

MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO

OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES

DAMAGE ASSESSMENT AND TESTING ON
TWO SITES ALONG THE OLD LUNA ROAD, GILA NATIONAL FOREST,
CATRON COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

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Submitted by
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ARCHAEOLOGY NOTES 105

ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

On November 2, 1992, the Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS) was notified by the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department (NMSHTD) that emergency resurfacing activities may have had an impact on two archaeological sites within the Gila National Forest, Catron County, New Mexico. The two sites (LA 98625 and LA 98626) are within the roadbed of the Old Luna Road off of U.S. 180. OAS personnel visually inspected the sites, conducted subsurface testing, and assessed the current status of the sites resulting from road resurfacing activities. The roadbed bisected the two sites during original construction in the 1930s. New resurfacing activities do not seem to have affected cultural materials likely to yield important information.

MNM Project 41.453
NMSHTD Project No. SP-OF-013-2(210)
Gila/Apache National Forest Special Use Permit (expires December 31, 1992)

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INTRODUCTION

The OAS was requested by the NMSHTD to conduct subsurface testing and assess the current status of two sites (LA 98625 [Forest Service No. AR-03-06-06-1055] and LA 98626 [Forest Service No. AR-03-06-06-1056]) in the roadbed of the Old Luna Road within the Gila National Forest, Catron County, New Mexico (Fig. 1, Appendix 2).

A bladed dirt road, which was built in the 1930s, runs through the two sites. The road was barricaded with dirt berms and was in disuse until recently. Authorization from the Reserve Ranger District was requested to reopen the road as an emergency bypass during construction work on nearby U.S. 180. Oakes (1992) conducted an archaeological survey of the Old Luna Road and located the two sites within the roadbed. Approval to use this existing road was obtained with the provision that no further modifications be made to the road in the two site areas. The site areas, however, were inadvertently bladed when the road was smoothed for emergency use. Yvonne Oakes, Dorothy Zamora, and Christine Sterling of the OAS inspected the sites on November 5, 1992, and conducted subsurface testing to determine if the construction activity had affected the sites. As a result of the testing program, it was determined, with the concurrence of the Reserve Ranger District archaeologist Powys Gadd, that no cultural materials likely to yield important information were disturbed at either site.

