

# ARCHAEOLOGY SOUTHWEST *magazine*

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# Archaeology Southwest

Volume 17, Number 2

Center for Desert Archaeology

Spring 2003

## The Casas Grandes Community

Paul E. Minnis,  
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Michael E. Whalen,  
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FOR MORE THAN 400 YEARS, Casas Grandes has been recognized as one of the largest and most important communities in the ancient Puebloan World, starting with Baltazar de Obregón's published description of the site in 1584. However, it was not until 1959 that the grandeur of this site was revealed in detail by the Joint Casas Grandes Project (JCGP), led by Charles Di Peso of the Amerind Foundation and Eduardo Contreras Sánchez of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). For three years, this monumental project uncovered the remains of a remarkable community with up to 2,000 rooms in massive, multiple-story adobe room-blocks, a sophisticated water-distribution system, and many public ritual structures, including ballcourts, platform mounds, and feasting ovens. There was also evidence of elites and hoarding of wealth, such as 4.5 million shell artifacts. Long-distance relationships were indicated by the many presumed trade items, such as parrots and copper, found at Casas Grandes, and the presence of both Puebloan and Mesoamerican features. Casas Grandes' designation as a World Heritage site by UNESCO and the construction of a world-class museum at the site by INAH are further recognition of this site's importance.

Ideas about concerning the role that Casas Grandes



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*The massive site of Casas Grandes, also known as Paquimé, has undergone major excavation and stabilization. The regional extent of the influence of this community has long been debated. This issue of Archaeology Southwest places the Casas Grandes community in the larger context of Chihuahua, Mexico.*

(also known as Paquimé) played in the prehistory of northern Mexico and the United States Southwest at its height during the Medio period (A.D. 1200-1450). The best-known explanation is Di Peso's mercantile model. He suggested that the Casas Grandes area was a Puebloan backwater until *pochteca*—trading agents of the great Mesoamerican states to the south—

*This issue was made possible  
by a generous gift from  
Benjamin W. Smith.*

*Issue Editors: Paul E. Minnis  
and Michael E. Whalen*

*Archaeology Southwest  
is a Quarterly  
Publication of the  
Center for Desert  
Archaeology*



organized Casas Grandes to coordinate economic exploitation of Mesoamerica's far northern hinterland, an area that Di Peso called the Gran Chichimeca. Once the trading networks changed, Casas Grandes lost its prominence and then declined, ultimately being sacked by its enemies. A more recent explanation is a geographically reversed image of Di Peso's ideas. Stephen Lekson argues that Casas Grandes was established by Chaco elites from the north after the decline of their original homeland. We offer a third alternative: that the rise of Casas Grandes is best understood as primarily a local phenomenon of emergent elites jockeying for power and prestige, ultimately leading to the dominance of Casas Grandes over its neighbors.

Casas Grandes did not develop in a regional vacuum. It has long been known that hundreds of smaller Medio period sites are present in the Casas Grandes region. Early regional surveys—especially those by E. B. Sayles, Donald Brand, and Robert Lister from the 1920s through the 1940s—described

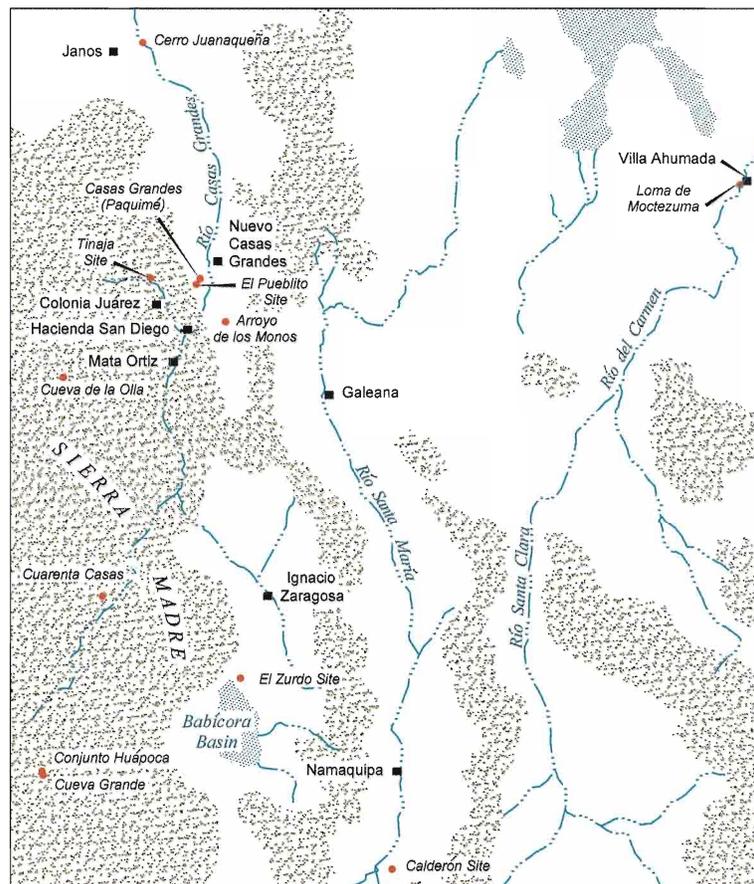
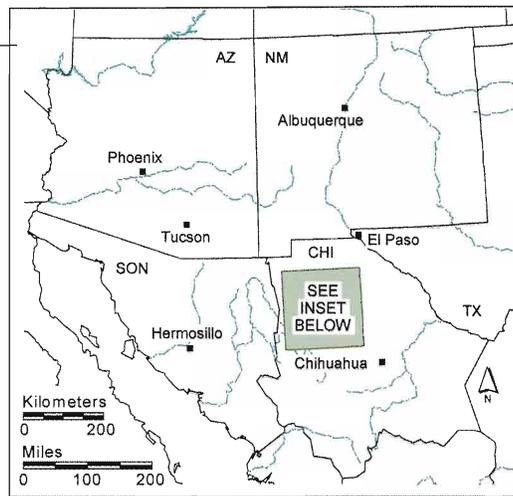
some of these sites, and the JCGP conducted limited regional reconnaissance. The nature of the relationships between these communities and Casas Grandes is neither well known nor agreed upon by archaeologists. Progress has been steady but slow, however, because funding resources available north of the border are not available in Chihuahua. For example, there have been recent *individual* archaeological projects in the United States Southwest whose budgets surpass all of the money ever spent on study-

ing the prehistory of the entire state of Chihuahua. Despite the relative lack of funding, a number of recent and current projects are investigating Chihuahua prehistory.

