

New Mexico Department of Transportation

CULTURAL RESOURCE

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Series



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FALLEN PINE SHELTER: 3,000 YEARS OF PREHISTORIC OCCUPATION ON THE Mescalero APACHE RESERVATION



Museum of New Mexico
Office of Archaeological Studies • AN 325



ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

An archaeological excavation was conducted by the Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS), Museum of New Mexico, at Fallen Pine Shelter (LA 110339) within the U.S. 70 right-of-way on the Mescalero Apache Reservation near Ruidoso. The work was undertaken intermittently between November 2001 and March 2002. Investigations were initiated at the request of Mr. Blake Roxlau of the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) prior to proposed road widening along U.S. 70. Permission to conduct archaeological activities within the highway right-of-way corridor was granted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Mescalero Apache Tribe.

LA 110339 was a small rockshelter almost covered by fallen trees, branches, and pine duff. During the excavations 81.2 cu m of soil were removed from the site by hand, and almost 6,000 artifacts were recovered. Artifact analyses and the results of 85 radiocarbon assays yielded dates ranging from 1410 B.C. to A.D. 1640, plus two modern readings. Based on the dates, occupation appears to have been not quite continuous, but on a fairly regular basis throughout prehistory. There

was a strong Archaic presence, with numerous projectile points and associated dates. However, the primary occupation occurred between A.D. 1000 and 1200. Several hearths, roasting pits, and a child burial were found within the shelter, along with a series of eight occupational surfaces. Outside of the shelter, deposits reached 3.6 m in depth and contained numerous artifacts and an adult burial. No occupation surfaces could be found here, however, because of soil disturbance from exposure to the elements and erosion. Archaeological excavations removed all soils and artifacts from within the shelter and approximately 95 percent of cultural materials from outside of the structure.

Fallen Pine Shelter, because of its limited size, is considered to have been a short-term or temporary encampment for small groups of people while hunting or collecting, or as they traveled through the mountain pass. No remaining deposits are likely to yield additional information important to the prehistory or history of the area, and no further archaeological investigations are recommended.

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MNM Project No. 41.698 (Mescalero Cave).
BIA Permit No. BIA/SRO-02-001.
Mescalero Apache Tribe letter of permission, October 5, 2001.
NMCRIS No. 82695.