin in original location

Caretaker's Cabin today