

Chapter 1

Hovenweep National Monument





A clustering of dwellings in Hovenweep

Created in 1923, Hovenweep National Monument has preserved 6 groupings of Pueblo Ruin sites for nearly a century. Holly Canyon, Hackberry Canyon, Cut-throat Castle and Goodman Point are located in Colorado, and the Square Tower and Cajon are located in Utah. Travel to the sites is relatively easy, and within the monument camping opportunities are available.

Hovenweep is located on the border between Utah and Colorado. Visitors can access the monument from Cortez, Colorado, or they can also come from Blanding, Utah (which is near another National Monument, Natural Bridges). You can easily visit several monuments in the area from either location.

The Hovenweep Ruins were once home to thousands of people. They were built between 1200 and 1300 A.D. And the ruins include multi-level towers, single level dwellings, and unique build locations as well.

[First time visitors can start their exploration from the Park Service office located near the Square Tower site.](#) Video presentations are available throughout the day, and the Rangers on duty are available to answer questions about the monument and the locations you're interested in visiting. A small campground is also located

next to the park service office.

Visiting the Ruins



A Tower at the Holly Group

you will be brought right up to ruin site after ruin site. Be sure as you make your way around to notice several ruins within the canyon (the ruins on the top can often distract from the fact there are more in the canyon).

Before heading out be sure to pay a visit to the Ranger Station. Often those on duty will give short talks on the Monument and the ruins. There are sometimes evening programs in the park as well. And last year there were “star gazing” programs as well.

Additionally, the Ranger Station has an informational video area. Visitors are welcome to come inside and watch the documentaries on the region, the people who lived there, and the ruin sites themselves.

The Ranger Station in Hovenweep is located next to the Square Tower ruins site. From the parking area a very easy two mile loop can be followed along the canyon edge. As you make your way around the canyon

From the Square Tower location there is also a trail leading out to the Holly Group Ruins as well. The 4 mile hike is not too strenuous, however during the summer it can become extremely hot and dry. As with any desert park, be sure to

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bring plenty of water. A single Aquifina bottle doesn't count as plenty of water, so be prepared before exploring Hovenweep.

The remaining locations will require a little travel from the main Hovenweep Visitor Center. Each of the locations trailheads are accessible by vehicle, but you are advised to use a high clearance vehicle with 4WD. The access roads are normally single lane dirt roads that can become extremely muddy and impassible during rain storms.

Leaving the Ranger Station drive to the main road, turn right and travel 4 miles North to the access road for the Holly

Group, Horseshoe, & Hackberry. Getting to the access road will bring you across the border into Colorado. The access road is a short drive to the trailhead (1.1 miles) for Horseshoe & Hackberry ruins. It's a .5 mile walk to Hackberry, and a .3 mile walk to Horseshoe. Continuing on to the Holly Group parking area is only an additional .8 miles, but the road becomes very rough and high clearance vehicles are necessary.

From the Ranger Station it is 9.5 miles to the access road for Cutthroat Castle. 2 miles along the access road leads you to the trailhead parking for the Castle and the park service recommends a high clearance vehicle here as well. The trail is





Watch for these road markers at access roads

.8 miles long to access Cutthroat Castle. While it's an easy walk we can't stress enough that you should bring plenty of water along, especially during the warmer seasons.

Finally the last ruin site is Cajon. It's south of the other ruins groups. Leaving the Ranger Station turn left continuing in Utah for 5.7 miles. At the crossroads turn right and travel .4 miles toward Blanding. Turn left on an unimproved dirt road for 2.8 miles to the parking area for Cajon.

Author's Note: I have visited Hovenweep in May, August, and November. And even in November when freezes occur at night, hiking during the day in this area can present hot and dry conditions. Personally I recommend a Camelbak hydration pack, or a few Nalgene bottles along with you at all times. In my truck there are always 3 full Nalgene bottles and a Camelbak pack!

Things to do

So, what type of recreational activities are available when you visit Hovenweep National Monument? There's plenty to do!

Hike the Ruins

There are 6 locations in total (as noted earlier in this chapter). It's one thing to walk down the path from the Ranger Station and take a quick look out into the canyon. It's another thing to walk the whole 2 mile path and see the towers and houses from different angles. Photographic opportunities abound! If you're feeling really adventurous, hike from the campground to the Holly Group location. 4 miles each way makes for a good day outdoors.

