Malcolm Rogers’ Arizona Fieldwork, 1926–1956

Jerry Schaefer

Abstract

Malcolm Rogers was the father of Far Southwest desert archaeology. Almost single-handedly, and with much personal sacrifice, he conducted independent surveys in southern California and Arizona from which he developed a culture sequence for the region. Much of his work remains the foundation for current artifact typologies and culture chronologies. His California work is well known and frequently referenced, not so for his work in Arizona, including survey, surface collection, and excavation, which also contributed to Rogers’ mega-regional archaeological worldview. His field notes, maps, sketches, and collections at the San Diego Museum of Man provide a window into how he worked and thought.

Introduction

Malcolm Rogers was no provincial who might draw empirical blinders at the Colorado River. He saw the entire Far Southwest desert region as a unified whole with a connected cultural history and connected influences. Western Arizona was very much part of that whole (Figure 1). His field notebook and photographs archived at the San Diego Museum of Man provide a window into his world during the period between 1926 and 1956 as he accumulated information and developed and revised the concepts that finally resulted in his grand synthesis of Far Southwest cultural history and archaeology, edited and posthumously published by Richard Pourade (Rogers 1966).

A review of his 30-year career in Arizona is presented here along with inferences drawn about both his field strengths and weaknesses. Rogers kept a separate notebook for his Arizona work and numbered the sites he investigated from A-1 to A-134. Some sites received a one-line notation, perhaps to index surface collections, while those with the greatest interest to him were documented with several pages, up to 50 pages for White Tanks, including maps and rock art sketches. Generally, his note taking was descriptive and concise. By today’s standards some entries would be considered too brief for practical use and hardly enough to fill out a site form. Other notes are full of insightful observations and interpretations. (All quotations below are from his handwritten notes). For example, at Cave #5 of site A-1-C, one of the first sites he recorded, his description of the rock art is a good example from the beginning of his Arizona fieldwork:

The cave is 50 ft. wide and the back wall and ceiling are covered with white, black, purplish red, hematite red and orange red pictographs. There is much superimposition and smudging by fires and some vandalism which make it impossible to decipher the construction of about half the work. The purple reds and white ones are the oldest and the hematite red, orange and black the youngest. In some instances the white was applied to a smudged white tuff background. This gives a negative effect. Some pictos are outlined with two colors red and white or red and black. Some reds have been retraced with white. All the pictographs of this region are characterized by small size and fine lines. Many have the appearances [of] pottery designs. The key
Figure 1. Some of Malcolm Rogers’ fieldwork localities discussed in the text. (1) Secret Pass and Meadow Creek; (2) Borrego Tanks, Gila Mountains; (3) Intersection of Trails A-26 and A-29; (4) White Tanks; (5) Signal Spring, McCracken Basin; (6) Alamo; (7) Bridle Creek; (8) Site A-26 Trail System; (9) Bouse Wash.
and maze element types are common in the older pictos.

Of another rock art site, A-2 (Figure 2), he wrote:

A-2 = Caves No. 1 & No. 2. Cave #1 is 40’ wide and the entire back wall and ceiling of white tuff is covered with pictographs and a few petroglyphs. The later have all been filled in with a bright red paint, but most of them especially the great snake pattern was first painted with a bluish black paint and the red put on later over it. In the floor are 3 bedrock mortars and in the cave parts of 3 thick flat topped [sic] metates. The fill as early as 1928 had been washed out but the talus produced Pueblo, Mohave and Walapai sherds and [some?] stone work. In 1928 the roof of Cave #2 directly east of #1 had fallen so that it rested on the crown of the occupational talus. In 1941 it was found that a cloud burst had completely destroyed the site. #2 contains 2 flat metates and one ancient petroglyph.

He had to rely on poor, small-scale maps for the most part, and he supplemented these with sketch maps at various scales. Rogers documented the sites with numerous field photographs, usually taken by his father, who accompanied him on many of his field trips, or by other staff who worked with him. Some of this record remains invaluable, as he noted that some rockshelters had collapsed since his first visits and other sites had washed away.

