

SUTHERLAND WASH ARCHEOLOGICAL DISTRICT

The western foothills of the Catalina Mountains have attracted humans for thousands of years. The Hohokam, Pima, Tohono O'odham, Mexican, Spanish and modern Americans all left their mark on the area. This article will just address the results of a very small portion of these influences, particularly those of interest to hikers exploring the area.

The more recent of these influences may be found just by looking at a map and wondering how different features received their names. The Catalina Mountain name probably evolved after Padre Kino named a nearby Indian Rancheria Santa Catarina de Cuytoabucam. The mountains were called the Sierra de la Santa Catarina until about 1880 when Catarina was changed to Catalina and the name was eventually shortened to the Catalina Mountains. Placer miners searching for gold had little success but one of the main washes with some placer gold became the Canada del Oro Wash. Cattle ranching was the most successful operation. Francisco Romero, the grandson of a Spanish soldier, established the first in 1844 and his legacy is the, Romero Trail, Romero Pools, Romero Pass and Romero Ruins. The Romero Ruins are not only the remains of the Romero family residence but also of a Hohokam Village.. Romero built his home amidst the ruins of a large Hohokam village that had been occupied from about A.D. 500 to A.D. 1450. William Henry Sutherland bought the Canada del Oro Ranch and their family name was given to the Sutherland Trail and the Sutherland Wash which is a main tributary of the Canada Del Oro Wash. The Sutherland Wash is of particular interest to the GVR Hiking Club because of the archeological features associated with the Wash. Also, a physical feature in the area has an interesting name (Baby Jesus Ridge) and a peak in the foothills (Romo Peak) was the location of an important archeological find.

BABY JESUS RIDGE: There is a ridge in the Catalina Mountains called the Baby Jesus Ridge that is located just north of Catalina State Park along the Sutherland Wash. It was named after a rock formation on the ridge that resembles, if you approach it from the right angle, the Madonna and the Baby Jesus. Figure 1 depicts the Madonna facing right with the Baby Jesus (far right) in her lap.



Figure 1. Madonna and Jesus

ROMO PEAK: The peak is named in honor of Ray Romo who made an important archeological discovery while hunting in some hills in the vicinity of the Sutherland Wash in November 1949. Romo was walking near the top of one of the hills when one of his boots broke through the surface. To Romo's surprise, a close inspection of the cavity revealed two

intact earthenware vessels, one serving as a lid for the other with the larger jar being filled with beads. Both vessels were subsequently identified as being of Hohokam origin. The red-on-brown design patterns on the vessels further dated them as being made between A.D. 1100 and 1150. The jar contained around 100,000 stone and shell beads, and about 30 copper bells. Most of the beads were made from red and black stone, but a small number were made of turquoise or marine shell. According to the

book *Solving an Archaeological Mystery in Fiction* by Sharon Miller, the beads weighed three-and-one-half pounds. The black ones (representing 40% of the collection) were made of steatite or talc and the red ones (58%) were made of “ferruginous aphanitic matrix containing quartz grains.” There were blue and green turquoise beads (about 2%), as well.”

A majority of them exhibited signs of wear from having been strung. However, no thread was found to show whether they were strung when placed into the vessel. The estimate in the book *Archaeology in the Mountain*

Shadows is that it would take a single person 2.8 years of constant work to produce the 100,000 beads and if strung together they would stretch 300 feet. The treasure had quite a bit of meaning to the people who left the objects. This find is called the “Romo Cache” (Figure 3) and the peak where the cache was found is called Romo Peak (Figure 2) after Mr. Romo.

SUTHERLAND WASH: Besides having a ridge with an intriguing name, the Sutherland Wash contains other features which make for some outstanding hiking there. First of all, the area has one of the largest archeological sites in the Coronado National Forest and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 as the Sutherland Wash Archeological District. Subsequently, the area was also listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the Sutherland Wash Rock Art District in 1993. University of Arizona Archeologists have found 28 different sites and 3400 separate glyphs. The Hohokam culture which existed between 300 AD and 1500 AD in Arizona was responsible for these petroglyphs. The glyphs are thought to be of religious significance. Petroglyphs are not found in villages or homes, but probably were located



Figure 2 Romo Peak



Figure 3. Romo Cache

many times at ceremonial spots near springs or on elevated vistas. To see the petroglyphs in the Sutherland Wash area requires strenuous hiking and they are a well-kept secret among hikers who want to protect them.

There have been at least two published reports on the Sutherland Wash area which state there are approximately 600 images representing animal forms; 400 representing humans and 180 petroglyphs representing flowers or plants. Some of the animal glyphs having horns are thought to be sheep or deer depending on the direction the horns are curved. The authors of the report determined that in the case of male images if the third leg was shorter than the other two it was a male. If longer it was considered a lizard. A human figure with an enlarged groin area, a dark spot in that area or two dark areas on the chest were considered female. The flower images with solid centers might represent plants related to the sunflower family. Ones with an open center and a dot may have been representative of the saguaro or prickly pear cactus flowers.

Archeologists continue to update, but one of the early reports stated that this wash area contained over 3,000 petroglyphs, the most in the Tucson area at that time.. Other areas near Tucson and the number of petroglyphs found at that time were: Cocoraque, 1888; Picacho, 1116; Tumamoc, 734; Webb, 469 and Signal Hill, 232. Then in 2015, the University was given permission to determine the glyphs on private land at the Cocoraque Ranch site. When the final count was done the total petroglyphs counted there came to over 11,200, the most in southern Arizona; Picacho tallied 4,000.

Summarized by Terry Ferguson & Tom Johnson, May, 2022 from various web sites, “Trepanning”, the global education project.org, Ancient bead.com, “Hohokam petroglyphs at Sutherland Wash: Flower World & Gender Imagery”, “Solving an Archaeological Mystery in Fiction”, Sharon Miller.

Figure 1, the Madonna, is a screen shot from a Tucson Channel 4 video. Figure 2, Romo Peak was taken by T. N. Johnson. Figure 3, the Romo Cache was reproduced from the Honey Bee Pit House Construction Maps.

The following photos are representative samples of the glyphs found in one small area of the Sutherland Wash Rock Art District and were taken by T. N. Johnson





