

ARCHAEOLOGY IN TUCSON

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Newsletter of the Center for Desert Archaeology

October 1991

Volunteers Aid Site Preservation

Coyote Mountains National Register Nomination Submitted

Once again, *Archaeology in Tucson* volunteers have played a vital role in nominating a prehistoric archaeological district to the National Register of Historic Places. Those who have followed past *AIT* activities are already aware that the Center for Desert Archaeology has undertaken a number of National Register nomination projects. The first nomination was for the Valencia site in 1983, and the Sutherland Wash National Register district followed in 1987. The impressive Romero Ruin is located within the Sutherland Wash district (see related story on page 7).

In 1988-1989 volunteer survey was completed in the Gunsight Mountain Archaeological District, southwest of Tucson along the east side of the Altar Valley. The National Register nomination for that district has now cleared all of its in-state reviews and has been forwarded to Washington, D.C., where the Keeper of the National Register will soon make a final decision on whether the Gunsight district will be added to the nation's foremost listing of historical and archaeological sites.

More recently, *AIT* members participated in the National Register nomination project for another archaeological district along the west side of the Altar Valley. This was the Coyote Mountains Archaeological District survey project, which just came to an end in September 1990. The Coyotes are the rugged range of mountains just south of the highway from Tucson to Ajo (State Route 86) and northeast of Kitt Peak, the mountain where the University of Arizona has its astronomical observatory.

The importance of the west side of the Altar Valley as a National Register-quality district was realized by *AIT* member Jim Holmlund shortly after he began hiking and hunting along the southeast side of the Coyote Mountains in 1978. Noticing the remarkable density of Hohokam Classic period ruins there, Jim began conducting archaeological surveys in 1985 to identify the general cultural character of the region and to try and find a boundary between the Hohokam culture of the Tucson Basin and the Avra Valley, and the more southerly Trincheras culture centered in the Altar Valley of northern Sonora, Mexico. Jim found that the Coyote Mountains were well to the north of

the Hohokam/Trincheras culture boundary, firmly within the Hohokam territory.

After he had located most of the significant archaeological sites on the southeast flank of the Coyote Mountains, Jim persuaded Desert Archaeology, Inc.—the private archaeological consulting firm associated with the nonprofit Center for Desert Archaeology—to team up with his surveying and mapping company, GeoMap, Inc. The goal was to conduct an archaeological site recording and mapping project that would form the basis for nominating the Coyote Mountains Archaeological District to the National Register. Desert Archaeology was awarded a federal matching grant through the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office, and the project got under way in November 1989. From that time through August 1990, *AIT* volunteers helped Desert Archaeology record 26 archaeological sites and collect samples of artifacts from most of them. Meanwhile, GeoMap was recording other sites and precisely mapping seven walled-in compounds that the Hohokam had built in the area.

