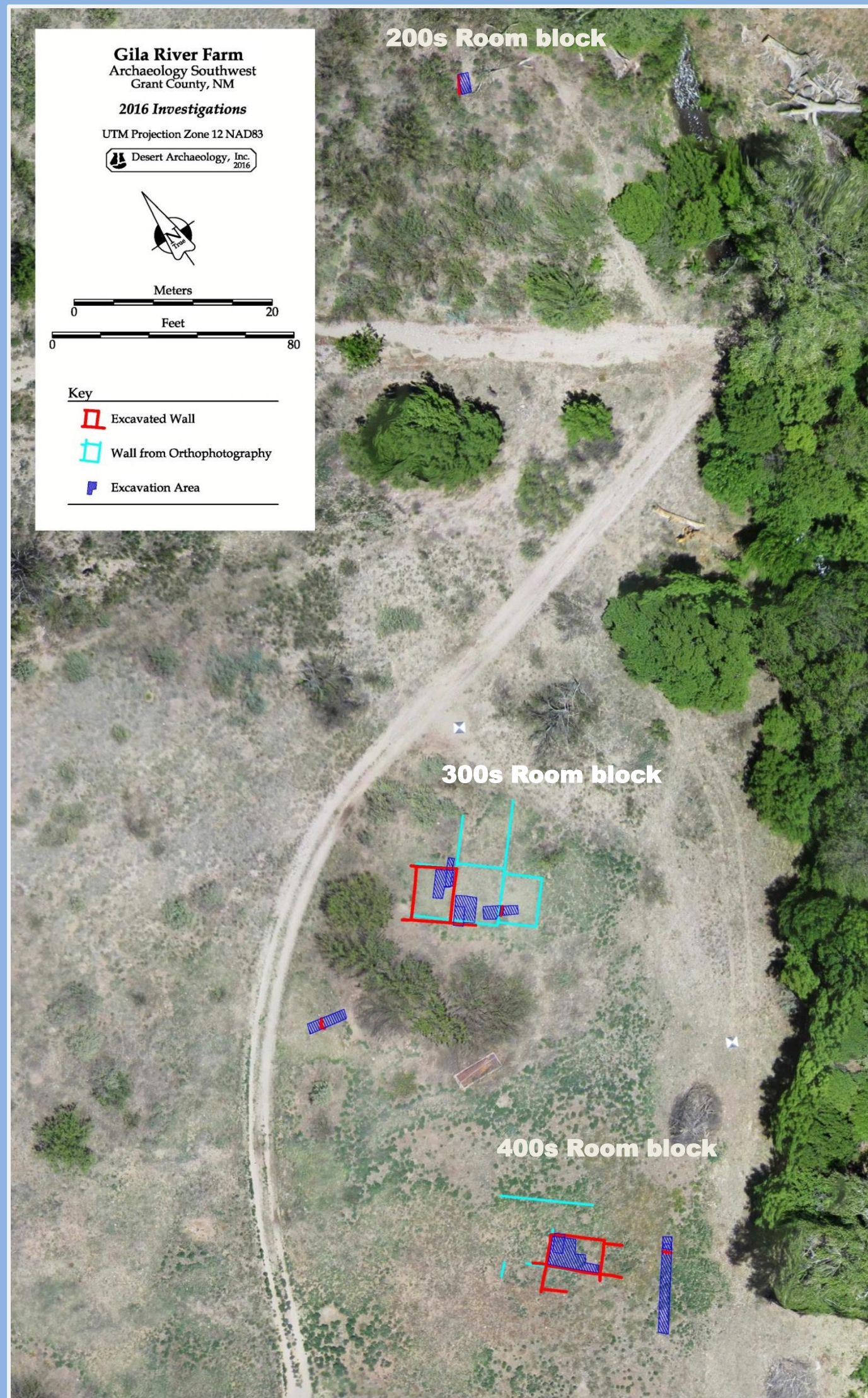


Introduction

During the summer of 2016, Archaeology Southwest and the University of Arizona's Upper Gila Preservation Archaeology (UGPA) field school conducted limited excavations at the Gila River Farm Site (LA 39315), a Cliff Phase (A.D. 1300–1450) site near Cliff, New Mexico that is owned by the New Mexico Nature Conservancy. The site is composed of three main adobe room blocks that are visible on the surface to differing degrees. The 200s room block was heavily looted and recognizable as a series of large contiguous pits within an architectural mound. A portion of the 300s room block is preserved as an architectural mound, but it has suffered mechanical disturbance on its east and west sides. The 400s room block is in a leveled area, with no obvious architectural mound. It was visible only by patterns in the vegetation (known as the Brigadoon effect), where the plants above the adobe walls are slightly stunted and walls are only visible during certain times of the year.



