

# Walnut Canyon

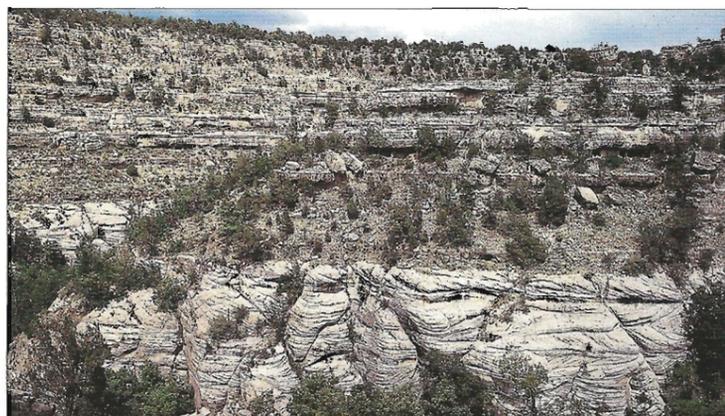
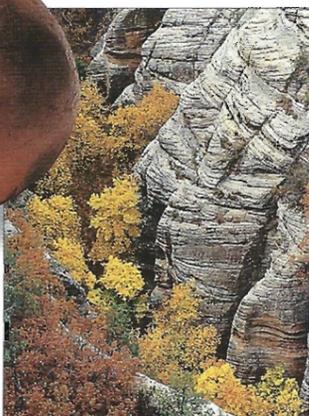
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Monument  
Arizona



Clockwise from top: Sinagua cliff home in north-facing wall; Kaibab limestone layers resting on Coconino sandstone; boxelders and Arizona black walnut on canyon floor; black-and-white bowl obtained in trade; locally produced redware olla.



## The People Without Water

Dwellings sheltered by overhanging cliffs were home to Walnut Canyon's only permanent inhabitants more than 800 years ago. Inside the canyon and throughout the pine forests on its rims, these people made their living by farming, hunting deer and small game, gathering an assortment of useful plants, and trading. The people are today known as Sinagua—Spanish for “without water”—a tribute to their ability to turn a relatively dry region into a homeland.

These people were not the first to encounter Walnut Canyon and its abundance of plants and animals. Artifacts show that Archaic peoples, who traveled throughout the Southwest thousands of years ago, probably occupied the canyon seasonally. These nomads were long gone by the time their Sinagua successors appeared in the rugged volcanic terrain northeast of present-day Flagstaff more than 1,400 years ago. Perhaps these newcomers migrated from elsewhere, or perhaps they broke away from a local group and developed a distinct way of life. Like earlier inhabitants, they were probably attracted by the region's abundant plants and animals. But they were also farmers.

They built one-room pithouses near their fields, where they employed dry-farming techniques to grow corn and other crops. Archeologists once thought that debris from the eruption of nearby Sunset Crater sometime between 1040 and 1100 made the land more fertile, attracting many more people to the San Francisco volcanic field and bringing change to Sinagua life. Recent findings discredit this theory. Among the more likely influences were increased rainfall, new water-conserving farming practices, trade, and a general population increase in the Southwest. This period after the eruption, when Sinagua culture flourished, is marked by a change in architecture from the pithouse style. The large, above-ground villages at Wupatki and Elden Pueblo and

Walnut Canyon's cliff dwellings, built between 1125 and 1250, date from this period. The canyon builders took advantage of natural recesses in the limestone walls. Over millions of years, flowing water eroded the softer rock layers, creating shallow caves.

These were also the years of the Sinagua culture's greatest geographical extent. Settlements ranged from the eastern slopes of the San Francisco Peaks northeast to the Little Colorado River and south to the Verde River valley. Trade items found in Sinagua dwellings include turquoise from the Santa Fe area, seashell ornaments from the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of California, and macaw feathers from Mexico. These goods may have been acquired by intermediaries who arranged trade between other groups of people.

The cliff dwellings were occupied for little more than 100 years. Why these people left is not clear. By 1250 they moved to new villages a few miles southeast along Anderson Mesa. It is generally believed that they were eventually assimilated into Hopi culture. The Hopi today call their ancestors the Hisatsinóm (“people of long ago”). Their tradition suggests that these early migrations were part of a religious quest to have all clans come together.