**Early Fieldwork**

His earliest Arizona work focused on Secret Pass in the Black Mountains between the Mohave Valley and Kingman. This corridor is populated with impressive cave sites and rock art along a major east-west trail about which his field notes are quoted above. He recognized a mix of Mohave (i.e., Patayan), Pueblo, and Yavapai brown ware ceramics in this complex, representing the cultural influences and interactions that shaped the region’s late prehistoric and ethnohistoric cultural history. By 1928 he was focused on the isolated Meadow Creek site.

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Figure 2. Multiple layers of petroglyphs and pictographs at site A-2, Cave #1. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.
complex along Sitgreaves Pass on Route 66 between Topock and Kingman. He returned to the riches of these rockshelter sites in October 1941 to dig three test trenches in the deep middens at the entrance of Site A-2-F, Cave #10, the site he thought had “the greatest occupational deposit in the pass” (Figure 3). Screening as he went and exposing hearth features and midden deposits in 6 ft of strata, he recognized San Dieguito III, Amargosa II, transitional pre-pottery, and Yuman horizons. Here he saw a mix of dart points and small projectile points in the upper Amargosa deposits, positing correctly that the bow and arrow arrived in the Basketmaker III period. As elsewhere over time, the strikeouts and revisions of his notes indicate his reappraisal of the dates and cultural assignments. For example, “Amargosa II with the possibility of some San Dieguito II” is changed to San Dieguito III for site A-2-B.

His other early work continued to focus on the uplands of west-central Arizona around Kingman. It took him to Truxton Canyon (7B Ranch), the turquoise mines at Mineral Park, Round Valley, Signal Valley, the rhyolite quarries of McCraken Basin, the Bill Williams River Valley (Swansea Basin caves and Alamo), Groom Mountain, Rawhide Canyon, and Burro Creek. From there he moved southeast to the Wickenberg area, including Bridle Creek and Congress Junction, all in west-central Arizona. Much of his interest was in ethnohistoric Walapai and Yavapai camps and in the many cave sites throughout the area. His background in geology and his understanding of lithic reduction processes were clearly put to use at the quarry sites, such as at A-12 in the McCraken Basin, of which he wrote:

On the residual flanglomerate [sic] fingers in the basin is a very extensive quarry industry in pinkish gray rhyolite and some jasper. Greatest linear extension one mile. We could find no evidence in the basin of where the people lived who worked this deposit of rhyolite boulders. Blade-blanks are very scarce even broken ones but the patination is of a degree and the work of the nature that the site could be identified as belonging to the pre-Yuman dart-point industry of western Arizona.
In his surveys through this area, Rogers identified the small obsidian nodules in the alluvial valley fans from which small points were being made. More recent work at White Tanks has further characterized these “Apache Tears,” as they are commonly called (Shackley 1991, 1996). Survey work continued in west-central Arizona near Bridle Creek and Congress Junction.

At site A-22, a “Yavapai Camp” on a creek that drains into Bridle Creek, his notes demonstrate the types of observations he made and the conclusions he drew from them:

At the east end and back of the camp on the hillside is an outcropping of granite with a heavy crust of black desert varnish. On two of the big rocks are petroglyphs of two different ages but both probably of Yuman origin. In the largest group the rock was covered with many vertical snake motifs. In the central section an area was either eroded or purposefully rubbed over and on this area are some later glyphs. The old ones are all of the “broad-line” style found in the central Yuman terrain and the later ones are undoubtedly Yavapai. It is difficult to believe that the [Yumans] had expanded sufficiently far to the east though at such an early date. The oldest ones cannot be less than 1000 years old.