We began our fieldwork in 1989, to understand the regional context of Casas Grandes' dynamic history. During four seasons of survey, we recorded about 450

sites—350 of which date to the Medio period—around Casas Grandes and up to 70 kilometers away. Casas Grandes is a unique site in terms of its size and characteristics; it is about 10 times larger than the next largest site in the surrounding area. Nevertheless, we concluded that Casas Grandes controlled a core area much smaller than many previous researchers suspected, on the order of about 30 kilometers from the site. Communities farther away were certainly influenced by Casas Grandes in many important ways but seem not to have been controlled by it.

Since 1996, we have been excavating sites in the core area to further refine our understanding of the history of the Casas Grandes polity. Specifically, we have worked at four sites, each representing different parts of the Casas Grandes system. Two sites, 231 and 317, are "typical" domestic sites—representative of communities where most ancient Casas Grandians lived. With a full complement of domestic artifacts, and unremarkable but serviceable architecture, these sites were inhabited by small groups of subsistence farmers. Our pilot project studying upland agriculture indicates that the core



*The Casas Grandes region contained hundreds of smaller Medio period sites. Influence from Casas Grandes extended throughout much of northwestern Chihuahua, but recent research suggests that direct control by Casas Grandes extended only some 30 kilometers from the center.*

area was extensively farmed using many different techniques and harvesting a variety of crops, such as corn and agave.

Our 1998 field season concentrated on site 242, which is very different from sites 231 and 317. This site has an unusually elaborate and large ballcourt, as well as the only platform mound found in the area outside Casas Grandes itself. There is some preliminary evidence from the study

of nearby field sizes and from the ceramic assemblage that the leaders at site 242 produced unusually large amounts of food or drink for public feasts.

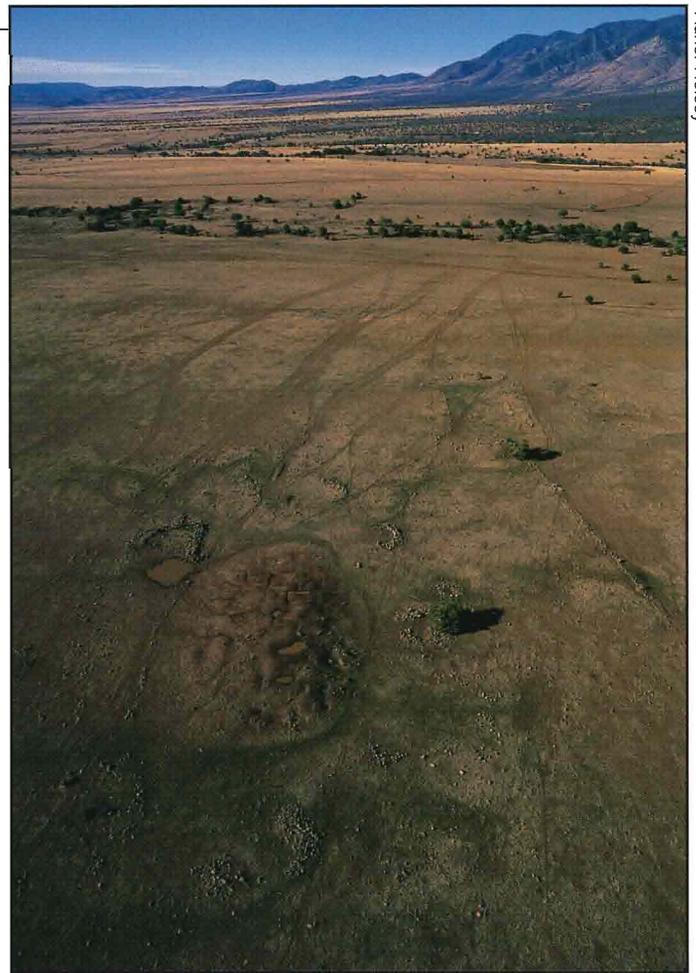
We recently concluded

three seasons of work at the Tinaja site (site 204), one of the largest sites in the Casas Grandes core, located approximately 15 kilometers west of Casas Grandes at the base of the Sierra Madres. We excavated 35 of its approximately 200 rooms, a ballcourt, two feasting ovens, and a midden. Our work at 204 represents a large excavation database for a Medio period site, second only in size to the work at Casas Grandes itself. This research will allow us to examine the role of large sites within the Casas Grandes polity from a historical perspective. Were these large sites early competitors with Casas Grandes or were they always secondary to it?



Paul Minnis

Feasting ovens such as this were used to prepare large amounts of food for public events.



Adriel Heisey

Site 242 appears to have been an administrative center, where agents of Casas Grandes' leaders helped to organize outlying communities. This photograph shows its domestic mound, surrounded by stone arcs. In the right mid-ground is a ballcourt with a platform mound; in the distance, the Sierra Madres.

Despite our efforts and those of the other scholars working in northwestern Chihuahua, there is much to do. Decades during which little or no archaeological research was conducted, as well as meager funding, have left a research deficit that will require much work to overcome.



Adriel Heisey



Michael Whalen

Left: The beginning of three seasons of excavations at the Tinaja site (site 204). Right: The excavation of an adobe-walled room at the Tinaja site.

# Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia Chihuahua

Elsa Rodríguez García

Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia Chihuahua

**L**A GRAN RIQUEZA en patrimonio cultural con el que cuenta México, la necesidad de su protección y puesta en valor hicieron que en el año de 1939 se creara el Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Se trataba de una Institución de carácter federal dependiente de la Secretaría de Educación Pública.

El INAH, como se le conoce a esta institución, tiene como objetivos generales: la investigación científica sobre

del país. El esplendor del legado cultural heredado por las Culturas que se desarrollaron en Mesoamérica y el patrimonio colonial producto del contacto entre las culturas prehispánicas y española, dirigieron inicialmente las labores del Instituto a este rico territorio. Por ello los primeros Centros INAH se localizan en el sur y centro de México. En Chihuahua la presencia del Instituto se reducía solamente a la protección de la zona arqueológica de

Paquimé, que era custodiada aún antes de las excavaciones de Charles Di Peso en la década de los 50.

Frente al monumental patrimonio arqueológico y arquitectónico localizado en el sur y centro del país que estaba siendo intensamente estudiado, el norte de México contaba con escasas y sencillas construcciones principalmente de tierra que parecían aún más insignificantes por la falta de investigación.

En México durante siglos predominó una política centralista, uno de cuyos reflejos fue un discurso enfocado a posicionar entre los mexicanos, la idea de compartir un pasado en común y de ser producto de los mismos procesos históricos.

El nacimiento de la Nación Mexicana fue doloroso, en el transcurso de sus primeros años de independencia perdió más de la mitad de su territorio: Centro América, Texas, Nuevo México, y la alta California. Por este motivo gobiernos tan distintos como el de Juárez, Porfirio Díaz y por supuesto los postrevolucionarios se plantean como objetivo fortalecer la unidad nacional. Invocan a “héroes” como Quetzalcoatl y Moctezuma y a los mismos Aztecas que nos hicieron únicos y por lo tanto distintos a los otros. Se creo, entonces, un discurso destinado a reforzar a la Patria desde la óptica de lo que ocurrió en el “Centro.” Este discurso se difunde a través de todos los centros

educativos, desde la primaria hasta la Universidad.

