

# Untangling the Tularosa Phase: Preliminary Results from Archaeology Southwest's Mule Creek Archaeological Project

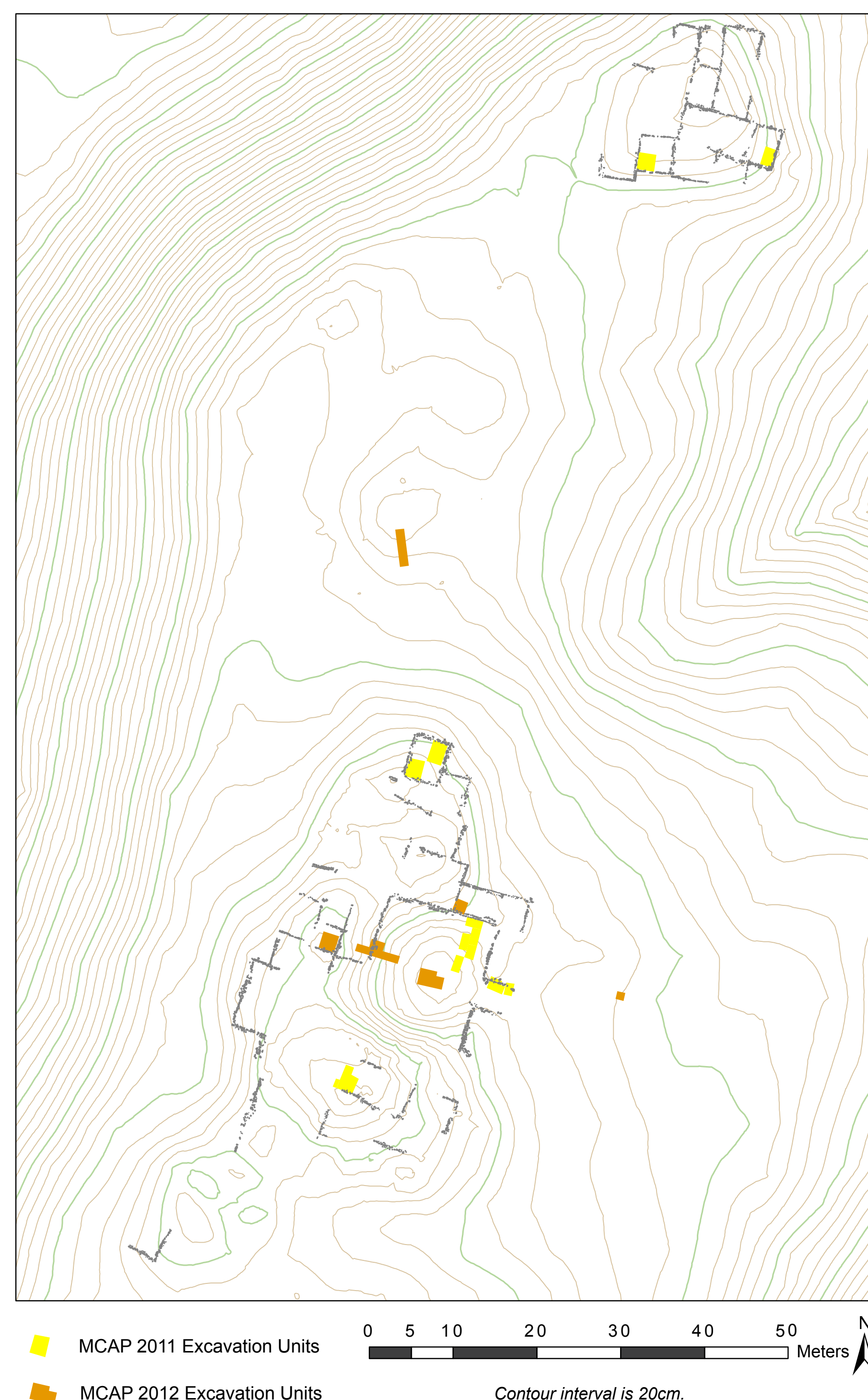
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## I. Introduction

In 2011 and 2012, Archaeology Southwest (formerly the Center for Desert Archaeology) has collaborated with the University of Arizona School of Anthropology to offer a Preservation Archaeology Field School as part of a larger research focus on the Upper Gila region of New Mexico. The excavation portion of the field school has focused on the Tularosa Phase component of the Fornholt site (LA164471) in Mule Creek, New Mexico.

