

Field Trip:

Tuzigoot National Monument and Verde Valley Archaeology Center Museum

Photos and notes by Dennis DuBose, Treasurer, Rim Country Chapter, AAS

Rim Country Chapter in association with San Tan Chapter of Arizona Archaeological Society conducted a Field Trip to Tuzigoot National Monument near Clarkdale, Arizona, and to the Verde Valley Archaeology Center Museum in Camp Verde, Arizona on Saturday, November 21, 2020. Our Guide and Speaker at Tuzigoot was National Park Service Archaeologist Matt Gruebard.



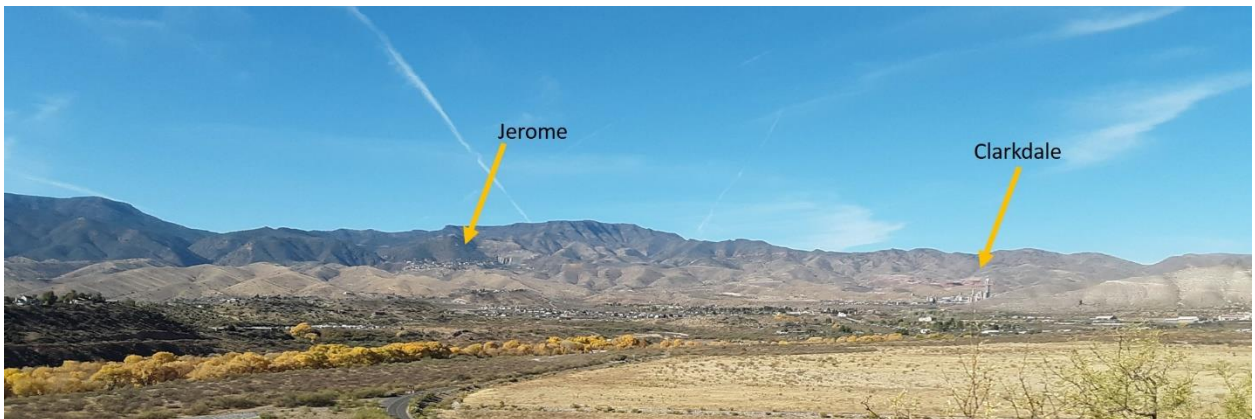
Field Trippers Sign in and await the beginning of the guided tour in front of the Tuzigoot Museum. Note the flute player in the left background performing with a SW Native People style flute.



The Field Trip group approaching the Tuzigoot Pueblo ruin from the north, viewing the marsh to the left below (not shown) in passing. Guide Matt Gruebard is narrating the view.

Tuzigoot Pueblo is in the Verde Valley on a ridge above an oxbow in the Verde River.

Nearby modern Jerome and Clarkdale were both originally towns housing and serving local copper miners.



Dating evidence indicates that the later parts of the Tuzigoot Pueblo were built in the 1380s. Archaeologists call the culture the Southern Sinagua.



Field Trip group viewing a large Tuzigoot room on the East side as Matt describes the points of interest and reviews the history of the excavation and its preservation/stabilization.

Tuzigoot was originally excavated in 1933-34 under a Depression Era New Deal project of the Civil Works Administration (CWA). The project used local miners and other unemployed workers to excavate, stabilize, and sometimes restore or reconstruct the site. Much of the reconstruction has been since removed. Lower portions of walls are original, although the visible mortar is protective stabilization.

At the time of excavation the Tuzigoot site was part of land owned by a copper mining company. At a later date the company donated the site to the US Government.

The New Deal excavators were supervised by two professional archaeologists. Although the excavation and excavation notes do not follow modern conventions, they were pretty good for that time. Almost everything known about the prehistoric people who occupied Tuzigoot comes from the excavation notes.



The Field Trip group listens as Matt explains this particular room.

The feature on the present floor was actually below the prehistoric occupation level floor. The excavators dug deeper and left them exposed and in place for viewing. The feature may be a storage bin or possibly the remains of an older structure built over in prehistoric times.

