INTRODUCTION

During three field seasons, between 2015 and 2017, the Upper Gila Preservation Archaeology Field School conducted pedestrian survey of the portions of the Burro Creek Cienaga located on the landholdings of the Pitchfork Ranch. The survey targeted the flood plain of the Burro Creek and the first terrace above the flood plain. Four previously recorded sites were relocated, while another 30 sites were recorded for the first time. Sites range from isolated Paleoindian artifacts to 20th century homesteads.

The survey results are used here in an analysis of Pithouse and Classic Mimbres settlement patterns to help contextualize this section of the Burro Creek within the broader archaeological pattern of the Mimbres region.

Our primary research question involves the transition from the Pithouse period (A.D. 200-1000) to the Classic Mimbres period (A.D. 1000-1130), which is marked by both aggregation of populations into large villages and intensification of agricultural production (e.g. Hegmon 2002:325). Our project aims to evaluate if this transition evident along the Burro Creek and if preferences for site location changed along this transition.

RESULTS

Our analysis indicates that two distinct settlement patterns were pursued along this section of the Burro Creek: one pattern in the narrower, northern half of the survey area, and one pattern along the widening flood plain of the southernmost section of the survey area.

We have established that:
1. The amount of arable land per site is consistent across the Pithouse-Classic Mimbres transition, for both the southern and northern sections of the survey area (see Figure 3). However, sites in the southern regions along the widening flood plain are proximate to much more arable land on average.
2. The number of sites in the northern area increased between the Pithouse period (n=3) and the Classic Mimbres period (n=7), while the number of sites in the southern area decreased (four Pithouse sites and two Classic Mimbres sites).
3. The smallest size classes of Mimbres sites (“Habitation” and “Hamlet” sites) are exclusive to the northern half of the survey area (see Figure 3).

On this basis, we conclude that:
1. Agricultural intensification in the northern half of the survey area took the form of investment in a series of smaller sites (“Habitation” and “Hamlet” size classes) along the length of Burro Creek. In contrast, aggregated populations could exploit the widening flood plain at the southern end of the survey area.
2. Availability of arable land led to greater depth of sedentism in the southern area, while Mimbres villages in the northern area were not built on top of some large Pithouse sites in unfavorable locations (like Pitch 5, located on a mesa top above a narrow section of flood plain).

These conclusions are not surprising given that prior research has identified variable settlement patterns across the Mimbres region in response to local environmental and geographic contexts (e.g. Hegmon et al. 2006), but this analysis helps fit the Burro Creek into the larger scope of research on the Pithouse-Classic Mimbres transition.

REFERENCES