Sinagua homes remained largely undisturbed until the 19th century. In the 1880s the railroad brought souvenir hunters to the ancient dwellings. Theft and destruction prompted local efforts to preserve the canyon and soon drew national support. In 1915 Walnut Canyon was declared a national monument. Hundreds of years have passed since Sinagua voices and laughter could be heard. Today, as you explore the trails, imagine the canyon alive with people carrying food and water, greeting one another, and building their cliffside homes.

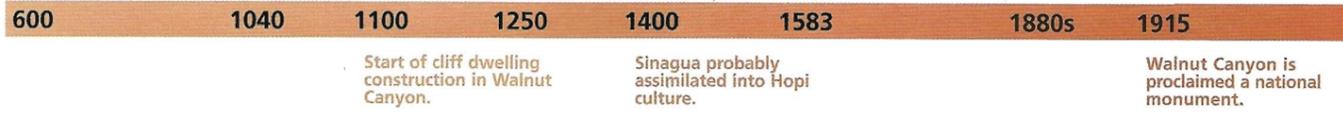
Sinagua people arrive in San Francisco volcanic region northeast of Flagstaff.

Sunset Crater is created in several volcanic eruptions; Sinagua life begins to change.

Sinagua depart Flagstaff area for new villages to the south.

Antonio De Espéjo opens Spanish exploration of northern Arizona.

Walnut Canyon becomes a popular destination for souvenir hunters.



### Planning Your Visit

**Hours and Facilities** There is an entrance fee. The park is open daily except December 25. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; hours may be extended in summer. Note: The Island Trail closes one hour earlier. This part of Arizona is on Mountain Standard Time year-round.

The visitor center has an information desk, exhibits, a bookstore, and a panoramic view of the canyon. Two paved foot trails begin at the visitor center. The Island Trail, a 0.9-mile loop, passes 25 of the cliff dwelling rooms and takes you through different plantlife zones (see map on the other side of this brochure). There are sheer drops and a 185-foot climb (240 steps) back to the canyon rim. The 0.7-mile Rim Trail overlooks the canyon and passes the ruins of rimtop structures. The park has a picnic area. Campgrounds, lodging, and restaurants can be found nearby.

**For a Safe Visit** Elevation at the canyon rim is nearly 7,000 feet; be careful when attempting strenuous activity such as climbing stairs. • Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. • Picnics are permitted only in designated areas. Open fires are not allowed. • Stay on the trails when hiking; off-trail hiking is not allowed. • Pets are not permitted in the visitor center or on trails. • All plants, animals, and archeological objects within the park are protected by federal laws. There are substantial fines for damage or removal of these resources.

**Location** Walnut Canyon National Monument is 10 miles east of downtown Flagstaff. From I-40, take exit 204 and follow the entrance road.