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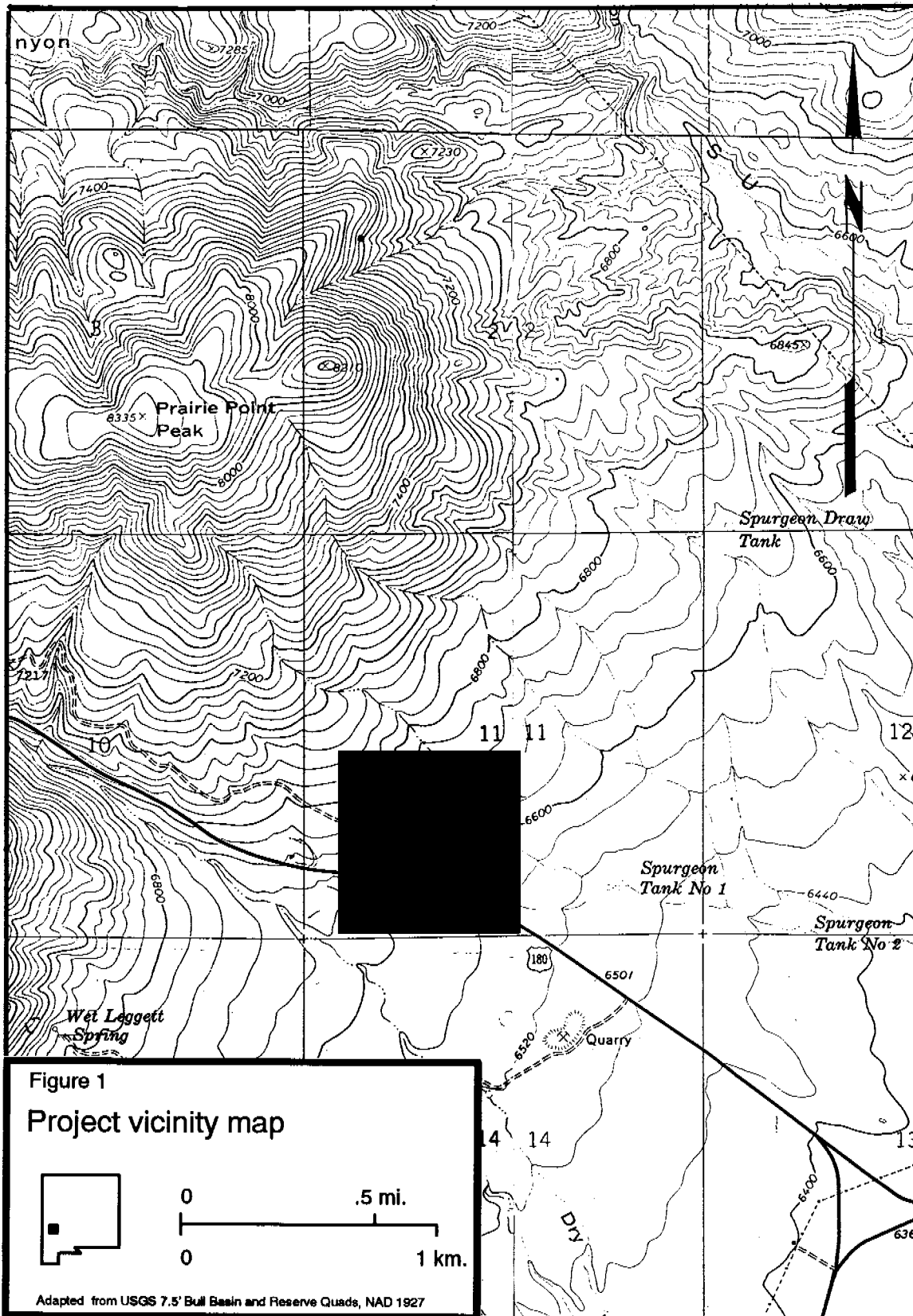
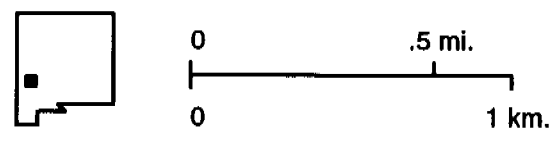


Figure 1
Project vicinity map



Adapted from USGS 7.5' Bull Basin and Reserve Quads, NAD 1927

SITE DESCRIPTIONS

LA 98625 (AR-03-06-06-1055)

The site consists of a sherd and lithic artifact scatter within the roadbed of the Old Luna Road and also extends downslope into an open clearing. It measures 30 m north-south by 45 m east-west. Artifacts observed on the site include Alma Plain and Polished, San Francisco Red sherds, and a small scatter of lithic artifacts. No structural features were visible; however, because of the type of ceramics present on the site, there is the likelihood of a pithouse within the site boundaries. A large mesquite tree sits next to the road in the center of the site. This tree is out of context in the piñon-juniper-oak setting and may possibly be growing in the disturbed fill of a pithouse. The site dates between A.D. 500 and 700 and probably contains an early Mogollon pithouse of the Georgetown phase.

Approximately 30 artifacts were seen on the old roadbed during the survey of the area. As stated in a previous report (Oakes 1992:20), these artifacts are not in their original provenience and are not likely to yield important contextual information on the site.

LA 98626 (AR 03-06-06-1056)

This is a very dispersed lithic artifact scatter that extends downslope across the Old Luna Road. It measures 38 m north-south by 30 m east-west, tapering to 12 m on the south end. No artifacts were observed in the roadbed. Ceramics were not present on the site nor were diagnostic lithic artifacts. The period of occupation cannot be determined although the site is probably a small campsite that saw limited use.

TESTING PROGRAM

Archaeologists from the OAS, Museum of New Mexico, conducted limited testing on LA 98925 and LA 98926 to determine if any subsurface features might exist within the roadbed on either site and if those features had been affected by construction activities.

