

TRAVEL

WORTH THE TRIP



PHOTO BY ROBIN TIERNEY/FOR THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER

Visitors can trek through ancient ruins in Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado.

Climb into Mesa Verde

By Robin Tierney
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

“If you have a fear of heights and tight spaces, this tour’s not for you,” said Park Ranger Paula Wolfe, preparing 25 adults and children for an hour climb up and down cliffside ladders, squeezing between rocks, and crawling through crevices “as wide as my hat.” The destination is Balcony House, a cliff dwelling inhabited by nimble pre-Columbian Indians between 1180 to 1270 A.D.

“I studied these peoples, the ancestral Puebloans,” the former Fairfax resident said of her decision to work in southwest Colorado’s Mesa Verde National Park. Besides this \$3-per-person tour, the park’s new offerings include the five-hour Far View Explorer (\$25 adult, \$12.50 child) tour that comes with lunch and transportation to spots such as Mummy Lake, a 90-foot-diameter reservoir that’s among America’s oldest engineered structures. The expanded tours let visitors “experience how native peoples lived,” said park spokeswoman Judy Swain. For breathtaking views, she suggests staying in the park’s Far View Lodge, open through October.

A World Heritage Site, Mesa Verde (“green table”) is North America’s largest archaeological preserve, and the first national park designated to preserve indigenous culture. Established in 1906, the park’s 52,000 acres contain 4,400 archaeological sites, including 600 cliff dwellings.

By 750 A.D., instead of moving with the seasons, Ancestral Puebloans settled and farmed Mesa Verde’s south-facing sites. Pit houses evolved

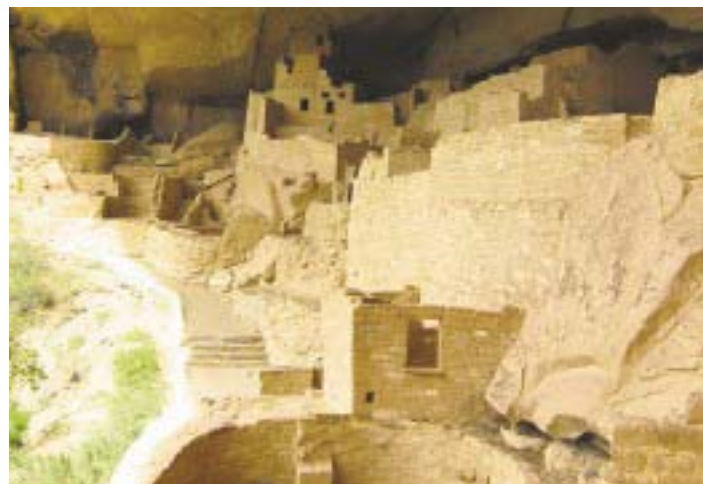


PHOTO BY ROBIN TIERNEY/FOR THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER

into pueblo communities atop mesas, as at the Far View site, and in mountainside alcoves, such as Cliff Palace, the world’s largest known cliff dwelling.

Balcony House’s plaza looks down 600 feet into Soda Canyon. Explorers peer into the 38-room dwelling, its sophisticated food storerooms and two kivas — chambers dug into the plaza floor integrating smartly designed fire pits, with timber pilasters for support. The original juniper-beamed roofs have been removed. Dwelling walls were constructed of fine stonework coated with plaster.

Wolfe explained how alcoves formed over centuries of tan sandstone freezing and thawing. Residents grew corn, beans, squash and amaranth on mesa tops, and harvested nutrition-dense nuts from pinon trees.

The site appears as it did 800 years ago, aside from ladders sparing visi-

IF YOU GO Mesa Verde

» **Info:** mesaverdecountry.com, 800-530-2998; Mesa Verde National Park: nps.gov/meve, 866-292-8295

» **Aug. 27 and 28: Mesa Verde Country Food, Wine & Art Festival:** Farmers, vintners and artists celebrate centuries of the area’s agrarian heritage.

tors from having to use finger- and toeholds carved by the original occupants.

By 1300 A.D., the cliff dwellers were gone. “Depletion of soil, trees [and] water” were likely factors, Wolfe said. But she said that Puebloan lore gave another reason: “The gods told us it was time to go.”

GAS TANK AWAY

Experience the healing powers of Berkeley Springs, W.Va.

By Marie Gullard
Special to *The Examiner*

Cradled in the soft, rolling hills of northeast West Virginia, Berkeley Springs is a haven for Washingtonians seeking the creature comforts that act as a tonic for mind, body and spirit.

Art and culture thrive here in this seat of the Morgan Arts Council, located in the Ice House Co-op Gallery. Moreover, visitors are renewed by partaking of the town’s natural springs — the very ones enjoyed since the early 1800s by young and old.

Winding streets are lined with galleries, breathtaking scenic overlooks, homey cafes, historic inns, a history museum, day spas and

bath shops.

“Berkeley Springs is both a family place and a lovers’ place,” said Laura Smith, who lives and works in town. “There is so much to do, and much of [these attractions are] free.”

For example, the Morgan Arts Council presents the 24th season of Summer Concerts in the Park with a seven-concert lineup that includes two pre-concert jam sessions and a showstopping array of local roots music. In between, the audiences will enjoy a variety of programming that includes everything from Balkan music to an African drummer backed by a Manhattan jazz quartet.

“We begin the summer with a Berkeley Springs-based band that is kicking off its national tour and

end it with a concert featuring more than a dozen local musicians ranging in age from eight to 80,” said Mary Hott, MAC’s executive director.

These free Saturday evening concerts (beginning at 5:30 p.m. and running approximately to 7:30 p.m.) are set against the backdrop of the mountainside that makes up the western border of Berkeley Springs.

“My kids would play in the run with 20 to 30 other kids, making new friends while all the adults got to sit and listen to the music,” Smith remembered.

The town’s unique water attraction Smith refers to is the very splashable spring channels and pools in Berkeley Springs State Park.

The indoor baths contain tubs filled with 750 gallons of spring water directly out of the ground, where visitors can relax and renew themselves for night life that includes Thursday night jamming at Tari’s Cafe (where Smith, a member of the wait staff, takes care of guests) and Friday and Saturday night music at any number of nightspots including Fairfax Coffee House and Earthdog Cafe.

Maybe shopping, gallery hopping and clubbing aren’t in the agenda for your getaway weekend. In that case, seek to be soothed.

“Berkeley Springs has a feeling of healing,” Smith said. “You can come to the town and feel very relaxed. There’s enough to keep you busy, but it’s also a great place to stroll and soak in the waters.”



IF YOU GO Berkeley Springs

» **Where:** 100 miles from Washington, D.C.
» **Info:** berkeleysprings.com