

# INDIAN RIDGE HOHOKAM HISTORY TOUR

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Indian Ridge Estates Resident

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This article is being presented for Indian Ridge Estates (IR) residents who could not attend the recent walking tours of the historic Hohokam ruins, which took place on the above date. We would like to thank Dr. Paul Fish and Dr. Suzanne Fish who gave the tours as representatives from the University of Arizona (UofA) Anthropology Department. They are both professors at the University and are Curators of Archaeology at the Arizona State Museum. Dr. Barbara Mills, the Chair of the UofA Anthropology Department also attended along with graduate student, William Reitze, who lives in the historic house/lab on the property and acts as the caretaker of the land. Dr. Mills spoke of the upcoming extensive renovation to the house and lab space on the site, which are both living and work space for UofA graduate students studying anthropology. Although the site is strictly off limits to the public, the tours were arranged to give us an opportunity to know more about the area in which we live.

Our guides answered all our questions, walked us through some of the significant structures and finds on the site, described the Hohokam Indians who lived there, explained the history of the different digs that had taken place on the grounds, and talked about what the future holds for the site. They were even kind enough to offer helpful suggestions for those of us who continue to find pottery and other Indian artifacts in our own yards.

The University Indian Ruin site is within the boundaries of our neighborhood and is approximately 13 acres in size. The land is owned by the University of Arizona's Department of Anthropology through a generous donation from a former UofA archaeology student (1933), gifted in order that there would be a working site with which to train archaeology students. The site was originally open to the public for several years for a self-guided tour of the ruins and excavation areas. Soon lack of resources closed the park to the public, yet it stayed busy with archaeological excavations. Keep in mind, the original dwellings extended beyond the boundaries of the present-day 13-acre preserve and out into the IR neighborhood, but the external dwellings were most likely not easily identifiable and were built over when IR was born.

As the story goes, centuries before Europeans first came to the Tucson Basin, a group of Indians with a distinctive way of life settled here. They were called the Hohokam (ho-ho-kam), a Pima Indian word meaning "all used up." The Hohokam people built villages close to streams in order to farm the rich soil, and to hunt and gather in the surrounding desert and mountains. Following a long period of early farmers beginning 4,000 years ago, the Hohokam lived in the Tucson Basin from about A.D. 300 to 1500. According to the dating of artifacts found, the Hohokam people who settled on IR land were here from approximately A.D. 1150 to as late as 1450. Additional discoveries of certain

dated artifacts raise the possibility that people were intermittently here as late as the early 1700s and possibly even into the 1800s. The site was once a prominent, central place in the late pre-Hispanic settlement pattern of the eastern Tucson Basin. We know this was the only settlement in the area with public or ceremonial architecture, in addition to adobe dwellings. This village served as a public focal point for a much larger community of interrelated and dispersed populations living in numerous surrounding hamlets and small villages. Other evidence of structures and artifacts enables us to estimate that 600 to 1,000 Hohokam people may have lived in our neighborhood. They farmed the flat low-lying area we now know as the Tucson Country Club. Archaeologists have identified this site as one of the last and largest Hohokam villages in the Tucson Basin. Features at the site represent more Puebloan influences, including contiguous-walled room blocks. These villagers were part of the larger Hohokam world, whose inhabitants lived in the Sonora Desert of southern Arizona.

We were led to the highest point on the site. On top of this raised berm you could see evidence of the tops of the walls that made this a Hohokam platform mound. To create the platform mound, the Hohokam began with a set of existing adobe walled rooms which they filled in, before adding additional soil and walls around them to enlarge the overall mound size. Once the mound was created, elevated buildings were constructed on top of it, reaching a greater height. According to our guides, the platform mound was most likely centrally located, used by tribal and religious leaders and had limited access by the rest of the tribe. It was used as a space for worship, a sacred location on which to hold religious ceremonies, and a lookout point for the tribe to spot approaching enemies, animals, etc. Massive adobe walls, up to eight feet in height, enclosed each residential compound and platform mound precinct at the site. These walls are believed to reflect the architectural demarcation of social groups rather than having served a defensive function.

The guides went on to point out other walls from other Hohokam structures, locations of the previous archaeology digs, and some of the interesting artifacts found on the site. They explained how the Hohokam people of this area lived in clusters of conjoined rectangular adobe rooms within a walled compound. Regarding the structures, Dr. Paul Fish explained how the walls were adobe but not adobe brick. To build these adobe walls, first a short wall of wet adobe was raised about 2-3 feet high. Then tall post-like rocks would be placed (pointing upward) on top of the wet adobe wall. Once dry, they could raise the next 2-3 feet layer of wall on top of the first layer and the "standing" rocks would act as primitive rebar giving the wall additional strength and stability. The room/house walls were normally about nine feet high. This means that the top of the platform mound stood about 18 to 20 feet above the village floor.

