

THE TRIPLE HOUSE SITE, A LATE PREHISTORIC HOUSEPIT SITE NEAR THE COCO-MARICOPA TRAIL, JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK: PRELIMINARY REPORT OF SYSTEMATIC SURFACE MAPPING AND COLLECTION

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ABSTRACT

The Triple House Site (CA-RIV-1950) incorporates at least three large circular depressions and an accompanying dense surface scatter of cultural remains including a wide variety of ceramics, faunal materials, and stone artifacts. Systematic mapping and surface collection revealed that the distribution of surface materials was directly related to the circular depressions and could identify areas of intensive activity. The geographical location of the Triple House site, at the mouth of a canyon leading to a permanent water source and providing a panoramic view to the south and of the probable route of the Coco-Maricopa Trail, suggests that the site may have been more than a temporary campsite in aboriginal times.

The Triple House site is on a south-facing, gently sloping alluvial fan at the transition zone between the Mojave Desert and the Colorado Desert and is located at the break between the fan and rocky foothills of the Little San Bernardino Mountains to the north. The site is adjacent to a major wash that runs out of the hills to the north and just below the entrance to a canyon that leads to a major spring. Many late prehistoric campsites, petroglyphs, and historic sites have been located in the area centered on the spring. The topographical situation of the Triple House site suggests a strategic location associated with spring access, group movements, and trade.

CA-RIV-1950, newly named the Triple House site, was first recorded by National Park Service archaeologists during a road survey. The site fell within one of the stratified random sample transects selected in a wider-ranging 1991/1992 survey project (Warren and Schneider 1993) and was relocated in March 1992.

Environmental Context

The south-facing alluvial slope overlooks the route of a major historic and aboriginal trail that is sometimes known as the Coco-Maricopa Trail; today, Interstate 10 follows the approximate course of the trail in this area. The situation of the Triple House site, elevated at the head of an alluvial fan, affords an extended view of the surrounding area to the south, east, and west and the Salton Sea is visible today as Lake Cahuilla was in the past. Other sites recorded in the immediate vicinity of the Triple House site consist of lithic scatters and workshops

containing a variety of lithic materials including local granular chert, chalcedony, obsidian, quartz, jasper, and basalt (Warren and Schneider 1993).

Vegetation on the site is relatively sparse, but includes creosote, cholla, annual grasses, and palo verde. Ironwood and willow trees are present in the wash adjacent to the site. In the spring of 1992, abundant stands of chia (*Salvia columbariae*) were present on the site and in surrounding areas.

Methods and Rationale for Mapping and Systematic Collection

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas archaeological team and Joshua Tree National Park cultural resources personnel considered the site to be both unique and at risk due to exposure, visitation, and erosion. At the time the Triple House site was relocated, it was in fairly undisturbed condition, although there were some indications that ceramic sherds had been collected from the surface. (Several obviously piled sherd concentrations were present.) The site is located in an unprotected area with easy access. In addition to the evidence that visitors had disturbed the site, the western-most portions of the site appeared to be eroding into the adjacent wash.

A project of mapping the site surface and systematically collecting and mapping all surface cultural materials was undertaken in June 1992, with the help of a number of volunteers. A 5-meter grid was established on the site; site boundaries, features, and contours were mapped using a transit (Figure 1). All bone, stone, and ceramic artifacts were plotted on the grid and collected.

Major Features of the Site

The Triple House site is approximately 50 m north-south and 40 m east-west. Three of the four depressions are located close together in the northern area of the site while the fourth is somewhat separated and located in the southern portion of the site. Three of the depressions are roughly circular in outline and range from approximately 4.5 to 6 m in diameter; the fourth depression, somewhat more irregular in outline, is about 6 m wide and may represent a ramada adjacent to a circular residential structure. All depressions have midden accumulations on their downslope side (Figure 1). Although the entire site surface had scattered cultural remains, a cursory view of their distribution points to a strong correlation between high density of cultural remains and the depressions (Figures 2).

Cultural Remains

This preliminary discussion of the Triple House site does not include full analysis of the cultural remains. Flaked stone, milling equipment, bone and tooth enamel, a variety of ceramics, a single shell bead, and a shell fragment were collected from the surface of the site. The faunal remains (Figure 2) from the Triple House site as well as from other sites recorded in the project are presented below (Noah, this volume). The ceramics (Figure 2) from the Triple House site are discussed below (Seymour, this volume).

Artifacts of Stone

The stone artifacts (Figure 2) collected from the surface of the Triple House site have not yet been analyzed but include seven metate fragments, five projectile points, one unifacial and one bifacial tool, three use-modified flakes, five cores, and 186 unmodified flakes or shattered fragments.

