



# A PRESENCE IN THE PARKS

CASA GRANDE NATIONAL MONUMENT PRESERVES THE "BIG HOUSE" OF THE ANCESTRAL TRIBES OF THE SONORAN DESERT.

*All photos courtesy NPS*

BY KRISTY ALPERT

**NATIVE AMERICANS**  
**ARE PROMINENT**  
**FROM YOSEMITE**  
**TO THE GREAT SMOKIES**

**L**ong before the conception of the national parks system, the native people of America were roaming the countryside making use of beautiful landscapes and all they offer. Luckily for history buffs and adventurous travelers, many of today's national parks help preserve the rich heritages and historic sites these tribes left behind so that groups can commemorate the contributions of the Native American cultures to the vast lands across the country.

**HOPEWELL  
CULTURE NATIONAL  
HISTORICAL PARK  
CHILLICOTHE, OHIO**

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park is centrally located among a host of special places related to Native American heritage all across central Ohio. The park offers groups the chance to explore these UNESCO World Heritage Site-nominated grounds over just a few hours or over several days.

The park is home to a series of monumental mounds and earthworks built more than 2,000 years ago by the Hopewell Native Americans that display the tribe's deep understanding of geometry, architecture and astronomy, as their works align fluidly with the movements of the sun and moon. The Hopewell people invested an unfathomable amount of labor to build those sacred places, gathering raw materials from distant lands like the Great Lakes and the Appalachian Mountains, and assembled there for feasts, funerals and rites of passage.

"The park is a great place to take a quiet walk, and the ancient monuments never fail to evoke a sense of mystery and wonder about the native peoples who built and used these remarkable places," said Bret Ruby, archaeologist and chief of resource

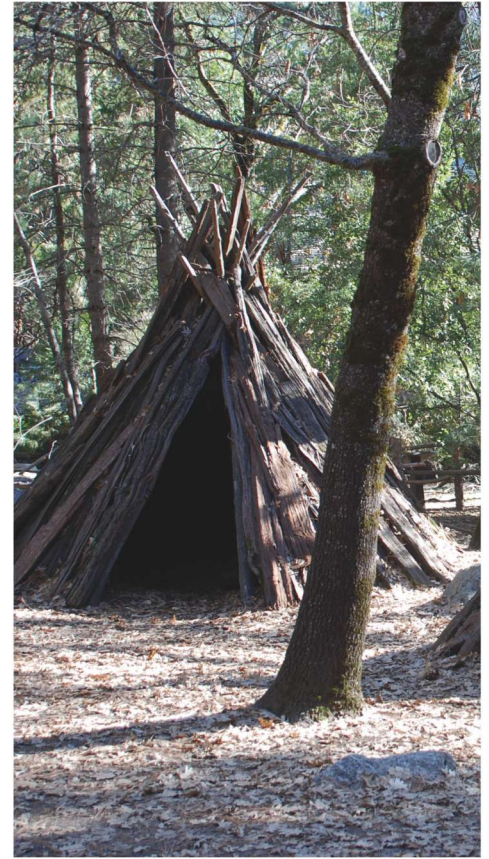
management for the Hopewell Culture National Historical Park. "The park works to protect these places from damage due to the growth of modern cities, plowing and natural erosion by raising awareness and appreciation for these special places."

[WWW.NPS.GOV/HOCU](http://WWW.NPS.GOV/HOCU)

**YOSEMITE  
NATIONAL PARK  
YOSEMITE, CALIFORNIA**

With evidence of a native presence dating back more than 9,000 years, the Native American legacy is an important part of Yosemite National Park's history. Most of the names around the park are derived from Native American words; for example, Lake Tenaya is named after one of the Paiute chiefs, and the Ahwahnee Hotel is named after the Ahwahnee Indians. The name Yosemite is an American Indian name given to the area to describe the fear-inducing tribes that roamed the countryside; it translates to "those who kill."