The 13th century component of the Fornholt site contains two room blocks and an estimated 60 rooms. Tularosa Phase painted diagnostic types recovered from the site include St. John's Polychrome and Tularosa Black-on-white. In addition, the presence of Pinedale Black-on-white suggests that the occupation lasted into the late 13th or early 14th century. The site is at the southern edge of the distribution of Tularosa Phase sites. This "boundary" position is reflected in the presence of other ceramic types more characteristic of Southern New Mexico, including Playas Incised and El Paso Polychrome.

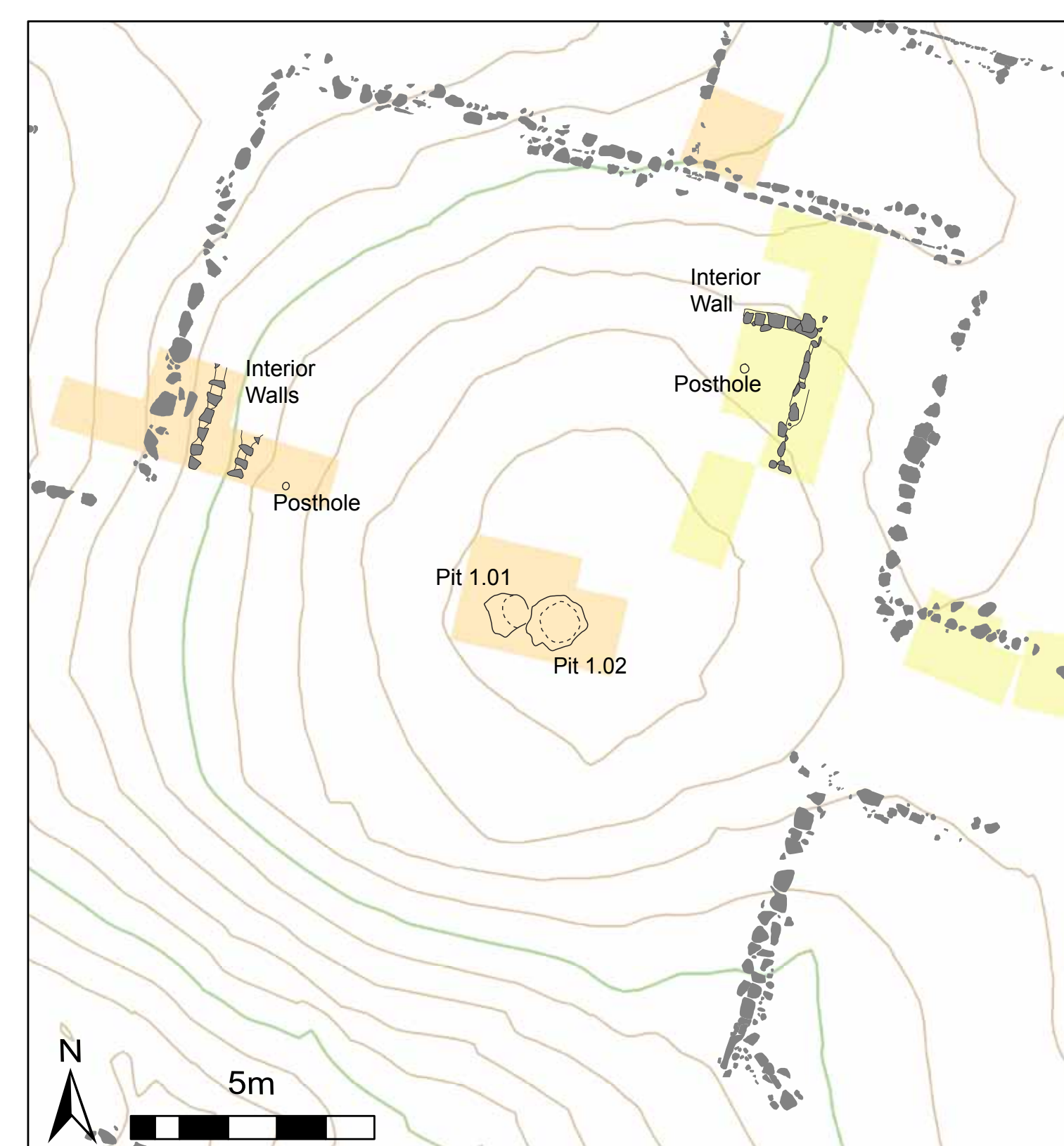


## III. Great Kiva

A major focus of the 2011 and 2012 field seasons was the large depression within the southern room block. A rectangular outline and a southeast facing entrance are visible at the modern ground surface, suggesting that this feature resembles Reserve Phase and Tularosa Phase great kivas in the eastern Mogollon Highlands and the Point of Pines area.



The western trench, showing the wall visible on the surface and two interior walls. The innermost wall has largely collapsed, but likely stood at least as tall as the middle wall.



Pit features 1.01 and 1.02 after excavation. Small patches of intact plaster were found in both pits.



Feature 1.02 during excavation, showing a worked slab surrounded by worked and unworked cobbles.



The interior wall corner and partially intact floor exposed in the north trench.

Hand trenches dug from the walls visible on the surface at the north and west sides of the depression encountered buried interior walls. The 2011 trench from the north wall uncovered an interior corner paralleling the north and east walls visible on the surface. The 2012 trench from the west wall uncovered two interior walls, about 60cm apart. These interior walls are associated with intact floors in both the north and west trenches. Small postholes were found in both trenches, both about 75cm inside the interior walls. No distinct layer of roof fall was found anywhere in any of the great kiva units, and it seems possible that the postholes supported some kind of ephemeral roof structure at the kiva edges.

The floor in the center of the structure was largely eroded, although a cluster of sherds and an Archaic projectile point were found directly above floor level. Two roughly circular pit features appear in the center of the structure. The deeper, eastern, pit was capped with a mortar-like material and contained a substantial amount of faunal bone, along with beads and other artifacts. Small sherd disks were found directly above both pit features. Test excavations in another large depression, located between the two room blocks (see site map), showed that this feature is not associated with the Tularosa Phase occupation, dating instead to the Late Pithouse period.

