



Segment 14 (Units 25–28)

Mystery of the Anasazi

Genre: Science program

Viewing Time: 3:13

Background Information

During the first millennium of our era, a number of groups established themselves in the American Southwest. There isn't much archaeological evidence from earlier times because most of the groups from that period were nomads who didn't leave constructions behind. The most significant sedentary (as opposed to nomadic) groups of the Southwest were the Hohokam, the Anasazi, and the Mogollon. The Anasazi and Mogollon groups built towns designed for defensive purposes. The construction of the Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde has been established at around A.D. 1100. The scarcity of water caused a decline in the Native American population in the Southwest. Starting in about 1250, most Anasazi started abandoning their cliff towns, probably due to drought. By 1350 the Anasazi had practically disappeared from the area.

Vocabulary for Comprehension

Preview the vocabulary with your students.

cliff: *a high rock or piece of land with a steep side*

dwelling: *a house, apartment, etc. where people live*

deflector: *a mechanism used to turn the direction of something*

draft: *a current of air*

extended family: *a family that includes parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.*

firepit: *a hole in the ground used to make fire*
gust: *a sudden strong movement of wind, air, snow, etc.*

Answer Key

Previewing (Answers may vary—as long as they are appropriate guesses, accept them for now.)

1. The southwest United States
2. An area in the United States where Native Americans used to live.
3. Their inhabitants abandoned them for unknown reasons, probably because of lack of water.

In-Depth Viewing

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|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. 600 | 2. 100 | 3. 45 | 4. 900 | 5. 200 |
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Video Script

Narrator: Traces of a mysterious lost civilization can be found in Mesa Verde National Park, where the ancient Anasazi Indians are believed to have lived until some 900 years ago.

The Anasazi built their cliff dwellings into the walls of the mesa. The word *mesa* means "table" in Spanish, because the flat-topped mountain resembles a table. And *verde* is the Spanish word for "green." Spanish explorers called this mountain area Mesa Verde because it is surrounded by many beautiful green trees and bushes.

Mesa Verde National Park is located in the southwestern region of Colorado on the Colorado Plateau just north of the San Juan River. While there are approximately 600 cliff dwellings in Mesa Verde, there are three key sites: Cliff Palace, Balcony House, and Spruce Tree House.

Here in Cliff Palace there are some 200 rooms. This "pueblo" (or "town," in Spanish) was very much like a modern-day apartment house; many large extended families lived here.

In addition to their cliff dwellings, the Anasazi also built kivas, which are pits or holes dug into the ground. The kivas were something like an all-purpose room, and the Anasazi people used them to conduct spiritual and ceremonial rituals, as well as to prepare food or dry their corn on the rooftops.

Balcony House contains over 45 rooms, as well as two kivas, and archaeologists believe that 40 to 50 people probably lived on this medium-sized cliff. Visitors must climb a 30-foot ladder to gain entrance. It is thought that the Anasazi moved to this height to protect themselves from wild animals and to better cope with the hot sun in summer and snowstorms in winter. The Anasazi also chose this area because of a reliable water source nearby.

The two Balcony House kivas have small openings with ladders. The smoke from the firepit inside would rise through the opening, and a deflector prevented drafts or gusts of wind from putting the fire out.

Archaeologists believe the Anasazi moved to Spruce Tree House in the late 500s to early 600s A.D. It has over 100 rooms and more than 100 people are believed to have lived here.

Another key to survival in Mesa Verde is found in the plant life surrounding it. The yucca plant grows nearby and the Anasazi found many uses for it, including sandals, baskets, and soap. They also ate the fruit that grows on top of the plant.

By the 13th century, the Anasazi had abandoned the Mesa Verde area. But why did they decide to leave their homes? Were they attacked by another tribe? Was there a drought? Even after years of research, no one knows for sure.

When we come back we'll speak with archaeologists who continue to work at Mesa Verde National Park looking for clues to this ancient people. You're watching *Relic Hunters*.