

# ARCHAEOLOGY IN TUCSON

Vol. 2, No. 5

Newsletter of the Institute for American Research

Fall 1988

## ANCIENT ADOBE WALLS UNCOVERED

As the memories of the fierce summer heat fade slightly, the Los Morteros archaeological team is spending long days at their analysis tables and computers, carrying out the archaeologist's most difficult task—making sense of the masses of information that were collected from the field. In about one year, the first descriptive report will be published, then another year will pass before the final synthesis volume is ready. Some highlights of the results are recounted now. For those who missed earlier newsletters, Los Morteros is a large Hohokam village located near the north end of the Tucson Mountains.

One of the most interesting and time-consuming finds was a set of adobe walls that dated to the Tanque Verde phase, roughly A.D. 1150 to 1300. The adobe walls are called compound walls by archaeologists, because they originally enclosed a small group of at least four rooms. Historical accounts gave clues that there might be one or more compounds at the north end of Los Morteros, but cultivation of the site area had destroyed any surface evidence of architecture. As the compound was slowly exposed, archaeologists could trace the scars where the plow had scraped along the floors of houses and gouged deeply into the adobe walls. Because of this damage, it was not possible to locate the western side of the compound wall, but the maximum length of the enclosed living area was about 100 feet. The length was at least 40 feet.

The Tanque Verde phase was noted in an earlier *AIT Newsletter* as having been a time of architectural change, and this was certainly apparent at the north end of Los Morteros. The compound wall had been remodeled at least twice; one of those times the north wall was extended about 23 feet to the north. Several rooms had evidence of remodeling as well. Most houses were apparently built on the surface, and most of the adobe walls were about 12 inches thick at their bases. To give them greater strength, some had been reinforced with wooden posts 4 - 7 inches in diameter. Near the center of the compound was a large, nearly square pithouse that had massive adobe walls that were up to 20 inches thick. The adobe used in the walls was not bricks; rather course after course of mud was laid down, creating a solid wall.

Outside the compound, both pithouses and rectangular surface structures were found, but thus far these houses appear to represent groups of only a few structures, much smaller than the cluster of at least four that made up the compound.

This variability is interesting for several reasons. First, studies on a world-wide basis have shown that there is a strong relationship between the amount of effort that goes into house construction and the status of the residents of that house. Thus the compound may be an indicator of the higher social ranking of a portion of the population that lived at Los Morteros. Unfortunately, most of these structures had been cleaned out of any useful items at the time they were abandoned, so it will be difficult to use the artifacts as a way to further explore this idea.

Another possibility is that walled compounds reflect an increasing concern with defense during the Hohokam Classic period. The height of the compound wall could not be determined at Los Morteros due to the plow damage, but a height in the range of three to six feet would be predicted. Other evidence at Los Morteros of increasing warfare is the presence of Tanque Verde phase houses on the steep slopes of the rocky hill just west of the recent excavations. Similar hillside and hilltop sites are known throughout southern Arizona for this time period.

The area excavated this summer is just outside the area that will become the Los Morteros Regional Archaeological Park. Within the park, a full range of archaeological remains is expected, from the early occupation at around A.D. 800 to 900 up through the Tanque Verde phase, which ended in 1300. There is a large ballcourt with in the planned park area, and the results from this summer raise the possibility that there are additional compounds. There is still much to learn about Los Morteros and the many changes that occurred during its occupation. The preservation of this area as a park helps ensure that future Tucsonans can continue to ask questions about and appreciate firsthand the accomplishments of those who came before us.

