

Earl's Diary - Thursday - March 6, 2014 (Part 1)

Greetings Loyal Readers;

Today I am going to continue traveling to places that I visited 60 years ago. Yesterday I visited Tuzigoot National Monument. Today my travels will take me to Montezuma Castle and Montezuma Well - both sites of prehistoric peoples.

Sixty years ago I visited these sites with a small group of Boy Scouts. I am here now, to refresh some of those memories.



My recollection of Montezuma Castle is one of camping (somewhere) near here by the Verde River. I remember, after a long days riding in a car, that we enjoyed a swim in the Verde River. The next morning we visited the Castle. I sure don't remember too much else. However, I do remember it was awesome to look up at the structure.

You are invited to come along with me as I relive part of this adventure.

I left the campground at Dead Horse Ranch State Park in the mid-morning heading for the community of Camp Verde, located alongside Interstate 17. Montezuma Castle is located just off I-17. Passing through Camp Verde you would never know that tucked away nearby in a canyon is the Castle! I wonder how many of these homes were here 60 years ago?

This is an easy monument to visit. There is a 1/3-mile paved trail starting at the visitor center that follows the base of the cliff containing the ruins. Access to the ruins has not been allowed since 1951 due to extensive damage of the dwelling. About 350,000 tourists visit the site each year.



I found this picture on the internet





A natural overhang shades the rooms and shelters them from rain. Another part of the cliff wall bears the marks of an even larger dwelling, which has not survived. Due to heavy looting, very few original artifacts remain. The discovery of Castle A in 1933 revealed many Sinagua artifacts and greatly increased understanding of their way of life.



Montezuma Castle has been called the best preserved example of Native American architecture in the Southwest. Tuzigoot is so exemplary of its time period that its era is known as the Tuzigoot Phase of the Sinagua culture. To this day, Montezuma Well has ceremonial importance to at least four modern tribes.

These sites are just three pieces of a much larger, fuller picture. From 600 to 1425 CE (Common Era), the Verde Valley was home to 6,000 to 8,000 people. Early on, they began with dozens of scattered, one- and two room buildings. By the time the Sinagua left this valley, they had built not just three, but more than forty major pueblos on the landscape.



Although Montezuma Castle is the showpiece of the monument, it was not the only building here. Once upon a time, its 20 rooms stood alongside more than 65 others in Castle A and along the cliffs. Between 85 and 90 rooms total housed a community of perhaps 150 people.



Now badly deteriorated, it was once an imposing five-story apartment like building with about 65 rooms. Occupants found reliable water in the creek and fertile land on the nearby terrace.





Southern Sinagua farmers built this five story, 20-room dwelling sometime between 1100 and 1300. It occupies a cliff recess 100 feet above the valley.



Looking at the dwelling from different points of view.



The castle was carved into the limestone of a high cliff. This shows that the Sinagua were very daring builders. It took ladders to climb Montezuma Castle which made it incredibly difficult for enemy tribes to penetrate the natural defense of the vertical barrier.



Since 1951 visitors do not have access to climbing to the Castle. A narrated diorama shows what the inside might look like.

I happened to be there when a park ranger gave an illustrated talk about the inhabitants, their food source, why they were there, why did they build what they did, where did they go. In short, the culture of the Sinagua. It was an enlightening presentation and filled in a lot of blank spaces for me.



The inhabitants used the plentiful Arizona Sycamore trees for food, basket and mat making, and building materials. The large limbs were used for roof supports in the Castle above. How they got those heavy timbers up the cliffside is anybody's guess.





For decades, national park rangers mistakenly told visitors that the prehistoric people of the Southwest mysteriously disappeared sometime around 1400. Places like Montezuma Castle, Tuzigoot, Mesa Verde, Chaco Canyon and others all thrived for hundreds of years, rangers said, and then the people who lived there -- vanished!



