

Cliff dwellings. Would you like to live there?

Many people around the world have used cliffs to make their homes. This was one of the earliest forms of shelter because only a front entrance needed to be protected.

Building off the ground is less common because of the difficulties of reaching the dwellings. But then this is all a matter of how the caves are arranged. The advantage of caves half way up a cliff is that they are much less in danger from wild animals.

The Mesa Verde cliff dwellings belong to people who used to be called Anasazi and who lived in SW U.S.A. until about 1300AD.

In this lesson, the actual location of the dwellings is not important. We are going to concentrate on how you live in a cave.

1. Tell children they are going to think about cave living. Do they think a cave is a hole in the ground, a hole going vertically or horizontally? Discuss how caves might have been formed (in limestone by rivers, or weathering of cliff faces if rocks have different layers of hardness, and also by waves at the sea).
2. Ask why caves at the sea are very rarely used for living in (tidal effects and most caves are actively flooded daily)
3. What do children think the environment is like in a cave? Dark, humid and other factors that might affect whether or not it would be a nice place to live.
4. Show the video. Make sure children are aware from the voiceover that people lived on the plateau top for a long while, then moved down the cliffs to be closer to their fields in the valley.
5. Discuss the practicalities of getting building materials to the cave, and also how the cave might limit how big dwellings are, and why they are built in a more or less solid mass without spaces.

6. How would you get on on a daily basis for water and fuel? What would you use to reach the homes? What about sanitation? In general this is a good opportunity to discuss the services needed for any kind of home using an extreme example to highlight problems.