LA 98925

A baseline was laid out with a meter tape on one side of the graveled roadbed for 25 m (Fig. 2). Augers with a bore of approximately 10 cm were used every 2.5 m along the baseline, starting at the west edge of the artifact scatter. Initial spacing of the auger bores was at every other proposed test locus. It soon became apparent that the ground beneath the roadbed for the westernmost 15 m of the site was culturally sterile. Three auger tests in this area (1, 4, and 6) reached an average depth of 37.6 cm before reaching the sterile soil (Table 1). Gravel covered the top 1 to 3 cm of the roadbed. Directly under the gravel was a plastic, dark brown clay. As depth below the surface increased, the soil gradually changed to a yellow-brown and included sandy particles. No artifacts were present in the tests, nor was there any charcoal flecking in the soil.

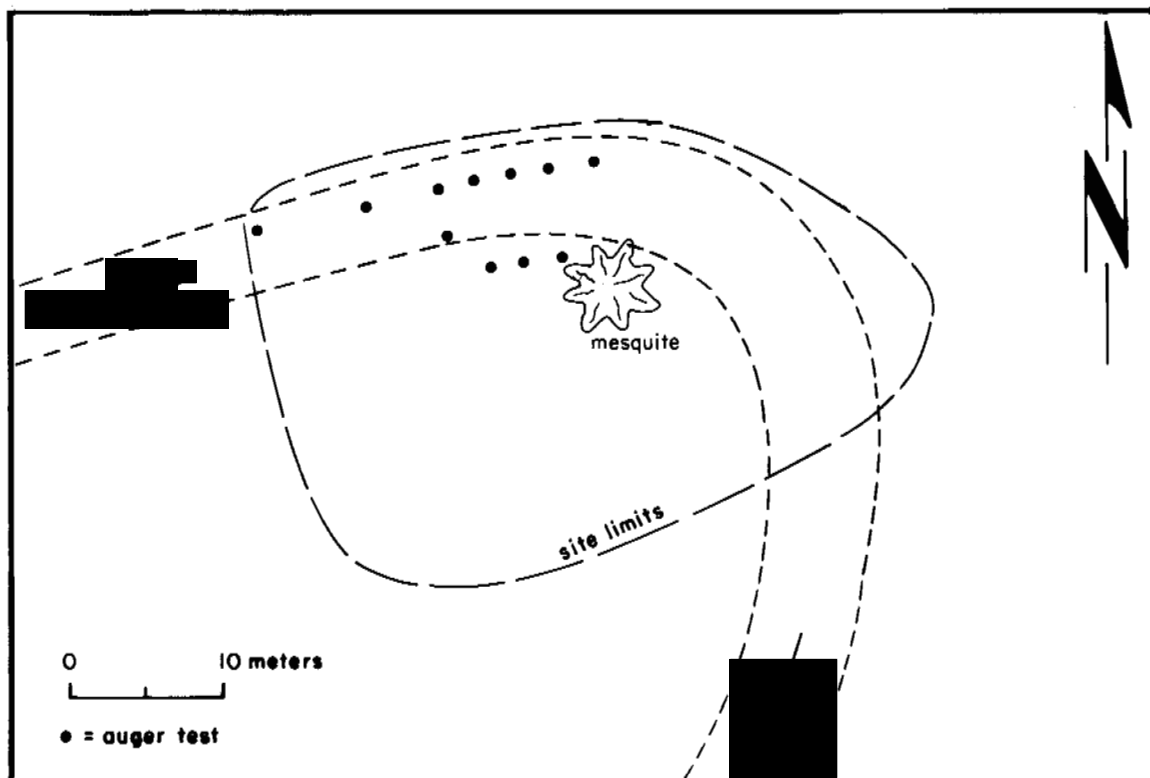


Figure 2. Plan map of LA 98625.

Table 1. Results of Auger Tests at LA 98625

Auger No.	Depth*	Charcoal	Artifacts
1	54 cm	no	no
4	35 cm	no	no
6	24 cm	no	no
7	30 cm	yes	1 obsidian flake
8	23 cm	no	no
9	42 cm	yes	no
10	16 cm	yes	1 San Francisco Red sherd
11	43 cm	yes	no
12	18 cm	yes	no
13	34 cm	no	no
14	25 cm	no	1 Alma Polished sherd

* Depth to sterile soil.

