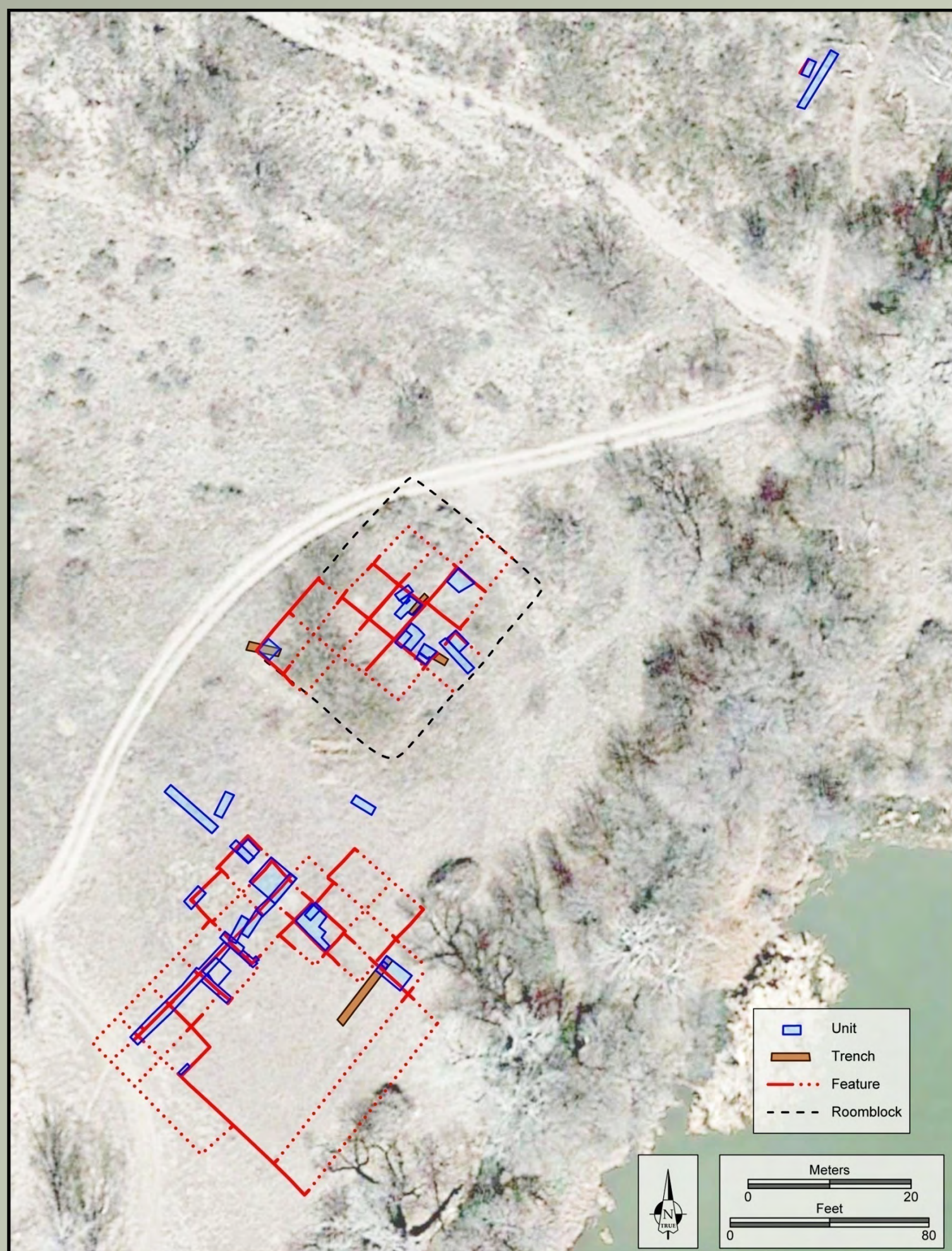


Introduction

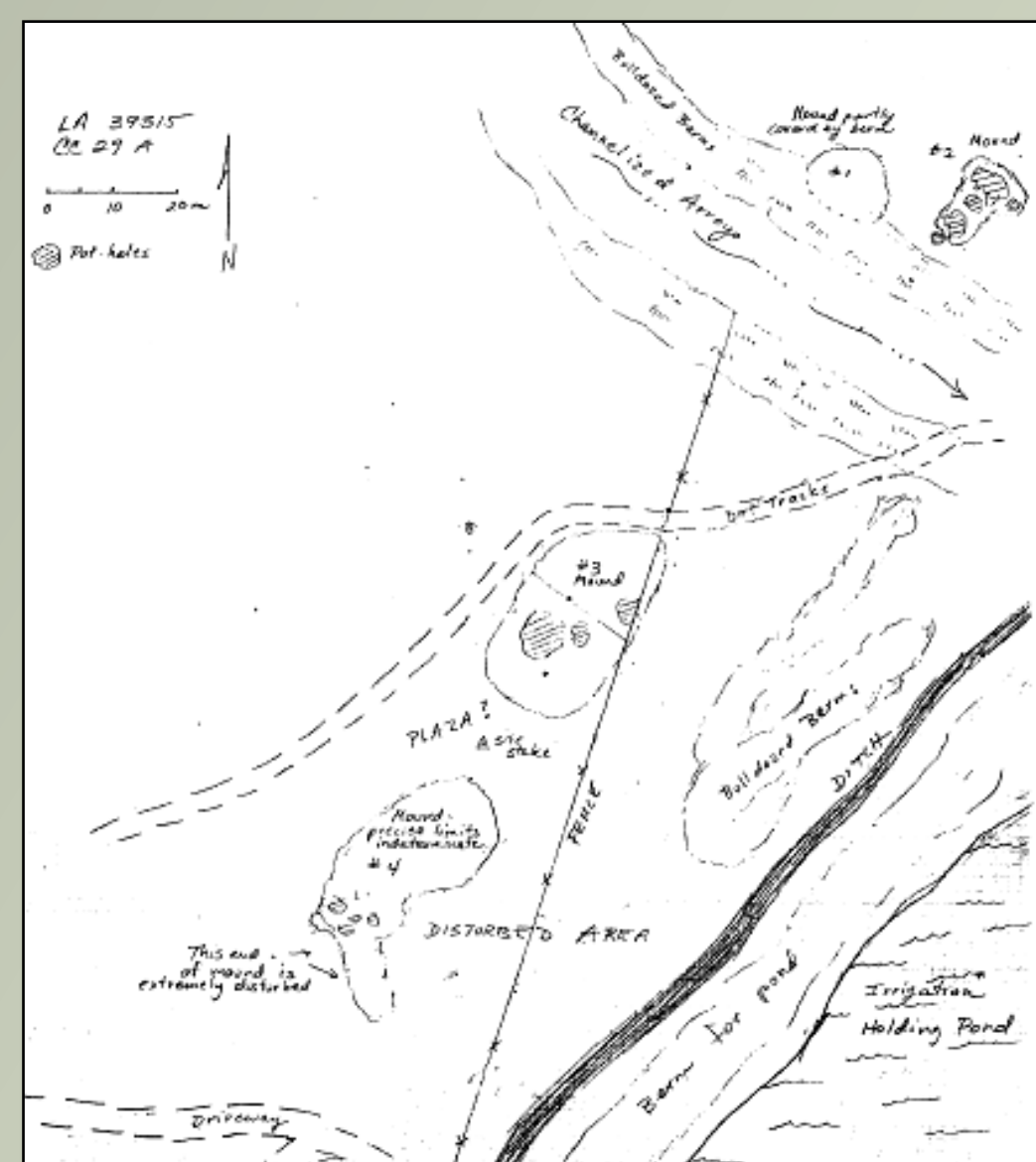
During the summers of 2016 – 2018, Archaeology Southwest and the University of Arizona’s Upper Gila Preservation Archaeology (UGPA) field school conducted limited excavations at the Gila River Farm Site (LA 39315), a Cliff Phase (A.D. 1300 – 1450) site near Cliff, New Mexico, that is owned by the New Mexico Nature Conservancy. The site is composed of three main adobe room blocks that are visible on the surface to varying degrees. The 200s room block to the north has been heavily disturbed, and our excavations have focused on the two southern room blocks. The 300s room block is partially preserved as an architectural mound, but it has suffered mechanical disturbance on its east and west sides. The 400s room block lies within an area that was formerly an agricultural field, which has been leveled and also shows significant signs of looting.