Trying to get all six locations in within the span of one day is possible, but if you're here to enjoy the scenery and immerse yourself in where you are, we'd suggest planning two days to really wander each location, take in the awesome views, and really get the feel for the place.

Cycle the side roads

The routes coming into Hovenweep are not heavily trafficked. On our last visit





we were the only vehicle coming in from Cortez (both inbound and outbound). The rolling roads will present a fun opportunity for any cyclist visiting the area.

Enjoy the campground

The campground at Hovenweep is a thing of beauty! While there are limited RV sites we have yet to see the campground full. Call ahead, and make sure there's an open spot for you before you pull in with your rig. The entire campground is surrounded by canyons and ruin sites.

Stargazers will delight

It's so hard to see the stars in populated areas. Hovenweep is not a "populated area" by any means. There's no light pollution out at Hovenweep. So if you're camping there you'll find a night sky that you probably won't even recognize!

[Visit Dolores Colorado and the Anasazi Heritage Museum](#)

Do you want to know more about Hovenweep and the Canyon of the Ancients? There's no better place to spend an afternoon learning about who lived here hundreds of years ago than the Anasazi Heritage Museum. The staff on hand is available to answer questions, many exhibits are at your finger tips, and often special programs are scheduled for visitors.

Camping Options

- **Hovenweep National Monument**: There is a small campground near the Ranger Station. There are several RV sites, and several tent sites as well. This is “dry camping” and the park lists “generator” hours if you travel with a generator. \$10.00 per night

Cortez Colorado Camping

- **LaMesa RV Park**: Located in Cortez Colorado, LaMesa is a 45 mile drive to the main park. They offer nightly, weekly, and monthly rates.
- **Sundance RV Park**: Located in Cortez Colorado, Sundance is a 43 mile drive to the main park. They offer nightly, weekly, and monthly rates.
- **KOA Cortez**: Located in Cortez Colorado, KOA is a 47 mile drive to the main park. They offer nightly, weekly, and monthly rates.

Dolores Colorado Camping

- **McPhee Campground, San Juan National Forest**: Located outside Dolores Colorado, McPhee is right on a reservoir and offers amazing views. Max RV length is 35 ft.

Blanding / Bluff Utah Area Camping

- **Blue Mountain RV Park**: Located in Blanding UT. 44 sites, Big Rig Friendly, pull thru. 45.1 miles to Hovenweep.
- **Kampark Campground**: Located in Blanding UT. 52 sites, Big Rig Friendly, pull thru. 46 miles to Hovenweep.
- **Sand Island Campground - BLM**: Located in Bluff Utah, 27 sites, Big Rig friendly, pull thru. 45 miles to Hovenweep. \$10 per night.
- **Cottonwood RV Park**: Located in Bluff Utah, 39 sites, Big Rig Friendly, 15 pull thru. 44 miles to Hovenweep.
- **Cadillac Ranch RV Park**: Located in Bluff Utah, 14 sites, Big Rig Friendly, and offers nightly, weekly, and monthly rates. 42.1 miles to Hovenweep.

**There are other camping opportunities. For this particular monument we're listing places to stay within 50 miles.*

**From Cortez Colorado:
Signs for Hovenweep
are present along the
route from BB road
onward.**

- Follow US-491 N/N Broadway to Rd Bb in Pleasant View. 18.8 mi / 19 min
- Turn left onto Rd Bb. 6.0 mi / 16 min
- Continue on Co Rd 10 to San Juan County. 19.9 mi / 35 min
- Turn left onto Co Rd 10. 16.5 mi
- Continue onto Hovenweep Rd. Entering Utah. 0.2 mi
- Continue onto C R 212. 3.3 mi
- Turn left onto C R 268A Hovenweep Sign
- Park Visitor Center will be on the right.



From Blanding Utah:

- Head south on US-191 S/S Main St toward E 100 S. Continue to follow US-191 S. 14.8 mi
- Turn left onto UT-262 E/Hovenweep Rd. 8.4 mi
- Turn left onto Hovenweep Rd/Indn Rte 5099. Continue to follow Hovenweep Rd. 6.7 mi
- Turn right onto Reservation Rd. 9.4 mi
- Turn left onto County Rd 413/Reservation Rd. Continue to follow Reservation Rd. 2.6 mi
- Continue onto County Rd 413. 2.4 mi
- Continue onto C R 212/Hovenweep Rd. 0.9 mi
- Turn right onto C R 268A. Park Visitor Center will be on the right.

[If you have network coverage click here to pull up a Google Map of Hovenweep.](#)