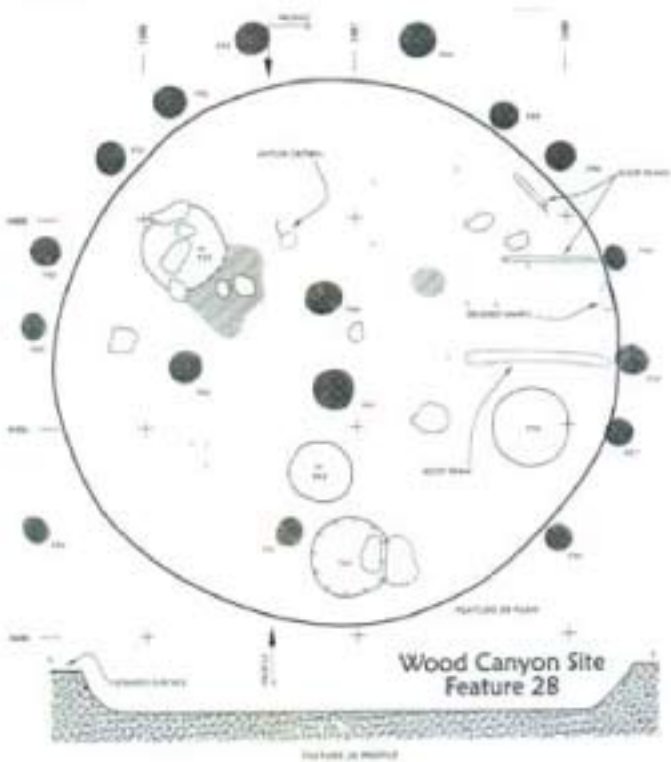
CULTURAL RESOURCE

TECHNICAL SERIES
2000-3

A Highway Through Time: Archaeological Investigations Along NM 90

TRC
Project Number 24830



Volume I

New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department

Abstract

Archaeological data recovery investigations were conducted at nine sites along the New Mexico 90 right of way in Grant and Hildago counties, New Mexico. These sites include Forest Home (LA 78089), Wood Canyon (LA 99631), Beargrass (LA 121158), Peterson Canyon (LA 121159), Power (LA 121210), LA 121160, LA 121164, LA 121165, and LA 121209. Data relevant to the Late Archaic/Early Agricultural, Early Pit House, and Late Pit House as well as protohistoric intervals were recovered and analyzed.

Late Archaic/Early Agricultural period components from Forest Home, Wood Canyon, and Beargrass represent substantial agricultural settlements with structures, large storage facilities, numerous extramural thermal and non-thermal pits, and burials associated with high densities of artifacts and thick cultural deposits. Dating between approximately 800 BC and AD 200, these settlements produced the earliest evidence of maize production thus far in the Mimbres region. Data from the sites suggest their use over long periods of the year.

Early Pit House period components at Forest Home and Power are interpreted as small seasonal agricultural settlements with few structures, extramural features, and one burial. Dated to the early end of the period, these components offer data on early ceramic production and further evidence to support a seasonal settlement model for the Early Pit House. A third Early Pit House component at Beargrass is recognized by only one very substantial structure dating relatively late in the sequence. The labor investment in its construction suggests a major commitment to the location and perhaps a winter occupation.

Intensive use of the area during the Three Circle phase of the Late Pit House period is indicated by the occupations at Beargrass and Peterson Canyon. Both indicate mixed farming and foraging activities. Beargrass was a large community with multiple structures, burials, and extramural facilities, while Peterson Canyon consisted of a single pit structure, a possible surface structure, and a sparse artifact assemblage. Chemical compositional and petrographic analyses of the Mimbres Black-on-white ceramics indicate production centers in the Mimbres Valley.

One chronometric determination from Wood Canyon suggests a brief protohistoric occupation between AD 1500 and 1700. Derived from a shallow, oval pit structure thought to be Late Archaic/Early Agricultural period in age, the date was not associated with Euroamerican goods, arrow points, or late ceramic types that could support its accuracy.