



The wavy east wall was pushed out of shape by the collapse of the foundation.



The CHALLENGE



Interior view of the northwest corner, where erosion below the slab caused it to break under the weight of livestock.



Cattle had completely destroyed the wall beneath the west front window.



The disintegrating state of the Painted Desert Trading Post in 2018.

Courtesy Terry Drewitz

For half a century the interior had been a shelter for livestock, crows, and other animals.



Facing imminent collapse when acquired in early 2018 by the Route 66 Co-Op, a U.S. Park Service grant and other fundraising efforts allowed stabilization work of the trading post to begin that fall.

Go-op members included those with contracting and preservation experience, along with other relevant skill sets, but no one involved had attempted such a challenge. The budget discouraged hiring the work done, but networking led to other preservationists who had made careers of saving similarly distressed landmarks. Consultations with them generated the knowledge needed to produce both confidence and a plan, although improvisation proved to be a daily ingredient once work got underway. With few exceptions, the rescue was completed by a spirited crew of all-volunteer labor, and a successful outcome was ultimately achieved.

Decades of soil erosion, wind, and water had opened the roof and caused the walls to sag from a disintegrating foundation, which was nothing more than a concrete curb sitting on the ground. Roof rafters were rotted, and exterior walls had been damaged by cattle. The site's remote location created logistical challenges, requiring that a generator and water be brought in, and that equipment and materials be transported from Albuquerque and Gallup, New Mexico.



The southeast corner had slumped a full sixteen inches from the level of the slab floor, creating a serious threat to the structure's stability.

The bottoms of the walls in the north-east corner were severely decayed.



The building's roof sagged from decades of unchecked wind, rain and snow.



The foundation had completely fallen away from the building's northwest corner.