

Project Overview

Introduction

The Reserve Area Archaeological Project (RAAP) is a collaborative effort between the Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS) and the United States Forest Service (USFS). Centered in the greater Reserve region of the Gila National Forest in west-central New Mexico, this project brings together many datasets, including collections from the Field Museum's excavations (1939-1955), site data from the USFS and the New Mexico Archaeological Records Management Section (ARMS), paleoclimate data, and new research that to date has focused on non-invasive methods including geophysics and pedestrian survey.

The goals of the project are to examine human-environmental interactions, adaptive strategies, and social dynamics over time. We are also reevaluating regional chronology through radiocarbon dating on archived collections from Tularosa Cave and by revisiting and updating ceramic sequence data originally published more than half a century ago.

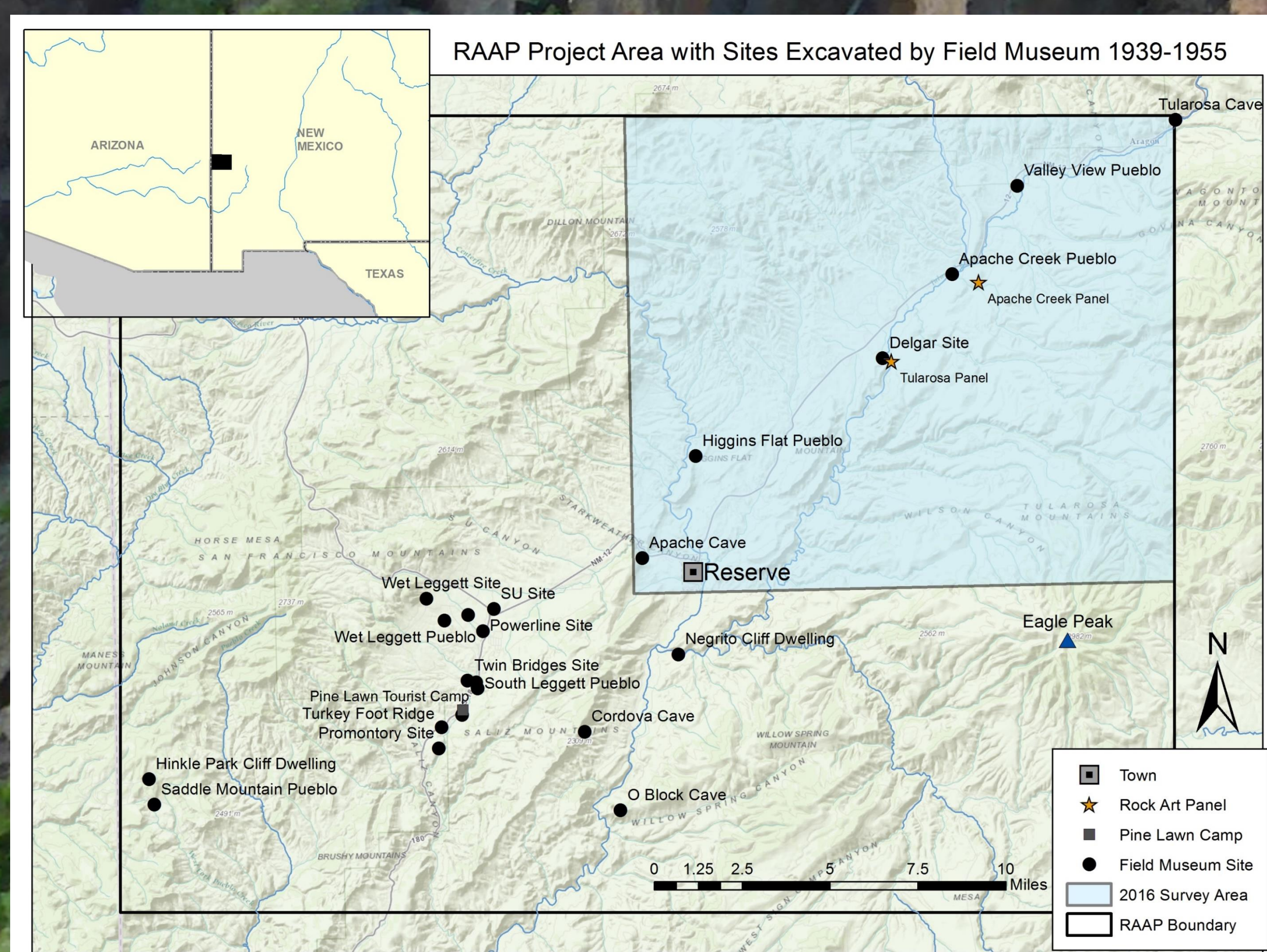


Figure 1: RAAP Project Location

Project Location

The RAAP area is defined by a rectangle extending from Hinkle Park Cliff Dwelling, at the southwest corner near the Arizona border, to Tularosa Cave, located northeast of Aragon, New Mexico, at the northeast corner (Figure 1). In 2016, we focused on the northeast quarter of the RAAP project area, where in 2015 we identified a large number of promising sites (Figures 1).