Note that the lower portion of the room back wall has a different color and pattern to the part above it. The room above and behind had been backfilled after excavation but without suitable drainage involved. Accumulated water caused the upper portion to collapse into the room. The fallen stones were put back in place but not exactly as originally. Over the decades many efforts have been made to facilitate better water drainage for preservation of the walls.



Matt comments on the history and features of the Tuzigoot environment.

The autumn golden leaved sycamore trees in the background mark the path of the Verde River, quite close to Tuzigoot Pueblo.

There was a smaller site on top of the ridge to the left of Matt's head in the photo. It was on privately owned land, but the National Parks Service was allowed to excavate it and holds the artifacts found. A house sits on the site now.

The modern town of Jerome, Arizona, is barely visible above the head of the Rim Country Chapter President, who is standing just to the right of Matt in the photograph.



Here Matt gives the history of the structure to the left.

As the New Deal Era excavation was winding down, the excavator miners attempted a complete reconstruction of several rooms at the north end edge of the Tuzigoot Pueblo, including roofs, ladders, and roof entrance. In earlier decades tourists could climb up and down into these rooms to get an impression of what living in the Pueblo in prehistoric times was like. However, the reconstruction was structurally faulty and began to deteriorate, making it unsafe, so the NPS removed most of it. They left part of it intact and better stabilized, as it is part of the history of the site.



After the tour of the Tuzigoot Pueblo site, Matt gave the Field Trip group a narrated tour of the Museum, which displays many artifacts from the site and also from the local Verde Valley area.



There is quite a variety of artifacts displayed in the Tuzigoot Museum and the printed labels and explanations are very informative. The Museum is mostly devoted to the prehistoric items and activities, but there is a small section about the historic Depression Era CWA project. It includes photos of the archaeologists, excavation workers, laboratory, and of the excavation itself in progress.

Matt, who lives in nearby Clarkdale, says that there are many descendants of the excavators still living there. He said that when they drop by the Museum, they like to point out in the photos, "There is my great grandfather," or something similar.



Finally, Matt took the Field Trip group down slope from the Tuzigoot Museum to a replica reconstruction of a typical prehistoric room. The group members explored in and out of the building.

The reconstruction was modeled after a room in Montezuma Castle. The National Park Service workers tried to copy it exactly to learn about the issues and decisions that the prehistoric builders faced. They experimented a bit with different materials and techniques to gain understanding of choices made.

The reconstructed replica building was also used to test various theories. The room was constructed with a roof vent hole modeled in location and size after the one in the original building. NPS archaeologists tested how well it worked with a hearth fire inside.

And speaking of fire ... in Matt's presentation at the Montezuma Castle Field trip on October 17, he said that local tribal oral history indicated that attackers had destroyed the Castle A structure by shooting flaming arrows onto the roof. So, the NPS archaeologists tested this claim by using a replica bow and arrow to shoot a flaming pine tar ball onto the roof of this replica room structure. It succeeded all too well. There was danger that the resulting fire would not only cause serious damage to the replica but could set the surrounding area on fire. They scrambled to put the fire out.



After the Tuzigoot tour and presentation, the Field Trip group drove to nearby Verde Valley Archaeological Center (VVAC) in Camp Verde.

After eating lunch outside in an adjacent small park, the group toured the VVAC Museum.

This Museum has many artifacts from the Dyck Collection on display as well as other Verde Valley artifacts. The Dyck Collection is notable for its many perishable objects that have not perished due to being in a large dry cave site in the Verde Valley. These artifacts are fabulous.



Here is just one of the extraordinary Dyck Collection artifacts on display at the VVAC Museum. It is a woven fabric selvage. In case you do not know what a selvage is (I did not), according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, “a selvage (variant selvage) is the edge on either side of a woven or flat-knitted fabric so finished as to prevent raveling; specifically, it is a narrow border often of different or heavier threads than the fabric and sometimes in a different weave.” At any rate it is an incredible piece of work. The prehistoric Verde Valley inhabitants were skilled, talented, and creative.