- The metate fragments are all small and are either of granite or metamorphic materials. Several are burned.
- The projectile points are all late prehistoric Desert Series forms (Figure 3): there are three Cottonwood Triangular points and two Desert Side-notched points. One especially finely pressure-flaked Desert Side-notched point has serrated margins and appears unused.
- The biface fragment is probably a knife or thin scraper created on a very large and flat chalcedony flake. It appears to have been reworked after breakage. A flake scraper of chalcedony appears to have been heat-treated. Three chert flakes have use-modified margins.
- The five cores are local grey granular chert, basalt, and quartz.
- The major lithic materials represented in the unmodified flake collection (n= 186) include quartz (62/33%), chalcedony (44/24%), and local granular chert (38/20%). Materials present

in lesser amounts include jasper (10/5%), "wonderstone" chert (5/3%) and other cherts (16/9%), quartzite (5/3%), basalt (2/1%), granite (3/1.5%), and obsidian (1/<0.5%).

Future Prospects for the Triple House Site

The Triple House site is expected to contain a substantial subsurface deposit. We are anticipating that, due to expected impacts from increased visitor use of Joshua Tree National Park, ease of access to the site, and continuing loss of cultural materials through erosion, the National Park Service will eventually support excavation of the site. The investigators believe that the strategic location of the site, the presence of structural remains, and the substantial surface deposit are indications that the site contains significant information that will enhance our knowledge of the prehistory of the region.

Notes

Volunteers who participated in the mapping, collecting, and recording of the surface of the Triple House Site include: Rosie Pepito, Drew and Pam Palette, Marc Schneider, Carol Serr, Mary Robbins-Wade, and Cheryl Jeffrey. University of Nevada, Las Vegas crew included Russell Adamson, Richard Simmonds, Frank Dittmer, Susan Rose, Cydney Yatsov, Cindy Stoddard, Indre Antanaitis, and Jim McCarty. Russell Hapke drew the map of the site from data collected during the project.

REFERENCE CITED

Warren, Claude N., and Joan S. Schneider
1993 *Final Report, Phase I: An Archaeological Inventory of Joshua Tree National Monument*. Report on file at Joshua Tree National Park and National Park Service, Western Region, San Francisco.

