

Hovenweep National Monument by Dave Cooper



The Square Tower Group is home to some of the most spectacular ruins-small.JPG

If you enjoy visiting archeological sites, Hovenweep National Monument is a must-see. Straddling the Colorado-Utah border, this area receives only a small fraction of the number of visitors that head towards nearby Mesa Verde, so you are likely to have the opportunity to study the impressive collection of ruins in relative peace and quiet.

Constructed by the same Ancestral Puebloans who built Mesa Verde, the buildings at Hovenweep are nevertheless quite different in character to those of its famous neighbor. Built towards the end of the Ancestral Puebloan Period, the structures consist largely of multi-story towers and kivas clustered in villages at the head of a drainage. This is in sharp contrast to the dwellings we see elsewhere, built into alcoves below the canyon rim.

Getting to the Trailhead: To reach the Hovenweep Visitor Center from Cortez, drive north on Highway 491 (shown on older maps as Highway 666!) for 18 miles. Turn left (west) on County Road BB and drive 6 miles to the intersection with County Road 10. Turn left (south) on County Road 10 and drive 20 miles to the Hovenweep National Monument headquarters and visitor center sign. Turn left and drive 0.4 miles to the parking area.

To reach the Horseshoe/Hackberry Trailhead. From the visitor center, return to County Road 10 and drive 4.0 miles to a turnoff. Turn right (south) and drive a further 1.0 miles to the trailhead.

To reach the Cutthroat Group Trailhead from the Horseshoe/Hackberry Trailhead. Drive back to the junction with County Road 10, turn right and drive 4.5 miles to a turnoff. Turn right (south) and drive 1.7 miles on the rough road to the parking area.

Details: The monument offers short, easy hikes at each of the areas described here. Access to the Square Tower Group and visitor center is on paved roads, while the Holly, Hackberry/Horseshoe and Cutthroat Castle Groups are reached on sometimes rough, dirt roads. These roads can be impassable when wet and the rangers recommend high-clearance vehicles when dry. The best time to visit the Monument is Spring and Fall. Summer temperatures can exceed 100 degrees.

For more information go to <http://www.nps.gov/hove/index.htm>

A \$5 per vehicle entrance fee, good for one week and payable at the visitor center, is charged for admission to the Hovenweep National Monument.

Several short hikes allow visitors to explore the scattered groups of ruins. You'll want to start at the Square Tower Group. This is where the visitor center is located. Rangers here collect entrance fees and will happily provide detailed information on all of the sites. On a recent visit we took the 2 mile self-guiding loop trail around the Square Tower Group, then drove to several of the outlying areas where short hikes let you explore yet more of these amazing structures.

Hike Details

The 2 mile loop trail begins immediately behind the visitor center and is well-signed. Follow it around the Canyon Rim and then across the canyon bottom to see the diversity of building styles, from round to square to D-shaped, and from multi-story towers to small structures built into some of the larger boulders.

Some of the buildings along the 2 mile loop hike near the visitor center-small.JPG

Sunrise and sunset provide, as usual, the best lighting conditions for photography. The prominent locations of many of the buildings, perched on the canyon rim, create dramatic photo opportunities.

After completing this first loop, drive to the Horseshoe/Hackberry

Trailhead, which provides access to the ruins of the Horseshoe/Hackberry Group and stunning ruins of the Holly Group, perhaps my favorite area.



Precariously balanced on a rock, Boulder House is one of the Holly Group structures-small.JPG

The trail to the Horseshoe/Hackberry Group is one mile round trip. After seeing this area, head over to the Holly Group, 0.8 mile from here. Allow yourself extra time at this area to see some remarkable ruins, including the improbable Boulder House.

One of the buildings in the Holly Group-small.JPG





Cutthroat Castle-small.JPG

The last of the outliers to explore is another amazing group, the Cutthroat Group. Unless you drive the very rough road beyond the parking area this offers a pleasant 0.8 mile hike each way, and makes a great end to a remarkable day.

