

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Casa Grande**

We have crossed the Continental Divide, and two time changes since we left Monterey. Contrary to the action of one of the favorite columnists we did not use a full canteen of water to prove to ourselves that at that point the water would run toward the Atlantic and also toward the Pacific Ocean, but we did act as genuine tourists and took pictures of our party before the large sign. And also like that same columnist we had fun changing time with a ten-year-old companion who is experiencing her first visit outside her native State of California.

Between Tucson and Phoenix, we visited the Casa Grande National Monument, the ancient watchtower apartment house which dominates the ruins of the walled villages whose Indian inhabitants 600 years ago irrigated and farmed Arizona's valleys.

Casa Grande was the first national monument to be acquired by the United States. The earliest written history of it was by the Jesuit missionary, Father Kino, who visited the site in 1694 and gave it the name by which it is still known - Casa Grande (Big House). The building was already in ruins then.

We were pleased again to be reminded of Monterey. Viewing pictures on the walls and in the cases, we discovered that the National Park Service appreciates the artwork of the late Joe Mora of Pebble Beach. His maps and books have been chosen as suitable articles to be sold in the museum at the monument.

We learned from the ranger that the Smithsonian Institution sent Cosmos Mindeleff in 1891 to excavate at Casa Grande. Other excavations have been carried on at the Casa Grande group of ruins by the Smithsonian (1906-8), the Southwest Museum (1929), and the Los Angeles County Museum (1930). Six prehistoric villages remain untouched, we were told.

In 1889 Congress authorized the President to reserve lands embracing the Casa Grande ruin and in 1918 the area was designated a national monument. It contains 472 acres.

During the past 60 years, by excavation and study of the ruins of Southern Arizona, archeologists have pieced together an amazing story of the early human occupation of this region. Each year's work adds a little

knowledge of the Indians who lived along the Gila River and its tributaries before the days of the Spanish occupation.

It is believed that Indians began farming the Gila Valley not long after the Christian era. Small-scale irrigation must have been practiced in those early days, for there is nothing to indicate that Arizona's climate has changed materially during the past 2,000 years. Today, these Indians are known as the Hohokams. This is a term used by the Pima Indians and means "The Ancient Ones." The modern houses of the Pima and Papago homes are similar in appearance to the wattle-and-daub houses of the Hohokam homes. Their crops were corn, beans, pumpkins, and cotton. Their dead were cremated, they were proficient in carving shell and stone, their pottery was of a buff color with designs applied with red paint. Examples are on display in the museum.

Casa Grande served as an apartment house. Its 11 large rooms probably accommodated as many families. It was probably in use only a short time. Built about 1350, it was abandoned about 1450 by both the Hohokam and Pueblo Indians. Discovered evidence indicates that the land became so waterlogged because of centuries of irrigation that would no longer produce crops.

A visit to these ruins is well worth the time and the short distance off the regular highway that it takes to make the tour with a well-informed national ranger.