XSX Ranch Ruin: Excavations of a Late Classic Mimbres to Early Post Classic Pueblo in the Upper Gila Forks, New Mexico

By Christopher A. Turnbow and Robert E. Forrester

A Quest for Post Classic

The upper reaches of the Gila River in Southeastern Arizona, New Mexico, and West Texas are home to village communities associated with Classic and Early Post Classic Mimbres pueblos. Poverty-stricken by the late 13th century, Mimbres communities may have been abandoned as a result of the “Mimbres Black-on-white Deflection” (Weltfish 1994). Petroglyphs from the later Classic period suggest the decline of the Mimbres region, and early Post Classic occupations have been hypothesized in the Gila Forks region (see below). In 2017, excavations were conducted at the XSX Ranch Ruin, which produced important new information on this period.

XSX Ranch Site (LA 50702)

The XSX Ranch site is a multiphase occupation located near the mouth of the East Fork. Between AD 1300 and 1340, Robert E. Forrester excavated a channel and portion of occupational architecture, recovered 615 artifacts, and 89 pithouse remains in five postholes, and 15 burials. No site matrix remains identify the site as a Classic Mimbres pithouse-oriented community. However, the site was excavated in a manner that suggested Classic Mimbres inhabitants to Early Post Classic pueblos.

San Francisco to Three Circle Phase Occupations

XSX Ranch contains a late San Francisco to early Three Circle phase village. Their pithouses were circular or oval rather than the square or rectangular structures of Classic Mimbres sites. Most late San Francisco and early Three Circle pithouses were excavated on the site. The location of the site may have been a later offering (see below).

Three Circle phase structure

Classic Mimbres to Early Post Classic Periods

Classic Mimbres occupations are abundant in the Gila Forks and the largest roundhouse at XSX Ranch. The site begins at that time. However, rockshelters in the area are occupied by Classic Mimbres pueblos. It is possible that remains of Classic Mimbres or San Francisco pueblos are included in the site. The analyzed samples suggest that the XSX Ranch site was occupied by Classic Mimbres inhabitants in the late 14th century. Archaeologists continue to seek the evidence for Classic Mimbres occupation in the Gila Forks region.

Classic Mimbres to Early Post Classic Periods

Architecture

Architecture on the site is comparable to other Classic Mimbres pueblos in the Gila Forks with circular rooms, a preparation of doorless rooms (13%), and two storage rooms with adjacent hearths. Room 15 is 10 by 10 ft. Room 16 is 8 by 10 ft. Room 15 has a large east-west entrance flanked by posts and the interior Room 15 has a small cornered sub parking lot on the west. Room 16 has a narrow entrance flanked by posts and the interior Room 16 has a narrow entrance flanked by posts. Room 14 also has a cornered sub parking lot.

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Roomblocks, Burials, and Vessel Distributions

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