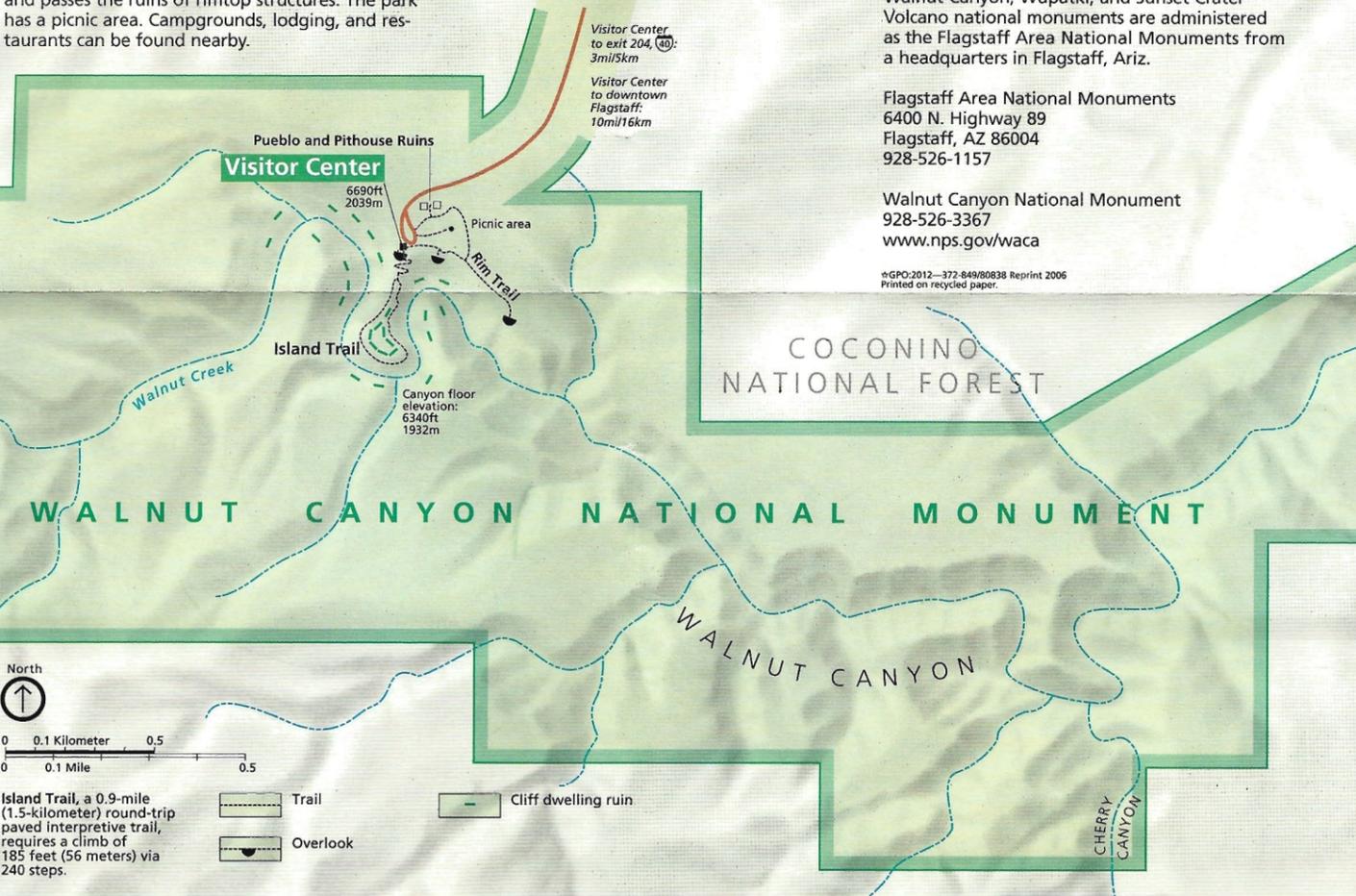


**For More Information**  
Walnut Canyon, Wupatki, and Sunset Crater Volcano national monuments are administered as the Flagstaff Area National Monuments from a headquarters in Flagstaff, Ariz.

Flagstaff Area National Monuments  
6400 N. Highway 89  
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Walnut Canyon National Monument  
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www.nps.gov/waca

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# Exploring Walnut Canyon

## Reconstructing the Sinagua Past

It is difficult for us to know exactly how the Sinagua people lived. They left no written history when they departed the Flagstaff region sometime before 1250. In the 1880s pothunters removed many Sinagua possessions, dynamiting some of the cliff-dwelling walls to allow in more light for their search.

To reconstruct what life must have been like, archeologists and anthropologists rely on what survived the centuries: building remains, ceramic fragments, tools, ornaments, and

agricultural areas. Study of the rimtop and canyon dwelling sites reveals much about settlement patterns.

The Sinagua story has been pieced together by examining objects, comparing them with the ways of prehistoric groups elsewhere in the Southwest, and learning the oral traditions of the Hopi, the probable descendants of the Sinagua. Though incomplete, this information tells us a good bit about life in Walnut Canyon.