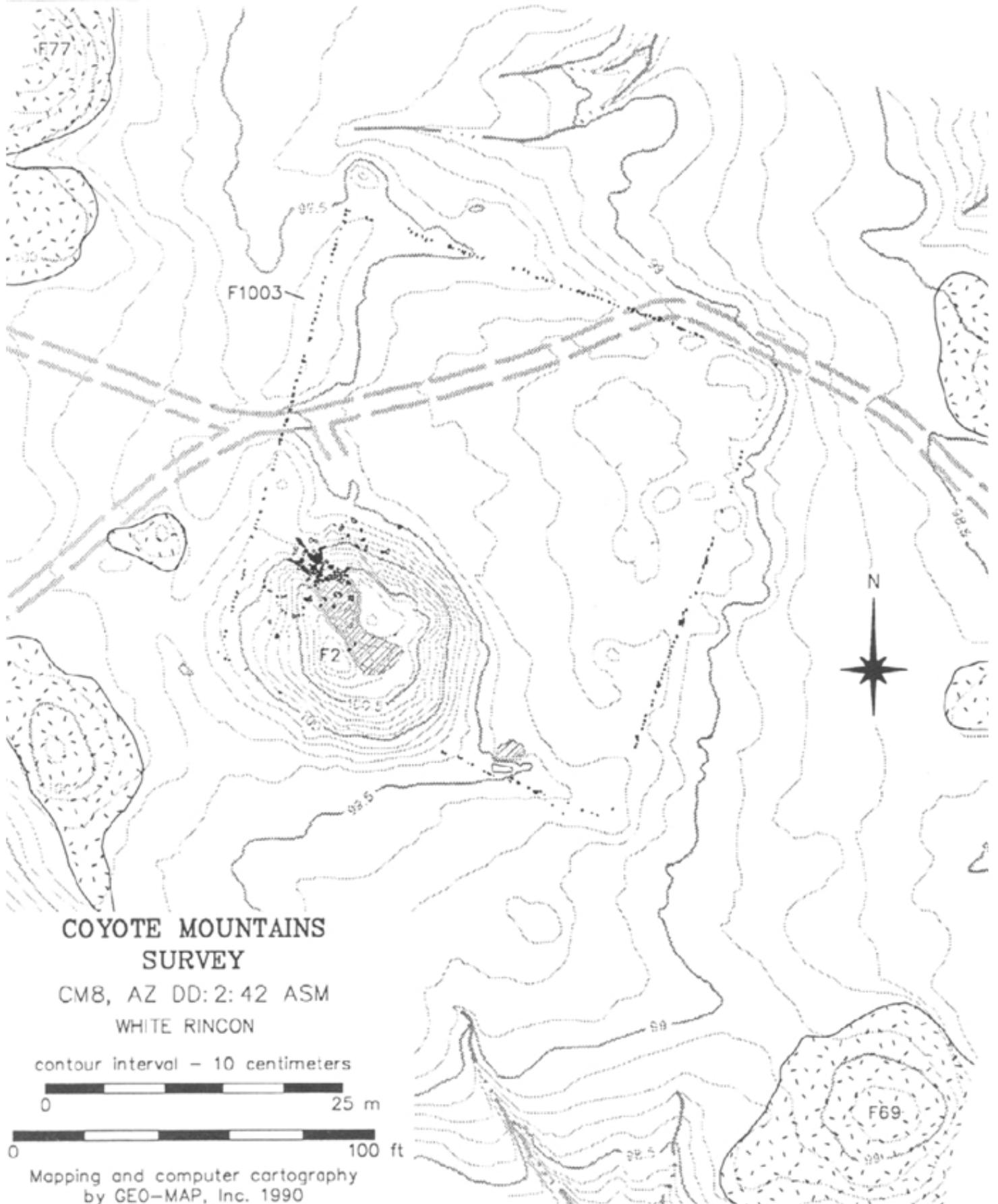
Some of the archaeological sites found in the Coyote Mountains district exhibit unusually high frequencies of stone artifacts compared to ceramics, and some Archaic period projectile points were discovered during the survey, so it seems that some of the sites were first occupied during the Archaic period, between 7500 B.C. and A.D. 200. However, most of the prehistoric sites were occupied later, by the Hohokam.

Several earthen mounds studied at the recorded archaeological sites yielded pottery types that represent the Canada del Oro, Rillito, Early Rincon, and Middle



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Map of the compound wall, platform mound, and nearby trash mounds at site DD:2:42 in the Coyote Mountain Archaeological District. Top of the platform mound has been seriously damaged by pothunters. By Jim Holmlund of GeoMap, Inc.

Rincon phases (roughly AD. 750-1100). However, the information collected during the Desert Archaeology/Geo-Map project suggests that most of the sites were first occupied during the Late Rincon subphase (AD. 1100-1150), and that some of them continued in use until after AD. 1275, late in the Classic period. Among the ruins of the Late Rincon Classic era are the remains of at least 10 walled compounds. Five of these are associated with "platform mounds"—large, formally constructed mounds that are either attached directly to the walls of the compounds or standing inside them, and apparently serving a ceremonial or civic function. All of the platform mound-and compound sites include other earth mounds that are either trash heaps or ruins of above-ground houses, and some of the sites include agricultural features and rock art.

