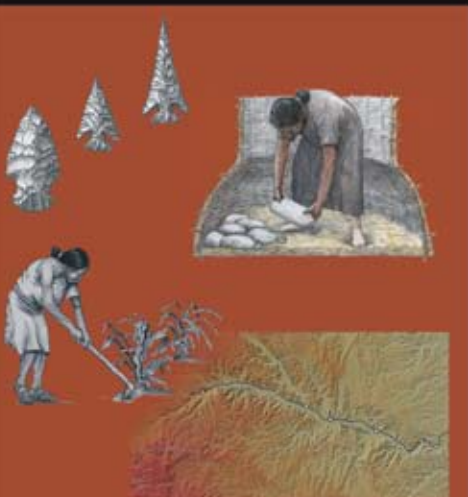


ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE HONDO VALLEY LINCOLN COUNTY, NEW MEXICO



CULTURAL
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NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT
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TECHNICAL SERIES
2006-1

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The US 70 project resulted in major archaeological discoveries, some of which alter considerably previous knowledge about prehistory in the Jornada Mogollon region and southern New Mexico. Most of the prehistoric remains uncovered date from the Late Archaic and Early Formative periods and reveal exciting new evidence of early farming in the region. The project discoveries support previous findings that intensive farming and food storage was practiced by pre-pueblo, pit-house-dwelling occupants of the Sierra Blanca highlands, a subsistence pattern that contrasts sharply with that of highly mobile hunter-gatherers inhabiting the surrounding desert lowlands during the same time span. More importantly, whereas previously this pattern of intensive farming was traceable only to circa A.D. 500, the US 70 discoveries push this pattern well back into pre-ceramic times, to at least 100 B.C. and perhaps as early as 300-400 B.C. Together with previous findings from LA 58971 and the NM 90 project in the southern Mogollon highlands to the west, it is now clear that intensive farming (as evidenced by high maize ubiquity and substantial storage pits) in southern New Mexico extends back at least to the second half of the first millennium B.C. As such, the findings of these two projects force a revision of existing ideas concerning early prehistoric farming in southern New Mexico, and in this respect the region now appears much more similar to southeastern Arizona, where evidence of intensive farming much earlier than previously thought began emerging nearly two decades ago.

The 91 radiocarbon dates produced by the US 70 project outnumber all other previously obtained dates for the Sierra Blanca region combined. As such, these dates provide considerable new chronological information on the region's prehistory and the timing of certain developments. The most important of these was the arrival of ceramics, which the evidence now shows did not reach the Hondo Valley until approximately A.D. 540-550. This is several centuries later than the earliest ceramics in the adjacent desert lowland to the southwest, and this apparent time lag is surprising, and somewhat counter-intuitive given the evidence that intensive farming started much earlier in the Sierra Blanca highlands.

Other analysis results were also unexpected. The flaked stone data revealed changes between the Late Archaic and Early

Formative periods. Specifically, the Late Archaic assemblage included had significantly more fine-grained raw materials, more late-stage flakes, overall smaller flakes than the Early

Formative flaked stone materials. This pattern of change is not surprising in and of itself, and in fact has been widely observed between pre-ceramic and ceramic period sites. What was potentially puzzling, however, is that these changes are taken as indicators of reduced mobility and the shift to food production over time, but no evidence was found for such settlement and subsistence changes between the Late Archaic and Early Formative periods among the US 70 sites. Thus, either the subsistence-settlement evidence gleaned from the project is somehow misleading, or the observed shift in flaked stone patterns must be due to some other factor(s). As discussed in the final chapter of this report, it is suggested that the shift probably reflects the arrival of the bow and arrow in the Hondo Valley some time around A.D. 500-550, which could have led to differences in flaked stone patterns as they are typically observed and recorded in archaeological assemblages.

The results of the faunal analysis also presented some surprises. Specifically, most identifiable elements of artiodactyls (deer and other large game) represented body parts that did not contain substantial cuts of meat, and elements associated with the highest meat values (femurs and humeri) were either rare or absent. Such a pattern is more typical of kill sites or temporary hunting camps, where dispatched animals are partially butchered and the less desirable parts discarded, rather than intensive habitation sites such as those containing the analyzed faunal remains from the US 70 project. The absence of high meat-bearing elements is difficult to explain. But the presence of elements normally discarded at kill sites or hunting camps suggest that the inhabitants of these sites probably did not have to go very far to hunt or trap deer and other large game, whose conditioned fear of humans may have been offset by the attraction of maize fields and gardens in the vicinity of the Late Archaic and Early Formative settlements in the Hondo Valley.

Six of the investigated sites contained historic components. Four of these had still-standing structures and another had an adobe foundation. The south, LA 71167, was a rockshelter/cave complex that was occupied in both prehistoric and historic times. Archaeological investigations at the historic sites recovered artifacts of glass, metal, ceramic, and other materials. Together with archival research and oral histories that were carried out as part of the cultural resources "creative mitigation" for the US 70 project, these historic artifacts help reveal details about the rhythms and changes in rural life in the Hondo Valley from the late 1800s through the middle part of the twentieth century.