Todavía recuerdo como en los años setenta, en la Universidad Iberoamericana en la ciudad de México (a donde tenías que acudir si querías estudiar Antropología), nuestra clase de “Pueblos y Culturas de América” se destinaba casi exclusivamente a estudiar a las culturas mesoamericanas. Las sociedades del norte de México eran vistas como grupos nómadas de recolectores y cazadores conocidos como “Chichimecas.”



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Zona Arqueológica Paquimé, Casas Grandes, Chihuahua. (Paquimé was designated a World Heritage site in December 1998.)

Antropología e Historia relacionada con la población del país y con la conservación y restauración del patrimonio cultural arqueológico e histórico, así como el paleontológico; la protección, conservación, restauración y recuperación de ese patrimonio, y la promoción y difusión de los materiales y actividades que son competencia del Instituto.

La enorme labor encomendada al INAH hizo necesario que se crearan Centros regionales en los estados

Durante la década de los 70, sin embargo, también se inicia un movimiento encabezado por investigadores en ciencias sociales, que plantea la necesidad de que la historia de México se complete y entrelace con las historias regionales y las microhistorias de los pueblos, que también forma parte de historia nacional.

En la década de los 80 se crea en Chihuahua, una oficina del INAH que posteriormente se convertiría en el primer Centro INAH Chihuahua. A partir de entonces y junto con otras instituciones educativas como las universidades se intensifican las investigaciones de carácter social en el Estado.

Para finales de la década de los 80 y particularmente durante los años 90 el Centro INAH Chihuahua recibe a una serie de especialistas: antropólogos, arqueólogos, arquitectos, etc., que se proponen investigar, proteger y difundir el patrimonio cultural tangible e intangible del Estado.

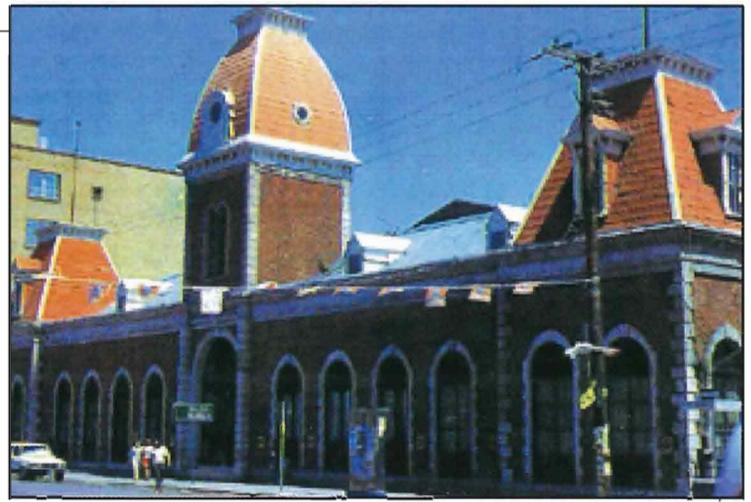
Así mismo se abren al público el Museo Histórico de la "Ex Aduana" en Ciudad Juárez y el Museo de "Las Culturas del Norte" en Casas Grandes. Se apoya también a 14 museos comunitarios cuyo objetivo es involucrar a la población en la protección y difusión de su patrimonio cultural.

Por otro lado, se inician de manera sistemática las investigaciones arqueológicas y se intensifican los estudios sobre las sociedades prehispánicas en el Norte de México, tanto por parte de investigadores del Centro INAH Chihuahua, como por arqueólogos de Estados Unidos interesados en esta región.

Durante el año de 1998 se organiza la primera Conferencia de Arqueología en Casas Grandes Chihuahua. En esta se dan a conocer los resultados de las investigaciones arqueológicas sobre Chihuahua y se comparte y complementa información sobre la cultura que se desarrolló en el Norte de México y Sur de los Estados Unidos. De esta manera vemos que en esta vasta región se desarrollaron culturas que, según las últimas evidencias, manejaban un sistema agrícola desde hace 3,500 años antes del presente, que tenían una forma de organización social estratificada, que manejaban con gran destreza la elaboración de cerámica, que tenían un sistema hidráulico avanzado, y que, probablemente se especializaban por actividades económicas. Que el contacto con la cultura mesoamericana era permanente y que había un constante intercambio de bienes y creencias. De manera que los



*Primer Custodio de Paquimé, Casas Grandes. (The first steward at Paquimé.)*



*Museo histórico "Ex Aduana" Ciudad Juárez. (A historical museum was established in this former immigration authority building in Ciudad Juárez in the late 1980s.)*

Chichimecas no eran tan Chichimecas.

El 2 de diciembre de 1998 Paquimé es declarado Patrimonio de la Humanidad, en el año del 2001 la comunidad de Valle de Allende y la ciudad de Parral son declaradas zonas de monumentos históricos y las Cuarenta Casas zona de monumentos arqueológicos.

Estudiosos de la historia de México consideran que aún más dramático que el centralismo político y económico en México, fue la concentración de la oferta educativa en la ciudad de México (La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México cuenta con 300,000 alumnos aproximadamente). Hasta hace algunas décadas las personas que deseaban estudiar carreras universitarias tenían que recurrir a la capital para continuar sus estudios.

En el año de 1990 se creó en Chihuahua la Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia dependiente del INAH. Se inició entonces la licenciatura en Antropología Social así como una serie de diplomados relacionados con las disciplinas sociales. Actualmente la ENAH en Chihuahua cuenta con una maestría en el área de antropología y se planea abrir licenciaturas en arqueología e historia.

Actualmente el Centro INAH Chihuahua cuenta con 38 proyectos de investigación, protección y difusión del patrimonio cultural.

La responsabilidad del Instituto sigue siendo ambiciosa por ello el Programa de Trabajo 2001–2006 se propone como una de las más importantes líneas de acción la de involucrar a las comunidades en la protección del patrimonio. Se enfatiza además, la necesidad de establecer alianzas estratégicas con el gobierno estatal y municipal, con grupos sociales organizados, con la comunidad en general y con instituciones internacionales para investigar, proteger y difundir este patrimonio cultural que es de todos.

# INAH in Chihuahua

*Elsa Rodríguez García (a translation of article on pages 4-5)*

**T**HE RICH CULTURAL PATRIMONY of Mexico and the need to protect it led to the establishment of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, or INAH, in 1939. It was established as a federal agency under the Secretary of Public Education. The general goals of INAH are: scientific investigations into the anthropology and history of the peoples of Mexico; conservation and restoration of cultural, archaeological, historical, and paleontological resources; protection and recovery of those resources; and the promotion and sharing of the materials and activities of the institution.