Four other Hohokam settlements in the area also contain walled compounds. At three of these sites, large mounds just *outside* of the compounds could be platform mounds, but because the compounds are not actually surrounding or attached to the mounds (as has been the case for almost all other Hohokam platform mounds known), it is unclear whether these mounds are true platform mounds. All three of these sites also contain numerous other trash mounds and house-ruin mounds outside the compounds. The only other walled-compound site is unique because it contains two compounds, along with several beautiful petroglyph panels and some bedrock mortars, but no identifiable trash mounds or house-ruin mounds.

At least 13 sites without compounds are identifiable as Hohokam settlements with dense household refuse deposits, including definite trash mounds. Another six Hohokam sites contain only limited evidence of habitation, such as one or two mounds interpreted as ruins of adobe or cobble-walled structures, or small trash deposits that are nonetheless dense and varied. These six sites are interpreted as farmsteads used only for small-scale habitation, perhaps for only a part of each year. Surrounding many of the settlements and farmsteads are check-dams and rock piles believed to be agricultural features. One of the sites recorded during the project consists almost entirely of agricultural cobble piles.

Another site in the Coyote Mountains Archaeological District was recorded in 1942 by Emil W. Haury, the world-renowned archaeology professor at the University of Arizona. This site, and several others recently found in the district by Jim Holmlund, are examples of *trincheras* sites—steep mountainsides where large terraces were built up. *Trincheras* sites have most often been interpreted as prehistoric fortifications, but recent studies indicate that such sites in southern Arizona exhibit significant diversity. Many were used for habitation, and evidence of hillside farming is often

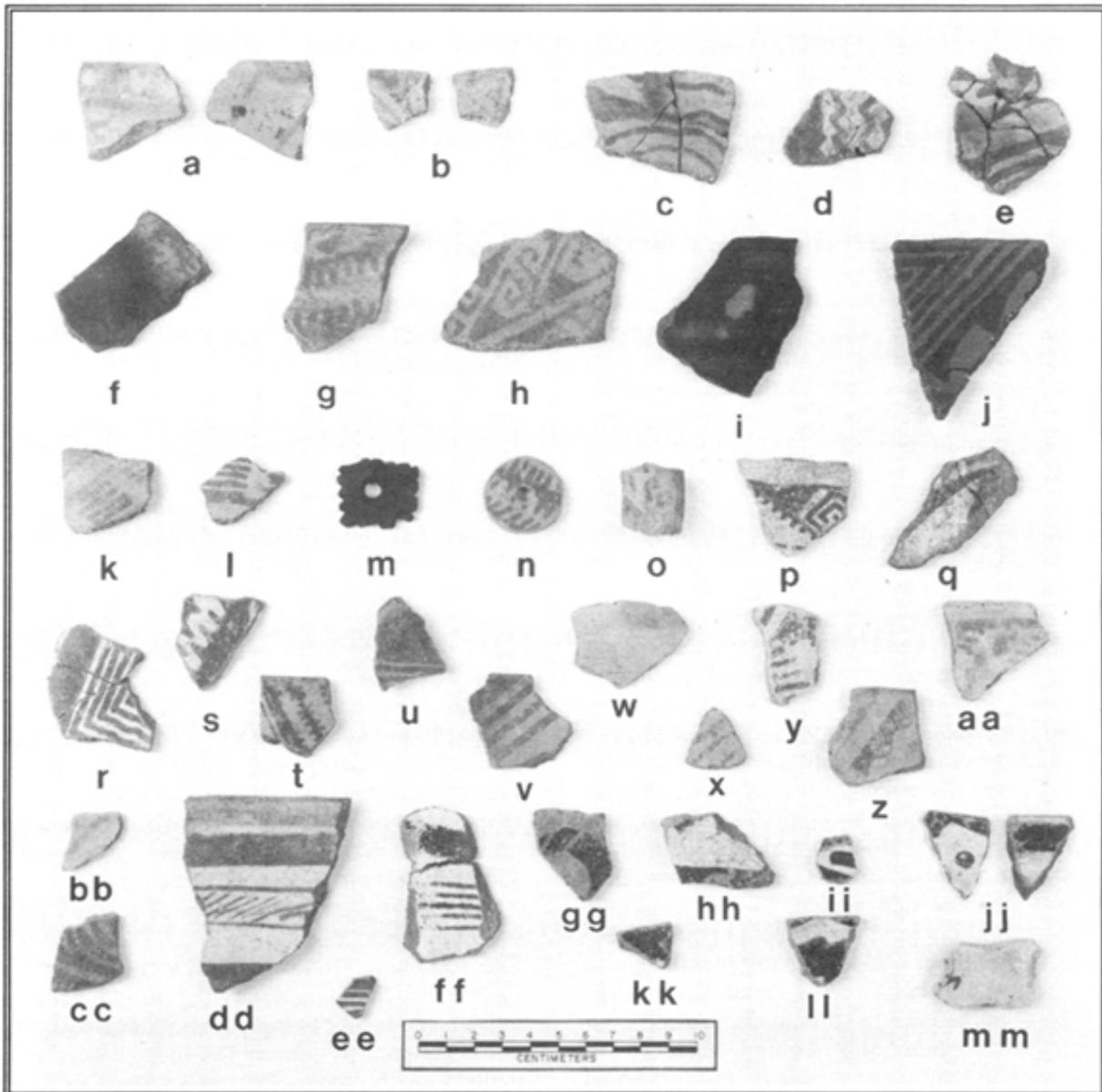
present as well. Dr. Chris Downum, who has studied these terraced sites extensively at the University of Arizona, notes that they are located approximately where the Phoenix Basin and Tucson Basin Hohokam subtraditions came together. This leads him to suggest that the *trincheras* were built in highly visible, upland locations by subgroups within some Tucson-area Classic period communities, at least partly to fulfill a symbolic purpose that is not yet fully understood.