The Gila National Forest was once home to the Mogollon archaeological culture (ca. A.D. 200-1300). The region has traditionally received far less scholarly attention than other areas of the Southwest. This is one reason why the area has been seen as generally less populated and less sophisticated than other parts of the Southwest. We aim to change this narrative and demonstrate that the Reserve area contained substantial populations, in addition to serving as an important crossroads of interaction for groups from the north, south, east and west.

The Field Museum's Research

From 1939 to 1955, Paul Sidney Martin and John Rinaldo based the Field Museum's Archaeological Expedition to the Southwest at Pine Lawn, near the SU Site in the center of the current RAAP project area. Martin and Rinaldo conducted extensive archaeological survey and excavated or tested 32 sites, making substantive contributions to the definition of the Mogollon culture outlining regional culture history. Unfortunately, their work remains poorly published and the Field Museum collections remain only partially analyzed.

Survey Results

RAAP survey teams consist of professional archaeologists, high school students from the Museum's Teen Science Scholars program, and DMNS volunteers.

In all, we have covered more than 3,000 acres, documented 29 new sites and 68 isolated finds, and re-documented seven previously recorded sites (Table 1, Figure 3).

A total of 27 sites are located in the Gila National Forest; 7 are on private land; 2 straddle federal and private land.

Table 2. Site Occupations by Time Period

Time Period	Count
Early to Late Pithouse	1
Late Pithouse to Early Pueblo	1
Late Pithouse?	1
Early Pueblo	4
Late Pueblo	4
Early to Late Pueblo	12
Unknown Pueblo	3
Total	26