The enormity of the responsibilities entrusted to INAH made necessary the establishment of regional centers in the states of Mexico. The splendor of the cultural legacy left to us by the cultures that developed in Mesoamerica, and the colonial heritage that was the product of the contact between the prehispanic and the Spanish cultures, was the focus of INAH's initial work. For the same reasons, its first centers were located in central and southern Mexico.

The only effort in Chihuahua was the protection of the archaeological site of Paquimé. In contrast to the monumental archaeology and architecture of central Mexico, which were being intensively studied, the north had only a few simple earthen structures that seemed even more insignificant because they had been so little studied. The societies of northern Mexico were seen as nomadic groups of hunters and gatherers known as Chichimecs.

The birth of the Mexican nation was a painful one; soon after Mexican independence, more than half of its national territory—the areas that are now Central America, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, and California—was forfeited. For this reason, governments as disparate as those of Benito Juárez, Porfirio Díaz, and the post-revolutionaries have attempted to forge national unity by invoking “heroes” like Quetzalcoatl, Moctezuma, and the Aztecs, which make us unique and distinct from other nations.

This concept of national unity presents our heritage from the perspective of what occurred in the “center” of our country. This message has been spread by all of the educational centers—from elementary schools through the universities. However, during the 1970s, Mexican social scientists began to argue that regional histories, and even the micro-histories of the common people, required study and should be interwoven with the national history.

In the 1980s, an office of INAH was created in Chihuahua that would subsequently become the Centro INAH

Chihuahua. From then on, in partnership with the universities, the investigation of the history of Chihuahua intensified. At the same time, the “Ex Aduana” Historical Museum opened in Juárez, and the Museum of the Northern Cultures opened in Casas Grandes. There are also 14 community museums whose mission is to involve the public in protecting and better understanding its cultural patrimony.

During the 1980s and 1990s, systematic archaeological investigations were initiated, and research on the archaeology of the prehispanic cultures of northern Mexico was intensified. This work was undertaken by the Centro INAH Chihuahua staff, as well as by archaeologists from the United States and Canada.

In 1998, the first Casas Grandes Archaeological Conference shared the results of research into cultural developments in northern Mexico and the southwestern United States. We now see that this vast region has been home to cultures that have practiced agriculture for the past 3,500 years, had a form of stratified social organization, developed elaborate ceramic traditions, had an advanced hydraulic system, and probably had specialized economic activities. There was likely a constant contact and interchange of goods and ideas with the cultures of Mesoamerica. The result was that the Chichimecs were not quite as primitive as had always been maintained.

Historians note that even more dramatic than the political and economic centralization in Mexico is the concentration of the educational offerings in Mexico City. Generally, people who wanted to pursue university studies had to travel to the capital to do so. In 1990, the National School of Anthropology and History, a branch of INAH, was created in Chihuahua. A degree program in social anthropology was initiated, along with others in the social sciences. The school offers a Master's degree in anthropology, and there are plans to offer degrees in archaeology and history.

Currently, the Centro INAH Chihuahua has completed, or is overseeing the completion of, 38 projects. It is guided by an ambitious work plan for 2001–2006. This plan calls for direct involvement of communities to protect their heritage. Furthermore, it is anticipated that strategic alliances will need to be made between state and local governments, with various interest groups, with the general public, and with international institutions in order to study, protect, and share knowledge about this cultural patrimony, which belongs to all of us.

# Loma de Moctezuma: At the Edge of the Casas Grandes World

Timothy D. Maxwell, Museum of New Mexico

Rafael Cruz Antillón, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia

**A**N ANCIENT SITE APPEARS as inconspicuous sand dunes to motorists who pass through the town of Villa Ahumada on the way between Juárez and Chihuahua. Archaeologists now know that these mounds are collapsed dwellings from an abandoned prehistoric village that was once the largest in the Río Carmen Valley.

In 1943, archaeologist Donald Brand named this village Loma de Moctezuma. Scattered around the site were painted sherds resembling those found at Casas Grandes, leading Brand to contend that this was the easternmost village in the prehistoric Casas Grandes domain.

Later, Di Peso agreed with Brand, but no one investigated the site until 1993, when Rafael Cruz Antillón of Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia began to excavate it. Antillón was soon joined by archaeologists from the University of New Mexico and the Museum of New Mexico.

The collaborators were eager to see what life looked like on the prehistoric Casas Grandes "border," and they found some surprises. The first was the discovery of a mound that Brand had missed. Second, our exca-

vations showed that the number of Casas Grandes sherds was really quite small. Instead, most of the pottery at the site was made by the prehistoric Jornada Mogollon people of northeastern Chihuahua.

Many partially formed pieces of turquoise jewelry were also found. The turquoise used in the jewelry is similar to that from sources near Santa Fe, New Mexico, but there are no conclusive tests to verify its origin. However, sites to the north also have large quantities of turquoise chips, suggesting that a trade route followed the Río Grande toward Loma de Moctezuma and then went westward to Casas Grandes.

Another surprise was the great quantity of rabbit bone. This is in marked contrast to Casas Grandes, where the bones of artiodactyls—such as deer, pronghorns, and bison—were most abundant. Almost 11,000 identified rabbit bones from only four square meters of excavation at Loma de Moctezuma represented at least 300 rabbits and hares, perhaps providing 300 to 600 pounds of meat. Another 11,000 small bone fragments may also be from rabbits. At Casas Grandes, only 162 rabbit bones were found in total. The many rabbits at Loma de Moctezuma possibly supplied pelts used to make pouches, clothing, blankets, and drum heads, which were then traded to the inhabitants of Casas Grandes.

Although it appears that Loma de Moctezuma was not a direct part of Casas Grandes society, it probably served as a trade gateway between Casas Grandes and other sites, making Loma de Moctezuma a nexus for various Southwest cultures. Despite its location in a desolate setting, Loma de Moctezuma supplied objects that helped make Casas Grandes a prominent economic and political center.



Courtesy Logan Museum of Anthropology



Courtesy Logan Museum of Anthropology

*Villa Ahumada polychrome figurines collected prior to 1934 in Chihuahua (Catalogue Numbers 7004 [top] and 7009 [bottom], Logan Museum of Anthropology, Beloit, Wisconsin).*

# The Southern Zone of the Chihuahua Culture

Jane H. Kelley, *University of Calgary*

Karin Burd-Larkin, *University of Colorado*

**T**HE SOUTHERN EXTENT of the Chihuahua culture consists of the Babícora Basin and the upper reaches of the Ríos Santa María and Santa Clara. These rivers originate in central Chihuahua and drain north into the desert lowlands, where the best-known Chihuahua culture sites are located. Prior to World War II, archaeologists such as Donald Brand, Henry Carey, A. V. Kidder, and E. B. Sayles surveyed and excavated many Medio period pueblos in this southern zone. The next work in the area was conducted in the 1980s, by Arturo Guevara Sánchez on the Río Santa María; more recent research was conducted between 1990 and 2000 by members of the Proyecto Arqueológico Chihuahua (PAC).