Four consecutive auger tests (7 through 10) in the next 10 m of roadbed produced charcoal flecking and two artifacts. The charcoal flecks appeared at depths between 4 and 12 cm below the graveled roadbed and extended for 24 to 30 cm below the surface in a dark brown matrix.

Four more auger tests (11 through 14) were placed 6 m south of the original baseline on the south half of the road and also in the open clearing next to the road. These were concentrated in the area of charcoal flecking. Average auger depth was 30 cm before reaching yellow-brown sterile soil. One Alma Polished sherd was recovered and charcoal was present in only one auger test beginning at 15 cm below present ground surface.

Auger testing revealed several artifacts and charcoal flecking at 4 to 15 cm below ground surface within an area of 10 m in diameter, indicating the presence of cultural fill. While the blading operations removed approximately 15 to 20 cm of roadbed, no cultural fill was disturbed by this action. The cultural fill located in the auger tests seems to represent the type of deposit that accumulates near habitation units and is likely related to the pithouse presumed to be on the site.

Photographs of the site area were taken and a map indicating the placement of the augers was produced. Orange barrels were placed along the edge of the roadbed to prevent any mechanical disturbance to that portion of the site adjacent to the road.

LA 98926

Most of the site is located directly north of the Old Luna Road on a gentle slope. Artifacts extend downslope and appear directly south of the roadbed in a 12-m-wide swath (Fig. 3). Testing consisted of placing three auger tests in the middle of the roadbed where artifacts or cultural fill from the north of the road were likely to be present (Table 2). Auger bores were 2.5 m apart and reached an average depth of 32.3 cm before reaching sterile soil. Below the 1 to 4 cm of graveled road, the soil was dark brown and very plastic. It gradually turned to a light tan-brown and the soil became crumbly. No charcoal flecking was present in the auger tests and no artifacts were recovered. It was concluded that no part of the site had been disturbed by the blading activities.

Photographs of the site were taken and a site map produced. Markers were placed along the road edge to prevent any construction activities occurring off of the road itself.