As stated previously, the University Indian Ruins land was donated in 1933. Byron Cummings, an Archaeologist with the UofA from the years 1927 to 1935, excavated a portion of the land from 1930 to 1933. Cummings found numerous wall structures and artifacts confirming that this was a Hohokam site. Cummings also performed excavations in two other locations on the same site from 1936 to 1938. During this same period, an archaeology student named Benjamin Wetherill was involved in a for-

credit archaeological field school and helped excavate this site from 1932-1933. Next, Emil W. Haury excavated two locations on the site, one in 1938 and one in 1939. He came to Arizona in 1925 to study with the aforementioned Byron Cummings and was eventually appointed Director of the UofA's Arizona State Museum (1938 to 1964). Haury gained notoriety in the Arizona Archaeology community for being instrumental in starting the Arizona Highway Salvage Program in 1955. The program was created to salvage valuable artifacts during the prolific highway-building period going on in the mid to late 1950s. The program surfaced in response to concerns that archaeological resources were being destroyed during highway construction. The next dig was in 1940 when Julian Hayden excavated a large structure (the platform mound) on the site. An associate of Emil Haury, Hayden wrote a book about his findings and although currently out of print, it is still available in the local library and on Amazon.com. The book is *Excavations, 1940, at University Indian Ruin*. Unfortunately, the archaeologists working this site before Julian Hayden did not have modern equipment or abide by the same standards of archaeological documentation used today. Not many records of these earlier digs remain, and many of the artifacts were either lost, misplaced, or the details were not well documented.

A UofA Department of Anthropology field school systematically reexamined the University Indian Ruins site in 2005. The purpose was to document the locations of previous research efforts and to assess the possibilities for future research. There are upcoming plans to renovate the curator's house and lab occupied by the graduate students. Both structural and modern-convenience improvements are planned to bring the house up to date. Currently the house uses only an evaporative cooling system and wood-burning stove to moderate the interior temperature. An AC-and-heating system will be added and the lab space will be improved to once again function as a working laboratory.

Toward the end of the tour I mentioned to Dr. Suzanne Fish that I have a few pieces of pottery I found while digging a trench in my yard, and I wanted to know if there was a way I could find out more about the pieces. We know there are many IR residents who continue to find authentic Indian artifacts in their yards. Items turn up when we dig holes for fencing, drainage, irrigation systems, or any other reason. One IR resident on the tour said she had found almost all the pieces for a pot but was not sure if she should try to assemble the pot with glue. For this specific example Dr. Fish recommended contacting the Conservation Division at the Arizona State Museum for advice on proper restoration. Another IR resident mentioned two boxes of artifacts he has found and saved including a turquoise stone attached to bone.

Have you found any Indian artifacts in your yard, or something you think could be a historic artifact? If so, would you like to know more about it? The Fishes and Dr. Barbara Mills extended a generous offer to IR residents who want to know more about the bits and pieces they've found. They said that if we can coordinate the IR residents who have possible artifacts, we could plan a day to bring our bits and pieces to the house on the University Indian Ruin property. Then on this agreed-upon day the archaeologists would be willing to tell us a little more about what we found. This would

be a win-win for both groups. As curious homeowners we get to know more about our artifacts and maybe learn some specific history about our individual properties while the UofA's researchers have an opportunity to see more examples of artifacts from the Hohokam people who lived in our neighborhood.

These tours were arranged through selfless effort and many volunteer hours from the following IR individuals: Doug Harbaugh, Doug Striggow, Pam Shack, David Shack, and Su Benaron; with apologies if I failed to mention anyone - it was a great IR group effort. The walking tours served two important purposes. First, to offer residents of IR the opportunity to know more about the history of the land on which they live, and second, to raise funds for the IR Historic Project. The success of the IR Historic Project depends solely on our efforts. Keep in mind; once IR receives a nationally recognized Historic Designation, residents will enjoy reduced property taxes and added value to their homes. If you have not yet made your suggested household donation of \$125, or any amount, please consider doing so now. We are also looking for long-time residents to participate in oral histories and to give us vintage photos related to the neighborhood. If you have questions please contact Doug Harbaugh or Doug Striggow at 733-0717 or [twodougs@yahoo.com](mailto:twodougs@yahoo.com).

On a final note, the Fishes have written a book called *The Hohokam Millennium* and the book includes much information about Indians who lived in the Tucson Basin and throughout southern Arizona. If you are interested in finding out more about the Hohokam dwellings in our area, this book is a good place to start. It can be purchased or ordered from major bookstores and online services such as Amazon.com or ordered directly from the publisher's website: <http://www.sarweb.org/press/press.htm>. The authors' will also bring discounted copies for sale to the artifact information event in our neighborhood, when that is scheduled.

If you have more questions about the University Indian Ruins site, please send your questions to Drs. Paul and Suzanne Fish at: [pfish@email.arizona.edu](mailto:pfish@email.arizona.edu)

#### BOOKS TO READ

*The Hohokam Millennium* by Drs. Paul and Suzanne Fish.

*Excavations, 1940, at University Indian Ruin, Tucson, Arizona* by Julian D. Hayden.