



MEMORANDUM

Date: February 23, 2016

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Sunset Road Project Archaeology Findings**

Enclosed please find a February 12, 2016 memorandum from the Director of Sustainability and Conservation detailing the archaeological investigation conducted by the County for Sunset Road improvements. The memorandum documents the work performed and the findings, which are remarkable.

In addition, this past week, this site was toured by the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation, as well as the Chairman of the San Xavier District.

CHH/lab

Attachment

Memorandum

DATE: February 12, 2016
TO: C.H. Huckelberry, County Administrator
FROM: Linda Mayro, Director
SUBJECT: **Sunset Road Archaeological “Footprints” Tours Update**

Below is a summary of information related to the public tours the County hosted of the 2500-3000 year old agricultural system that includes multiple sets of footprints of adults and children and dogs that were preserved in mud while prehistoric people were irrigating crops set out in a grid of bordered gardens and canals near the confluence of the Rillito and Santa Cruz rivers.

Not only are early agricultural sites like this rare, the field system and footprints of two adults and two children and a dog are among the oldest found in the Greater Southwest. This unusual discovery was made as a result of archaeological mitigation that was being conducted by SWCA Consultants prior to construction of the Pima County Sunset Road project. The high potential for impacts to early agricultural features and later Hohokam features had been previously determined in earlier phases of the project, and mitigation was being conducted within the roadway prism. Last weekend concluded the archaeological fieldwork for compliance mitigation necessary for the Pima County Department of Transportation’s road and bridge construction project to begin. The project is funded County and RTA sources, and is located on land owned by Pima County.



The footprints and fields have now been completely recorded, mapped and photographed, and a host of highly specialized conservators and other technical experts donated their time, effort, equipment and materials to record and preserve the footprints. The entire area has been photographed using a high tech camera which provides a complete three dimensional record to a very fine degree of accuracy, and allows for 3-D printing to be made. Some of the best preserved footprints have been cast in molds so that accurate replicas of the footprints can be made, and two of the best footprints have actually been extracted in block for curation at the Arizona State Museum.

The initial Pima County media release occurred the week of January 18, 2016, from which the following outlets and international organizations have reported on this unusual archaeological discovery: all local TV networks, AZ Daily Star, Arizona Highways, American Archaeology Magazine, Archaeology Magazine, International Business Times UK, Reuters, Scientific American, and several other outlets.

See: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ancient-footprints-discovered-in-arizona/>

Because of significant public interest generated by the media accounts, our department and County Transportation decided to offer scheduled tours over the last three weekends. These tours were largely organized by Ian Milliken of my staff with volunteer assistance from other County staff, our consultants, and archaeological volunteers so that the public could see the preserved 3,000 year old field systems and footprints. This past weekend marked the final weekend of the public tours.

The public interest was outstanding. Roughly 4,000 visitors over the course of the three weekends toured the site, including tribal members from the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Gila River Indian Community. The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation requested also requested a tour of the site, and we expect to give a tour to the San Xavier District Chairman and his staff next week. Overall, the community's response was extremely positive regarding Pima County's efforts to document the site prior to construction and offer educational public tours. The tours were attended by families and individuals from throughout southern Arizona and the Phoenix area and some visitors from out of state. In addition to the public tour dates, Ian also hosted three school groups, including two groups of elementary school students from the Tanque Verde Unified School District, and a group comprised of middle and high school students from Vail School District and Baboquivari Middle/High School on the Tohono O'odham Reservation.

This past weekend, a Pima County videographer with Communications was present for Thursday's tour for the Vail/Baboquivari students, as well as Friday's public tour. Friday's tour also included a large group of students from Pima Community College (PCC) who were accompanied by the Chancellor of PCC. Communications staff worked together with Ian and other tour leaders to interview a diverse group of visitors including Vail/Baboquivari students, the PCC students, as well as several individual members of the public of varying ages on Friday.



Aerial photo of canal and field cells measuring about 50' square where footprints were found

The tours were a resounding success for Pima County and the Department of Transportation in providing the public the opportunity to “touch and see the past” and understand how our Tucson ancestors began to settle in riverside villages as they adopted agriculture and developed sophisticated irrigation systems that required cooperation and corporate labor to prepare and maintain the system.

Following final mapping and last minute special tours, the prehistoric surface will remain exposed for the next week to honor the request from some tribal members that members from Native American groups may still wish to visit the project area prior to construction. However should any looting occur or should the weather threaten the site, the project area be covered with a geotextile fabric and back dirt until construction commences in March.

Cc: John Bernal, Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Nanette Slusser, Assistant Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Priscilla Cornelio, Director, Transportation
Jason Bahe, Program Manager, Transportation
Ian Milliken, Program Coordinator, Sustainability & Conservation