Table 2. Results of Auger Tests at LA 98926

Auger No.	Depth	Charcoal	Artifacts
1	16 cm	no	no
2	34 cm	no	no
3	22 cm	no	no

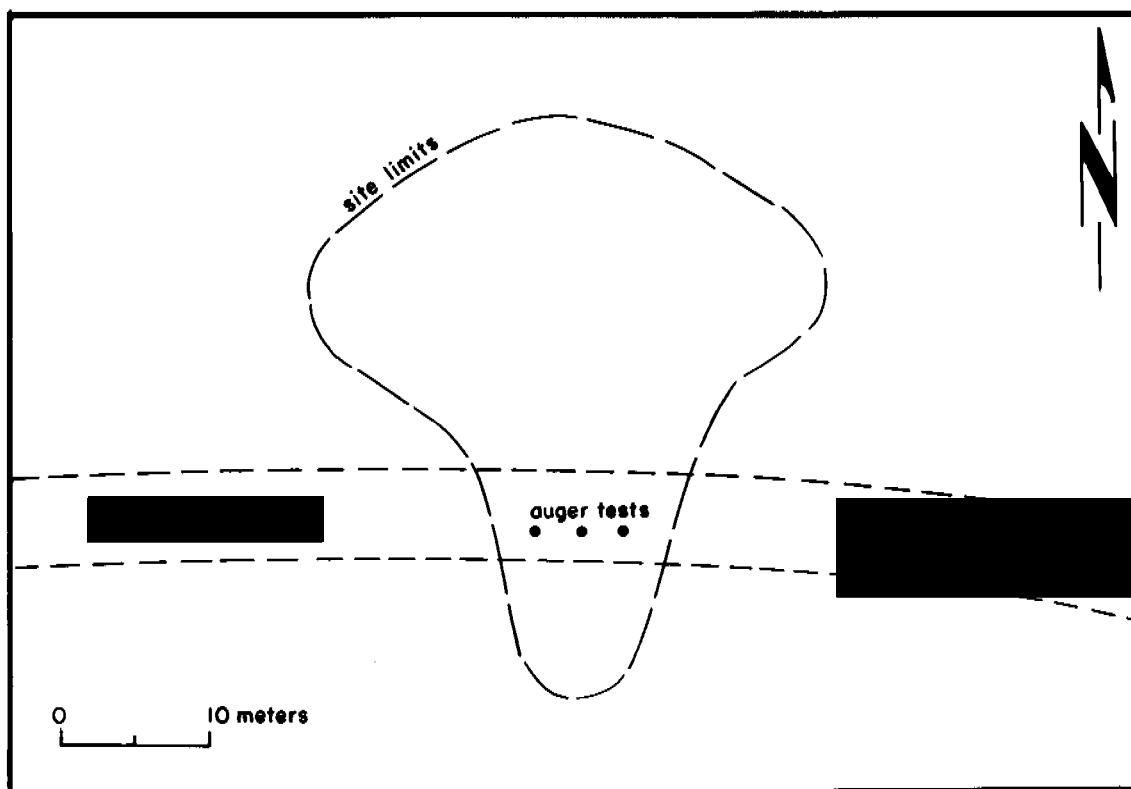


Figure 3. Plan map of LA 98626.

EVALUATION

Neither site is listed on the *National Register of Historic Places* or the *New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties*. They may have the potential for eligibility to these registers. The blading of the Old Luna Road in the area of the two sites has not affected site eligibility.

At LA 98625, the recent construction did not cut into the cultural fill nor did it affect that portion of the site adjacent to the road. To ensure that continued use of the road does not affect the subsurface fill recorded in the auger testing, the NMSHTD plans to cover the site portion within the roadbed with a layer of filter fabric (netting material) that will hold the soil in place. Over this will be placed 6 to 10 inches of fine gravel and then road gravel will be placed on top of that. This will prevent any displacement of the site and allow the road to be used as an emergency route.

No cultural fill or subsurface features were located within or beneath the roadbed near LA 98625. The construction work on the roadbed has not affected the data potential of the site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recent construction has not affected site content at either LA 98625 or LA 98626. Preventative steps were taken, through the placement of filter fabric over LA 98625, to ensure that no future damage would occur to this site. Therefore, no further archaeological investigation is recommended. LA 98626 was not affected by construction and no further archaeological study is recommended for the site. We concur with the Reserve Ranger District archaeologist that further graveling of the roadbed in the two site areas should be permissible.

Cost of the site inspections and testing program will be borne by the NMSHTD. These costs total \$1,384.73 for three archaeologists, mileage, per diem, three phone calls, and report preparation.

REFERENCES CITED

- Oakes, Yvonne R.
1992 *Archaeological Survey of Sites along of the Old Luna Road Near Reserve, New Mexico.* Cultural Resource Report 16, Santa Fe.

APPENDIX 1. STATEMENT OF EVENTS

The following information was provided by Powys Gadd, archaeologist with the U.S. Forest Service at the Reserve Ranger District.

On Monday, November 2, 1992, Powys Gadd was notified by Gary McCaleb, Forest Service representative for NMSHTD Project SP-OF-013-2(210), that FNF Construction had bladed the Old Luna Road in the area of two cultural resource sites (AR-03-06-06-1055 and AR 03-06-06-1056). Previous recommendations by Oakes (1992) stated that the sites were to be avoided by construction activity. Forest Service personnel (Gary McCaleb, Mike Gardner, Rod McClanahan, and Powys Gadd) inspected the site area and contacted the NMSHTD district office. Spence Dowlen, of the NMSHTD, stated that a medical emergency in the area required the road to be bladed in the site area so that emergency vehicles could get over the San Francisco Mountains. Steve Koczan of the NMSHTD was then contacted by Mr. Dowlen. Mr. Koczan notified project archaeologists at the Office of Archaeological Studies who then visited the sites on November 5, 1992.