



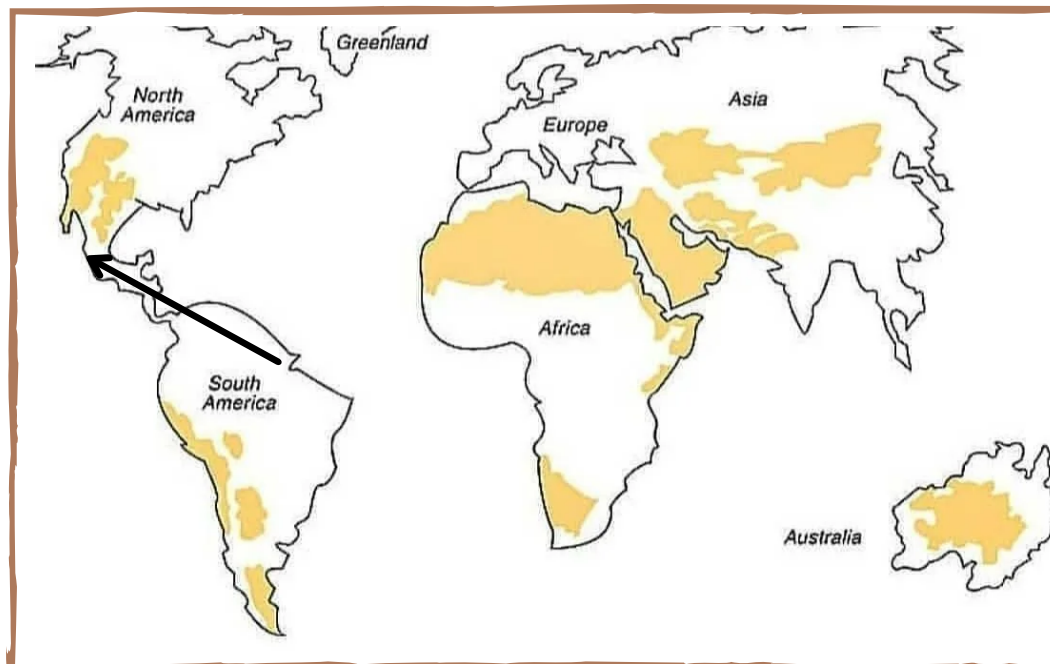
Casa Grande Ruins National Monument and the Ancient People of the Sonoran Desert

Sources: www.ohranger.com; www.nps.gov/articles.casagrande.htm, www.desert.com for the Center for Interactive Learning and Coordination

The Sonoran Desert

What is a desert? The ancient Hohokam people you're going to learn about lived in the Sonoran desert. What is a desert? A desert is any area that receives less than 10 inches of rain a year and evaporates more than 10 inches of rain per year. So deserts lose as much rain as they gain! There are four deserts in North America: The Great Basin, Mojave, Chihuahuan, and Sonoran.

Where is it?



The Sonoran Desert covers a large area that crosses the boundaries between the United States, Mexico, and some Native American nations. Most of the US part of the Sonoran Desert is located in Arizona and a small part of California.

What Plants and Animals live in the Sonoran Desert? The Sonoran Desert is dry and temperatures there can reach up to 120F during the day. Despite these conditions, the Sonoran Desert is home to a variety of plants, insects, and animals that have adapted in order to thrive there.



Want to find out about some of the amazing plants and animals of the Sonoran Desert?
Check out this info page from the Arizona Desert Museum:
<https://www.desertmuseum.org/kids/oz/long-fact-sheets/>

The Hohokam: The Ancient People of the Sonoran Desert

Modern Native American people like the O'odham and Pima people have lived in the Sonoran Desert for generations. However, they are the descendants of an ancient Hohokam/Huhugam people who lived there for thousands of years and built the Casa Grande Ruins. Hohokam is an O'odham or Pima word used by archeologists to identify the ancient people who lived in the Sonoran Desert. Hohokam means "those who are gone" or "all used up." We don't know what they called themselves.

Adapting to the Desert, Thriving in the Desert

The ancient Sonoran Desert people first formed a community that survived by hunting the desert's wild animals and gathering its wild plants. However, as the desert's climate became warmer and warmer, the amount of wild plants and animals decreased and the ancient Sonoran people had to adapt to survive. Archeologists think they may have traded with other Native people for corn so they could start growing food, as well.



The Hohokam people also adapted to the desert by using river run-offs and digging irrigation canals that provided water for their fields. They built hundreds of miles of irrigation canals throughout the Sonoran Desert, using stone and wooden tools to break the hard, dry desert soil.

Their irrigation system allowed them to grow more crops including corn, beans, squash, tobacco that they may have used for smoking and for ceremonies, and cotton that could be made into clothes and blankets. They also continued to hunt mule deer, bighorn sheep, snakes, lizards, squirrels, and rabbits and to collect plants like mesquite pods, and the fruit from prickly pear and saguaro cactuses.



Irrigation meant more food for more people and the Hohokam established a number of villages each home to several hundred people. Their villages featured large buildings like the one known today as Casa Grande, made from a mix of clay and sand called "caliche," which can withstand the heat and wind of the desert. They also made pottery and shell jewelry that they used in their daily lives and likely traded with other people for goods they needed.



For reasons that are still a mystery, the Hohokam people began abandoning their villages approximately 600 years ago in the 15th century. Today, people can still explore historic sites and national monuments like Casa Grande to learn about the Hohokam people and the resilience that helped them build their culture and communities.