



The Ranger Review

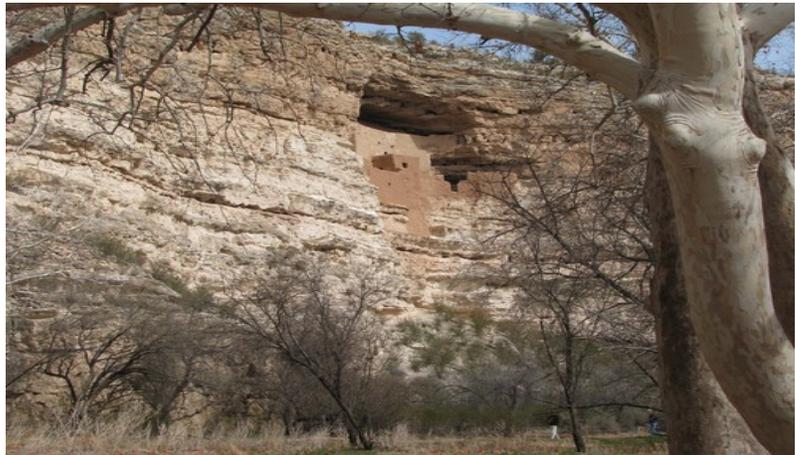
Montezuma's Castle, Montezuma's Well, & Tuzigoot National Monuments

And the List Goes On...

By Ranger Sharlot Hart

Visitors to Montezuma Castle National Monument are often awed by the 'giant white trees' that line the trail and shade the picnic area. These gorgeous trees are the Arizona Sycamore, *Platanus wrightii*, which is the only tree from the Planetree family native to Arizona, and which grows along Beaver Creek here at Montezuma Castle. White and smooth from peeling bark which exposes the inner bark, these trees are beautiful-- but that's not what strikes me most about them. In fact, what gets me about these trees isn't even what attracts wildlife or might interest scientists. The Arizona Sycamore is an amazing tree, and its list of attributes goes on and on and on.

The first thing that awed (and still awes!) me about these sycamores is the endurance of the wood. Here at Montezuma Castle the ceiling beams, some of which you can see sticking out of the Castle's adobe walls, are made of this tree. 600 years after the Sinagua left the Verde Valley, and these beams continue to support a structure inhabited only by bats. It would be easy to assume that archeologists would be giddy at the idea of wood support beams lasting that long so that they can gain exact dates for construction



Arizona Sycamores on the trail at Montezuma Castle.

of these homes. But the Arizona Sycamore has the last laugh on that one: since they only grow close to constant water sources the width of the tree rings don't vary with each year's rainfall and they can't be used to date sites and structures.

The sycamore is sturdy too. If supporting the roof of Montezuma Castle isn't enough, think about all the ladders needed to get up into the castle each day. And not just each day, but each time one of the Sinagua living there needed to carry water or crops up for storage. It was wood from the Arizona Sycamore that supported all that weight up and down the cliff side.

So, it's obvious that the Sinagua relied on this majestic tree, but I started this article out by talking about current day visitors. These enduring, sturdy trees that visitors find attractive also have strong roots. Remember that they only grow

along constant water sources? Well, along the stream banks here in Arizona flash flooding can quickly erode away soil. The spreading and deep roots (which in the trees' eyes are for searching out more water) help keep the tree in place, but also keep the soil around the tree in place. That means less trail maintenance and more enjoyment for the public too!

Don't forget about all those critters who love this tree also! Owls and other small birds use the hollows of old branches for nesting, while lizards search out meals on the branches. So, the next time you look at this tree with the peeling white bark, and the hand-shaped (or palm for 'palmate') leaves, keep in mind all the other great reasons we love this tree: shade for your picnic, homes for birds and support for an 800 year old dwelling. That list just keeps going!

Cornacopia: The Culture of Corn

By Resource Assistant Leah Duran

Ancient corn cobs – about two inches long and stripped of kernels – add a splash of golden-grey to dark crevices in the top floor of Montezuma Castle. These relics of earlier days are clues to the lifestyle of the Sinagua Native Americans who occupied various sites around the Verde Valley from roughly 1000 to 1400 AD.

On hot summer days long ago, women would spend hours grinding corn, the life force of the Sinagua.

Archeologists estimate the average family ate approximately three quarts of cornmeal per day. As the women knelt over manos and metates – large volcanic stones from nearby Beaver Creek – the air would carry sounds of twittering rock wrens, friendly chatter and ceremonial songs.