## II. Habitation and Storage Rooms

As of the end of the 2012 season, portions of six rooms have been excavated. Two of these had no surviving floor or floor features. Two were single story habitation rooms. Both of these had rectangular slab-lined hearths. The hearths were filled with ash, and the rooms had been cleaned out at the end of the occupation.

Excavations during the 2011 season uncovered a catastrophically burned storage room in the southern portion of the southern room block. The lower story of a two story room contained a substantial quantity of carbonized corncobs, along with fragments of burned basketry, whole and reconstructible ceramic vessels, and a plain cotton textile (probably a bag). Beams from this room have been submitted for tree-ring dating.



The northeast corner of a habitation room in Fornholt's southern room block. The slab-lined hearth is visible in the lower right corner.

Excavations intended to investigate another two story area in the western part of the southern room block during the 2012 season found instead a room that had been heavily remodeled. The early occupation of the room consisted of several floors associated with adobe walls. Masonry walls were later built up from the adobe wall stubs. While a post supporting the ceiling of this masonry room did burn, the space above the collapsed room appears to have been subsequently filled with trash, suggesting that this fire was not associated with the end of the Tularosa Phase occupation of the site.



The heavily remodeled room in the western part of the southern room block. The plaster has been removed from the southeast corner, showing the earlier adobe and later masonry construction.



The heavily burned lower story storage room in the southern part of the southern room block. Carbonized basketry fragments (right) were among the material recovered from the room.



A sample of carbonized maize from the burned storage room.



Aerial view of the Fornholt site.

## IV. Continuing Research

Excavation during the 2011 and 2012 seasons in Tularosa Phase rooms at Fornholt has shown architectural similarities with Tularosa Phase sites to the north, although the heavily remodeled room suggests possible connections with other architectural traditions.

Excavation in the great kiva suggests this structure is somewhat unusual and even that "great kiva" may not be the best label for this feature. The material recovered from the center of the feature does provide evidence for ritual activity, however. The ongoing analysis of the material recovered during excavation will shed more light on the structure of deposits in the "great kiva" and on the complex occupational history of the site.

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