An important aspect of the Coyote Mountains archaeology is its spectacular rock art, including both petroglyphs and pictographs. One finding of the Desert Archaeology/Geo-Map project was that a magnificent Hohokam petroglyph boulder now displayed at the Kitt Peak Observatory came from one of the archaeological sites in the Coyote Mountains Archaeological District. This boulder, which contains many human and animal petroglyphs, plus one of only two Hohokam petroglyphic maps known to exist, is only one example of the array of rock art in the district.

Most of the rock art consists of petroglyphs. Some occur along the base of the mountains within platform-mound sites and other settlements, but most are confined to sites without evidence of habitation. Interestingly, pictographs are more numerous in the Coyote Mountains district than in any other part of the Hohokam cultural region. The district's rock paintings occur in caves, shelters, and under overhanging rocks, and they include colors of black, gray, yellow, green, white, and at least three shades of red and orange.

The remaining Hohokam sites were utilized for more limited activities, some having to do with plant or animal food processing, others apparently used for nonsubsistence purposes. The food processing sites are defined on the basis of a small artifact inventory, lack of architectural remains or significant trash accumulations, and presence of roasting pits, rock rings, tabular knives, bedrock mortars or metates, portable ground stone tools, or other features or artifacts that could be interpreted in terms of food collecting or processing activities.

In contrast, two sites discovered during the Desert Archaeology/Geo-Map project were interpreted as limited activity sites *not* used for food processing, because of their unusual locations and the presence of uncommon rock features. One of these sites, located on a promontory halfway up a mountainside, consists of a circular area completely cleared of bedrock and gravels. In the center of this clearing is a small rock cairn, associated with a few sherds and one flake. The other site, situated in the "saddle" of a mountain ridge (a likely location for a prehistoric trail to have crossed the ridge), contains a light scatter of pottery plus two large rock piles similar to features that the historic Pima Indians acknowledged were trailside shrines.



Pottery recovered from the Coyote Mountains Survey. a-e: Cañada del Oro-Middle Rincon Red-on-brown; f-j: Late Rincon; k-v: Tanque Verde; w-z, Phoenix basin buffware; bb,cc: Rincon Polychrome; dd-ll: Gila Polychrome; mm: whiteware.