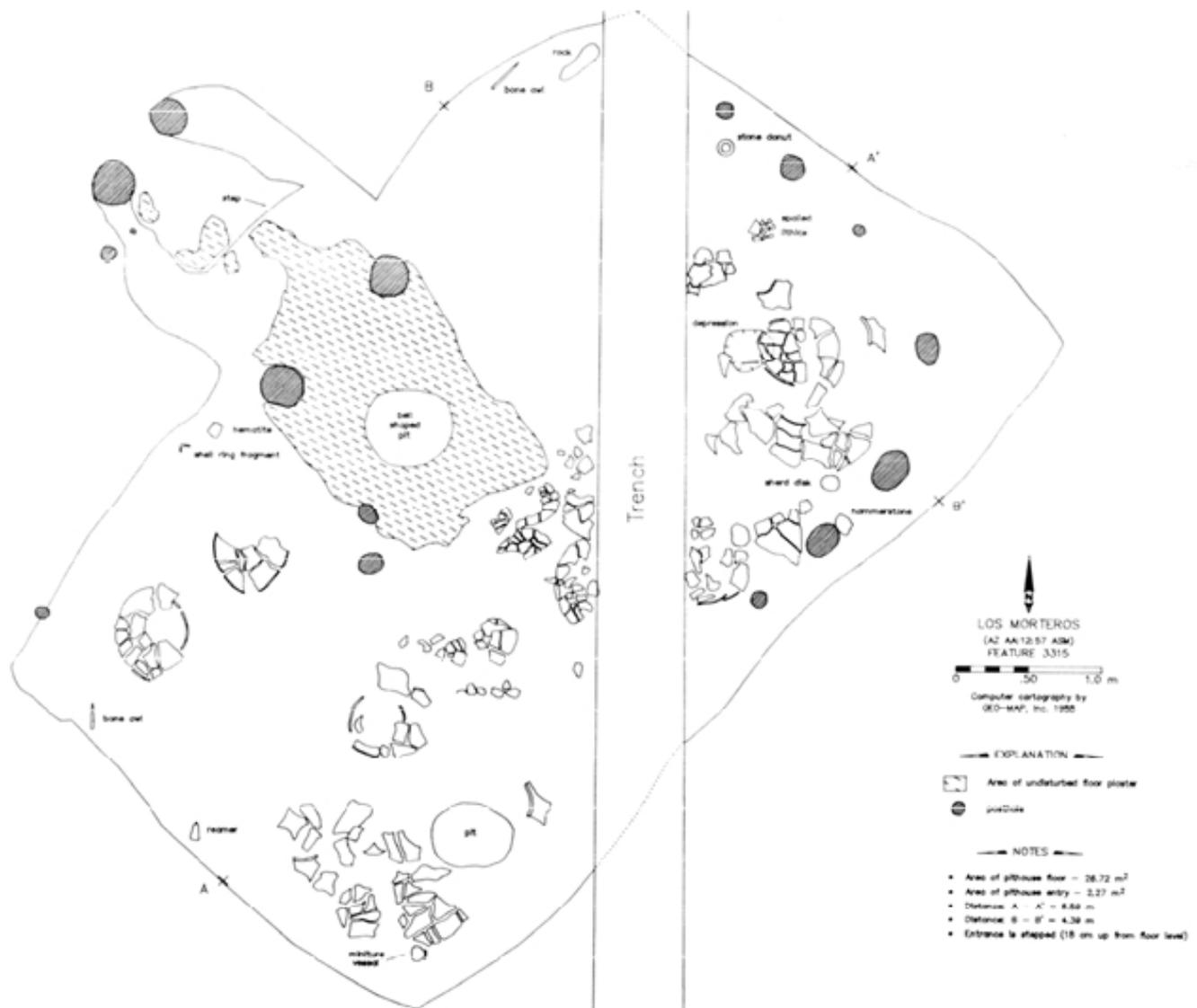
## THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM AT LOS MORTEROS

Volunteers have played an important role throughout the Los Morteros project. During the testing phase volunteers dug one meter by one meter excavation units to obtain controlled artifact collections for dating features. During the excavation phase, volunteers spent six Saturdays completing full excavations of houses that otherwise could only have been sampled. Other volunteers worked alongside our weekday field crew, and still others helped out in the lab. The volunteers are listed on page 3.

The illustration at the bottom of this page is one of the Los Morteros pithouses that was sampled by our field crew and was then completed by volunteers. Feature 3315 was one of the largest pithouses excavated at Los Morteros. It was initially used as a residence during Early Rincon times, sometime between A.D. 950 and 1000. Later the house was converted to a storage structure.

The large storage pit located just inside the entryway of the house probably once held a family's vital reserves of corn, but it had been filled with trash before this house burned. Many of the pots that were crushed on the floor when this house burned contained corn and other stored seeds.

Most of the pots that were crushed on the floor when this house burned were plainware jars, but some important painted pottery was also found. One vessel of Early Rincon Red-on-brown, a pottery type made in the Tucson Basin, was found, as was one vessel of Sacaton Red-on-buff from the Phoenix area. Situations like this where we can be confident that pottery types from two separate areas were actually being used together are very important for documenting how the pottery types relate to one another. This is just a glimpse of the volunteer's contributions.