Peoples past had an intimate relationship with the natural world that sustained them. Sinaguans couldn't run a quick errand to the grocery store, and preparing food was a community effort. Yet it wasn't only about physical labor – the entire process was part of a larger cycle and cultural viewpoints that still persist. The modern Hopi of northern Arizona claim ancestral ties to the Sinagua. One Hopi woman, Sevenka Qoyawayma, relates: "Mother corn is a promise of food and life. I grind with gratitude for the richness of our harvest, not with cross feelings of working too hard. As I kneel at my grinding stone, I bow my head in prayer, thanking the great forces for provision."* Thus, corn represents more than food and is engrained in Native American traditions honoring the Circle of Life. Customs among Hopis demonstrate this worldview. The Hopi, whose name translates "peaceful people," first attempted to ward off Spanish explorers by spreading lines of sacred cornmeal. Corn was an important part of pivotal events to

from birth to death. An ear of white corn – representing a newborn's symbolic mother – was placed on both sides of an infant. When a Hopi woman grew old enough to marry, she prepared a special bread called *qomi* out of sweet corn and left it on the doorstep of her chosen mate. The young man and his family brought the bread inside to accept the proposal.



When a man went to live with his wife, he offered some of his clan's cherished corn seeds for the first planting of her field.

In death, the deceased was placed with a black prayer stick attached to a cornhusk, an emblem of the passing physical form and a ladder to the house of the god of death, *Masauua*.

Corn is interwoven into the tapestry of our collective history and daily lives. Indigenous peoples cultivated this seed-bearing grass for thousands of years. Since corn is not a natural crop, it needs us to survive. Corn can pollinate, but cannot disperse. In the Southern Tiwa language of New Mexico, there are no words to say "corn grows;" only "the farmer grows corn." This figure of speech recognizes the centuries-old reciprocal relationship of growth and survival between humans and corn that continues today.

*For more information on Native American stories and traditions related to corn, read *Native American Gardening* by Michael Caduto.

Respecting and Protecting Sacred Places

By: Resource Assistant Sarahanne Blake

Did you know that visitors used to be able to go up into the Castle? Yep, until 1951, and they used to walk through Castle A, the ruins just a bit further down the trail, until 1979. They got to walk through these prehistoric ruins to get a first-hand look at how the Sinagua lived. This experience was once-in-a-lifetime. So why can't we go up now?

The short answer is because of your own safety and to preserve the ruins. That sounds good and all, but sometimes that reason just isn't good enough. I mean, you're willing to put yourself into harm's way to get a look at the inside of the Castle. You promise you won't push anyone off the ladders on your way up. You'll even sign that waiver that says "In the event of injury or death you or your family won't sue the park." Plus, it's not like you're going to take anything. You just want to see it. You'll be really, really careful, you promise! For one reason or another, our curiosity just gets the best of us. We feel entitled to see what's up there either because it's our nation's history, because other people went up there, or just because we want to. We want to leave our mark. We want to know that we were there, and sometimes more importantly, we want other people to know it.

I don't know how to put into words why we can't go up there anymore, so I want you to picture a space that you love, a space that's just yours. Maybe it's your bedroom, or a den, or that secret place in your backyard. Got it? Okay, now I want you to pretend



The cliff dwelling of the Sinagua at Montezuma Castle.

that you have to leave it. You still love it; you just can't stay there anymore. Now imagine someone you don't know comes in. They're poking around your room, touching your things, maybe they stop to write their initials and the date on your wall, you see them sit down in the same spot you used to sit.

How do you feel? Angry? Intruded upon? Disrespected, maybe? But they're not doing anything wrong. They're not taking anything, they're just walking around. Plus, you left. This place doesn't belong to you anymore.

Or does it? In your mind that place will always be a part of you. You're always going to consider it yours.

Now pretend you go back to your spot, knowing that somebody's been in there. Doesn't quite feel the same, does it? Something's just off. It doesn't feel like your special place anymore. Can you pinpoint what happened?

It lost the sacredness that it once

held because you know it's no longer yours.

As you walk around this trail or any other you happen upon, I want you to take a look at those ruins and picture yourself living there at the height of those people's society. Furnish the room with your things, hang your pictures on those walls. Maybe turn away from the dwelling and look at what you'd see if you were on the inside. Do you see your kids playing in the yard? Or your dog running around?

Then I want you to remember that while you're just pretending to live there, that somebody actually did.



National Park Service
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Park Happenings & Funny Pages

By Ranger Laura Albert

The Ranger Review is designed to give you more information about what to see and do while visiting our sites. We hope that you enjoy seeing our parks from a Ranger's point of view!

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