

Ancient Native American Archeological Site Unearthed at The Doña Ana Range/Fort Bliss

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In a recent find, archeologists have discovered pueblo and pit-house sites at the Doña Ana Range that are believed to date back to between the 14th and 15th centuries. This time frame coincides with the occupation of the Doña Ana by the Jornada Mogollon, a branch of the "Mogollon" culture in reference to the prehistoric peoples who inhabited much of southern New Mexico, east-central Arizona, northern Chihuahua, and far western Texas. The term "Jornada" comes from the term Jornada del Muerto or "Journey

Mogollon also appear to have participated in a widespread trade network, with other Mogollon peoples to the west, e. g. Texas High Plains bands, Middle Rio Grande pueblos, and northern Chihuahuan communities in Mexico.

Mr. Myles Miller, archeologist and principal investigator for the project has stated

that, "This is the first pueblo excavation that has been done professionally in over 20 years. I believe the last one was in 1986...So this kind of excavation is probably going to have a real revolutionary effect on understanding how people lived about 500 years ago out here. It's a big find for this area."

"You are looking at multiple occupations here



Principal archeologist holds a piece of an unearthed, broken pottery bowl typical of this ancient culture. *Photo courtesy of Fort Bliss Monitor.*

of Death" in reference to a desolate stretch of roadway used by the Spanish in their travels from El Paso to Santa Fe.

The Jornada Mogollon development consisted of a pattern of increased agriculture, pithouse village life, pueblo construction, and ultimately, cultural collapse. During the time that they lived in this region, the Jornada Mogollon apparently relied more on hunting and gathering and less on agriculture. Even though they constructed pithouses near their fields, evidence indicates that the Jornada Mogollon may have occupied them during part of the year, at planting or harvesting time.

Being more nomadic, the Jornada

over a period of time. You're talking about a separate occupation here and hundreds of years later you have another pueblo built 50 meters away from each other," said Brian D. Knight, senior archeologist.

Knight said the site was found last year, but due to lack of funding they excavated until the budgeted amount was expended. The site



The John A. Hedrick Site: the dark areas inside the pueblo walls are burned beams believed to have been ritually set on fire. *Photo Courtesy of Fort Bliss Monitor.*

was then covered with plastic and preserved until recently when more funding was available.

After performing a survey of the land, a high density of surface artifacts was found scattered throughout the area, which indicated previous intensive occupation. Then they sampled by excavating and scraping back some of the sand.

"And sure enough the pueblo walls started turning up," said Knight. "The site is pretty spectacular, it's huge. "We had never anticipated it was going to be as nice as it is," said Knight.

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Another view of the John A. Hedrick Site. *Photo courtesy of Fort Bliss Monitor.*

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The 11 room pueblo has one central large room, which is believed to be a communal room, typical of the Jornada Mogollon. Knight said they can usually distinguish it as a ritual room because it doesn't have the normal domestic activity type things, such as a ground stone artifact used for food processing. These rooms usually have more ritual type objects and less utilitarian type artifacts.

So far, the team has found hearths,



A *metate* or stone grinding slab artifact believed to have been left by the Jornada Mogollon. Photo courtesy of Fort Bliss Monitor.

ground stone and significant amounts of prehistoric ceramics. They have also found evidence of various burned beams, which according to some theories the pueblos were set on fire by the tribes before they abandoned them. It might have been a ritualistic or catastrophic event. "We have even found in one of the rooms what appears to be cache," said Knight.

Knight said a large percentage of the



Global positioning system is used to obtain coordinates of the outside of the pueblo's walls for final map construction. Photo courtesy of Fort Bliss Monitor.

Jornada Mogollon culture is contained on Fort Bliss and White Sands Missile Range. "We are one of the primary core areas for the Jornada Mogollon culture. We have a giant archeological research laboratory between the two installations," said Knight.

According to Knight, the fall of the Jornada Mogollon was probably around 1450 A.D. The primary theory of their fall is that there may have been an extensive drought during that time period, which may have caused the groups to start moving across the landscape.

Another hypothesis is other groups such as the Manso, Suma, Jcome, possibly the Tarahumara and some of the other Apache groups that were moving through the area and were conducting raids. Researchers believe that this may have disrupted the Jornada Mogollon culture as a whole.

The site is not open to the public due to safety issues such as live artillery and convoy exercises. According to Knight they will seek to provide opportunities for public visits in the future.

Knight said they will produce reports, which will have complete maps, photographs and detailed descriptions of everything that was found. The artifacts will be collected and kept in the Fort Bliss Curatorial Facility. Researchers are encouraged to visit the facility



Screening for small artifacts at the discovered site in Doña Ana. Photo courtesy of Fort Bliss Monitor.

and analyze the data to use in their own research. They will be able to examine the artifacts and get copies of the reports.

"The main thing I want people to understand is that we have a lot of rich archeological resources out here. We are probably providing some of the best research that is being done in the west Texas and southern New Mexico area. Sometimes there is a perception that because we are on a military base



Archeologist carefully brushes and exposes an unearthened hearth where the Jornada Mogollon prepared their food. Photo courtesy of Fort Bliss Monitor.

the evidence is being damaged and written off, and that is absolutely not the case. It is important for the public to know that the military is doing a very fine job in protecting our cultural patrimony," said Knight.

The unearthened site has been named after John A. Hedrick, a curator who handled the collections at Fort Bliss for many years. He also excavated a number of sites on the Fort Bliss area and all through west Texas and the Trans Pecos. "So it's a tribute to him," said Knight. ☺