

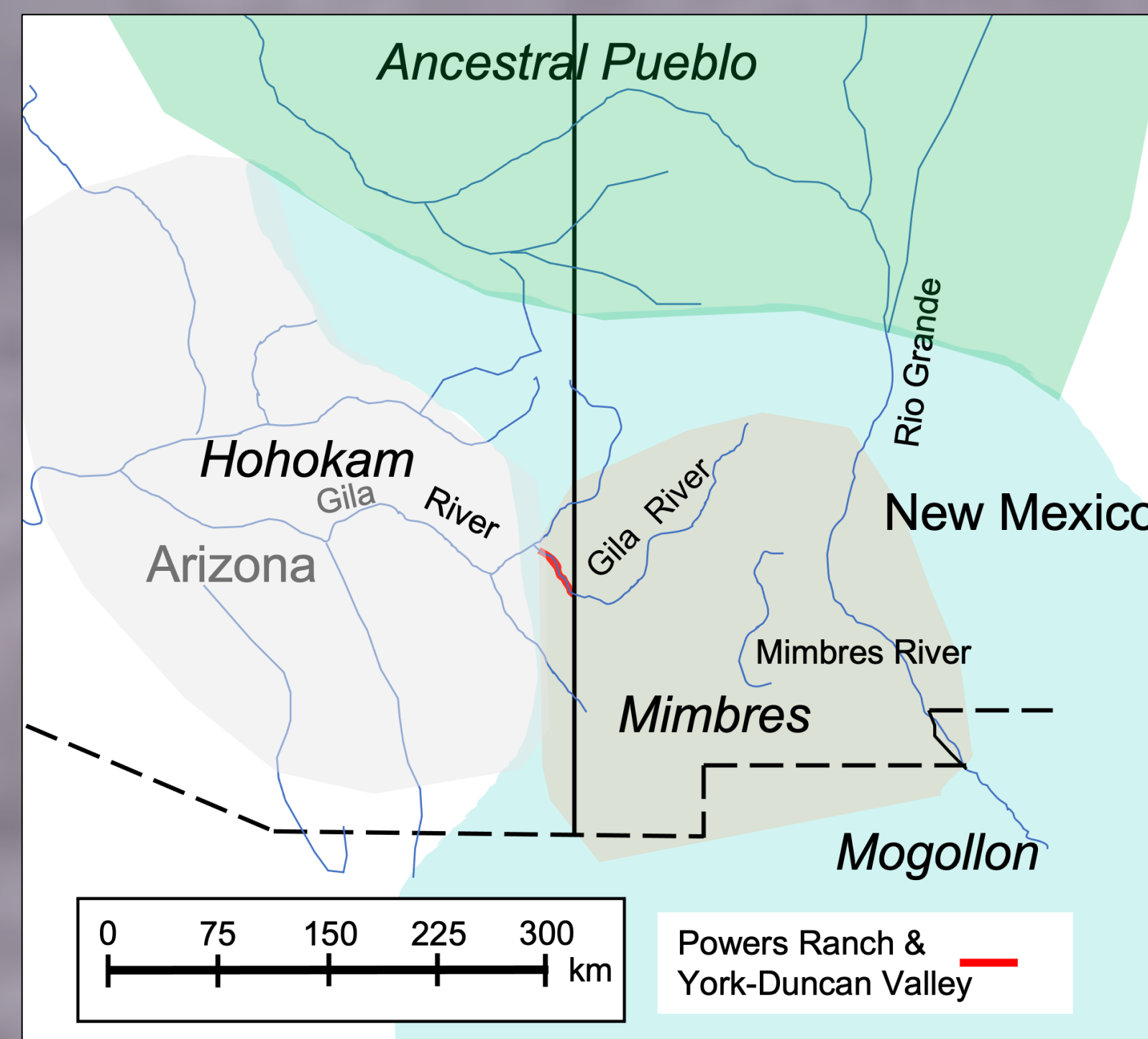
# Powers Ranch (AZ:CC:3:46 [ASM]): Identity and Affiliation West of the Mimbres Heartland