Finally, the Coyote Mountains Archaeological District contains Historic-period structures, reservoirs, roads, and other features used by ranchers and miners, plus a series of government survey markers. All of these features were apparently utilized after the United States purchased southern Arizona in 1853 and before World War II.

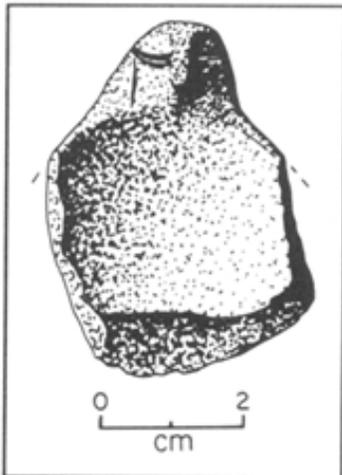
An important focus of research during the project was the analysis of artifacts, especially pottery, collected from the compounds, platform mounds, trash mounds, and house ruins in the district. Artifact studies have provided the best information about how old the various sites are and have demonstrated that Hohokam occupation of the area began as early as A.D. 750 and

lasted until after 1275. Perhaps most significantly, several attributes of the pottery—including relative frequencies of different types of redware, corrugated ware, and styles of plainware vessel handles and rims, plus the presence of Gila Polychrome pottery and particular design motifs in the Tanque Verde Red-on-brown ware—suggest that all of the possible platform-mound sites were occupied primarily during the latter half of the Classic period, after A.D. 1275.

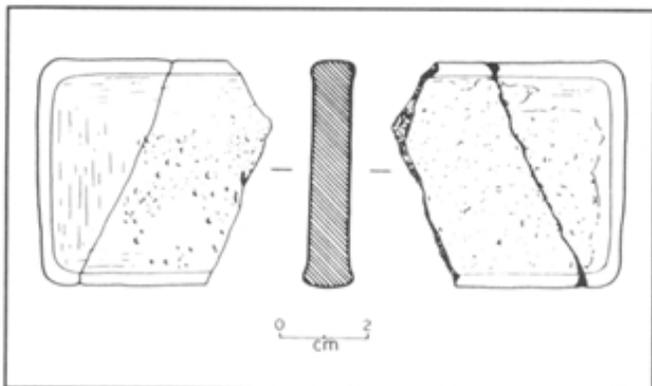
The Coyote Mountain district is particularly significant because it seems to be part of a cluster of platform mound sites that represents the westernmost extent of Classic period platform mounds in Arizona. The majority of the known platform mounds are located in

the Phoenix area, but the regional extent and diversity of these features is just now beginning to be fully appreciated. For example, the archaeological studies being funded by the Bureau of Reclamation at Lake Roosevelt have a major focus on platform mounds. Similarly, Paul Fish of the Arizona State Museum is heading an ongoing excavation of a Tucson Basin platform mound located in Marana, and the Center's volunteer survey with *AIT* members along the San Pedro is documenting another system of platform mounds (see related story on page 6). New information is accumulating at a rapid pace, but adequate regional synthesis takes some time.

By Allen Dart, Research Archaeologist, Center for Desert Archaeology.



Miniature pottery scoop with modeled human face. From *Los Morteros* project.



Top, bottom, and cross-section views of a ceramic palette recovered from the *Los Morteros* site.

Thanks!

The great success of the Coyote Mountains project was largely the result of the enthusiastic assistance provided by *AIT* volunteers. Those who contributed their time and effort, braving heat, cold, wind, bumpy roads, thorns, and aching muscles, include: David Anderson, Harry Ashby, Mary Bernard-Shaw, Barbara Buchanan, Janet Chumbley, Valerie Conforti, Cherie Freeman, Cindy Gibbs, Tom Kimmel, Rick and Sandy Martynec, John Murray, Don Reser, Kay Rosenow, Barbara Snyder, Betty Wall, Phyllis Wallace, and Russ Wilde. Desert Archaeology also extends thanks to Mr. and Mrs. John F. King of the King's Anvil Ranch, and to Mr. David Wolfswinkel, one of the trustees of the EMW Property Trust, for giving their permission for Desert Archaeology to conduct archaeological studies on their private properties and to make study collections of some of the artifacts found on their archaeological sites.

