

ABSTRACT

Archaeological testing and data recovery investigations were conducted by TRC at 22 sites along US 54 in Otero County, New Mexico. These sites include Jaca (LA 6829), Orogrande 1 (LA 128699), Orogrande 2 (LA 128700), Orogrande North (LA 128708), LA 110358, LA 115255, LA 115256, LA 115257, LA 115258, LA 115259, LA 115260, LA 115261, LA 115262, LA 115263, LA 115264, LA 115265, LA 126178, LA 126181, LA 128701, LA 128707, LA 128709, and LA 128710. Eleven of these sites were tested only and were not treated during the data recovery phase (LA 110358, LA 115255, LA 115257, LA 115258, LA 115261, LA 115264, LA 126178, LA 128701, LA 128707, LA 128709, and LA 128710). Two of these sites, LA 115255 and LA 128709, were determined eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), while the rest were deemed not eligible. LA 115255 was completely avoided by a re-design of the construction right-of-way, and significant cultural resources at LA 128709 were all located outside of the small corner of the site impacted by the construction project.

Eleven sites were treated during the data recovery phase (Jaca [LA 6829], Orogrande 1 [LA 128699], Orogrande 2 [LA 128700], Orogrande North [LA 128708], LA 115256, LA 115259, LA 115260, LA 115262, LA 115263, LA 115265, and LA 126181). These sites produced significant cultural resources spanning in time from the Late Archaic period to the early portion of the El Paso phase. A wealth of diagnostic artifacts, along with 73 radiocarbon dates, provided abundant chronological data on these sites. Historic remains, most of which were associated with the town of Orogrande, were also documented at some of these sites. These sites varied considerably in terms of size, numbers of features, and density of remains. Jaca (LA 6829) was, by far, the largest and most productive site, with a primary component dating from the late Doña Ana phase to early El Paso phase. Orogrande 1 (LA 128699) was the second largest site, with

both Late Archaic and Mesilla-phase components, although this site appears to be a palimpsest of many small occupations whose debris accumulated over a long span of time. The other sites were all considerably smaller, although they still varied in terms of size and numbers of features, and most of these yielded significant chronological and other archaeological data.

The Late Archaic and Mesilla-phase components all appear to be the remains of small-scale, seasonal, and/or short-term occupations. One Late Archaic pithouse was uncovered at Orogrande 1 (LA 128699), and four Mesilla-phase structures were also encountered at this site. One (and possibly another) Mesilla-phase pithouse was excavated at LA 115262, a basin-floor site. Unfortunately, preservation conditions at the Late Archaic and Mesilla-phase sites were not especially good, and the recovered botanical remains in general tell us little about subsistence patterns associated with these occupations.

Late Formative components were identified at several of the US 54 data recovery sites, and most of these date from the poorly known Doña Ana phase. At the Jaca site (LA 6829), the intensive Late Formative occupation spans the late Doña Ana phase to the very early portion of the El Paso phase, and this was the only site to contain a recognizable occupation from the latter phase. This site is especially significant, in that it straddles the temporal boundary between these two phases, a situation that has not been clearly documented elsewhere in the Jornada Mogollon region. Despite its short occupational duration, a detailed internal chronology of the site was constructed based on stratigraphic, ceramic, and radiocarbon evidence.



Excavations at Jaca turned up a major surprise, in that the vast majority of the 18 structures uncovered at the site consist of simple, informal pithouses. One formal pithouse was also present, and directly on top of this a large, rectangular, communal structure was built. This structure appears to have been part of a room block, which includes an adjacent structure to the west that only barely extended into the investigated right-of-way. Dating from the Doña Ana/El Paso phase transition, this room block is one of the earliest documented cases of pueblo construction in the Jornada Mogollon region. Even while this room block was constructed and occupied, however, simple pithouses continued in use at the site. Following abandonment of the room block, pithouses continued to be built and used at Jaca. Recovered botanical remains from this site included large quantities of maize (present in macrobotanical, pollen, and phytolith samples), along with beans and a domesticated gourd.

Among the other Doña Ana-phase sites along US 54, LA 115260 also yielded especially significant data. Although among the smaller sites, LA 115260 contained a buried midden deposit

and high density of features, indicating an intensive occupation. Aborted excavations at this site uncovered plastered floors that appear to mark substantial structures. Preservation conditions at this site were exceptionally good, and it yielded the largest faunal assemblage from any of the US 54 sites, and maize was recovered from the botanical materials. Adjacent site LA 115265 also yielded maize remains, and is probably part of the same, early Doña Ana-phase community that includes LA 115260. These sites are unusual for Late Formative agricultural settlements, in that they are located within a basin-floor playa.

Although none of the historic remains at the data recovery sites were deemed significant to the NRHP, most of these materials are associated with the historic town of Orogrande. A century ago this was booming mining center, but was almost completely abandoned in the early twentieth century. Because so many of the investigated sites were located in and around historic Orogrande, archival and oral historical research surrounding this town's history were carried out as part of this project, and a narrative account of the town and its mining district is presented in this report.



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