

The Formation of Monument Valley

Monument Valley, located on the Colorado Plateau, formed over hundreds of millions of years as layers of sand, mud, and silt were deposited by ancient rivers, oceans, and winds. These layers eventually hardened into sedimentary rocks, including sandstone, shale, and limestone. Later, during the uplift of the Colorado Plateau, the entire region was raised thousands of feet, giving rivers like the San Juan and Colorado more power to cut deep canyons into the rock layers.

Once the land was elevated, erosion became the main sculptor. Softer rocks, such as shale, wore away quickly, while harder sandstones resisted erosion and remained standing. Over time, this process created the iconic mesas (flat-topped plateaus), buttes (isolated towers), and slender spires that define Monument Valley. The Cedar Mesa and De Chelly sandstones are especially important because their resistance to weathering formed the tall red cliffs and monuments seen today.

The dramatic landscape of Monument Valley is still being shaped by natural forces. Wind continues to sandblast rock surfaces, rainwater carves gullies and washes, and the slow breakdown of softer layers reveals more isolated stone towers. What we see today is a snapshot in a much longer geologic story, with the monuments themselves slowly shrinking as erosion carries their material away, grain by grain.