### Rimtop Croplands

The canyon rims, relatively flat with pockets of deep soil, were the main farmlands. Even in the semi-arid climate, water was usually available even though Walnut Creek probably did not flow all year. To conserve rainwater and collect soil, the people built terraces and small rock check dams. Their major crops were a drought-resistant variety of corn and several kinds of beans and squash. Recent evidence shows that edible wild plants were

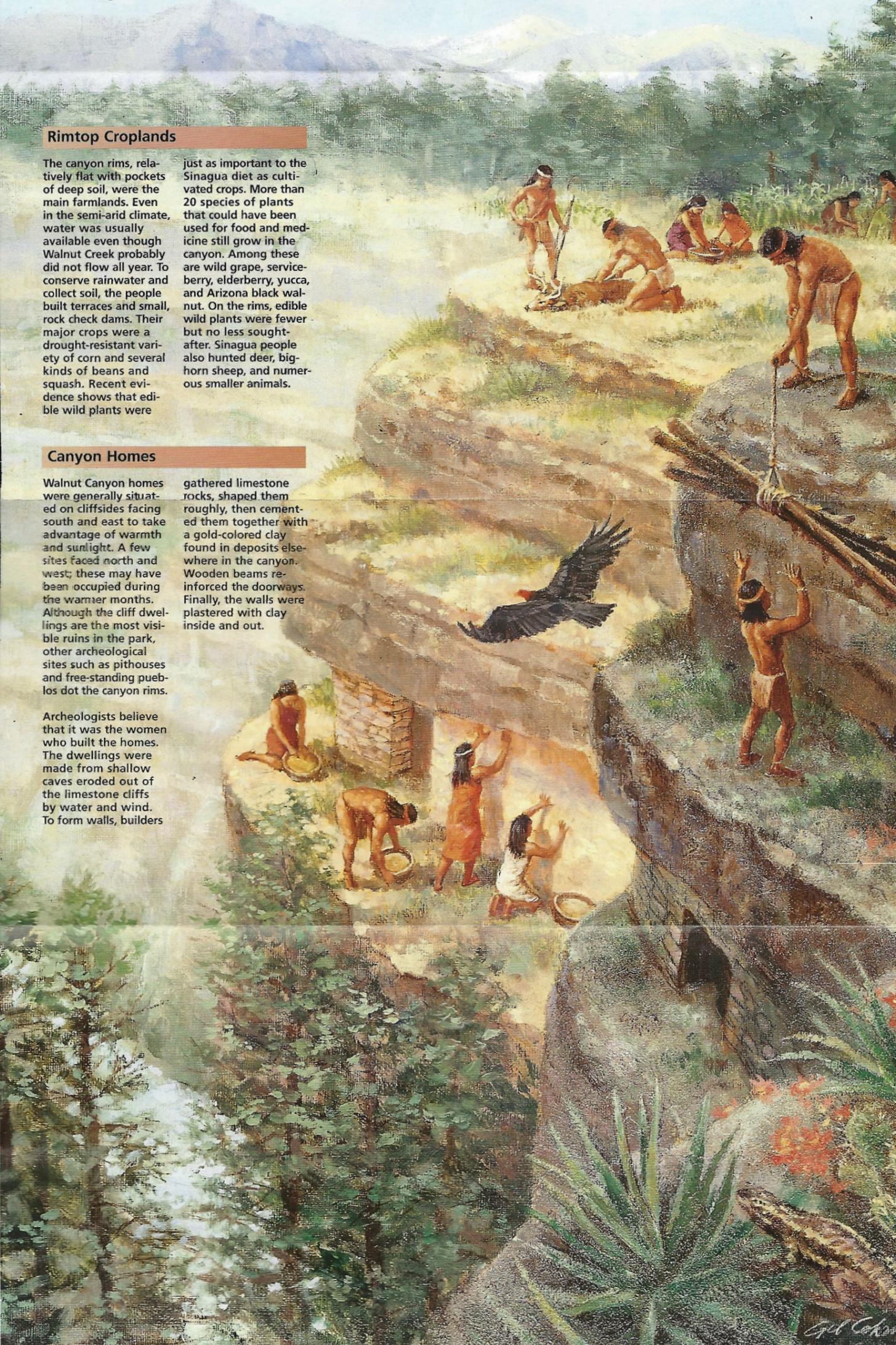
just as important to the Sinagua diet as cultivated crops. More than 20 species of plants that could have been used for food and medicine still grow in the canyon. Among these are wild grape, serviceberry, elderberry, yucca, and Arizona black walnut. On the rims, edible wild plants were fewer but no less sought-after. Sinagua people also hunted deer, big-horn sheep, and numerous smaller animals.

