

Casa Grande Ruins National Monument

Many mysteries abound in this region of Arizona and many of these have to do with the ancient tribe of Native American who lived in Central and Southern Arizona for centuries. One such mystery can be found in Casa Grande Ruins National Monument near the Amtrak stop of Maricopa. The predominant feature of the park is the “Big House” or Casa Grande in Spanish.

When the Big House was built around A.D. 1350, it was surrounded by a thriving Hohokam village. Contemporaries of the Anasazi to the north, their culture lasted over a thousand years before fading away in the 1400s – another mystery of the Arizona desert. Life in the desert has changed since then, but still, common threads weave through history.

Then as now, farmers adapted to dry desert conditions by developing impressive irrigation systems. The Hohokam diverted flowing rivers and built many hundreds of miles of canals throughout their territory. They grew enough corn, beans, tobacco, cotton and other crops to support a large population. Today, monstrous metal irrigation machines creep across the land, or spin great circles of life-giving water. The grains, vegetables, cotton and citrus produced in this area are important parts of Arizona agri-business.

The modern town of Casa Grande, Arizona exports agricultural products and manufactured goods, while merchandise from around the world is sold in shopping centers and malls. The ancients also enjoyed imports from near and far. Turquoise, pinyon nuts and exotic pottery from neighboring regions have been found in their sites, as have seashells from the Pacific Ocean, and copper bells and parrots from Mexico. In turn, the Hohokam exported their surplus crops, fine etched-shell jewelry and their own distinctive pottery.

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What about the Casa Grande structure itself? Though now somewhat eroded, it stood four stories tall – one of the largest prehistoric structures ever found in the United States. Scholars debate why the Hohokam built it: was it residential, religious, defensive...astronomy related? We'll probably never know for sure. Years of study have produced as many questions as answers.

You can visit the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument and take a self-guided walking tour or a ranger-led tour to the Big House. A visitor center has exhibits about the site and surrounding region. An annual American Indian Music Fest is held in the park each year – contact the park for schedules and details, or visit their website at www.nps.gov/cagr .

Source(s):

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