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## Overview

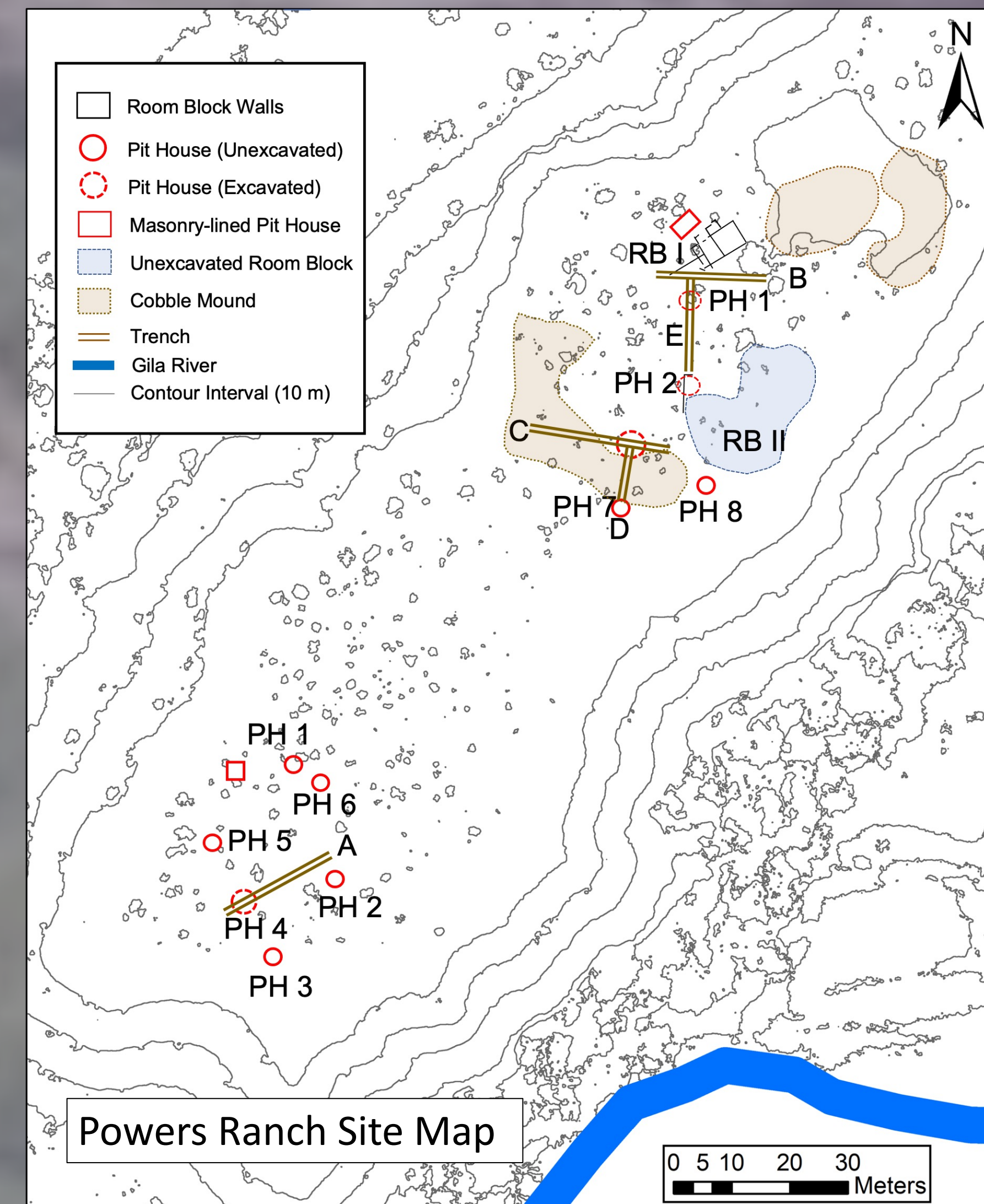


❖ Archaeologists in the U.S. Southwest have increasingly focused their research on understanding the lives and identities of people who lived outside core cultural areas. The Mimbres region encompasses southwest New Mexico and southeast Arizona, but the Mimbres cultural core is in the Mimbres Valley.

❖ The Powers Ranch site lies in the Western Mimbres area on the Gila River in east-central Arizona, far west of the Mimbres Valley. Powers Ranch is the only professionally excavated residential Mimbres Classic (CE 1000-1130) site in Arizona's Gila Valley.

