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Prehistoric Camps Along Lower Nash Draw

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NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSPORTATION

ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

This report represents the results of data recovery operations conducted along New Mexico Highway 128 from Milepost 0 to Milepost 10.6. The work was accomplished by the Office of Archaeological Studies, part of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, for the New Mexico Department of Transportation between November 2006 and December 2007. The NMDOT project consisted of the partial realignment and upgrading of the highway, starting at the highway's junction with NM 31 and ending just beyond the turnoff to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP) facility.

The NM 128 project started on the terraced gravel ridges immediately west of Nash Draw Valley, crossed the broad lower valley of Nash Draw, and terminated on the western escarpment of Livingston Ridge, immediately east of Nash Draw. Archaeological sites LA 129216, LA 129214, and LA 113042 were situated on two gravel ridges at the west end of the project. LA 129300 and LA 129222 were on low erosional remnants in the bottom of the Nash Draw Valley, and LA 129220 was situated on the broken ground of the valley's eastern slope. LA 129217 and LA 129218 were situated among the dunes of Los Medanos on the west edge of Livingston Ridge. Los Medanos supports the westernmost extent of the shin-oak communities (*Quercus havardii*) in this part of New Mexico.

One hundred forty-five radiocarbon dates reference dozens of occupations that took place at various prehistoric sites in the area and indicate that all of the sites were used on multiple occasions. The majority of occupations occurred between AD 1 and the early to mid-1400s. Five ¹⁴C dates attest to a few occupations at LA 129218 and LA 129300 from the period 4500 to 4200 BC. A single date of about 900 BC represents the only other occupation of the sites during pre-Christian times. Three Golondrina (late Paleoindian) projectile points were recovered from two of the sites, but all appear to represent "pickups" by later peoples. However, possible Paleoindian (buried) features at LA 129216 were dated by optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) to 8970 BC and 10,600 BC.

Analyses presented in this report suggest that all prehistoric occupations of the sites were of short duration by small groups of people. The three western most sites (LA 129216, LA 129214, and LA 113042) were reoccupied so frequently that anthrosols—man-caused accumulations of dark sediments—were formed. Evidently, men, women, and possibly children were present during many or most of the occupations for purposes of food collecting, processing, and consumption. Plant foods included wild annual and perennial species, with yucca stems probably being one of the main target species. Animal foods were mainly small mammals. Corn residues and pollen were documented on several tools. Seasons of site use probably included late spring, early summer, and mid-summer to fall. The nearest known sites that may have been used for overwintering by the NM 128 peoples are at a nearby group of lakes, including Laguna Plata, a few kilometers northeast of Nash Draw.

A geomorphology study of the NM 128 project area made substantive additions to Stephen A. Hall's (Hall 2002) field guide to the Mescalero Sands country.

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