The results from the PAC study indicate that the southern zone follows the same Viejo-to-Medio period sequence as defined by Di Peso for the Casas Grandes area. Investigations at four Viejo period sites and one multicomponent site recovered Mimbres Black-on-white pottery (which is also common in northern Viejo period sites), found evidence for corn and beans, and, at three sites, encountered pithouses. Radiocarbon dates from these Viejo period contexts range from about A.D. 800 to the late 1200s. The southern extent of the Viejo period occupation was marked by relative homogeneity in material culture and shared cultural traits, with apparent greater access to imported goods than was the case during the Medio period.

Medio period sites are found throughout the southern zone, though at nowhere near the scale of Casas Grandes or the density of sites in much of northwestern

Chihuahua. The largest known site in the south, which extends along the Arroyo Raspadura for almost 1 kilometer, has at least 18 mounds of melted adobe, the largest of which contain over 50 rooms, compared with the three or fewer house mounds typical of southern Medio period sites. In addition, no public architecture, such as ballcourts or platform mounds, has been identified in the south. In contrast to Casas Grandes, imported ceramics are scarce

in southern Medio period sites. Only one copper bell has been reported from a southern site, and turquoise and marine shell are also uncommon. Medio period sites in the south have been radiocarbon dated from A.D. 1200 to the later 1400s, the same interval as their northern counterparts.

The southern zone reflected the influence of Casas Grandes in terms of architecture, artifact assemblages, and types of crops cultivated. However, it lacked ballcourts, platform mounds, and the amount of exchange found in the desert lowlands. Similarities in pottery motifs and rock art in the southern region and in northwest Chihuahua suggest that these regions were linked ideologically. However, given the distances involved, it is unlikely that the north had political or economic control over the southern zone.



Low Nelf

*The Viejo and Medio period inhabitants of the Río Santa María Valley had ties to Casas Grandes but appear to have remained relatively autonomous.*

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For a list of references to archaeology in the Casas Grandes region, visit the Center for Desert Archaeology website at [www.cdarc.org](http://www.cdarc.org).

# Exploring the Mountains of Chihuahua: Proyecto Provincia Serrana de Paquimé

Eduardo Pío Gamboa Carrera

Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia

**E**L MÉXICO DESCONOCIDO, or *Unknown Mexico*, was an apt choice for the title of Carl Lumholtz's famous 1902 travelogue about the Sierra Madres of Mexico. For the past eight years, the spectacular ruins and scenery of this little-known area have been explored by the Proyecto Provincia Serrana de Paquimé. Our funding has come from Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), the J. M. Kaplan Foundation, the World Monuments Fund, and the Wilson Fund.

Over many thousands of years, the caves of the Sierra Madre have served as a refuge or a home for a diversity of cultures—early hunters, incipient farmers, the Casas Grandes culture, and modern groups. Cliff dwellings made of puddled adobe are the most striking sites encountered, some reaching two or three stories in height. Remarkable features found in many of these cliff dwellings are very large granaries in the shape of ollas (see page 13) or mushrooms.

Five hundred years ago, the mountains were not the hinterland they are today. Although mountain communities were an important part of the Casas Grandes region during the Medio period, Casas Grandes itself, the other large communities, and most people lived along the river valleys and gentle plains of northwestern Chihuahua. Many Medio period villages occupied the rugged river valley in the Sierra Madres to the west and southwest of Casas Grandes. The best-known sites are cliff dwellings, but pueblos in river valleys and on mesa tops are more common.

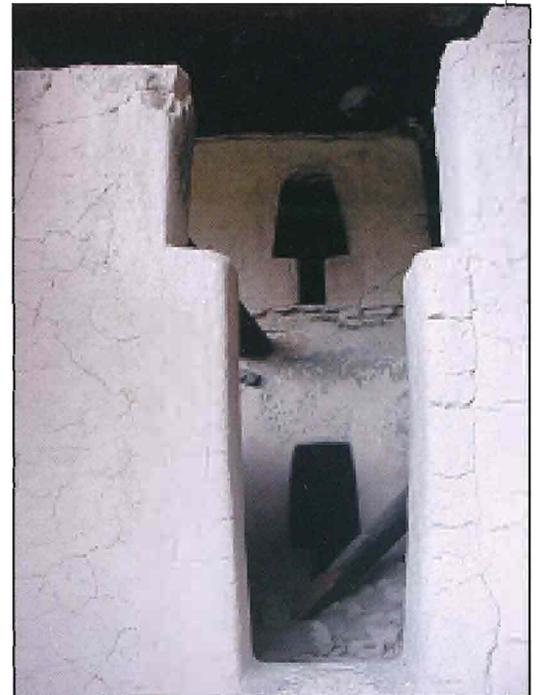
In fact, our research indicates that the mountain dwellers were able to support themselves using locally available resources. There are

extensive agricultural terrace systems on some of the moderately steep slopes, and farming along rivers was practiced where the floodplain was wide enough. The rivers were also a source of fish. In addition, "quids" of inedible agave fiber have been found and indicate the importance of agave as a food resource and for fiber. Pine trees from the mountains were also important sources of wood for construction.

The architecture and artifacts were similar to those in lowland communities. The presence of at least one ballcourt in the mountains suggests that these people participated in a belief system like that of the lowland peoples.

Did the mountain people play special roles in the regional economy of the Casas Grandes sphere? At present, we cannot say. However, it is not too farfetched to suggest that these people were able to supply the denser lowland populations with resources more easily acquired in the mountains, such as meat, various minerals, and wood.

Our research has expanded the inventory of known sites and provided new research insights. The work has also shown that the sites of the Chihuahua mountains are threatened by grazing, vandalism, and erosion. We are working to stabilize and protect many cliff-dwellings sites so that more tourists can visit these fascinating sites.



Many mountain sites have well-preserved T-shaped doorways.



Massive storage facilities are present at many mountain sites. This one is taller than the adjacent room walls.

Eduardo Pío Gamboa Carrera

Eduardo Pío Gamboa Carrera

# The Hilltop Site of El Pueblito

T. Alan Pitezel, University of Arizona

**E**XPLORERS AND ARCHAEOLOGISTS have been drawn to the site of El Pueblito, 6 kilometers south of Casas Grandes, for more than a century. Despite this interest, the site had never been systematically studied until the recent El Pueblito mapping project. This research documented over 80 features, including adobe and stone architecture, isolated stone outlines and walls, trails, and a possible reservoir.