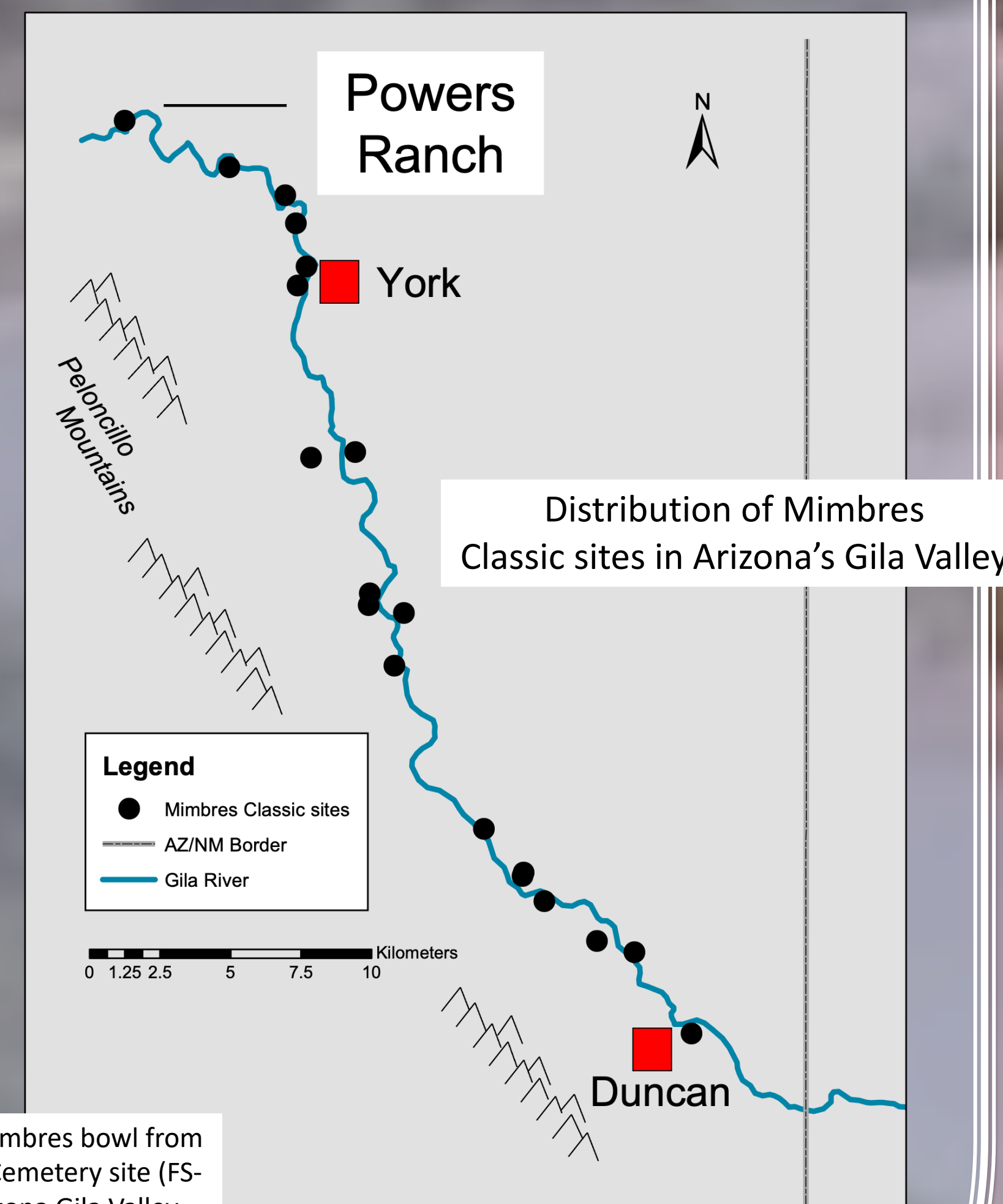


Excavation at Powers Ranch, 1983



❖ Shaw (1983) recorded at least 11-13 rooms in 2 room blocks, extramural activity areas, at least 13 pit structures, and 2 burials. The project collected an astounding 29,000 sherds, at least 167 projectile points, and 39 shell artifacts. Most painted sherds are Mimbres Classic Black-on-white, with 13% of the entire assemblage being Classic. The site also includes an Early Pit Structure period (CE 200-750) component.