Center Initiates Publication Fund

A vital part of the Center for Desert Archaeology's mission is to publish the results of important archaeological studies. To achieve this, the Center has two series, a *Technical Report* series and a set of *Anthropological Papers*. Presently, the Center is able to provide funding on a small scale in order to publish key studies in one of these series. The first such award has been approved by the Center's Board of Directors for a report on the Coyote Mountain Archaeological District authored by Allen Dart.

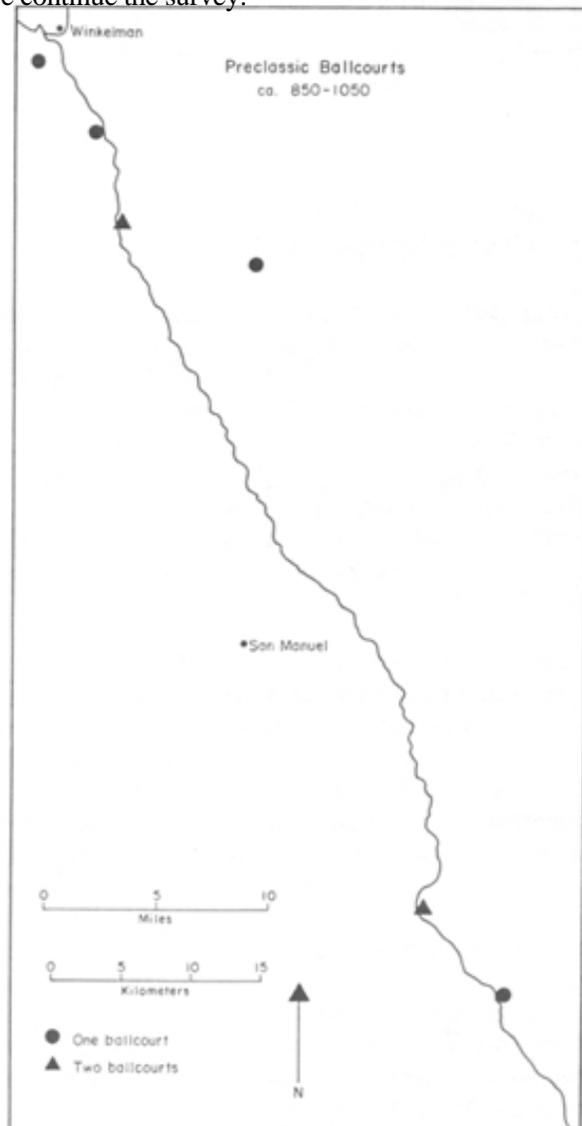
The amount of this initial award is \$500. It is hoped that the size of the publication fund within the Center can be expanded substantially in the future. This will allow us to provide larger-scale support for archaeological publication in order to bring more information to professionals, interested avocational archaeologists, and the general public. Keep this important goal in mind when you are renewing your membership, and seriously consider moving up to the next higher membership category.

The publication *Ancient Hohokam Communities in Southern Arizona: The Coyote Mountains Archaeological District in the Altar Valley* by Allen Dart is now available for sale for \$10 per copy, only \$9 per copy for *AIT* members.

San Pedro Survey Continues

Plans to continue the volunteer survey of the San Pedro river between Redington and the Gila River are being finalized. Allen Dart will head the survey this Fall, and two Saturdays per month are planned for November and December. This was a very popular undertaking with *AIT* members last year, so please call Jennifer as soon as possible to indicate your availability. Also, remember that you must be a paid-up member to participate. The following dates are scheduled for November and December: November 3 and 17, December 1 and 15.

