Looking east from the west bank and floodplain of the Santa Cruz River, the distant Rincon Mountains await the summer rains that allow life to thrive in the desert. Today, the Santa Cruz River remains dry most of the year; however, more than 1,000 years ago, the river flowed year round, allowing groups of people to flourish here, building communities, engineering the land and the most sacred of resources - water, which gives life but could threaten, too.

The image shows villagers draining their fields to avoid flooding from the next rainstorm that looms in the distance. During the monsoon season, these ancient people worked cooperatively to build and maintain canal systems, tend fields, and harvest crops. As agriculture intensified, groups of people settled into village life along the river, and surpluses of food could be stored for the future or traded to nearby and distant villages for other goods and crafts.

Through time, trade networks and cultural alliances were formed among related and different communities. Today, their descendants 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 remain tied to this place – through their histories, stories and songs.

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