

# Mesa Verde National Park (A00125)

Adapted by Peter Schmitt for Open-ESL.org from a VOA Special English story written by Marilyn Christiano and Shelley Gollust. Audio by Barbara Klein and Steve Ember.

It was a cold day in 1888 in southwestern Colorado.

Richard Wetherill and his brother-in-law were trying to find some missing cattle.

They were up on Mesa Verde. Spanish explorers had named the area. The



high, flat mountaintop is covered with many green juniper and piñon pine trees. It looks like a huge green table, which is “mesa verde” in Spanish.

The two men came to the edge of a deep canyon. Through the falling snow, they saw what looked like a small city across the canyon. It was in the middle of the rock wall. They named the ruins Cliff Palace. In the next few days, they found two more large ruins. They named one Spruce Tree House. They named the other Square Tower House.

It looked as if the people who had lived there had just walked away, leaving everything they owned: cooking pots by the fireplaces, food bowls on the floors, shoes in the corners.

The ruins in Colorado had been home to the ancestors of the present day members of the Pueblo tribes. They were named Anasazi, or ancient ones, by the Navajo Indians. They moved to Mesa Verde about 1,500 years ago and left 700 years ago.

On June 29, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt signed a bill creating Mesa Verde National Park. It was the first National Park designed to protect the works of humans

Today, from a distance, Mesa Verde appears as it did centuries ago. It rises above the floor of the valley. Visitors can drive up to the top of Mesa Verde on a winding mountain road. In the distance are flat lands and mountains. That is where the states of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Arizona meet.

Within the national park are more than 5,000 ruins from the time of the ancient Pueblo people. 600 are cliff dwellings. Most of the ruins remain unexplored. Some have been uncovered and supported to make them safe to visit. These ruins are open to the public. The visitors' center at the park is open during the summer. National Park Service guides lead visitors to the ruins. They give talks about the cultural history of the area.

Some of the ruins in the area are from the earliest people who lived there. They were hunters and gatherers, now known as Basket Makers. The Basket Makers lived in caves. Their civilization existed 2,000 years ago.

In about the year 750, the early Pueblo people began building square structures of large connected rooms, or pueblos, above ground. Finally, in about 1100, they climbed down the canyon walls and began building cliff dwellings.

About 500,000 people visit Mesa Verde National Park each year. Mesa Verde is recognized as a special place. The United Nations named it a World Heritage site in 1978.

Today's Pueblo Indians whose ancestors lived in Mesa Verde consider it a sacred place. And for visitors from around the world, it remains a place of mystery and beauty.

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