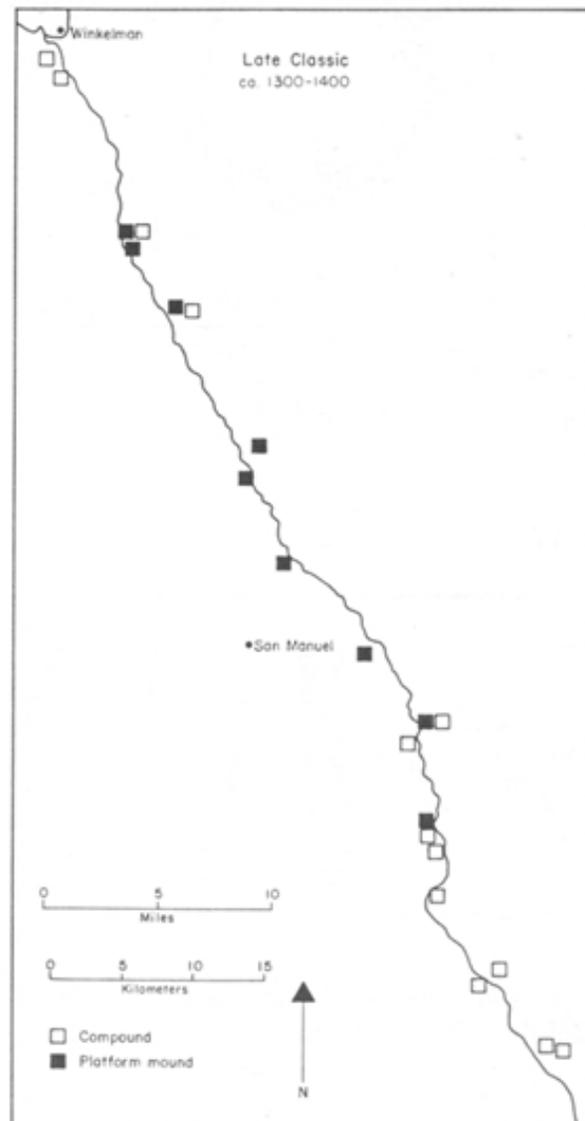
The results of the survey to date have been highly satisfying. Almost every field crew has found from one to five sites on each day in the field. Only on the very last day of survey—a warm day in May—did we enter an area where site frequency appeared to drop off substantially. But we know that it is only a little bit farther north to a large platform mound, so the prospects are that many more sites will be located as we continue the survey.



This pair of maps displays our current knowledge of ballcourt and platform mound locations along the San Pedro. No new ballcourts have been found, but we have confirmed the locations of nine sites with platform mounds. We suspect that there may be at least one platform mound that is still to be found, and it seems likely that there are several more ballcourt sites.

Some of the most impressive features have been the extensive agricultural systems that were used for dry-farming on the rocky surfaces overlooking the San Pedro River. Rock piles, check dams, and contour terraces have all been noted, and agave plants have been observed still growing among these rock features in several different locations.

Unfortunately, we have had very little success in locating definite evidence of Protohistoric (Sobaipuri) sites along the San Pedro. Come join us as we continue the search.



The Center's First Grant is Received!

Over the summer we received notice from the State Historic Preservation Office that the Center was being awarded a \$5,000 matching grant to work at the Romero Ruin in Catalina State Park. This work is in conjunction with a planned interpretive development of the ruin that is being carried out cooperatively by the U.S. Forest Service, Arizona State Parks, and the Center for Desert Archaeology.

The purpose of the grant is to carry out limited excavations that are designed to offset the impacts of the small-scale stabilization that will be required in order to develop an interpretive trail through the Romero Ruin. Targeted for testing are: two areas along the compound wall that enclosed a portion of the Tanque Verde phase (A.D. 1150-1300) settlement, two of the historic period rooms that have been heavily pothunted, and the largest of the prehistoric trash mounds.

Desert Archaeology Completes Excavation Project in the Avra Valley

From the crisp month of March through an unusually rainy July 1990, Desert Archaeology, Inc., excavated five archaeological sites on the Schuk Toak District of the Tohono O'odham Reservation, located west of Tucson in the Avra Valley. The Schuk Toak project focused on three Hohokam farmstead sites that were occupied early in the Classic period (shortly after A.D. 1150).