Above: Aerial photo of the Gila River Farm site, showing our excavations from the 2016 – 2018 field seasons.



Above: Photos of the brigadoon effect revealing wall alignments on the surface. This greatly aided us in locating and mapping the walls and in estimating the number of rooms in each room block.



Prior to our excavations at the site, the only work done was a survey in 1983. Manmade disturbances by bulldozers have damaged portions of the site and their trenches are observable today. Work at the Gila River Farm Site contributes to our understanding of trading networks, settlement patterns, population densities, and social dynamics in the Upper Gila region.

Left: A sketch map of the Gila River Farm Site from the original 1983 survey. It shows room blocks and nearby features and displays disturbed areas. We were not able to relocate their Mound 1.



Above: Photos of the coursed adobe walls in the site. The perpendicular walls intersect and create blocks of rooms akin to rooms in an apartment building. The stone foundations, or *cimientos*, are easily observable and are near the ancient ground level of the rooms.

Although most of the architecture was not visible from the surface, our excavations revealed large preserved room blocks beneath the surface. People built the walls of the Cliff phase rooms using coursed adobe. Large cobbles called *cimientos* provided footings for the adobe walls. Average individual room size at this site was much larger than what is expected for the area and time.



Left: Close up of a bowl built into the floor of the room as part of a mealing station.



Right: A mealing bin in 300s room block. One bowl's rim is observable but the other is still buried

Several of the rooms in the 300s room block have mealing bins, or grinding stations, built into the floors of the rooms. This is a trait that is generally associated with Mogollon houses in pre-Salado times. Their presence here is an example of the blending of Mogollon and Kayenta cultures to form Salado.



Above: Photos of perforated plate sherds found at the Gila River Farm site. Most of these artifacts, which indicate a connection to Kayenta ancestors, were recovered from the 400s Room Block.



People from the Kayenta region of Northeastern Arizona migrated south during the late 1200s and brought with them their own beliefs, culture, and way of life. It was the merging of the Kayenta traditions into the already established Mogollon culture that has manifested itself materially into what we call “Salado.” Perforated plates are a key marker of Kayenta and Salado sites. During our excavations we found several pieces of perforated plates in the 400s room block, as well as Maverick Mountain pottery, which is associated with Kayenta enclaves.

Excavations of the 400s room block revealed a room with hundreds of fish bones. Fish bones are relatively rare in archaeological contexts from this area, and their presence here may indicate a special use for this room. The fish bones (probably as whole fish) were placed over the floor of the room when it was retired. There are no other examples of this type of room retirement in the Upper Gila.



Above: Assortment of fish bones collected from a room in the 400s room block.



Above: Photo of the wall from the 400s room block. The long length and lack of cross walls was unexpected.

One surprising thing from our excavations was the discovery of a long and continuous wall running east from the 400s room block. This wall was unexpected, and its size and lack of cross-walls suggest the presence of an interior plaza feature. The extent of the wall was only fully revealed during the final days of the 2018 field season. More excavations during the 2019 field season are needed to understand its role.

Conclusion

Excavations at the Gila River Farm Site have revealed a complex Salado settlement that differs from others in the area. The lack of pattern at Salado settlements in the Upper Gila is an interesting and somewhat frustrating

phenomenon that demands more research. Despite heavy looting and other human disturbance, there is more to be learned from this site. Future excavations will continue to contribute to our understanding of site structure, settlement patterns, and the traditions and lifestyles of past residents.



Above: Some students from the 2018 UGPA field school season and two high-school visitors demonstrating a “wall dance”.

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The Davises, our hosts in Cliff

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