Where the Rillito and Santa Cruz come together, sediment formed a prominence called Sunset Mesa. Below, the floodplain is known as the Rillito Fan where people farmed for millennia. This was home to the ancestors of the Tohono O’odham Nation, Gila River Indian Community, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Ak-Chin Indian Community, the Hopi Tribe and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe.

Here you see some of the first farmers of the North American continent tending their agricultural fields. Cottonwood trees in the distance give way to a thick mesquite forest, parts of which have been cleared for agricultural fields. Corn, wild sunflowers and amaranth grow in the fields you see. Early corn was a popcorn that grew on a short cob, about the size of an ink pen cap. Beyond the river, the Tucson Mountains face the coming storm, which might bring much needed rain.

Since the 1980s Pima County has worked to ensure that ancestral places are considered prior to development actions. Excavations of a buried settlement here reveal how people lived their daily lives several thousand years ago, even uncovering the intact footprints of farmers, their children, and their dogs, which were preserved in the muds of these ancient fields one rainy afternoon in the distant past.

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