Interest in El Pueblito derives from its hill location, which contrasts with its contemporary Medio period neighbors. Communities in the region are generally found near water and arable land. Yet El Pueblito sits about 200 meters above the valley on a mesa extending from the northern end of Cerro de Moctezuma, with an *atalaya* (watch tower) at its summit, and surrounded on three sides by precipitous rhyolite cliffs.

Adobe is the usual construction material used in the region, but the lack of nearby water necessary for producing adobe makes its occurrence at El Pueblito curious. Exposed adobe walls in the mound show that the walls are about 55 centimeters thick. Recently, investigators in the Casas Grandes region have suggested that walls of this thickness correspond with a style of architecture of distinct social and political significance.

El Pueblito also contains a variety of stone features. However, due to centuries of collapse, many of these features are difficult to define. Until more intensive investigations are conducted, some features have been labeled probable structures. Most of these structures have an exterior veneer of stacked, unshaped rhyolite with a rubble core. The walls of these features are about 1 meter thick. The massive fortification-type wall on the eastern side of the site, which has a similar core-veneer construction, is about 1¼ meters wide and 1½ meters high.

An unanticipated result of the project was that more, and a greater variety of, features were found than have been reported previously. For example, there are about 18 rectangular and circular features defined by stone outlines. These are either piled rocks or a single row of contiguous rocks. Features of this type are not found at other Medio period sites. It is possible that these features once supported superstructures, though there is no evidence at this time to support this inference.

The quantity and diversity of features, the structures' thick walls, and the site's prominent hill location suggest a special role for El Pueblito in the Casas Grandes regional system. The next phase of research will include excavation



Adriel Heisey

*The massive landmark of Cerro de Moctezuma, with its famous atalaya (a watch tower or communication feature). The atalaya is on the highest point (back right in photo), which rises 380 meters and can be seen from a distance of 20 kilometers from three surrounding valleys that meet at its southern base. El Pueblito is on the flat mesa in the center foreground.*

of the adobe mound and stone features. Architectural and material evidence obtained in this phase of research will provide information necessary to more accurately define the function of the site, its chronological history, and its social and political significance.

# Late Archaic Villages on the Río Casas Grandes

John R. Roney, Bureau of Land Management  
Robert J. Hard, University of Texas at San Antonio

**F**ORTIFIED HILLTOP VILLAGES found along the Río Casas Grandes are proving to be some of the earliest agricultural sites in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico, and they contradict almost everything that archaeologists thought they knew about the Late Archaic period. Not so long ago, many of us considered the Archaic period in Chihuahua a long, dull prelude to the really important developments in prehistory, which, of course, all took place at Casas Grandes. Were we ever mistaken!

Even today, most textbooks describe the introduction of corn into the area as a very gradual process, one that had little initial effect on the lifeways of hunter-gatherers. Until now, archaeologists thought that settled villages with economies dependent on serious food production did not appear until A.D. 500 at the very earliest, some 2,000 years after maize reached these people.

The scenario just outlined may well be true for some parts of the American Southwest, but it certainly does not describe the events that unfolded along the fertile Río Casas Grandes 3,500 years ago.

Here, within just a few centuries of the initial appearance of cultivated plants, we find a dozen fortified hilltop sites, or *cerros de trincheras*, scattered up and down the river valley. These sites consist of residential terraces and other features located on isolated hills. The largest of these sites, Cerro Juanaqueña, may have been home to 200 or 300 people (see *Archaeology Southwest*, Vol. 13, No. 1). It is 450 feet high and includes over 500 individual terraces. Terrace surfaces were littered with artifacts, and the rocky fill

behind the terraces contained the abundant remains of plants and animals exploited by the inhabitants. The evidence leaves no doubt that this site was intensively occupied.

We have mapped or photographed nine similar sites along the Río Casas Grandes and have tested three of these, in addition to Cerro Juanaqueña. Although the other sites

are smaller than Cerro Juanaqueña, they are very similar in terms of the features present, construction techniques, artifacts, faunal bone, and plant remains. Despite large quantities of cultural materials, these sites were occupied for only about 200 years, with major occupations centered at 1250 B.C., and a less-intensive episode at about 300 B.C.

Why did people choose to live in these uncomfortable and terribly inconvenient hilltop locations? The sites were rapidly constructed on highly defensible hills and enclosed by low berm walls, and many of them were situated so that line-of-sight communication would have been possible. In addition, more than 500 projectile points were recovered from Cerro Juanaqueña alone, possibly the debris from raids. We

also looked at a worldwide sample of 42 ethnographic groups who live on similar elevated landforms and discovered that defense is the major reason given for this settlement pattern.

The Late Archaic period inhabitants of northwestern Chihuahua found the Río Casas Grandes Valley a highly productive area, but one in which periods of raiding and warfare were as much a part of life as farming, themes that would repeat themselves over the millennia in this region.



©Adriel Heisey

*Cerro de los Torres, a Late Archaic site north of Casas Grandes along the Río Casas Grandes Valley.*

# Charles Di Peso and Casas Grandes

*Gloria J. Fenner, Western Archeological and Conservation Center, National Park Service*

**I**MAGINE: ALL EIGHT VOLUMES of the Casas Grandes report—every word, list, and sherd chart—were created on typewriters or written by hand, the former in multiple drafts. And I believe I am the only person in the world who has read every last word, title page through index. In spite of that, I would

do it again in a minute. Even though I did not participate in the fieldwork, it was a dream job for an archaeologist, reporting on an incredible, unique site and a fascinating array of material culture with an amazingly creative and knowledgeable individual. All of these things are together in that

last sentence because I cannot think of Casas Grandes without thinking of Charlie Di Peso. They are one and the same.

Charlie told me that the Joint Casas Grandes Project—three continuous years of fieldwork, more than 14 years of writing, eight hefty volumes and many associated papers—came about because he wanted some time off from work. It seems that after completing his report on the Reeve Ruin, Charlie wished to take a long holiday in Italy, so he proposed to his employer, the Amerind Foundation's founder, William Shirley Fulton, the biggest and most expensive project he could think of, assuming that Fulton would not fund it. Fulton, however, rose to the occasion, and the rest is history.

The wonder is that such a major project was completed at all. In addition to having a competent staff, the laboratory portion of the project was accomplished by being organized. Charlie had it all planned out: we worked on different sections of the analysis in order, and we had a regular routine. Each person worked on his or her own

projects until 10 a.m. each day, when Charlie, John Rinaldo (senior archaeologist), Alice Wesche (illustrator), and I got together for two hours to read through and interpret the field notes and maps relating to the architecture—room by room, plaza by plaza, mound by mound, feature by feature.