In the late 1930s Rogers appears to have conducted his first survey in southwestern Arizona at Borrego Tanks, site A-24, located in three canyons south of “Cerro Prieta [sic] Pass in the north east side of the Gila Mts.” The Gila Mountains are located at the western end of the Barry M. Goldwater Range, southeast of Yuma in the far western Papaguería. It is difficult to establish the landmarks in Rogers’ notes. Cerro Prieto Pass seems to correspond to Telegraph Canyon Pass (Interstate 8), which is correctly located, although it may more likely be Cipriano Pass, which is farther south in the Gila Mountains. Borrego Tanks may be modern-day Spook Tank, although the extensive occupation in caves and mesas in front of the caves is not documented as yet during recent surveys of the extensive trail systems and ceramic scatters in the vicinity (Schaefner and Richards 2010). In Rogers’ notes there is the first reference to Indian trails and associated ceramics that would be of so much interest to him in developing a ceramic typology and chronology. In this case he acknowledged the trail running southeast from the tanks to Tinajas Altas, also known as the Camino del Diablo.

Throughout his career Rogers continued his keen interest in the larger sites at water sources and the trails that led to them. Sites of every period and configuration were also included during these forays. Much of this work occurred north of the Gila River in what is now the U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground. Although he first recorded some of these sites in the late 1920s and 1930s, he came back to some of them in the early 1940s to collect ceramics, to make more notes, and to record new sites. The areas he worked included the Castle Dome Plains, Obsidian and White Tanks canyons, Dry Tank at the north end of the Trigo Mountains, Mohave Tank, New Water Pass, Tysons Wash and La Posa Plain, Ranegas Plain, Livingston Wash, Alamo Wash, Bouse Wash, Kofa Mountains, Horse Tanks and Black Tanks at the north end of the Castle Dome Mountains, Granite Pass (west of Salome), and along both sides of the Gila River, including Antelope Hill, Radium Hot Springs, and Gila Bend. In the western Papaguería, he spent time at Tinajas Altas, Baker Tanks, and, of course, the Gila Mountains. The sheer geographical scope of just this portion of his Arizona fieldwork leaves one in awe, considering all the other work he did along the Lake Cahuilla shoreline, in the Mojave Desert, in Baja California, and on the San Diego coast.

Later Arizona Fieldwork

In his later years Rogers made regular visits to his mother-in-law in Phoenix, but especially to his good
friend and colleague Julian Hayden in Tucson, whom he met in 1930 while Hayden was visiting San Diego. Hayden worked as Rogers’ field supervisor at the C. W. Harris site in 1938 (Hayden et al. 2010). Except for one early trip to the Kayenta region and one to the Little Colorado River area around Cameron, the 1940s and 1950s were the times Rogers visited more sites in central Arizona, although sometimes only listing the site without any written observations. These sites included La Ciudad, Villa Buena, and Pueblo Grande near Phoenix; Wupati ruins near Flagstaff; Camp Verde area sites; Tule Spring in Ehrenberg Pass; Lonesome Valley sites near Prescott; Healy Terrace Ruin near Globe; the Fortified Hill site (Litoiki) west of Sells; New River Fort northwest of Phoenix; Snake-town; the University of Arizona excavations at University Ruin near Tucson; Palo Verde Hills; Painted Caves Canyon, many additional spring and tank sites; Ventana Cave; Cabeza Prieta; and many others too numerous to mention.

**Trails, Ceramics, and Shrines**

Trails and the ceramics along them were crucial to Rogers’ development of a ceramic chronology, applying a technique called horizontal trail stratigraphy (Rogers 1945:181; Waters 1982:276). Among the first trails that Rogers recorded was A-26, a pottery trail that extended from the north bank of the Gila River opposite the Mohawk Mountains to the northwest in back of the Castle Dome Mountains and Thumb Butte Tank (near the junction of SR-72 and SR-95, northwest of Bouse), and possibly on to Horse Tanks. These were all locations he revisited in later years and which formed part of the major Colorado-Gila trail system. Pre-pottery branches of the trail were recorded as A-26-A, which he noted branched out in a fan away from the Gila River. He used the “A” suffix to denote any pre-pottery component of subsequently recorded sites, including trail shrines. Rock rings, cleared circles, and lithic scatters throughout this area were often identified as “Malpais” (later, San Dieguito I). His notes suggest he remained well informed about other current research in Arizona, and Rogers’ many conversations with Julian Hayden and visits to Ventana Cave influenced his changing views on the interpretation of early prehistoric Arizona (Rogers 1966:68).