Today we know better. The people who lived here simply moved. People left in small groups -- perhaps just a couple of families or part of a clan at a time. There was no single date on which everyone left *en masse*, nor did they all go the same direction. Eventually many joined together to become the modern Hopi and Zuni tribes.

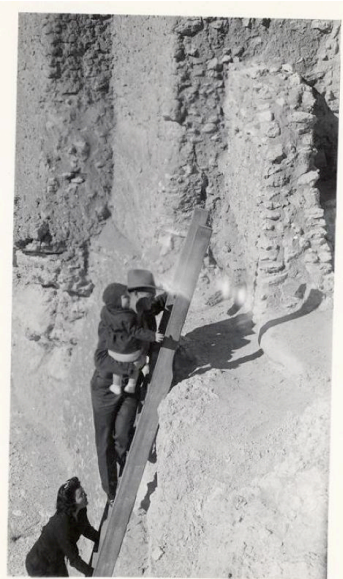
No one knows why the Southern Sinagua migrated away from their pueblos. It may have been overpopulation, depletion of resources, disease, conflicts within or between groups, climate change, or perhaps spiritual beliefs.

By 1425, Montezuma Castle and Tuzigoot and other villages throughout the valley were no longer occupied. However, the people did not disappear. Their descendants still live nearby, and they still return periodically to these villages built by the people of long ago.



When European Americans discovered them in the 1860s, they named them for the Aztec emperor (of Mexico) Montezuma II, due to mistaken beliefs that the emperor had been connected to their construction. Neither part of the monument's name is correct. The Sinagua dwelling was abandoned 100 years before Montezuma was born and the dwellings were not a castle. It is more like a "prehistoric high rise apartment complex."

Early visitors to the monument were allowed access to the structure by climbing a series of ladders up the side of the limestone cliffs. However, due to extensive damage to this valuable cultural landmark, public access of the ruins was discontinued in 1951.



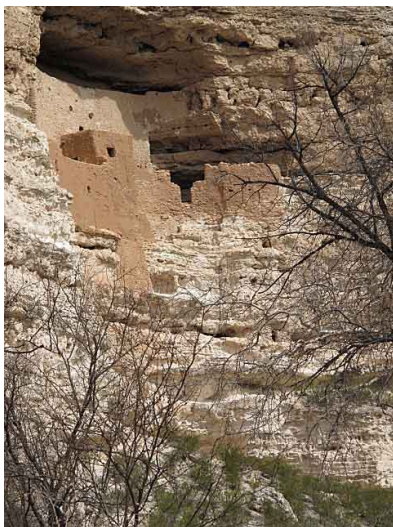
On December 8, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt celebrated the passage of the Antiquities Act by declaring four sites of historic and cultural significance as our nation's first National Monuments. Among these was Montezuma Castle, which the President identified as a place "of the greatest ethnological value and scientific interest."

Montezuma Castle National Monument quickly became a destination for America's first car-bound tourists. In 1933, "Castle A", pueblo ruin was excavated, uncovering a wealth of artifacts and greatly enhanced our understanding of the Sinagua people who inhabited this riparian "oasis" along Beaver Creek for over 400 years.



Montezuma Castle is five stories tall, has 20 rooms, and covers 3,500 square feet of floor space. Its alcove is about 35 feet deep.

This stately Arizona Sycamore tree branches made interesting photo patterns.



All the photos on these pages are mine, except a couple that I used on pages 1 and 4. These were from the internet. When searching the internet, most of those photos look just like the ones I took. I guess there's not many different ways to show this structure.

I spent a couple hours roaming around the 1/3 mile loop trail reliving old memories. By that time my feet were getting a little tired so it was time to head off for another important stop - Montezuma Well. Perhaps we will learn more about these people at the next location.

The Well is located about 5 miles north of the Castle. So, Loyal Readers, part 2 of this report will be coming to you shortly. Thanks for traveling along with me on this adventure. Bye for now - - Earl