

## Prehistory: 8,000 Years Ago

Coronado National Memorial was established in 1952 to commemorate the sixteenth century expedition of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado into what is now the United States. The Memorial, however, also protects a surprising number of Archaic period prehistoric sites. In fact, there is no comparable density of Archaic sites currently known in the mountains of southeastern Arizona.

### The Archaic Period

In southern Arizona, the Archaic period begins ca. 8800 BP (before present) and ends with the appearance of ceramic artifacts in the first few centuries A.D., but in some areas, the Archaic patterns of subsistence and mobility continued much later. Archaic people were semi-nomadic generalists, focusing on a broad range of food sources, including wild game and a wide variety of plant foods. Archaic sites typically consist of surface scatters of ground stone (manos and metates) and flaked stone artifacts, including scrapers, knives, and projectile points. Archaeologists can recognize several different types or styles of projectile points that have been shown to specific portions of the Archaic period.

In the Southwest, the Archaic period is commonly broken into three subperiods: Early, Middle, and Late, the latter of which also corresponds to the adoption of agriculture in southern Arizona. The Early Archaic period began more than 8,000 years ago (ca. 8800 BP, or before present) and is most recognizable archeologically by the presence of long-tapering stemmed projectile points. The Middle Archaic (5500 to ca. 3800 BP) is characterized by San Jose-Pinto, Gypsum, Chiricahua, and Cortaro points. The Late Archaic, marked by the presence of San Pedro and Cienega points, as well as an increasing number of ground stone artifacts used for processing plant foods, begins ca. 3800 BP and transitions in different parts of the Southwest at different times into the Early Agricultural Period as people focused more heavily on plant resources, and ultimately, domesticated foods such as maize (corn), squash, and beans.

### The Archaic in the Coronado Area

Archaic period archeological sites were first recorded within Coronado National Memorial in 1975. A resurvey of part of the Monument in 2010, and again in 2011, following the Monument Fire, however, revealed a density of Archaic sites

## FACT SHEET

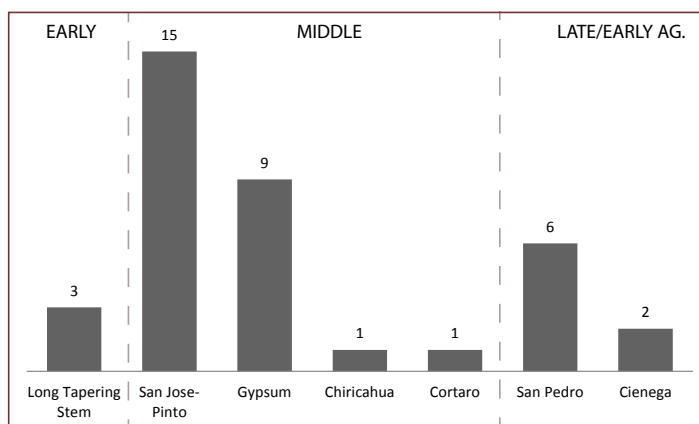


HUCKELL AND KNIGHTON-MISOR (2011:FIGURE 6)

Archeologists surveying in Coronado National Memorial after the 2011 Monument Fire.

(1 per approximately every 9 acres surveyed) unprecedented in the mountains of southeastern Arizona.

The majority of the sites date to the Middle Archaic, based on diagnostic projectile points, but the Coronado area was also occupied during the Early and Late Archaic periods and into the Early Agricultural period, as well. Most of the sites appear to have been the product of repeated, short-term (probably seasonal) use of the area by small groups of people.



Diagnostic projectile points, by time period, found at Coronado National Memorial Archaic sites. Elko series points were also found, but are diagnostic only to the Archaic period overall, not to any given subperiod.



Sample of the Archaic period projectile points found at sites in Coronado National Memorial. These points span a period of time beginning some 8,000 years ago and ending in the fourth or fifth century A.D.

The types of artifacts present suggest both hunting and gathering as focal activities. Stone tool manufacture and manufacture or maintenance of hunting equipment was also common at most of the sites (recognized by flake debris and discarded core material and points), as was plant processing. Nutting stones (small stones with a central depression) may have been used to process walnuts or acorns, and ground stone milling equipment (grinding slabs, metates, and manos) were used to process annual and/or perennial plant foods. Scrapers (scraping tools) and bifaces (knives) may also indicate butchering of game and processing of hides.

Five of the sites recorded in 2010 and 2011 also had obsidian projectile points and flake debris, and all but one of the samples submitted for sourcing came from Antelope Wells in New Mexico — a location 80 miles (130 km) to the east. It seems likely that the obsidian was obtained directly, which indicates the Coronado Archaic people also used the desert grasslands of New Mexico, and likely, the higher elevation resources of the Peloncillo, Perillo, and Mule mountains in between.

While the duration of each stay was likely short, several of the Coronado Archaic sites have rock pile features. These features do not appear to represent cooking activities, as the stones are unburned, and are also not likely related to plant cultivation, as most occur at Middle Archaic sites. It is possible, therefore, that these piles represent ground clearing for tent or brush structure constructions that are no longer visible or still buried.

## What Was the Draw?

In much of the American West, the period between 8,000 and 4,000 years ago (the Early and Middle Archaic) was both hot-

ter and drier than conditions today. The beginning of this period, however, also corresponds to the start of the seasonal monsoon system in the Southwest, and in southern Arizona, this combination may have resulted in a seasonally wetter, warmer climate in which cienegas, marshes, streams, and rivers could support rich and diverse biotic communities.

The Coronado National Memorial Archaic sites are also located in an oak woodland environment, which on a seasonal basis, is one of the richest biotic communities in southeastern Arizona. The Coronado oak woodland would have offered Archaic hunter-gatherers a number of important resources, including acorns from at least two different species of oak, agave, manzanita, small seed-bearing annuals, wild grapes, and possibly walnuts. White-tail and mule deer were also present, as were bighorn sheep.

## Summary

People returned often to the Coronado area — so frequently that the archeological record left behind surpasses in surface density alone any other reported for the mountains of southeastern Arizona. Although difficult to interpret, these sites offer a remarkable window into the past, and with future study, will no doubt contribute vastly to our understanding of the Archaic period in the southern Southwest.

## Source Literature

*The Coronado Archaic site information derives from the following report. Interpretations are those of the fact sheet's author.*

Huckell, Bruce B., and Jonathan Knighton-Wisor

2011 *2010-2011 Report on Investigations Conducted in the NPS Units of Chiricahua (CHIR) and Coronado (CORO) Affected by Illegal Border Activities*. Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.



Two nutting stones from Coronado National Memorial Archaic sites.