



Tours of archaeological interest in east-central New Mexico

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TOURS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST IN EAST-CENTRAL NEW MEXICO

by

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Tour One: Tucumcari to Logan, Campana, Mosquero, Gallegos, return to Logan, Cameron, and then to Tucumcari.

The area from Tucumcari to Amarillo is a flat plain across which the Canadian River flows. This creates a natural walkway in this region on an east-west parallel. For over 10,000 years Indians walked through this corridor from eastern New Mexico to the rich, productive stone quarries, now part of the Alibates National Monument north of Amarillo along the Lake Meredith area of the Canadian River. So widespread was the knowledge of this rich lithic quarry area to the American Indian, that it is estimated that more than 20 percent of all Indian artifacts today found in eastern New Mexico were made from the characteristically colored cherts, jaspers, and quartzites from this quarry location. Artifacts of Alibates chert (also called Alibates flint) have been found as far away as Wyoming, Arkansas, northern Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. At the quarries the Indians shaped rough teardrop "preforms" which were then taken to their home area, buried to retain their "green" flaking attributes, and later used as "blanks" from which finished lithic artifacts were made when needed. Several caches of these blanks or preforms have been found in the Tucumcari-Logan area of New Mexico.

At contact times, four major Indian groups roamed over eastern New Mexico. From the north came the Ute Indians, generally following down Ute Creek into east-central New Mexico. From the east came the Comanche and the Kiowa. Originally the Comanche were a branch of the Shoshone of Wyoming, leaving this group and travelling on foot to the west Texas area following a dispute with the Shoshone over the killing of a bear about 1700. Upon reaching the Southwest, they adopted the horse from the Spanish, and quickly became the most feared Indians of the southern High Plains. The "Lords of the Southern Plains," as they were called, raided as far west as Arizona and so far south into Mexico that they at one time threatened the Mexican city of Chihuahua. The Kiowa, who often allied themselves with the Comanche, were generally a more easterly group, and usually not quite so migratory as the Comanche. A series of Puebloid invasions came at various times from the west, mainly following the Pecos and Canadian River valleys. Some of these groups went as far east as West Texas.

Generally the Puebloid peoples built their settlements in the river valleys or along the base of cliffs or escarpments, while the Comanche and Kiowa preferred the higher ground of the tops of bluffs and hills for their campsites. The Ute were more variable, and could be found camping on either high or low ground.

The primitive road to Mosquero from Logan has no im-

portant excavated sites although it crosses an area of both Ute and Puebloid occupation in the past. To the northwest of Mosquero, between Wagon Mound and the Canadian River, caves and rock shelters have been located which are rich in perishable materials such as mats, baskets, wooden items of native manufacture, and even leather and cloth goods. Both the bow and arrow and the atlatl (a spear thrower used prior to the bow and arrow in the Southwest) are to be found in these Basketmaker and later Puebloid dry shelters. Unfortunately, most of these caves have been found and dug by collectors who have maintained neither good records nor procedures in excavation. It is only with proper excavation by skilled professionals that we can determine how close the perishable items of earlier Indians were to the later ethnologic accounts of Indians in this area by early historians.

The return road to Logan, along New Mexico 39, crosses Ute Creek at Gallegos. Artifacts, apparently Ute, have been found along the banks of this normally dry arroyo, although at one spot, along the northeast side of the arroyo and within fifty yards of the bridge, the remains of one or more mammoth have been uncovered. Most of the bones in recent years have been infrequently found and fragmentary when discovered. Frank Hibben of the University of New Mexico and George Agogino of Eastern New Mexico University have examined this possible site without finding human artifacts.

South of San Jon, where Highway 39 rises up over the San Jon caprock (Stop No. 5), lies an important Paleo-Indian site once dug by the late Frank H. H. Roberts, Jr., of the Smithsonian Institution. At a point roughly two hundred yards to the left of the road at the very edge of the caprock, Dr. Roberts uncovered artifacts some nine thousand years of age along with the remains of extinct bison overlying a stratum containing mammoth. No artifacts were found with the mammoth at this site. Since the excavation, which occurred in the early 1940's, additional bones and artifacts have occasionally been found.

Returning toward Tucumcari along New Mexico 88 one finds a heavy Comanche concentration as the road leaves the caprock, and again on Mesa Redonda, with a greater concentration of Puebloid and Ute artifacts being found in the lower areas north of the caprock.

One cannot pass Tucumcari Mountain without commenting on the Indian legend that gives the mountain its name. According to the legend, two lovers, Tucum and Cari, chose death by jumping from the mountain rather than face forced separation. It is the general opinion of serious students of folklore that there is no basis for the truth of this legend, but that it is instead a myth trying to explain an unknown Indian name for the peak. Except for a modest caprock, the mountain has too gentle a slope to make it popular as a suicide spot.

Tour Two: Tucumcari to Ft. Sumner and vicinity, then proceed to Santa Rosa and San Ignacio.

What has already been said in Tour One concerning the living locations of the Pueblo, Comanche, and Ute peoples holds true also for Tour Two. There are no known Paleo-Indian sites along the route, though this tour comes closest to the famous Blackwater Draw site near Clovis, forty miles to the southeast. This site is not only the largest mammoth-kill site in the New World, but also exhibits the longest sequence of undisturbed habitation of man in the Americas. Clovis, Folsom, Plano, and Archaic peoples inhabited Blackwater Draw sequentially from about 11,500 years ago into early A.D. times. Their remains are found in distinctive layers, generally termed the gray or speckled sands (Clovis), the diatomite (Folsom), the carbonaceous silts (Plano), and the jointed sands (Archaic). Their artifacts and the remains of their prey— notably mammoth for Clovis hunters and extinct bison (2 species) for Folsom and Plano—are a large part of the archaeological story we know today.