❖ Whisenhunt (2020) surveyed BLM, state, and private lands along Arizona's Gila Valley during five field seasons (2015-2019), supplemented by local knowledge of lost or previously inaccessible sites and local collections. Eighty-three sites were recorded along a 50 km stretch of the Gila River.



Distribution of Mimbres Classic sites in Arizona's Gila Valley



Classic Mimbres bowl from Sheldon Cemetery site (FS-79), Arizona Gila Valley

❖ To determine whether people at Powers Ranch were more closely connected to people in the Mimbres Valley, or represent part of the Western Mimbres phenomenon, we ask:

- ❖ Are site architecture and room numbers at Powers Ranch similar to those in the Gila and/or the Mimbres Valley?
- ❖ Are ratios of figurative and geometric painted designs similar?

❖ Considered in context with Classic sites in the Gila and Mimbres Valleys, the Powers Ranch site deepens our understanding of Mimbres identity in cultural "edge" regions.

## Powers Ranch Identity and Affiliation in Context

### Architecture



Cobble alignment in Powers Ranch pueblo room, 1983

❖ If Powers Ranch architecture is Mimbres, we expect the use of unshaped river cobbles to form the walls of surface rooms, as they do in New Mexico's Gila Valley and the Mimbres Valley.

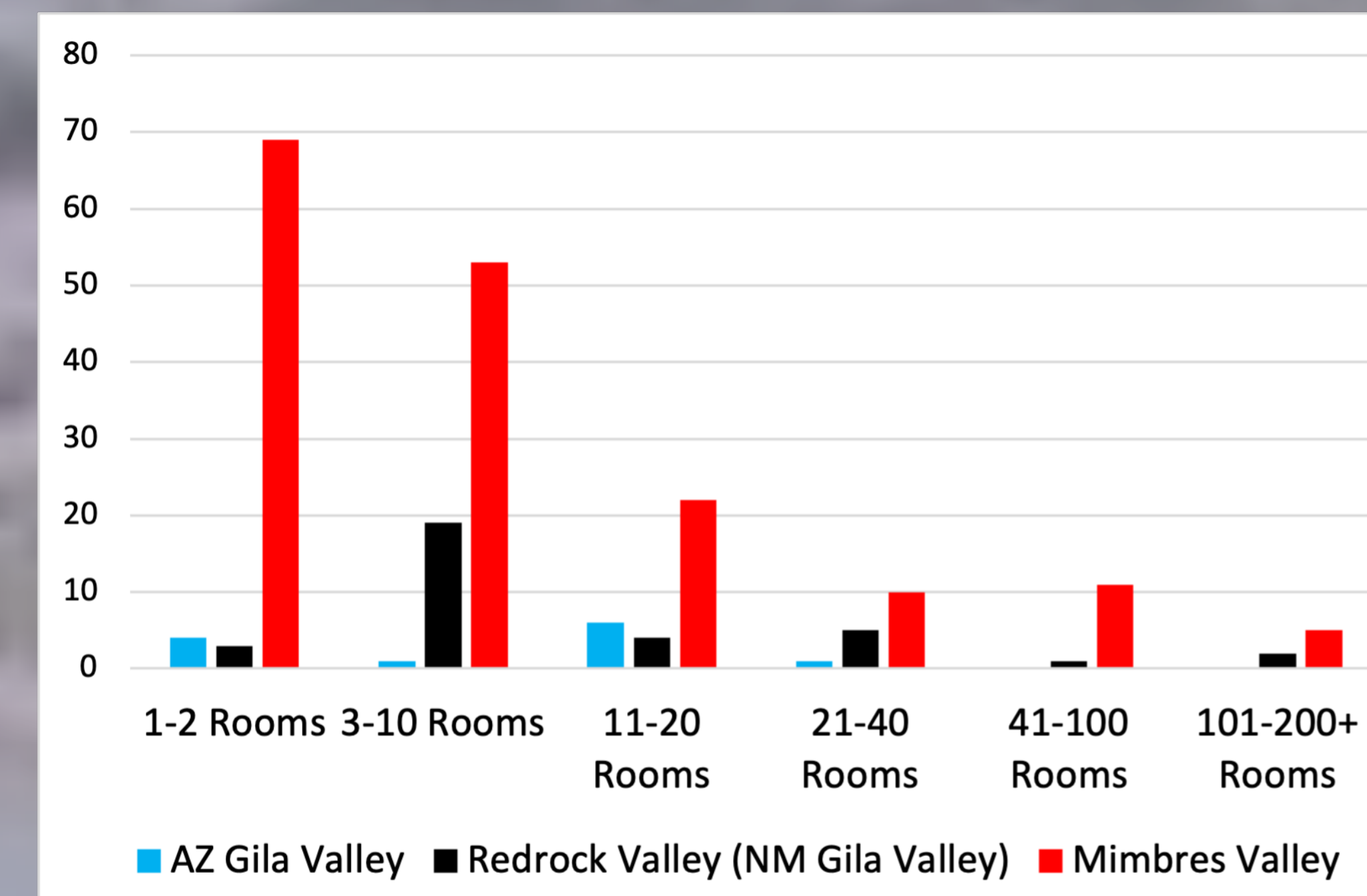
❖ Rooms would either be massed into a few room blocks like the Mimbres Valley or just a few rooms per room block like New Mexico's Gila Valley.