### Canyon Homes

Walnut Canyon homes were generally situated on cliffsides facing south and east to take advantage of warmth and sunlight. A few sites faced north and west; these may have been occupied during the warmer months. Although the cliff dwellings are the most visible ruins in the park, other archeological sites such as pithouses and free-standing pueblos dot the canyon rims.

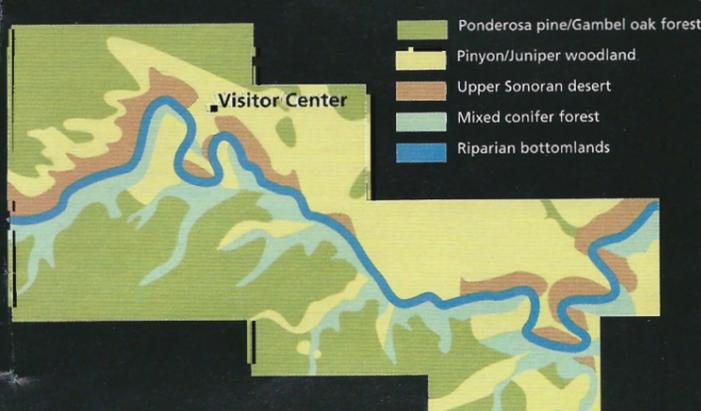
gathered limestone rocks, shaped them roughly, then cemented them together with a gold-colored clay found in deposits elsewhere in the canyon. Wooden beams reinforced the doorways. Finally, the walls were plastered with clay inside and out.

Archeologists believe that it was the women who built the homes. The dwellings were made from shallow caves eroded out of the limestone cliffs by water and wind. To form walls, builders

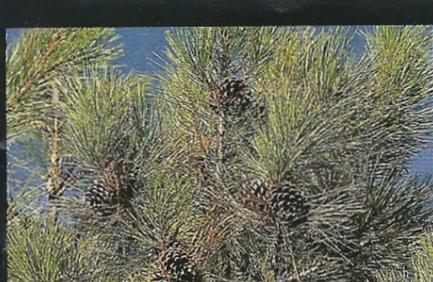


## Plantlife Zones of Walnut Canyon

Walnut Canyon has an unusual array of biological communities, each characterized by different temperatures and plantlife, and determined largely by the amount of sunlight received. These plantlife zones are miniature versions of the zones spanning the West from Mexico to Canada—all within the canyon's 20-mile length and 400-foot depth. As you walk the Island Trail you travel from the Upper Sonoran desert, with yucca and prickly pear cactus, to the cooler, moister Pacific Northwestern forests of shade-tolerant shrubs and mixed conifers, including Douglas fir. Elsewhere in the canyon and on the rims are pinyon/juniper woodland and ponderosa pine/Gambel oak forest, found throughout the southwestern United States. At the bottom is the riparian (riverbank) community, which includes boxelder and the Arizona black walnut for which the canyon was named.



Above: Plantlife zones mapped for central portion of Walnut Canyon National Monument. Above left: Prickly pear cactus.



Prickly pear cactus (top), claret cup cactus (lower left), and yucca (right) thrive in the Upper Sonoran desert plantlife zone, generally found on the south-facing slopes that receive full sunlight. Prickly pears have

edible pads—spines removed—and sweet, juicy fruit. The yucca was especially useful to the Sinagua for food, soap, fiber, and construction material. The pinyon pine (left) provided firewood, timber, black sap for

dye and adhesives, and nutritious nuts. Ponderosa pine trees (center) once covered the region surrounding the canyon; their long, straight trunks were prized for use in rafters and as support beams for structures.

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