In southwest New Mexico. Salado occupations (AD 1300–1450) are known as Cliff phase and characterized by adobe construction and Roosevelt Redware pottery. Archaeologists working primarily in the Mimbres Valley have proposed that Cliff phase sites represented short-term sedentary occupations by farmers who moved frequently between valleys. Frequent movement allowed valley resources to recover between short occupations.

This study evaluates the short-term sedentism model in the upper Gila area by focusing on three large villages: Dinwiddie, Ormond Village, and Gila River Farm. These sites generally meet expectations for the short-term sedentism model, although some sites occupations here were longer than those in the Mimbres Valley.

The Short-Term Sedentism Model

The short-term sedentism model is based on three key characteristics of Cliff phase villages in the Mimbres Valley:

1. Lack of trash middens (indicating short village occupations)
2. General lack of remodeling and superimposed features (indicating short room use)
3. Substantial variability between valleys and widespread distribution of artifact styles (indicating highly stressed populations and noncontemporaneous valley occupations)

In order to test the model in the Cliff Valley, we collected various types of architectural data that provide information on the length of site occupations, length and intensity of room use, and site construction sequences.

• Wall footings or concretions are stones forming the bases of adobe walls. Variations in footing construction reveal temporal and/or cultural variability.
• Adobe used for wall construction may vary within sites, showing temporal and/or cultural variability in construction techniques.
• Site layout, wall corner alignments, and bonding and abutting patterns in walls indicate how quickly villages were built and how they were used over time.
• Structural remodeling of rooms or floor features indicates the length of room use (whether through repeated reoccupations or continuous occupation).
• Floor relaying in rooms indicates the length of occupations, as more foot traffic causes more floor wear.
• Trash middens and trash-filled rooms indicate a longer site occupation than a lack of these features. Trash under room floors indicates whether rooms were added gradually (after residents of preexisting rooms disposed of trash) or quickly (before trash had time to accumulate).

Several types of architectural data that provide information on distribution of artifact styles (indicating thinly spread occupations) and trash inclusion indicate occasional growth at all three sites. Gila River Farm and Ormond Village grew more rapidly. Variation in ceramic and stone assemblages at Dinwiddie suggest comparatively slower growth.

Remodeling was rare at Gila River Farm and Ormond Village, and more common at Dinwiddie. Floor reoccupations were common at Gila River Farm and Dinwiddie, but rare at Ormond Village. Although most rooms were not used for long enough to require remodeling, rooms were occasionally occupied long enough to need floor repair. This suggests these sites were used more intensively than previously thought, despite the scarcity of trash.

The lack of trash middens supports the short-term sedentism model. Sites were not inhabited long enough to produce substantial amounts of trash. Similarly, a general lack of trash under floors indicates less intense occupations despite occasional growth of rooms.

Although expectations for the short-term sedentism model were met, the Cliff Valley sites show more evidence for intermediate use than the Mimbres Valley sites. The model was based on site-structural remodeling, more frequent floor reoccupations, and variability in construction between rooms and among the three sites at an individual and longer occupations in the Cliff Valley.

Resource depletion has been a recurring problem for sedentary agriculturalists worldwide. In other regions, approaches to soil depletion included setting fields to fallow without removing crops, adding soil amendments. Short-term sedentism may have allowed for and other wild resources to regenerate at a valley scale, addressing multiple sources of depletion. Continuing research in soils, plants, and animal remains, and more precise dating of Cliff phase occupations will allow us to investigate the extent to which short-term sedentism eased pressure on local resources.

Insights into the Salado Phenomenon from the Cliff Valley

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During the late 1300s, farmers from the Kayenta area of northeastern Arizona left their homeland and moved southeast. As they settled in southern Arizona and New Mexico, their traditions interfaced with Mogollon and Hohokam practices already present in these areas. The Dinwiddie Site is an 80–100-room adobe pueblo located west of Cliff, NM on Duck Creek west of the Gila River. Three room blocks are preserved. A fourth was destroyed due to mechanical disturbance. The site was partially excavated in the late 1960s by Ronald Wallace and excavated in 2013–2015 by the Archaeology Southwest/University of Arizona Preservation Archaeology Field School.

• Walls foundations include single- and double-coursed (accelerated growth)
• Walls don’t line up well (accelerated growth)
• Several rooms have remodeled walls and floor features (long use)
• Several rooms floors replastered (continuous use)
• No clear midden or trash under floors (less intense use)

The three Cliff Valley sites examined here generally fit the short-term sedentism model, although they also show some interesting variability.

• Wall foundations, adobe materials, and wall alignments indicate occasional growth at all three sites. Gila River Farm and Ormond Village grew more rapidly. Variation in ceramics and stone assemblages at Dinwiddie suggest comparatively slower growth.

Remodeling was rare at Gila River Farm and Ormond Village, and more common at Dinwiddie. Frequent reoccupations were common at Gila River Farm and Dinwiddie, but rare at Ormond Village. Although most rooms were not used for long enough to require remodeling, rooms were occasionally occupied long enough to need floor repair. This suggests these sites were used more intensively than previously thought, despite the scarcity of trash.

• The lack of trash middens supports the short-term sedentism model. Sites were not inhabited long enough to produce substantial amount of trash. Similarly, a general lack of trash under floors indicates less intense occupation despite occasional growth of rooms.

Although expectations for the short-term sedentism model were met, the Cliff Valley sites show more evidence for intermediate use than the Mimbres Valley sites. The model was based on site-structural remodeling, more frequent floor reoccupations, and variability in construction between rooms and among the three sites at an individual and longer occupations in the Cliff Valley.