

Summary of Field Trip to Tuzigoot November 21, 2020

Presentation by guide Matt Guebard, National Parks Service

Text below is based on notes taken by Dennis DuBose with some additional research. It was written by Dennis DuBose who is responsible for all inaccuracies in it.

Tuzigoot is a Southern Sinagua Culture pueblo near Clarkdale, Arizona. When the site was originally excavated in the 1930s, the excavators wanted a good Indian name for the site. As it turned out, one of the excavation workers was an Apache. So, they asked him what to call it. Tuzigoot sits near an oxbow in the Verde River. Apparently, such a river bend is referred to in the Apache language as “crooked water.” So, he gave this word “tuziwoot,” which ended up being mangled into Tuzigoot, and so it is called.

The Tuzigoot ruin occupies a peaked ridge running approximately North-South. It is North and Northeast of the nearby Verde River. On this day the river was marked by a band of golden Sycamore Fall foliage. The river was probably wider and shallower in earlier times. To the East below the ridge is a marsh which would have been there when Tuzigoot was occupied. The marsh is spring fed and is now largely full of cattails with some open water. Over 80 species of birds have been sighted there. The marsh was certainly a resource to the Tuzigoot community for food and materials.

Across the side of the valley from Tuzigoot North and a little West you can see the location of Hatalacva, a sister pueblo contemporary with Tuzigoot. It has not been excavated. It is owned by the Archaeological Conservancy.

It appears that the first structures in Tuzigoot were built at the highest point on top of the ridge. New rooms were added in stair-step fashion around earlier rooms, building on ledges down slope. Mostly, the rooms were one story, but the excavators identified about a dozen two story rooms. Generally, the further out and down from the center, then the later the room was built. The structural archaeology of Tuzigoot is complex. When people live in a place for several hundred years, they remodel or tear down and rebuild. Rooms are built over older rooms.

They ran out of room on these ledges and so some later rooms were built well down slope. Our Guide Matt Guebard pointed out a separate block of rooms about 50 yards down slope on the East side from the main pueblo block. You could see only part of it leaning out over the edge of the steep drop off.

Matt also pointed out some rectangular slab lined features in certain rooms. These stood about a foot or more high above the current room floor, slabs on edge. The original floors were at about the top of these features, so actually they were subfloor features, probably storage bins or possibly parts of earlier structures built over. The original excavators felt these were worth preserving.

Larger rooms appear to have been built later. They sometimes had brush and mud room dividers.

The one-story rooms were entered through a ceiling entrance doorway hole. Only 5-8 wall doorways were found at Tuzigoot.

It is believed that the walls were plastered over with clay mortar and not with bare exposed stones as show today. It appears that they used a thick layer to cover the masonry, then applied a finer finish cover, possibly using colored clays. There is one room near the top of Tuzigoot ruin where some plaster coating is still present. In the 1930s a roof was placed over this room to preserve it. However, this roof was damaged several years ago by heavy snow. It is not safe now, but the Park Service is working on getting it repaired. Formerly, it was possible to view this plastering and hopefully in the near future it can be reopened.

Approximately 250 to 500 people lived at Tuzigoot Pueblo at one time. There is limited tree ring data and it indicates later rooms were built in the 1380s.

Presumably Tuzigoot was built on this high ridge for defensive purposes. There are some 30 or so Sinagua Culture pueblos of 30-50 or more rooms in the Verde Valley with at least one other pueblo in line of sight forming a network of such pueblos. Some believe this was for signaling warning of intruders. These all date from the 13th or 14th century. Possibly, also they wished to preserve good lowland for farming.

A possible irrigation channel has been found by the Park Service near the base of the eastern slope of Tuzigoot near the marsh.

A small sister site on the next ridge to the South was excavated by the Park Service, which has the artifacts found. It is on private land and now has a house on it.

Today, standing on Tuzigoot, you can see the modern town of Clarkdale a short distance to the West, and further away, West-Southwest, is Jerome. Originally, these were both copper mining towns. William Clark owned the United Verde Copper Company and he founded Clarkdale as a company town to house his workers. The town was laid out by worker class with the miners in smaller homes lower down, supervisors in larger homes mid-way up, and the executives in the largest homes high up. Our Guide and Speaker Matt Guebard, who lives in modern day Clarkdale, says that you can still see this home size gradation today in the town.

Today, just to the West below Tuzigoot you can see a large flat meadow. Formerly this is said to have been a canyon of sorts, which was used to collect tailings drainage. It filled up at least 50 feet and became a shallow disgusting yellow pond from the mine tailings. It has since been isolated, covered over with soil, and planted with native species. It looks pretty nice now [I remember seeing this industrial waste playa on previous visits years ago. I was surprised it was gone now. –D DuBose].

At the present time you can see from Tuzigoot large piles of black mine slag near Tuzigoot. The copper mining is no longer active, but these slag piles are being processed with modern methods to extract copper remaining in them.

The copper smelting harmed local farm crops. To avoid trouble with local farmers, the mining company bought up their farms and let them continue farming provided they signed agreements not to hold the mining company liable for any problems.

The area suffered severely economically with the onset of the Great Depression.

The Civil Works Administration (CWA) was a Depression Era New Deal program. It was a temporary program to quickly create mostly manual-labor jobs for millions of unemployed workers during the hard winter of 1933–34. Some communities in Arizona took advantage of the CWA to carry out excavations of local archaeological sites while providing employment for otherwise out-of-work residents. Tuzigoot was originally excavated under this program to employ local miners and others near Clarkdale, Arizona. Similar projects were done at Montezuma Castle, Tonto, Wupatki, and other archaeological sites.

