

San Francisco, Aug. 28, 1939.

Mr. Frank Pinkley, Superintendent.  
Headquarters, Southwestern Monuments.  
National Park Service,  
Coolidge, Arizona.

Dear Mr. Pinkley;

Your letter was received several days ago, asking for further information regarding my early visit to Montezuma Castle. Mr. Earl Jackson, Custodian of Montezuma Castle Monument has also written me for similar information so I will answer your letters jointly and attempt to give such information as I can definitely remember over this long period of time.

My Father, Mother and three children of Burdett Kansas, started about the year 1895 on a trip through Colorado and the southwest purely for the purpose of sight seeing. We traveled in a wagon built especially for the trip and it was constructed somewhat similar to the present auto trailers, however it was powered with four mules.

We visited southwestern Colorado and at Mancos made the acquaintance of Richard Wetherill, who with his brothers had but recently discovered the Mesa Verde cliff dweller ruins. With Richard Wetherill as companion and guide we visited a portion of the Mesa Verde ruins, then traveled south to Aztec New Mexico, and from Farmington visited the Chaco Canyon ruins where we did some excavating. We found at this location a number of pieces of pottery in the small mounds opposite Pueblo Bonita.

From Chaco Canyon we traveled southwest to Phoenix and Prescott Arizona. In the early spring of 1896 we camped for about two weeks on the Verde River among the trees directly in front of Montezuma Castle. We came in by way of Camp Verde and as I recall some soldiers were stationed there at that time. We explained at Camp Verde that we expected to visit and probably do some excavating in Montezuma Castle, but we were told that excavation would be useless since the ruins had been completely excavated years before and nothing but the walls remained.

The ruin as we first saw it in 1896 appeared to have been well excavated, however we removed some accumulated rocks and loose material in the rooms but found nothing of interest other than fragments of ears of corn, broken animal bones, charcoal, feathers, and fragments of pottery. We had about decided that excavation was useless when we noticed that the dirt was undisturbed on a small ledge along the outside of the ruin at the point where the upper ladder now enters. A shallow excavation revealed the burial of a number of bodies. This burial place was in rather an exposed position and had the appearance that part of the original space may have possibly broken away and fallen below.

It was impossible for us to determine just how many bodies were buried in this spot for most of the remains were fragmentary and almost completely decomposed, only those immediately adjacent to the cliff were preserved. There were however probably eight or ten bodies buried here, these were all small and undoubtedly children. There was but one preserved mummy and that was photographed in the exact position that it was found. The depth of the excavation probably did not exceed two or three feet, a good idea of this can be had from the photograph as the ground under the shovel and at the foot of the mummy had not been disturbed when the picture was taken. Next to the head of the mummy was found a red pottery bowl about 8 or 9 inches in diameter, fragments of cloth were wrapped about the body and several sticks one of which was intact were laying across the body as shown in photograph. Also found with the mummy was a well preserved bow and several reed arrows, these can be seen in the larger photograph of the mummy and the bow is also noticeable in the picture showing the location of the mummy before removal. The dirt that covered the burials contained charcoal and fragments of pottery indicating that part of it at least was sweepings from the rooms. Some of the material however appeared to have fallen from above possibly from crumbling walls or, thrown there by earlier excavations.

There was no evidence that the burials had ever been disturbed since the bones appeared to be in their original burial position. The pottery bowl was the only one found in the entire burial place and there were no other fragments to indicate that other complete pottery pieces had been buried there.

The general appearance of Montezuma Castle as we saw it in 1896 and as I saw it this summer is almost unchanged. I recall that one or two of the upper interior rooms had fallen roofs. From one of the fallen roof timbers we sawed a short cross section which is now with our collection in Mesa Verde Park, apparently these loose timbers have since been removed as they were not apparent when I saw the ruin this summer. At the time of our early visit to this location we found it necessary to build crude ladders to gain access to the ruin. These ladders and their location can be seen in the photograph of the ruin.

*Near* I was greatly surprised this summer to see the rather extensive ruins that have been excavated and restored at the base of the cliff by. These ruins were entirely overlooked by us in 1896, probably concealed by debris from above.

The persons shown in the photograph are my father and his three children. The older sister later married Richard Wetherill and now lives in Tucson Arizona, PO Box 572. As she is several years my senior it is probable that she may recall details of our trip that I have omitted and I am sure that she would gladly furnish any information possible.