I can't say that there were not dull moments. The endless and repetitive descriptions and checking of sherd counts and measurements in all of those charts were deadly. In the afternoon, as needed, I would meet with Charlie to go over my comments on the text that

became Volumes 1 through 3, as well as the "back volume" sections he wrote.

Some people write slowly and are pretty much finished the first time through, but not Charlie. With him, it was the ideas that mattered the most. This resulted in a lot of rewriting and reorganizing. The reorganization meant cutting out bits and pieces, rearranging those pieces, and then taping them together in "pages" that might be two feet long. This was connected by all but indecipherable scribbles. I made him do three or four rewrites before I would even read a section, and even then it was a challenge.

Coming from Illinois, as I do, without any Southwestern archaeological preconceptions, I found Charlie's ideas fascinating. And he was ever so good at accepting my humble suggestions and allowing me to argue with him as well. He would have been very gratified to see all of the Chihuahuan work that is in progress, and would no doubt be playing devil's advocate to all—a role he greatly enjoyed!



*A 1967 photograph of Charles Di Peso and Gloria Fenner discussing a portion of the Casas Grandes report.*

*Courtesy of Gloria Fenner*

# Archaeological Tourism in Chihuahua

Paul E. Minnis, *University of Oklahoma*

Michael E. Whalen, *University of Tulsa*

THERE IS MUCH MORE to northwestern Chihuahua than Casas Grandes. Fortunately, traveling in northern Mexico today is safe and easy, and major cities have good restaurants and hotels. It is best to consult appropriate websites, up-to-date tourist guides, or Mexican consulates for current regulations regarding personal and vehicle permits. The official Chihuahuan website, [www.chihuahua.gob.mx](http://www.chihuahua.gob.mx), has a tourist section in Spanish, and the email address is [cturismo@buzon.chihuahua.gob.mx](mailto:cturismo@buzon.chihuahua.gob.mx). Hundreds of Casas Grandes-related sites dot the landscape, but few are developed and available for visits. Still, a number of archaeological sites are maintained for tourists, including:

- ◆ Cave Valley is in the mountains 50 kilometers west of Casas Grandes. Access to the site requires a high-clearance vehicle and three hours of driving. This picturesque area contains the famous Cueva de la Olla (Olla Cave), as well as other sites.

- ◆ Cuarenta Casas (Forty Rooms), an impressive cliff dwelling, is located about 90 kilometers southwest of Casas Grandes. The roads to this site are good.

- ◆ Two cliff dwellings in the area around Madera—Conjunto Huápoca (Huápoca Complex) and Cueva Grande (Grand Cave)—are open to the public.

- ◆ Arroyo de los Monos (Arroyo of the Monkeys), located 35 kilometers south of Casas Grandes, is the most famous rock art site in Chihuahua.

- ◆ The Convento (Convent) site consists of the ruins of an early Spanish church in front of which is a pre-Casas Grandes site excavated by the Joint Casas Grandes Project. Although only 6 kilometers north of Casas Grandes, the route is not marked, so ask for directions before heading out.

In addition to archaeological sites, the area around Casas Grandes has a rich and colorful history and a vibrant modern culture. Mata Ortiz, a modest community 25 kilometers from Casas Grandes, is well known for its exquisite and affordable ceramics, produced by more than 400 potters. The last two surviving Mormon towns in northern Mexico—Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublán—are thriving

in the Casas Grandes region. There are also many Mennonite communities (*campes*) north of Nuevo Casas Grandes and west of Janos.

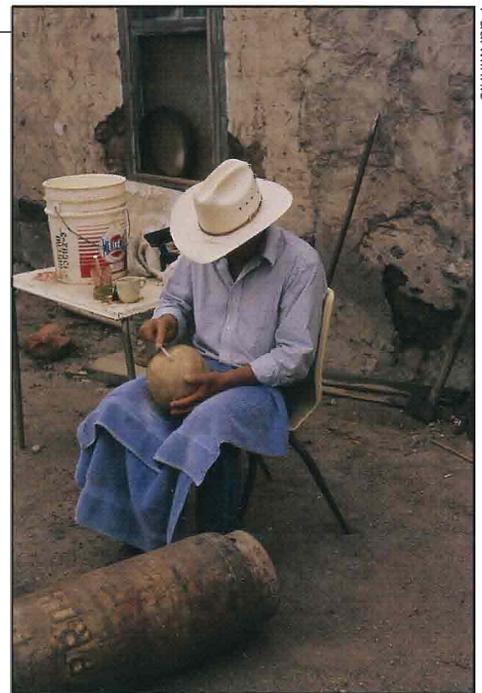
This region was a center of conflict during the Mexican Revolution. In fact, one of the first battles of the revolution was

at Casas Grandes. Pancho Villa's troops often traversed the Casas Grandes area, as did the Punitive Expedition, led by General John J. Pershing, which was unsuccessful in catching Villa after his raid on Columbus, New Mexico.

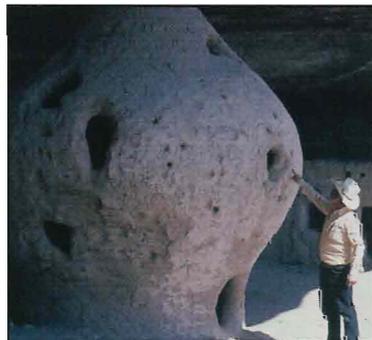
Located between Casas Grandes and Mata Ortiz, the Hacienda San Diego is the best preserved example of a pre-revolution hacienda in the region. It was used by various sides during the revolution. In addition, Carl Lumholtz wintered in the area at the end of his famous travels through northern Mexico.

Northwestern Chihuahua is also a convenient gateway to surrounding regions, including the Sierra Madres, famous for Copper Canyon and home to the Tarahumara. In addition, the state capitol of Chihuahua City is a four-hour drive from Casas Grandes.

*¡Buen viaje!*



Master potter Juan Quezada working on a vessel at Mata Ortiz.



Left: The site of Cueva de la Olla (Olla Cave). Right: The cliff dwelling of Cuarenta Casas (Forty Rooms).

# Museo de las Culturas del Norte

José Luis Punzo Díaz

Museo de las Culturas del Norte, INAH

A REMARKABLE ASSEMBLAGE rivaling or exceeding those from any site in northern Mexico or the American Southwest was recovered by the Joint Casas Grandes Project. Beautifully decorated ceramics, huge quantities of marine shell, exquisite turquoise jewelry, copper, and macaw and turkey pens, among other items, clearly demonstrate that Casas Grandes was the center of a highly complex society. Unfortunately, for the following three decades after their excavation, these objects were curated in warehouses or, in a few cases, displayed in museums, usually outside Mexico. In 1993, this situation changed dramatically when the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) decided to develop a world-class museum dedicated to the prehistory of the Gran Chichimeca.