❖ Powers Ranch, with its two room blocks with a few rooms each, is similar to the New Mexico Gila Valley, suggesting affiliation with those people.

### Site and Room Numbers

❖ Most Classic sites in the Gila and the Mimbres Valleys have 1-20 rooms, similar to Powers Ranch's 11-13 rooms

❖ However, the Mimbres Valley has 11 sites of 41-100 rooms and at least 12 between 101-200, suggesting that in contrast to the Gila Valley, most of the Mimbres Valley's population resided in large settlements.

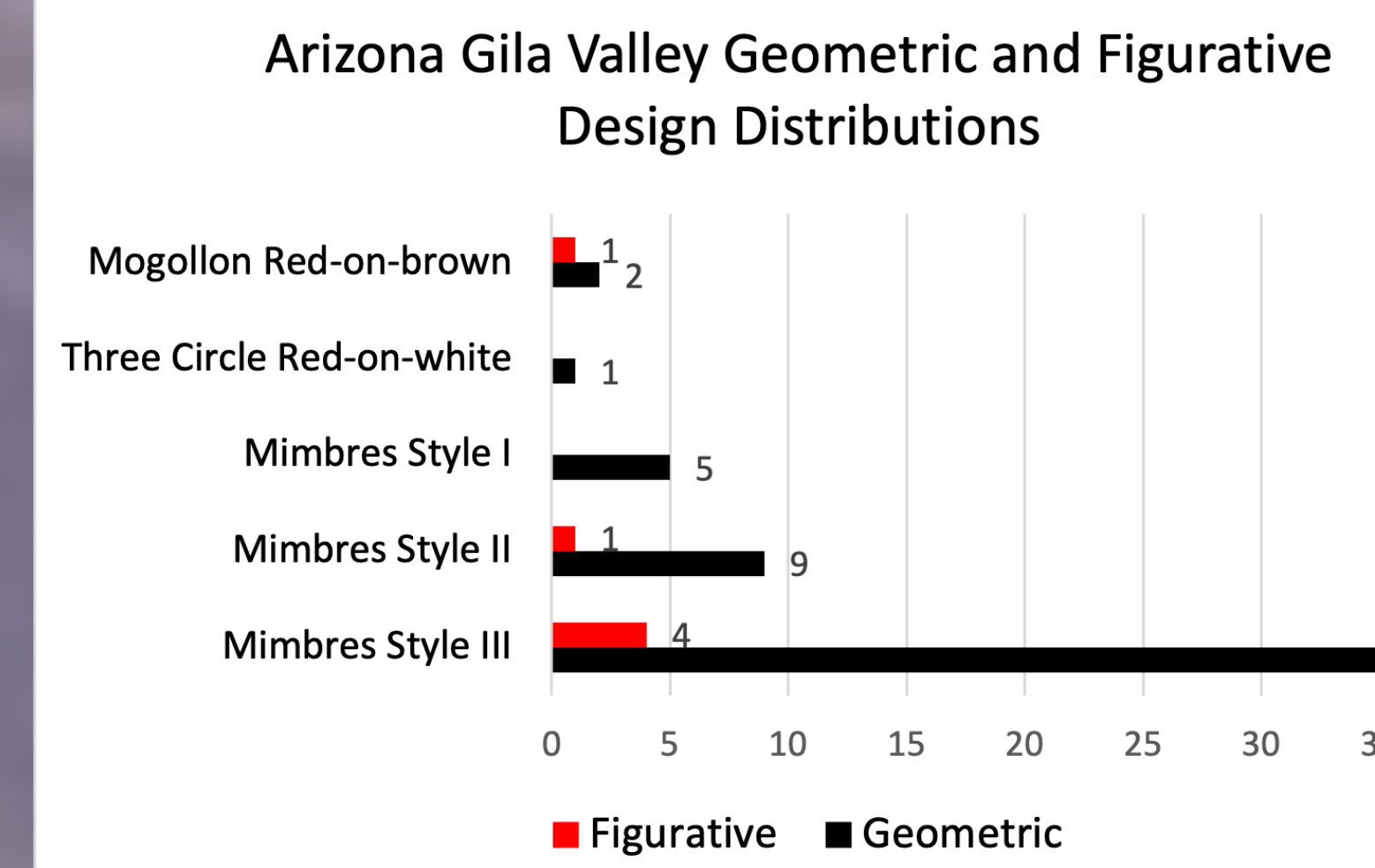


❖ Together with Powers Ranch, only 13 Classic residential sites with a total of 135 rooms have been recorded in Arizona's Gila Valley.

❖ Classic components and room numbers per site are far lower in the Gila Valley than in the Mimbres Valley, with its 170 Classic components and 2507 rooms.

❖ These figures show that this portion of the western edge of the Mimbres region had a significantly lower population than the heartland.

### Pottery Designs



Bowl with figurative design from Tyler site (FS-19), Arizona Gila Valley

❖ Gilman (2018) suggests the ratio of Mimbres Classic B/w figurative and geometric designs on pottery are one of several measures reflecting chosen social identity and relationships.