## LINDA MAYRO NEW PIMA COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGIST

Linda Mayro, who has been Projects Manager with the Institute for American Research since our local beginnings in 1982, starts her new position as the Archaeologist for Pima County on October 17. Pima County is the first county in the state of Arizona to add an archaeologist to its staff. This is a very positive development, and it is a step toward implementing Pima County's strong commitment to preserving the rich prehistoric and historic resources that are within its boundaries.

Linda's skills will be sorely missed at the Institute, but those same skills will help ensure her success in her new position. We all wish her our very best.



### INSTITUTE STAFF LECTURE SCHEDULE

Several of the Institute staff will be giving talks or presenting papers this Fall. You may want to plan to attend. The talks to the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society (AAHS) are all held at the Biological Sciences West Building on the University of Arizona Campus at 7:30 on Monday nights. *Archaeology in Tucson* members are welcome to attend these meetings, and there is no charge.

October 29. Mary Bernard-Shaw and William Doelle are presenting a paper at a symposium on Prehistoric Irrigation in Arizona at the Arizona Archaeological Council Meetings to be held at Pueblo Grande Museum in Phoenix.

November 9. William Doelle will speak to the Desert Foothills chapter of the Arizona Archaeological Society at 7:30 PM at the Adult Community Center in Cave Creek, AZ. Topic: "Recent Archaeological Research in the Northern Tucson Basin."

November 21. Henry Wallace will speak to the AAHS on "Perceiving the Hohokam Lifestyle through their Ceramics."

January 16. William Doelle will speak to the AAHS on "Tucson and Phoenix: Evidence for Prehistoric Rivalry." Paul Fish of the Arizona State Museum will provide an alternative view of this same issue. A tour of several Northern Tucson Basin sites is being planned for a weekend after the talk.

## THANKS, LOS MORTEROS VOLUNTEERS

The Institute staff has enjoyed the opportunity to get to know you better and we deeply appreciate your willingness to give of your time. Thanks so much to the following people.

Testing phase: Connie Allen, Harry N. Ashby, Mary Bernard-Shaw, John A. Bishop, Kay Burk, Jim Burr, Gloria Chivers, Bob and Valerie Conforti, Cindy Gibbs, Sky Gradillas, Walt and Erin Grassie, Tom Hartzell, Stephanie Holding, Bobbie Lee, Joan Lloyd, Joan P. Manemann, Betsy Marshall, Susan Matthes, William T. Morris, John Murray, Barry Perron, Donald Reser, Doris Rickard, Kay Rosenow, Darlene Smyth, Barbara Snyder, Mike Squires, Joyce St. John, Josh St. John, Wendy Tolleson, Sarah Tuttle, Betty J. Wall, Pattie Whitley, Russ Wilde

Summer excavations: Bill Attwood, Janet Chumbley, Bob and Valerie Conforti, Richard and Susan Ciolek-Torrello, Allen Dart, Bill Doelle, Sheila Donnelly, Alan Ferg, Scott Gongoly, Linda Gregonis, Darlene Heemstra, Jim Holmlund, Jerry Howard, Bruce and Lisa Huckell, Ben and Liz Huckell, Carli Hummel, Paul Knapp, Salena Littler, Judy Looper, Cindy Mendelson, Albert Morales, John Murray, John Nowlin, Don Reser, Luis Rodriguez, Nancy Russell, Mark Severson, Rob Surface, Sharon Urban, Henry and Cindy Wallace, Phyllis Wallace, Russ Wilde,.

Laboratory volunteers: Bobbie Lee Rivers, Kay Shirley Rosenow, Pattie Whitley.

Due to the large number of people who helped us out, we are sure that we probably missed some of you. We apologize, and if you give us a call we would like to get our records straight.

The Institute for American Research is a private, nonprofit, research and educational organization that specializes in the preservation of the American past. The Institute was founded in 1968, and its headquarters are located at 300 North Los Carneros Road, Goleta, CA 93117. Telephone: 805-964-3549.

In Arizona, the Institute specializes in the archaeology of the Tucson Basin and southern Arizona. *Archaeology in Tucson (AIT)* is a membership program of the Institute for American Research, and the AIT Newsletter is published quarterly. The Institute's Arizona offices are located at 245 South Plumer, Suite 14, Tucson, AZ 85719. Telephone: 602-622-6663.

Annual Membership Rates. Individual (\$10), Family (\$15), Supporting (\$25), Sustaining (\$100), Patron (\$500). Corporate Rates: Active (\$100), Supporting (\$200), Sustaining (\$500).

INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN RESEARCH



**INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN RESEARCH**

*Archaeology in Tucson*  
245 South Plumer, Suite 14  
Tucson, Arizona 85719