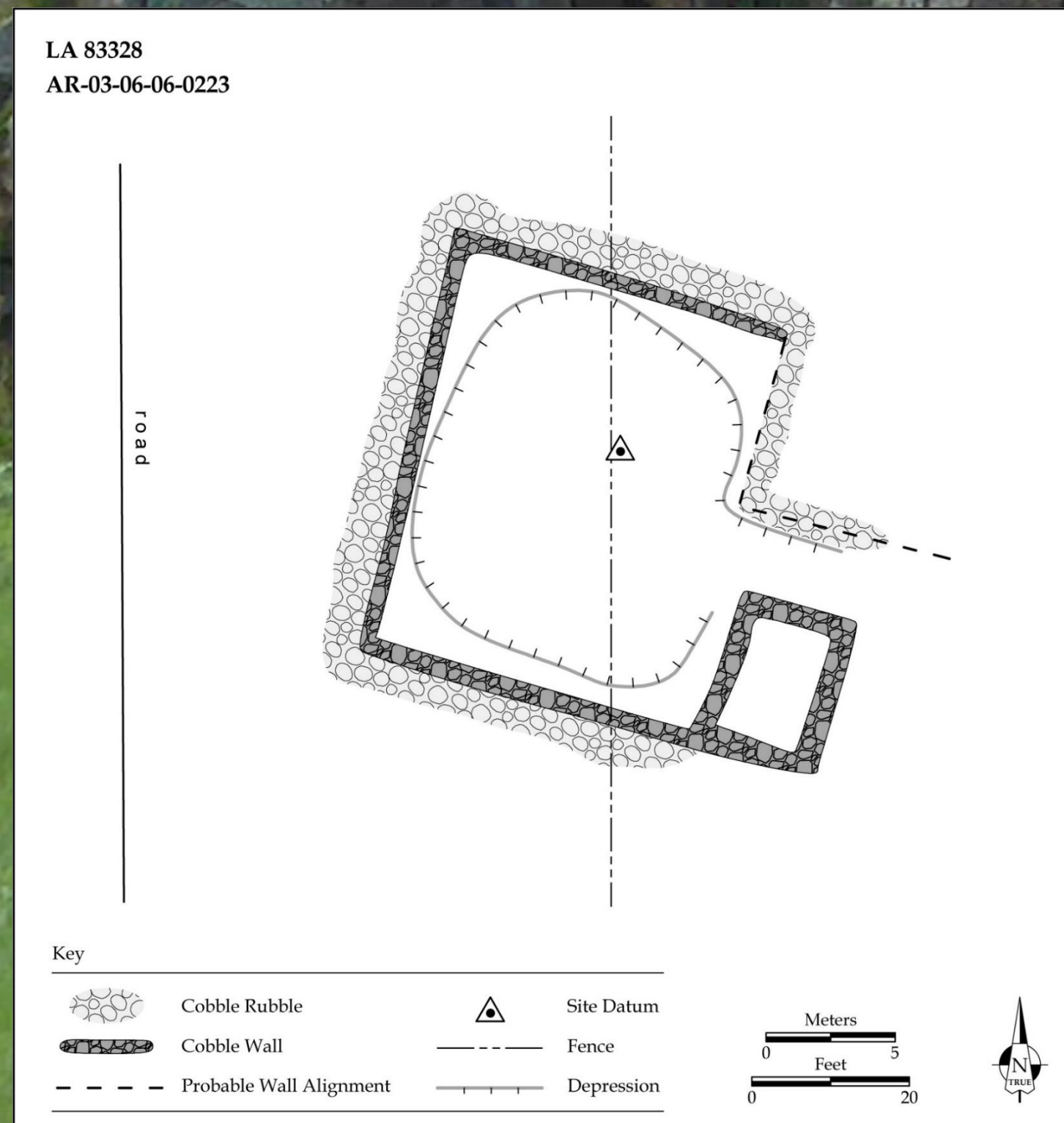


Figure 2: LA 83328: Isolated Great Kiva near Torriette Lakes

Seven sites contain no architectural features or lack diagnostic ceramics, and may therefore only be classified as Unknown Mogollon (n=5) or Unspecified Mimbres Mogollon (n=2); the latter have non-diagnostic Mimbres White Ware sherds.

Three sites have both non-diagnostic architecture and non-diagnostic artifacts; they may be prehistoric field houses or agricultural features, but we cannot assign cultural-temporal affiliation at this time (Table 3).

Several of the sites also had historic artifacts and components; one had two historic graves.

Table 1. Summary of Acreage and Number of Sites by Survey Block.

Survey Block	Ownership	Acreage	No. Sites	Methods
Higgins Flat	USFS	940	5	Block
Apache Creek	USFS	486	11	Block
Luna	USFS	457	1	Block
Tularosa	Private/USFS	389	12	Sample
Sector E	USFS	314	5	Block
Sector C	USFS	282	1	Block
Sector B	USFS	114	0	Block
Sector D	USFS	57	0	Block
Torriette Lakes	USFS	<1	1	Sample
Total		3040	36	

Temporal assignments for all sites are based on architectural remains and in-field artifact analysis.

One site dates from the Early (A.D. 200-600) through Late (A.D. 600-1000) Pithouse periods. Two sites have Late Pithouse occupations, one of which likely continues into the Early Pueblo period.

The majority (n = 23) of sites were occupied during the Pueblo Period (ca. A.D. 1000 - 1400). Four have Early Pueblo Period (A.D. 1000 - 1200) occupations; four have Late Pueblo Period (A.D. 1200 - 1400) occupations; 12 span both Early and Late Pueblo periods (Table 2).

Three sites have unknown Pueblo Period occupations; these have Puebloan architecture but lack temporally diagnostic ceramics. This group includes the isolated Great Kiva (LA 83328) near Torriette Lakes (Figure 2).



Table 3. Site Occupations by Time Period

Type	Count
Unknown Mogollon	5
Unspec. Mimbres Mogollon	2
Unknown, possibly prehistoric	3
Total	10

2017 and Beyond

Over the last several decades, archaeological surveys covering about 13% of the 2016 project area have been conducted but not published. Data from these surveys are preserved in (mostly) paper and (rarely) digital format at ARMS in Santa Fe. In March, 2016, we spent a week scanning 900+ site forms and survey reports for our database.

This database will guide upcoming research. An initial examination of 250 scanned forms indicates that there are numerous significant sites -- including many with between 20 and 120 rooms -- that have not been properly documented, much less analyzed and published. Most are from the Reserve through Tularosa phases (A.D. 1000-1300).

In 2016, four high school students from the DMNS Teen Science Scholar program accompanied us to the field. We documented 17 sites, including two Great Kivas. In 2017, we will focus on the Torriette Lakes region to better understand the area around the Torriette Lakes Great Kiva (Figures 2 and 3), all with an eye toward developing an excavation program in this region in 2018.