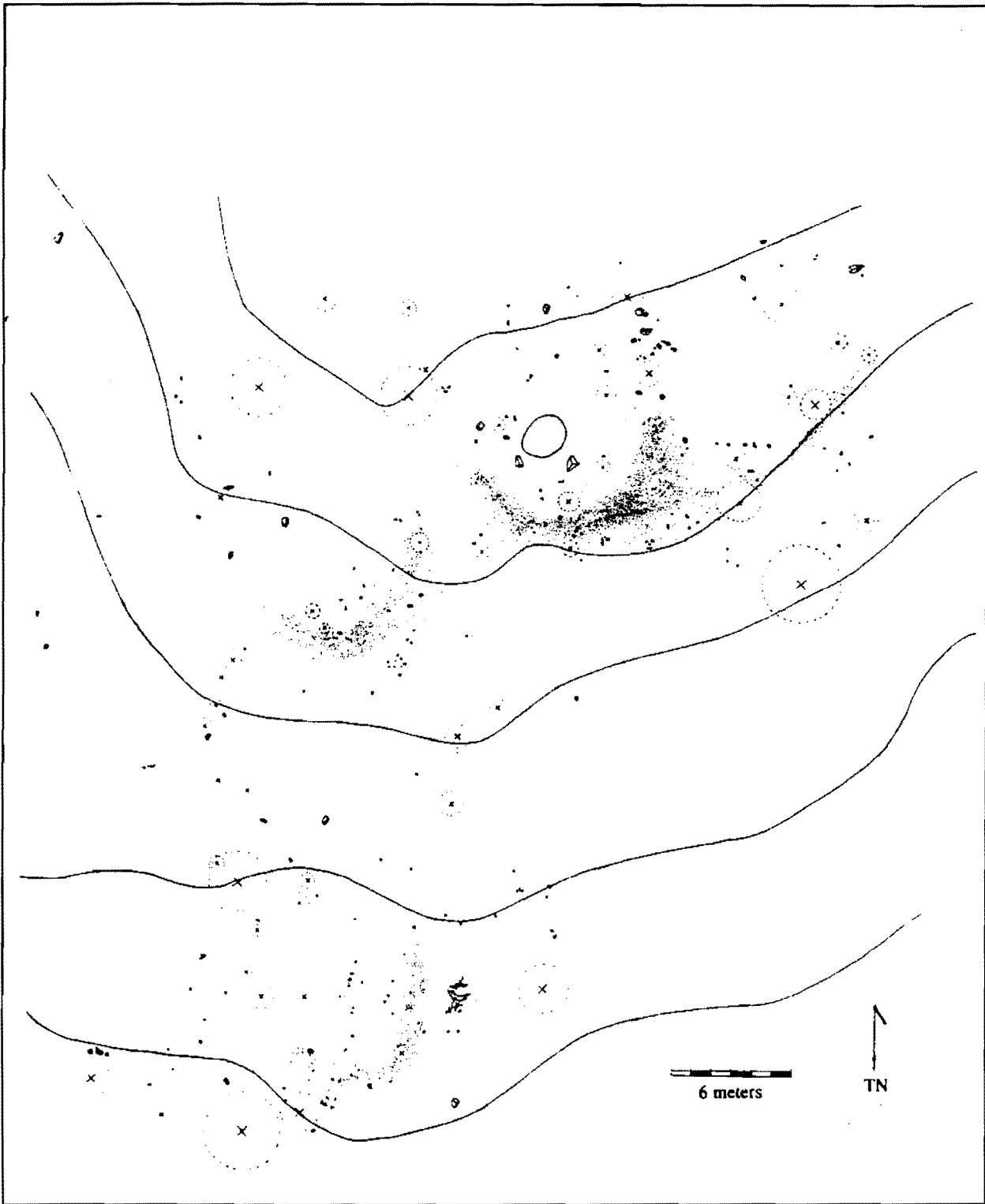


Figure 1: Triple House Site Map. Contour intervals are 50cm. Stippled areas are concentrated midden deposits. Dotted circular areas with central X are vegetation. Other items are rocks and boulders.

