Archaeological Survey in Southeastern Arizona: Partnering with Land Owners and Local Informants

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Southeastern Arizona is an understudied area of the American Southwest once broadly occupied by prehistoric groups. Historically, many Native-American sites in the Duncan-York Valley were extensively looted or systematically destroyed often in relation to activities such as agricultural leveling or construction. Particularly hard hit were the large, late prehistoric, aggregated communities famous for their ceramic culture. The majority of these sites lie on private property.

How do we communicate to local residents the importance of preserving and recording the valley’s cultural resources without appearing to threaten their ownership, or condemn past pot-hunting activities?

In our goal to document, and ideally, preserve the remains of vulnerable sites, the University of Texas at San Antonio and Colinas Cultural Resource Consulting have attempted to establish relationships of trust and respect with valley residents during their 2014 – 2017 field seasons.

Contacts with local community leaders, one-on-one engagement, and public outreach have enabled productive dialogue and access.

The valley’s archaeology remains highly vulnerable to human disturbance, heightening the need for strong local partnerships to preserve the sites that make up its remarkable occupational pattern.

The 14 sites on this reach of the Gila River are situated in an ideal setting heavily utilized in the prehistoric period.

The Gila River constricts just north of the cluster of sites, forming a reach boundary that offers a dependable source of moisture ideal for farming.

Five early agricultural sites on private land are testament to its attraction as early as the late Archaic period.

Two substantial Salado sites (Clark and Richards) and one probable multi-component site (Lunt Farm) on private property are located near extensive agriculturally productive soils in the Duncan Basin.

Both the Richards and Lunt Farm sites will be formally recorded in 2018.

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