Above: Aerial photo of the Gila River Farm Site taken with an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), showing all three room blocks. (Michael Brack)



Above: Photos of Brigadoon effect revealing wall lines on the surface. This aided greatly in flagging walls, mapping, and estimating the number of rooms in each room block



Prior to our excavations, the only archaeology that had been done on the site was a survey in 1983. During that survey, archaeologists drew a rough sketch map of four architectural mounds (only three have been re-located by the current project) and made notes, but no collections. Ongoing work at the Gila River Farm Site contributes to our understanding of trade networks, population densities, and settlement patterns and social dynamics in the region.

Left: Photo of historic artifacts: Metal nail and chain (probably used by looters), glass marble, and amulet (the amulet was found near the surface, indicating that perhaps it was intentionally buried by a more recent visitor).



Above left: Profile photo of an adobe wall of a Cliff phase room, with cobble cimiento stones at the base Right: Photo of the top of intersecting adobe walls, showing the neighboring rooms sharing walls with each other in a room block



Even though most of the architecture was invisible from the surface, excavations revealed well-preserved rooms just below the ground surface. The walls of the Cliff Phase rooms were constructed using coursed adobe. Large cobbles provided footings, or *cimientos*, for the adobe walls. Neighboring rooms shared walls with each other, forming room blocks that each comprised up to 15 rooms.



Above left: Photo of metates that make up grinding station Right: Excavated grinding station with ground stone removed.



One of the more interesting rooms that was excavated (Feature 300) had a meal feature, or grinding station, built into its south wall. The grinding station consists of two broken (but reconstructable) bowls placed in floor pits next to two large metates. The metates had been removed from their plastered recesses, ground stone manos were placed where they had been, and the metates were replaced on top of those. One of the metates had a hole in the bottom, which may have been from use, or may have been put there purposely when the feature was “retired.”



Left: Photo of slab-lined hearth on the floor of feature 302; Above: Photo of stone axe-heads found on the floor near the hearth

Another room in the same room block (Feature 302) may have been used as a workshop to make ground stone tools. Several 3/4-groove axe heads at various stages of manufacture were found on or near the floor of the room. In addition, other stone tools that appear to have been used to make stone tools were found on the floor near the hearth. This room was likely also purposely “closed” because it was heavily burned and one of the stone slabs lining the hearth had been pulled out.



Above: Photo of a cluster of sherds constituting a Gila Polychrome jar, an example of Roosevelt Red Ware (Salado Polychrome)

Left: Field school student finding a perforated plate sherd on the floor

People from the Kayenta region of northeastern Arizona left the area during the late 1200s, bringing their beliefs, traditions, and “ways of doing” with them. Their traditions merged with local Mogollon traditions and eventually became recognizable materially as Salado. Perforated plates are one of the key material markers of Salado and their Kayenta ancestors. At the Gila River Farm Site, we found several pieces of perforated plates as well as fragments of Maverick Mountain pottery (which is associated with Kayenta) and Roosevelt Red Ware (which is associated with Salado).



Above: Mimbres Black-on-white pottery fragments

Right: Photo of cobble masonry and floor fragment associated with Classic Mimbres architecture, beneath a Cliff Phase room



One surprising thing that we found during excavation of the northernmost room block at the site was evidence of an earlier Mimbres occupation. Even though the rooms had been heavily disturbed by pot-hunters, through our limited excavation we were able to discern the cimientos of a Cliff Phase room block above an earlier Classic Mimbres structure from the eleventh century. Not many Cliff Phase villages were built directly on top of Classic Mimbres structures, so this is an unusual and surprising combination that we will explore further next season.

Conclusion

The 2016 field season at the Gila River Farm Site showed that excavations of a looted, pot hunted, and disturbed site can still yield valuable information. Despite past human interference (both historic looting and modern agricultural activity) excavations revealed intact architecture and artifacts. Future excavations at the Gila River Farm Site will continue to provide information on site structure, population densities, traditions, and lives of the past residents of the site.

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The Davises, our hosts in Cliff

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