

The following pages are from:

Wilson, Dave; **Hiking Ruins Seldom Seen;**  
FalconPress, Guilford, Connecticut (1999).

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## 12 Sycamore Canyon

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**Type of hike:** Day hike, out-and-back.

**Total distance:** About 14 miles.

**Difficulty:** Strenuous.

**Topo maps:** USGS quads—Sycamore Basin, Clarkdale.

**Ruin coordinates:** N34° 55' 27" W112° 03' 46".

**Administration:** Prescott National Forest.

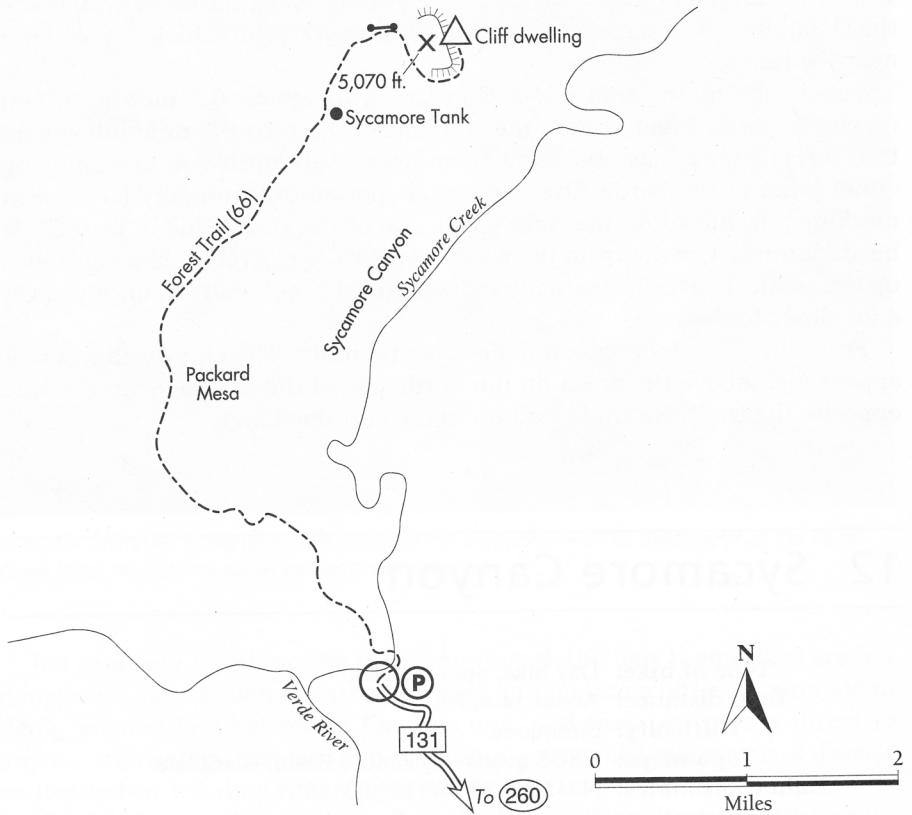
This cliff dwelling overlooking Sycamore Canyon can best be described as a miniature Montezuma Castle without an entry fee, tour guide, or sightseeing crowd. If there was an award for "Best Scenery Surrounding an Indian Ruin," the panoramic view from this site would win it.

Nestled under a natural rock shelter about 0.5 mile from the nearest established trail, the dwelling remains hidden from most hikers who venture into this part of the wilderness. Some people camp for days at a flat clearing just twenty minutes away from the ruin and never even know it's there. However, if you're willing to wander off the beaten path a bit, you're sure to be impressed when you first see the dwelling's ancient walls and mysterious rooms, a couple of which remain almost completely intact.

The site's largest room is tucked into the corner of the rock shelter so that the cliff serves as two of the back walls. The front wall, made of flat slabs of rock held together with mud, stands nearly 20 feet high, and another wall has a tiny doorway hardly more than 2 feet tall.

If you're willing to risk an encounter with a snake, skunk, or some other animal that might live inside the dark room, poke your head through the

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small doorway to see the smoke-blackened wooden ceiling. As an example of prehistoric engineering, the roof is a marvel in itself. A few large beams as thick as telephone poles provide the main support for the ceiling. On top of the large beams lie three more layers of beams, each smaller but more tightly bunched than the layer beneath it. The whole thing is topped off by a watertight seal of mud. With a fire crackling in the corner, the well-insulated room must have provided the occupants with a warm and cozy shelter, even on the coldest and rainiest of nights.

A second room in the opposite corner of the rock shelter remains equally intact, with a small doorway and wooden ceiling much like those in the first room. A handful of broken walls within the ruin and an avalanche of crumbled masonry immediately below the ruin reveal that the dwelling was probably about twice this size when it was built by the Verde Hohokam sometime between A.D. 1125 and 1300.

After exploring the cliff dwelling, take some time to kick back and enjoy one of the best views in Arizona. The lofty vantage point near the rim of



An exceptionally small doorway (note ball cap for size reference) provides entrance into a room still partially covered by a roof made of wooden beams, sticks, and mud.

Sycamore Canyon offers a bird's-eye view of classic red-rock canyons and buttes. All the red is sandwiched between a green juniper forest below and blue sky above, making it a polychromatic sight for sore eyes.

You need a telephoto lens for shooting the ruin's exterior and a wide-angle lens for shooting individual rooms and their interiors.