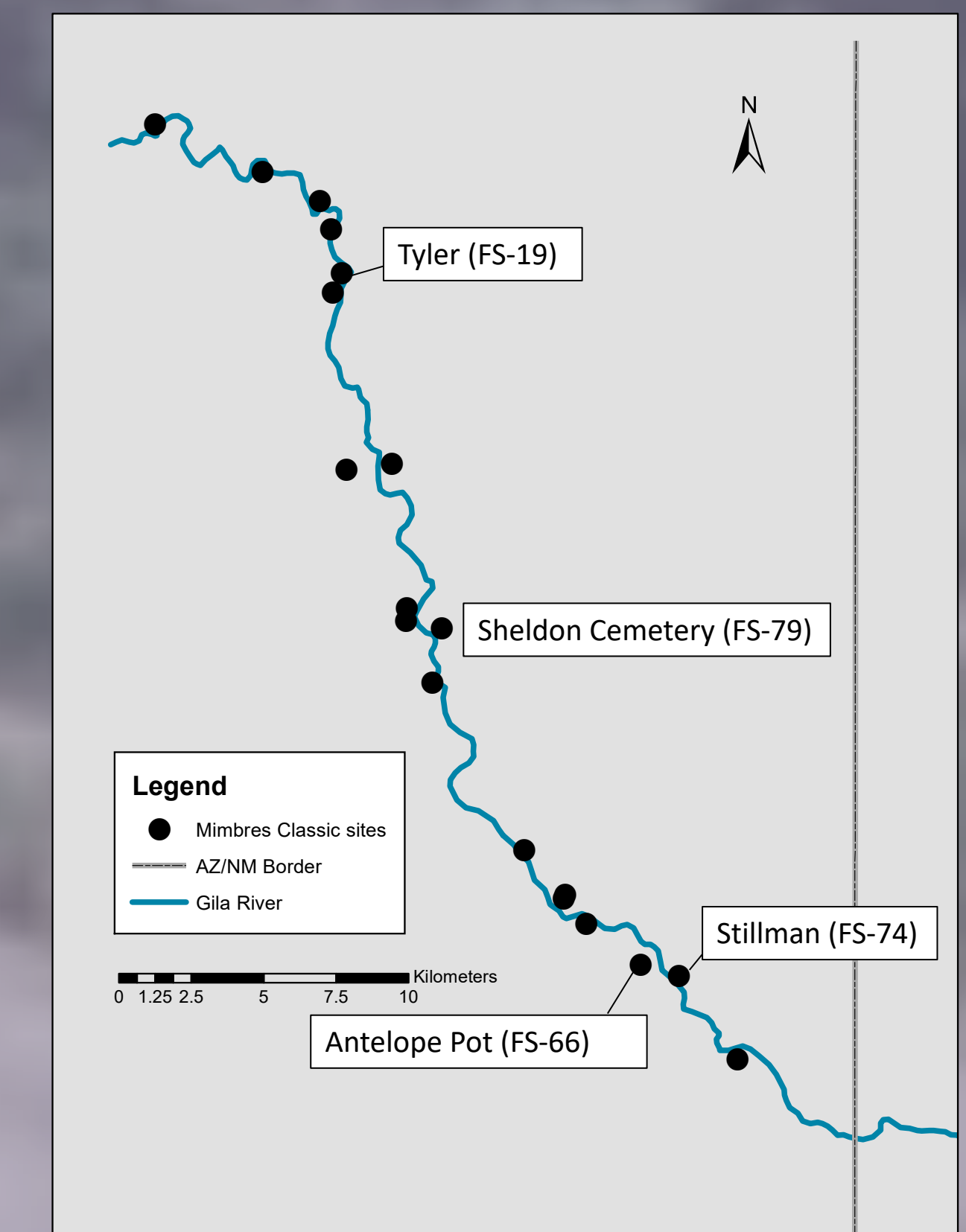
❖ Like New Mexico's Gila Valley, virtually no figurative designs were identified in Powers Ranch Classic B/w sherds.

❖ Photos of whole pots taken from Arizona's Gila Valley in the 1980s show higher frequencies (6 of 61, or 9.8%) of figurative designs.

❖ In contrast, 30-34% of Classic sherds in Mimbres Valley Classic occupations have figurative designs.

❖ Much lower counts of figurative designs in Arizona's Gila Valley in comparison with Mimbres Valley suggest people who lived there were less strongly affiliated with the Mimbres core area.

❖ Shafer suggests the dual fish designs are similar to those found in New Mexico's Gila drainage.



## Conclusions

❖ The Powers Ranch site's pattern of few rooms per room block is similar to that of both large and small Classic sites in the Gila Valley in New Mexico, unlike the Mimbres Valley.

❖ The small number of rooms at Powers Ranch is consistent with other Classic settlements in Arizona's Gila Valley, in contrast to the large, aggregated sites in New Mexico's Gila Valley and the Mimbres Valley.

❖ The predominantly Mimbres B/w sherd assemblage suggests that people who lived in Arizona's Gila Valley were broadly Mimbres. The near absence of figurative designs at Powers Ranch, relatively low numbers of figurative designs on Classic ceramics in the York-Duncan Valley, and association of some figurative designs with New Mexico's Gila drainage suggest a stronger identification with groups in the Western Mimbres region.

References cited: Shaw (1983) Archeological Investigations at Powers Ranch Ruin, 1983; Blake et al. (1986) Changing Settlement and Population in the Mimbres Valley; Greel (2006) Excavations at the Old Town Ruin, Luna County, New Mexico, 1989-2003; Nelson and LeBlanc (1986) Short-Term Sedentism in the American Southwest; Gilman (2018) Long-Term, Constant, and Stable Identities and Social Relationships with and within the Mimbres Region of Southwestern New Mexico; Gilman and LeBlanc (2017) Mimbres Life and Society: The Mattocks Site of Southwestern New Mexico; Mimbres Foundation unpublished and undated reports; Whisenhunt (2020) Investigating Resilience in Southeastern Arizona's Upper Gila River Valley: Prehistoric Settlement Patterns and Material Diversity.