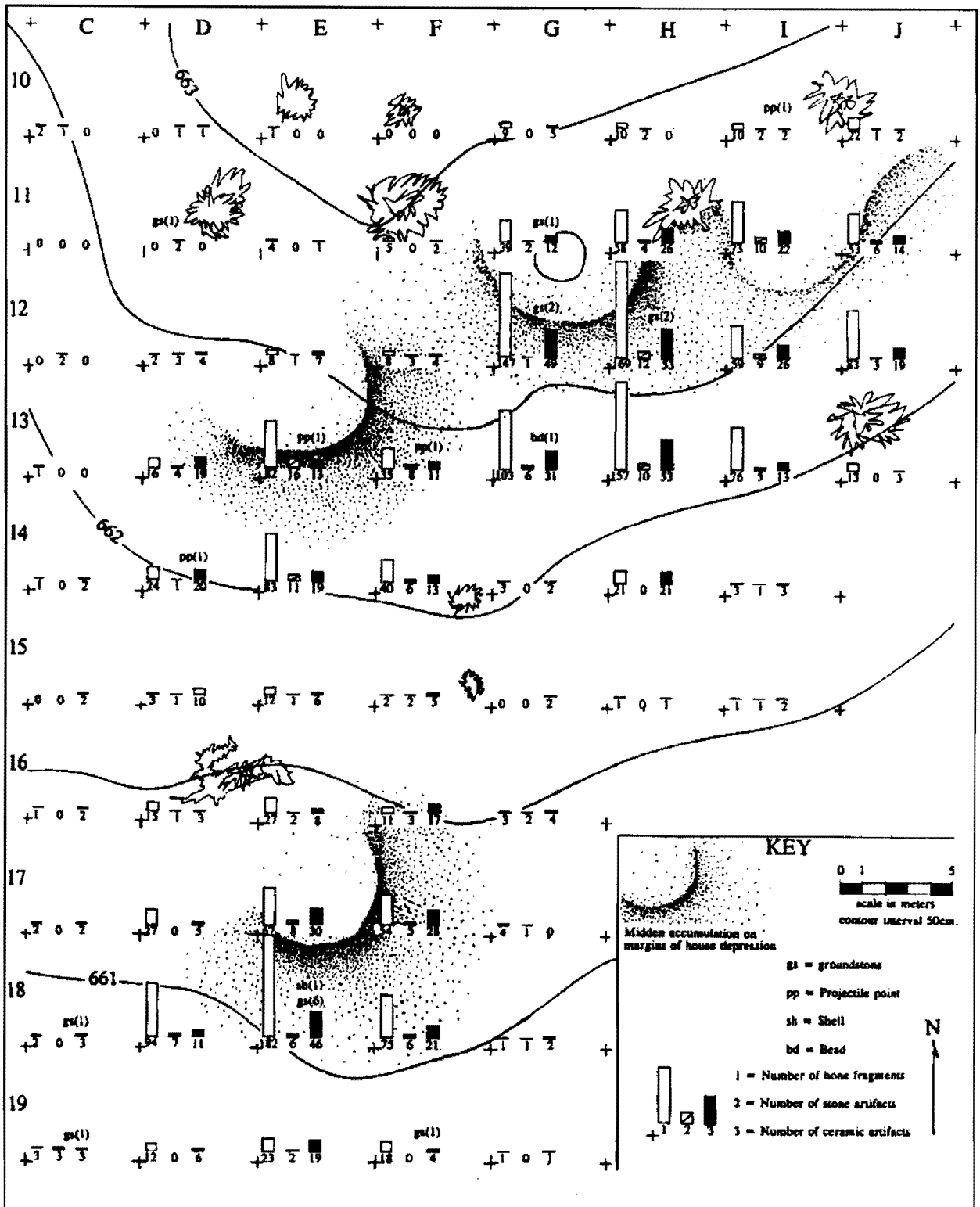


Figure 2: Distribution of Cultural Remains and Features at the Triple House Site (CA-Riv-1950)

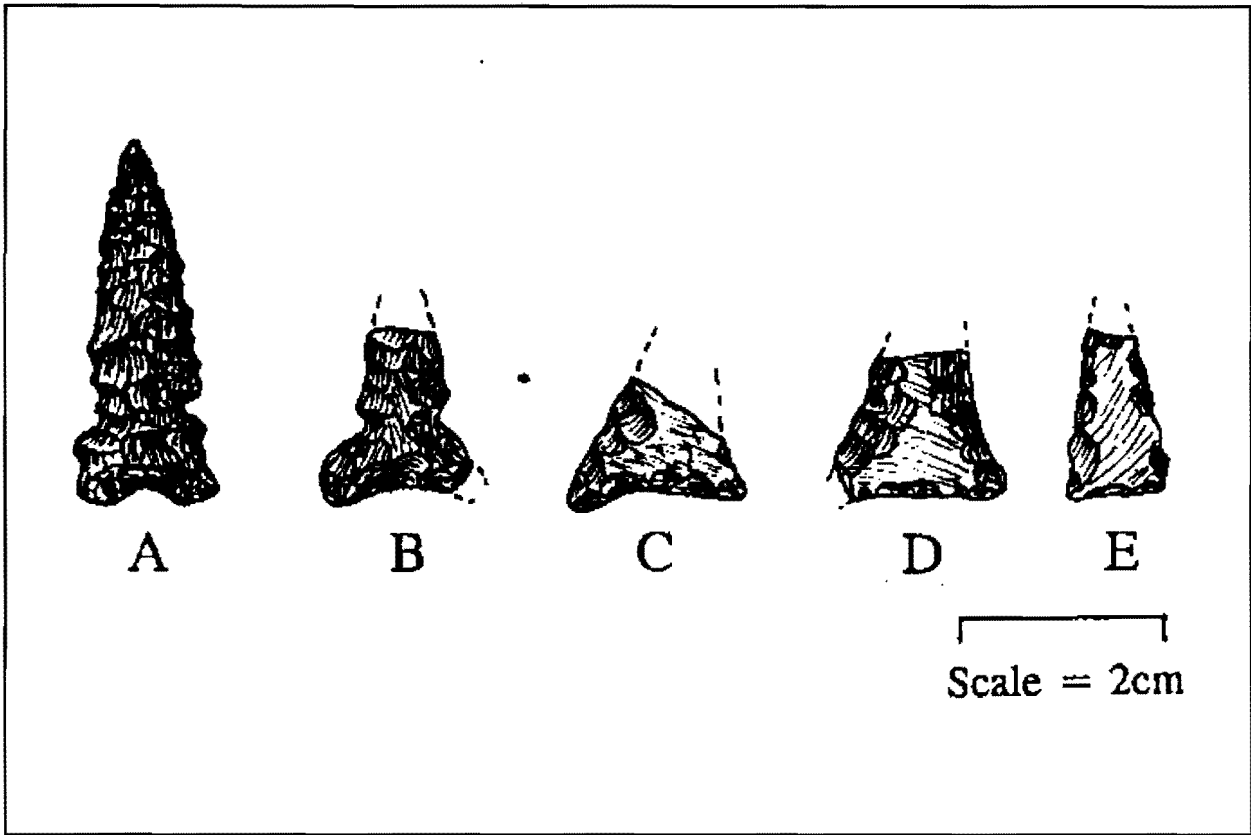


Figure 3: Projectile points from the surface of the Triple House Site