RAAP 2015 and 2016 Survey Areas

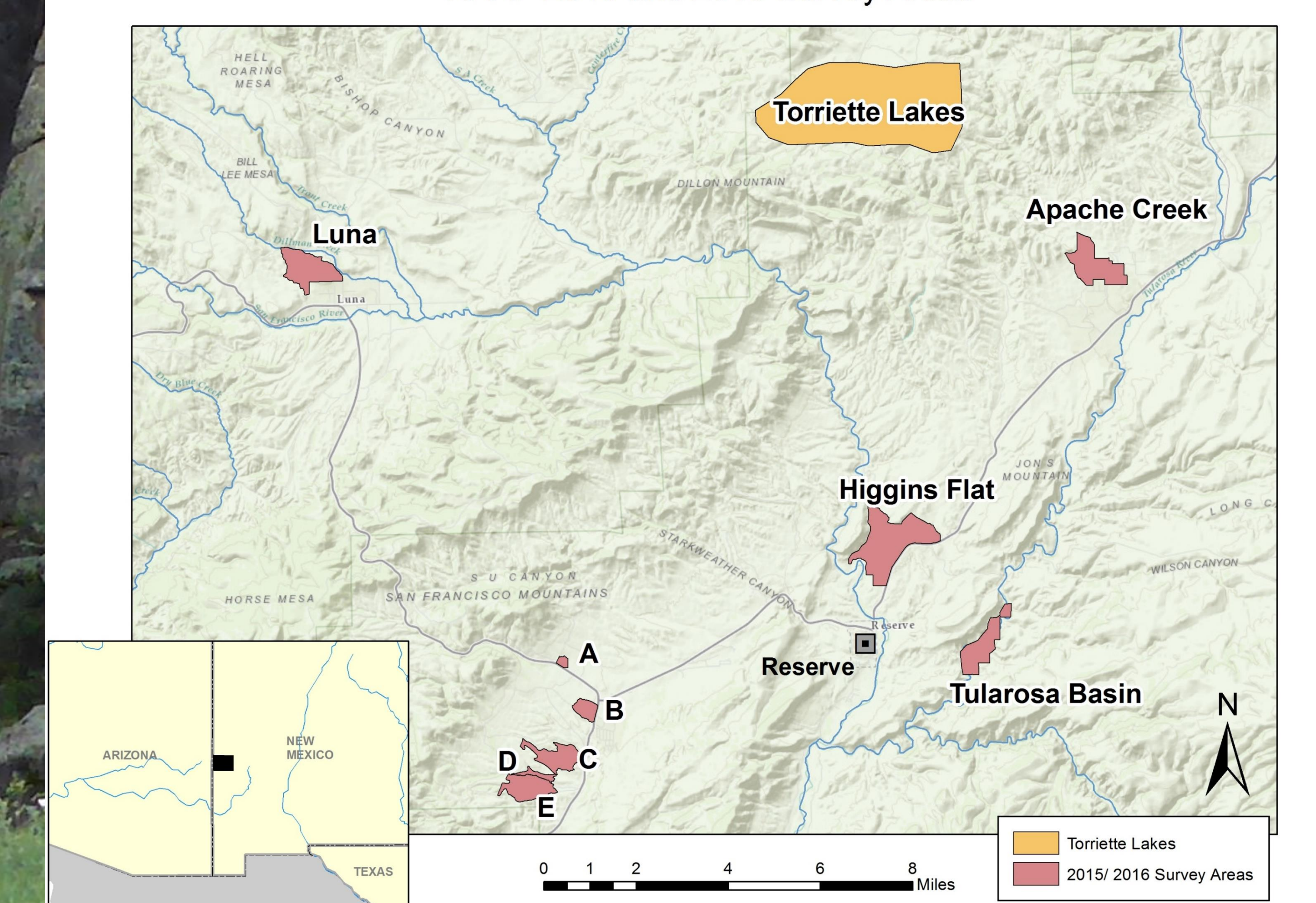


Figure 3: RAAP 2016 Project Location



Future Research

Our work demonstrates that the greater Reserve region was highly populated in the past, especially during the A.D. 1000-1300 time period. By revisiting museum collections from the 40s and 50s, compiling information from old site forms, refining old survey data, and visiting new areas, we are beginning to draw a more complete picture of the chronology, intensity, and nature of past occupation in the area. This research will lead to a better understanding of how settlement patterns changed over time, how these changes relate to past climatic changes, and how people in the Reserve region interacted with their neighbors in surrounding areas.