The Tuzigoot excavation project occurred from October, 1933 to May, 1934. Two archaeologists were supervisors. Unemployed miners were put to work. Many descendants of these workers still live in Clarkdale today. They were experienced diggers and they dug fast. They excavated some 87 rooms. According to the plan, they primarily were looking for artifacts to be displayed in a museum. The procedures used were not those of today, but they were more or less consistent with practices at the time. The notes taken by the archaeologists were pretty good for that time. Almost everything we know about prehistoric times at Tuzigoot comes from these notes.

The excavators found thousands of potsherds and a great many pots. At the time of the excavation, the copper mining company owned the land that Tuzigoot sits on, as well as much of the surrounding land. Company executives got first pick of the artifacts.

The excavators found 430 human burials. Almost all adult burials were on slopes, but children burials were generally in rooms. This is typical for the Sinagua culture. Cases showing signs of disease went to the University of Arizona at Tucson for study and analysis. The others were reburied somewhere on site not now known. About 20 years ago, all of the unburied remains and burial goods were repatriated to the Hopi Tribe.

Our Guide Matt pointed out one room where the remains of a Scarlet Macaw were found in a formal burial. It is one of three that has been found in the Verde Valley. Apparently, the Macaws were fed corn, not a healthy diet for these birds. A hawk burial was found in the same room.

The walls were made of stones and mud. Once uncovered they deteriorated rapidly. Originally, they used Portland Cement to repair and stabilize the walls. Since then some 27 kinds of mortar have been used over time for repairs and maintenance. Currently the Park Service employs several masons for continuous maintenance. All of

the old mortars are being replaced with a special mortar mix that includes local soil to mimic the original color. It lasts about ten years exposed to the weather. In general, the bottom half of all current exposed walls are original but with the exposed mortar replaced. This outer mortar is a preservative hiding original mortar deeper in.

Water from rain and snow gets trapped behind walls and creates a lot of pressure pushing out. All kinds of drainage systems have been installed for preservation here and there at Tuzigoot. Nevertheless, sometimes walls collapse. Matt pointed out one high wall section where the lower part was a little different color than the upper portion. This wall had partially collapsed and then was reconstructed.

There are some sections of Tuzigoot that were not excavated, and some rooms were not fully excavated.

At the North end of the ridge top room block is an apparent open area believed to have been a plaza. Next to it were some large rooms that possibly had been two stories high. The miner excavators decided to reconstruct these rooms. They built them up to two stories with ladders up to the roof entrances and ladders down into the rooms. Decades ago, tourists could climb up and then down into these reconstructed rooms. Unfortunately, the miners were not very good masons and these rebuilt structures soon began to deteriorate. So, due to being unsafe they were eventually torn down. Some parts of these replica structures have been preserved as they are part of the site historical record.

The original plan was to place the artifacts at the Smoki Museum in Prescott. But there were just too many of them. So, in 1936 the present Tuzigoot Museum was built to house some of the artifacts.

So, how did the Tuzigoot site end up in the US Park Service? The copper mining company at first tried to give it to the State of Arizona, but there was too much red tape involved. It turned out that all that was needed to give it to the US Government was for the US President to declare the site a National Monument. So, it was done. The mining company and the Monument share a land boundary and so they regularly confer on various issues.

Following the tour of the Tuzigoot ruin conducted by Park Service Archaeologist Matt Guebard, he took us on a tour of the Tuzigoot Museum. Just inside the entrance most apparent were the huge olla jars on display. These were reconstructed from their potsherds in the Depression Era lab by patient women also employed for the excavation. Next to this was a series of photos and artifacts illustrating the original 1933-34 excavation.

To Rim Country Chapter Members, most notable here was a photo of the two archaeologist supervisors of the excavation, Edward Spicer and Louis Caywood. Edward Spicer was the author of several books on Southwest Archaeology [I have seen some of the original volumes in the collection at the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community Library – D. DuBose]. This is notable because Edward Spicer is a

long term member and Assistant Adviser of the Rim Country Chapter, as well as formerly the organizer of many RCC Field Trips to Historical and Archaeological Sites across Arizona and adjacent states. Our Ed, who has a degree in Structural Engineering from the Air Force Academy and a degree in Archaeology from ASU, sometimes jokes about his “Uncle Ed Spicer,” but he admits he is no known relation.

The artifacts on display were varied and fabulous.

Finally, Matt led our tour downhill to a replica room built by Park Service personnel as experimental archaeology. One purpose for constructing the room was to experience issues and decisions that prehistoric peoples had faced. They also tested various materials and techniques to learn building technologies firsthand. The room was constructed as a one-to-one model copy of a room at Montezuma Castle. At the Montezuma Castle Field Trip on October 17, 2020, Matt Guebard had described a test using this replica room to see if such a structure could be set on fire with a flaming arrow. Native American oral histories had suggested that Castle A at Montezuma Castle had been set afire in this way. The test was surprisingly successful, and they had to scramble to get a fire extinguisher to put out the blaze.

Most of our Field Trip group crawled inside and out and had many questions for Matt.

The Field Trip then left Tuzigoot and went to the Verde Valley Archaeological Center for lunch (outside). Then inside the VVAC Museum we looked at the many fabulous perishable artifacts from the Dyck Collection. These are things that even professional archaeologists rarely if ever see, such as textile fabrics, bird snares, bows and arrows, sandals, sewing repair kits, and so on, fabulous.