The museum building's outside embankment is a botanical garden with plants from the surrounding Chihuahuan desert. The core of the round building is its central patios, where the main elements of the local landscape—the desert and the mountains—are symbolized. The canyon patio points to the summit of the closest mountain, Cerro Moctezuma, which has a prehistoric ceremonial or communication structure on its summit. The central patio, an amphitheater that leads to the second floor, is

composed of terraces where visitors can observe the surrounding area, including a magnificent view of the site, as well as the colonial town of Casas Grandes to the north.

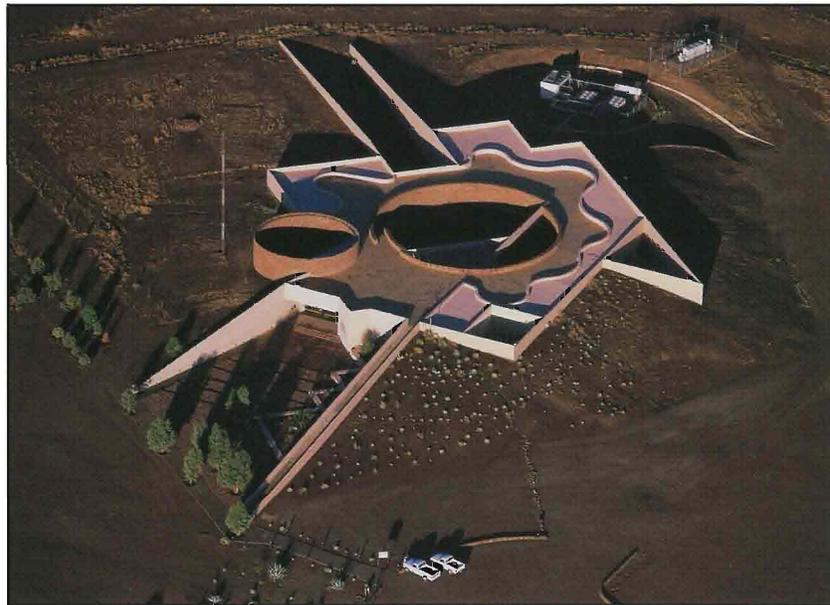
After years of planning, building construction, and exhibit preparation, the museum opened on February 28, 1996. On display is a breathtaking collection of more than 2,000 objects with explanatory text, in both Spanish and English, and video presentations.

Two contextual goals guided the development of the exhibits. First, the exhibits are not restricted to the Medio period, the time of Casas Grandes' zenith. Rather, they depict the occupation of the area from the Paleoindian to the Historic period.

Second, because we recognize that the border between Mexico and

the United States is a modern, arbitrary boundary of no significance in prehistory, our exhibits emphasize the biological and cultural connections between the ancient peoples who lived in what is now northwestern Mexico and the American Southwest.

The museum also serves as a cultural center, forging a bridge with the community by offering workshops, concerts, conferences, videos, temporary exhibits, and children's programs. In this way, INAH educates the local community about its natural and cultural heritage, particularly Casas Grandes, a highly vis-



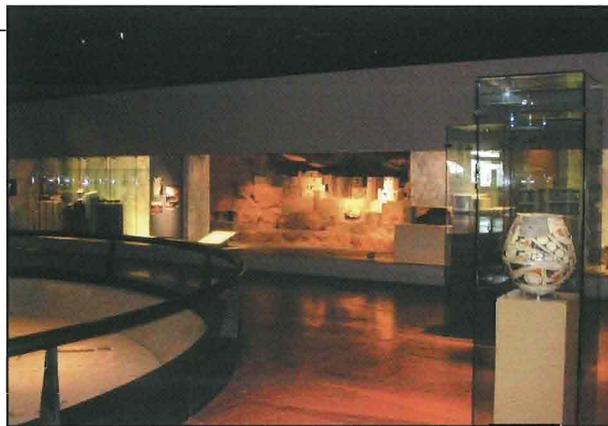
*The design of the Museo de las Culturas del Norte was influenced by the ceremonial mounds of Casas Grandes and the environmental setting of the site, where vistas of earth and skies harmonize.*



ible symbol of its cultural patrimony. Recognition of Casas Grandes' importance was strengthened in December 1998, when it was designated a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Everyone is invited to visit the site

of Casas Grandes, the Museo de las Culturas del Norte, as well as other cultural attractions in the region.



Eduardo Pio Gamboa Carrera

The museum exhibits discuss prehistoric cultures—such as the Hohokam, Anasazi, and Mogollon—that inhabited the region north of the border, in the United States, as well as those in what is now Mexico. For example, across from a model of Casas Grandes is one depicting Cliff Palace, a site in Colorado's Mesa Verde National Park.

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See the Center for Desert Archaeology website for more information: <<http://www.cdarc.org>>

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# Back Sight

**B**REAKING BARRIERS to the free flow of information on the shared prehistory of this borderland region is an important part of the Center’s mission. Our focus is not just the American Southwest, but also the Mexican Northwest. For example, this is the second time that we have devoted a full issue of *Archaeology Southwest* to the archaeology of northern Mexico.

Readers can visit the site of Casas Grandes if they attend the 2003 Pecos Conference this August. Archaeologist Emil Haury characterized the Pecos Conference as a “stellar event” in regional archaeological history. What he found so valuable about this informal, annual conference was the opportunity for researchers to “come together intellectually and philosophically to consider seriously the meaning of their labors.”

The first Pecos Conference held in Mexico was also at the site of Casas Grandes, and the year was 1961. The list of those attendees provided by Richard Woodbury in his history of the Pecos Conference is almost exclusively U.S. archaeologists. Even so, the event’s organizer, Charles Di Peso, commented, “the conference resulted in better understanding between Mexican and United States archaeologists.” In 2003, there should be a much larger number of Mexican archaeologists



*This photograph is a view west along the international border between Arizona and Sonora. It underscores that the boundary divides a continuous natural environment into two distinct entities. Those interested in the prehistory of the region must make an effort to break this barrier to information flow.*

present, and I urge all readers to take advantage of this unique opportunity to get to know first hand both the archaeology and the archaeologists of northwestern Mexico.

On January 9-10, 2004, there is an opportunity to return to Chihuahua—Chihuahua City, this time—for the biannual Southwest Symposium. Start your Chihuahua journey with *Archaeology Southwest*, and follow up with the real thing at the Pecos Conference next summer and the Southwest Symposium next winter.

*William H. Doelle, President & CEO  
Center for Desert Archaeology*

**back sight (băk sīt)** n. 1. a reading used by surveyors to check the accuracy of their work. 2. an opportunity to reflect on and evaluate the Center for Desert Archaeology’s mission.

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