Some fifteen miles to the southwest of the junction of NM 252 and US 60, along a tributary of Blackwater Draw called Fiddler Creek, lies a series of small limestone caves identified as Billy the Kid Caves. The famous outlaw is supposed to have hidden within these caves and perhaps to have hidden his “treasure” at this location. It is doubtful if “Billy” ever had anything of value to cache, but the legend persists. In the mid-sixties the Department of Anthropology of Eastern New Mexico University excavated these caves, finding a late Archaic to Puebloid occupation. While several Folsom points were reported from Fiddler Draw, no evidence of early human occupation was found within the caves. However, some interesting animal bones were found, namely the remains of a modern type of Old World camel. Apparently one of the imported Army camels had died at this location after being “discharged” by the military. Perhaps the animal was released at Fort Sumner and wandered to this location before death.

South of Fort Sumner, and directly on the tour route, is the Bosque Redondo, a wooded area along the Pecos Valley. Shortly after the Civil War, Colonel Kit Carson rounded up still nomadic groups of Mescalero Apaches and soon after the Navajo raiders and brought them under military authority to the Bosque Redondo, where attempts were made to introduce them to a farming economy. After such successes against the Apache and Navajo, Carson went after the Comanche and Kiowa, then in winter encampment in the Texas Panhandle. These Indians, the fiercest fighters of the Southwest, almost repeated the Custer Massacre, and it took Carson’s greatest skill to save his cavalry and his supporting Ute forces from destruction. The Comanche remained a threat to white settlers and buffalo hunters for several more decades. Meanwhile the Apache and Navajo living at Fort Sumner failed to adapt to the farming economy and eventually were allowed to return to reservation life in areas more favorable for them. Close to the Bosque Redondo area, actually once part of it, are currently the graves of Billy the Kid and Lucien Maxwell. It is irony to note that “William the Punk’s” grave has roughly one hundred visitors and admirers for every one who visits Maxwell’s, the man who once owned most of the area which your tours have covered.

The end of this spur tour takes you to the vicinity of the Pecos Valley roughly twenty miles south of Fort Sumner. In

this area of the Pecos, several small Pueblo ruins may be found along the cliffs at the edge of the Pecos Valley. Artifacts of Pueblo manufacture are common in this area and may be found if one concentrates on finding these items. Notched points, side and end scrapers, drills, and milling stones are most commonly found.

The road between Fort Sumner and Santa Rosa produces nothing of appreciable importance to people interested in Indian history. Occasionally metal points may be found in the area between Ute Dam and Fort Sumner, and throughout the entire Pecos Valley evidence of Puebloid peoples can be found, but the road travelled stays several miles from the actual valley and little is to be seen.

Northwest of Santa Rosa is another area in which “perishable” artifacts have been found in the limestone and sandstone rock shelters. It is neither as rich nor productive an area as that of the Wagon Mound-Canadian River area, although significant finds do occasionally occur.

Tour Three: Santa Rosa to Yeso then to Vaughn, Encino, and Clines Corners with several side trips.

Several small pueblos are to be found in the vicinity of Puerto de Luna, along the “Grand Canyon” of the Pecos. Inquiries at Puerto de Luna will reveal their locations. All are of the early post-contact period, roughly four hundred years ago. Occasionally polychrome pottery may be found at these site locations. Coronado is believed to have crossed the Pecos at this point.

A few miles south of the village of Yeso lies Yeso Arroyo, an intermittent stream that today provides the only good consistent water source between former Pleistocene Lake Estancia and the Pecos River area. There is no doubt that both men and animals must have travelled along this east-west drainage during Paleo-Indian and later periods. The arroyo walls of this drainage are rich with fossil bone of Pleistocene age. The bones of mammoth, fossil bison, extinct ground sloth, and Pleistocene horse have been found along the drainage. At one point C. Vance Haynes, Jr. and George Agogino found three separate layers of bison eroding from the bank. The middle-layer bison was removed and dated at close to ten thousand years. It proved to be the extinct *Bison antiquus*, the type of bison associated with Folsom man. Yeso Arroyo drains into the Pecos River.

The road from Yeso to Vaughn runs through an arid area. Both Puebloid and Archaic campsites may be found in and about blowouts, and a few Paleo-Indian points may be uncovered also. However, no outstanding sites are known from this region.

Near the town of Duran is Duran Mesa, which has been intensively investigated by C. Vance Haynes, Jr. of Southern Methodist University and George Agogino of Eastern New Mexico University. Many Paleo-Indian artifacts have come from both the top and the base of this mesa complex.

The nearby Encino “blowouts” is a sand dune area along NM 3 north of Encino. These dunes are so extensive that at one time the highway had to be diverted around the dune area. The remains of mammoth and extinct varieties of horse and bison are found in the “blowouts.” Rattlesnakes are frequently encountered here, and the relatively rare sidewinder has been seen in this area.

At the extreme west part of Tour Three, along US 60, we

come close to the railroad stop of Lucy. In 1954, K. W. Kendall discovered Clovis and Sandia points at this location. Excavations were done by graduate student William B. Roosa under the direction of Dr. Frank C. Hibben. The site, a series of blowouts along the shoreline of Pleistocene Lake Estancia, has produced artifacts from almost modern times to extreme antiquity. With the artifacts have been found extinct mammoth, bison, and horse. The age of Sandia artifacts has

been estimated from fifteen to thirty thousand years old, but recent research by Haynes and Agogino suggests a possible age similar to Clovis man, about 11,000 years.

The Pedernal Mountains were inhabited by both the Comanche and Ute Indians on an intermittent basis, but there is little more to be seen from the Pedernals to Clines Corners, where the tour ends.