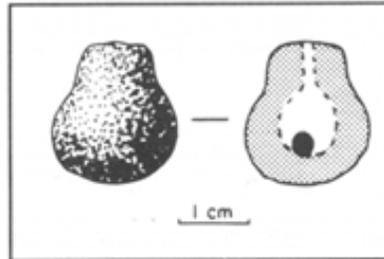
One of these sites contained only two pithouses and two outdoor pits. The other two Hohokam sites, which were quite near one another, were found to contain a total of 20 pithouses grouped in separate clusters around an unoccupied open space interpreted as a central plaza. The documentation of house grouping at these sites should go a long way toward interpreting how Hohokam households of the period were organized and interacted.

A fourth site is believed to have been utilized mainly for farming the valley bottom. The site contained no houses, but pit-ovens excavated there were used by the Hohokam during the Rincon phase (AD. 950-1150), and probably by a later group of Protohistoric period (AD. 1450-1700) people who likely spoke a variant of the language now spoken by the Tohono O'odham and Pima Indians.

Excavation of the fifth site revealed the ruins of two shallow pithouses, some outdoor pits, and a wealth of animal bones and burned plant remains. This site, which dates entirely to the Protohistoric period, is expected to yield important new information about subsistence and other cultural practices in southern Arizona during that little-known archaeological period.

Los Morteros Project Update

The Los Morteros project is drawing to a close, and several illustrations in this newsletter offer a preview of some of the unique finds from the site. All illustrations are by Ron Beckwith. (See also, page 5 where a miniature scoop with modeled human face and a ceramic palette are illustrated.)

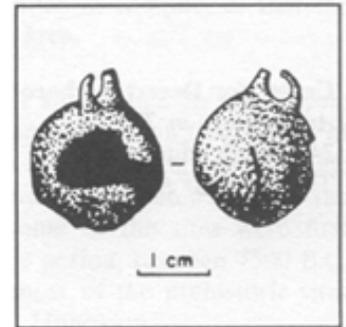


Clay rattle from Los Morteros project.

A miniature clay rattle was recovered from the floor of an Early Rincon pithouse. The rattle is globular or pear-shaped. A single pellet is present within the rattle. Although the material composing the pellet is unknown,

a small pebble is suggested. It is possible that the pellet was encased in wax or a combustible material and the rattle molded around it. During firing the material encasing the pellet would have burned out leaving the pellet free within the rattle's cavity.

A copper bell that was in good condition was found in a probable Late Rincon or Tanque Verde phase context at Los Morteros. Another bell was found previously, during the State Museum's excavations at the site. Other recent finds of copper bells have been at Honey Bee, Rooney Ranch, and the famous Romo cache found near the Romero Ruin. All of these sites are in the northern Tucson Basin. The intensity of research has been at least as high in the southern and eastern



Copper bell from Los Morteros project.

parts of the Basin, but no copper bells have been found. The full significance of this distribution is not known, but it may be due to more intensive interaction with the Hohokam of the Phoenix Basin. Copper bells are believed to have been made in Mexico, but in the Hohokam region they are most common in the Phoenix area.

The two-volume descriptive report on the Los Morteros excavations is being finalized this Fall, and the reports should be available early in 1991. The final synthetic volume on work at the sites of Lonetree, Redtail, and Los Morteros will be completed in mid-1991.

Membership Application

Archaeology in Tucson Membership Application

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Address _____

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Annual Membership Dues Enclosed _____

Annual Membership Rates

Individual	\$10	Corporate Rates:	<u>MAIL TO:</u>
Family	\$15		
Supporting	\$25	Active	\$100
Contributing	\$50	Supporting	\$200
Sustaining	\$100	Sustaining	\$500
Patron	\$500		

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The Center for Desert Archaeology

The Center for Desert Archaeology is a nonprofit, research and educational organization that specializes in the study of the archaeology and history of desert regions. Our Primary research focus has been southern Arizona.

Archaeology in Tucson is the membership program of the Center for Desert Archaeology. The *Archaeology in Tucson* Newsletter is published quarterly, and is one of the benefits that members receive. Lectures, site tours, discounts on publications, and participation in archaeological field projects are additional membership benefits. Memberships run for a full year from the time they are received.

Annual Membership Rates

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