In a previous letter to Mr Alberts at Montezuma Castle I explained that the mummy together with a number of specimens found at Montezuma Castle and a considerable collection of pottery collected elsewhere were loaned to the Mesa Verde Park. Mr Jackson has explained the desire to have the part of the collection from Montezuma Castle transferred to that local museum, but we do not care to have such a division made at the present time. The entire collection was highly prized by our father and he often expressed a desire to have it ultimately placed in a museum where the greatest number might enjoy it, so for sentimental reasons his children do not care to have it divided.

In your letter you mentioned interest in the photographs sent to Mr Alberts so for this reason I am enclosing additional copies for any disposal you may choose. Access  
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I hope that this meager narrative will serve as an answer to the information requested by you.

Yours very truly

*A. L. Palmer Jr.*

cc; Mr. Earl Jackson.

THE MANCOS TIMES  
(Weekly)

Mancos, Colorado  
Friday, March 20, 1896

A CLIFF HOUSE IN ARIZONA

Richard Wetherill writes us as follows concerning a visit he made, on the 6th inst., to a celebrated Cliff House located about two and one-half miles from Camp Verde, Arizona:

"Today I visited the old Cliff Dwellings known as 'Montezuma Castle.' It is on the north side of Beaver Creek and nearly three miles from the old fort, and is the one so graphically described by Charles Lumis.

"The cave in which the ruin is found is a small one, being not more than 70 feet long, 50 feet high and 20 or 30 feet deep. The house is a tier of rooms five stories high, and reached at the present time by ladders placed at convenient points on the face of the cliff by some enquiring investigator.

"The lower tier of rooms are small and unconnected, dug out of the solid cliff, with the fronts walled up, as are the cave dwellings of the lower Mancos.

"The second tier consists of but two small rooms, side by side, through which we have to ascend to reach the next, or third floor.

"This one has six small, rectangular rooms, except the west one, which was used as an estufa. In this room is a fire-place, in which the household baking was done. This is at the west side of the room and not in the center, as we usually find them. The smoke escaped through a small hole in the wall next to the cliff. At the east end of this tier of rooms is a small ledge 25 feet long and 4 or 5 feet wide. It adjoins the row of rooms, and over it all have to pass to ascend to the rooms above. In this small space I found, after a few minute's work, the remains of at least half a dozen children, one of which is a very fair mummy. All of these, except the mummy, were in a promiscuous mass and nothing with them. The mummy was the lower burial, and it rested in a very small excavation next to the rock on the floor of the cave. It was laid straight out; head to the east; face up; hands at its sides. A bowl was found at the left of the head, and a small bow and arrows were lying lengthwise at the right side. The body is wrapped in cotton cloth, which is still in a state of good preservation. The grave was covered with small, round sticks placed three or four inches apart and parallel with each other, supporting a rush mat which had been spread over the grave. Over all this was about two feet of debris, among which was found so many other remains.

"The fourth floor contained eight rooms similar to those below. The roofs of these rooms are in good condition. The longer floor joists are supported by timbers or posts set in the middle of the rooms. The doors are all of an irregular shape, being nearly a foot wider at the top than at the bottom.

"The fifth floor contains four small rooms connected by door-ways. The roofs and floors of these rooms are in good condition. There are no loop-holes

from these rooms looking out, and but one outside opening.

"The sixth, or upper floor, is a save 60 feet long, the front of which has a parapet three and a half feet high extending almost the entire length of it. There are two large rooms in the rear of this part, one of which contains a great amount of debris, which cannot be moved unless something could be contrived to settle the dust. In the front of these rooms is a space about 6 feet wide in which there is about a foot of debris, containing all such things as the Cliff Dwellers used in their work, but covered by sweepings from these rooms. Many loop-holes are in these upper walls, covering all approaches to the river below.

"I am highly elated at my success in finding traces here where so many have visited, and in a ruin that has always had especial mention made of it in works upon this deeply interesting subject.

"I have finished the work of today, and if I meet with further success tomorrow, the report will be sent in.

/s/ Richard Wetherill.

Note: Richard Wetherill was the oldest of the five Wetherill Brothers. He guided S. L. Palmer, his wife and daughters, and later married one of the Palmer girls.