"There's a lot of everything from archaeological sites and burial sites of Native Americans to villages and a lot of the current cultures," said Scott Gediman, assistant superintendent for public and legislative affairs at Yosemite National Park. "In fact, we have seven Indian tribes in and



YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK'S MEWAK VILLAGE

around Yosemite that we work with and [that] have a cultural affiliation with the park.”

From a working Mewak Village with cultural demonstrations and ceremonies to an elaborate visitors center showcasing the importance of the Native American heritage in the area, Yosemite offers numerous opportunities for groups to experience the history and culture of the region.

“For me, what I love is that Native Americans are such a huge part of the history of Yosemite, but even more than that, they are a huge part of the culture now,” added Gediman. “So one of my favorite parts about that is to see our demonstrators, most of whom are Native Americans themselves, being so willing to share their culture with visitors. It’s not just sterile history, where this happened a long time ago; it’s also part of the present-day Yosemite.”

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## CASA GRANDE RUINS NATIONAL MONUMENT COOLIDGE, ARIZONA

Credited as the nation’s first archaeological preserve, the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument was created in 1892 to preserve an

ancestral Sonoran Desert people’s community and “Great House.” The site was declared a national monument shortly after the National Park Service was established in 1918 and stands today as a proud reminder of the history of the desert.

Six different federally recognized American Indian tribes are able to trace their ancestry to the people of the Sonoran Desert, so visitors who explore the Casa Grande Ruins in this region will most likely pass through at least one American Indian reservation on their way to the monument.

“When we began meetings with representatives of the tribes regarding interpretation of the monument in 2009, our eyes were opened to very different perspectives on the resources we protect,” said Carol West, chief ranger for the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument. “Working with several of these articulate, insightful and patient people has been a tremendously exciting and enriching experience.”

[WWW.NPS.GOV/CAGR](http://WWW.NPS.GOV/CAGR)

## GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK GATLINBURG, TENNESSEE

The great nation of the Cherokees has spanned

more than eight states and 140,000 miles, including the acres that spread through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Even though the tribe is not headquartered in Tennessee, there were certainly Cherokees throughout this region long before there was a national park.

“The three things we’re known for in the Great Smoky Mountains are the biological diversity, the scenic beauty and then the human continuum,” said Julie Townsend, park ranger for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Service, “and there has been at least 12,000 years of human continuum in the Smokies. The thing I get most excited about when I’m doing programs with the general public is that the Cherokees are still here. We’re not just talking about history; we’re talking about ongoing dynamic community.”

Groups can explore the national park on foot or by bike to see preserved towns and home sites that once belonged to the Cherokee people; they can also take a short trip to visit the Qualla Boundary, just two miles out from the park’s borders.

[WWW.NPS.GOV/GRSM](http://WWW.NPS.GOV/GRSM)

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK ESTES PARK, COLORADO

Long before the Rocky Mountain National Park’s official inauguration in September 1915 — approximately 10,000 years by recent carbon-dating estimates — the Ute and Arapaho Indians used the region of the park as a sort of dividing line and battleground between the two tribes. But the area near Estes Park seems to have been mainly used as a coming-of-age location for young tribesmen.

“The Native Americans that used to indulge in this valley considered this area a very sacred place and held a ritual here called the vision quest,” said Dave Cosby, adventure guide and senior driver for the off-road division with Rocky Mountain Rush Tours. “On the quest, the young man would bring a token from home and come to Old Man Mountain in Estes Park to deprive himself of food, water and sleep until he had a vision. He’d then go back to the elders and have them interpret the dream. We’ve found geological rocks as far as northern Wyoming that have been brought into the area for these quests.”

Visitors can explore the park in one of Rocky Mountain Rush Tours’ 15-seat excursion jeeps or travel on foot to walk the same grounds the natives walked many years ago. Along the way, they will see the scenic ponderosa pines and aspen trees, referred to by the Native Americans as the “eyes of the spirits of the forest,” and, possibly, some wildlife.

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