Rogers speculated that site A-27 was a continuation of what he first called the Halchidoma Trail, A-29, which he later renamed the Colorado-Gila Trail. Of this latter trail (Figure 4) and its associated features, he wrote (with cross-outs, and overwrites indicated by angle brackets):

*(A-29) Halchidoma Trail (between the Colorado and Mohave Tank) Begins at the large Halchidoma settlements on the east side of the Colorado and is very strong until it enters the mountains near Dry Tank [north of Trigo Mountains] region where much of it has been destroyed by erosion. For a trade trail to the Gila it carries a very few broken ollas. Averages only one per 400 feet. Several branch trails from various river villages come into it about 3 miles from the river. <east of shrine.> Between shrine and river only 11 broken pots seen in a quick survey.

*(A-29-A) Shrine on the Halchidoma Trail. Located on south margin of trail on a gravel hill which sets above surrounding mesa lands. From the east the shrine can be seen on the sky line about 1/2 a mile away. From the shrine to the river it is 5 miles. Shrine is 16’ in dia. And 30” high. On the site there appears to be a ceremonial figure in [graved?]. As it is rather senseless it is probably the results of excavation by the Indians in scooping up dirt and gravel to place in the shrine. Shrine excavated Oct 28 & 29 ⟨(1938)⟩ by J B [Dorshand?] F. S. Rogers. Nov. 1940 F. S. R. recorded on the trail in 1 1/2 miles
This trail route coincides perfectly with the location where the southern branch of the Cocomaricopa Trail (Bradshaw Trail) in California enters the Colorado River Valley (Johnston and Johnston 1957), and it represents Rogers’ documentation of the continuation of this important route of cultural exchange and travel through what is now Yuma Proving Ground to the Gila River.

Later he would identify another trail through Yuma Proving Ground, his “Yuman trade trail,” site A-101, as the major route between Ehrenberg on the Colorado River and Arlington on the Gila River (Rogers 1966:76). His notes describe much older trails without ceramics that converged on and bisected this trail, as well as numerous pot drops along the main trail.

The Bouse Wash Site

Rogers had the opportunity to visit the famous Bouse Wash site, A-40, before it was excavated by Harner (1958). Harner left a frustratingly brief, five-page summary of the late prehistoric cultural phases at this large walk-in well and associated habitation site (Figures 5 and 6). Were it better documented, it would be one of the more important sites for developing a Patayan ceramic chronology because of the stratigraphic associations with better-dated Hohokam ceramics (Waters 1982:284–285). Although Harner’s collections remain curated at the Phoebe Hearst Museum at Berkeley, the field notes, drawings, and photographs remain in Harner’s possession and unpublished. The location and condition of the site are currently unknown. Rogers’ observations and photographs, although few, therefore provide important additions to what we know; to my knowledge, the photographs are the only images of the site.

Indian Well

This well, which is probably of Halchidoma origin, is the most pretentious piece of Yuman work I have ever seen. It seems to indicate a receding water table as the well was enlarged and deepened at one time. The base of the first well is still in evidence as is the second pit. The well has been dry since the white occupation of the region. Two big dead mesquite stumps are in the well. It was first
excavated in a broken volcanic rubble and the second enlargement carried it into bedrock [sic] although of a fractured nature. The flanks and pit are strewn with potsherds but as most are in two line[s] of approach one from the north and one from the south the situation seems to indicate the tracks over the low parts of the crater rim were where the women drew their water. The highest %

of Hohokam sherds in the area are on the south rim indicating considerable antiquity for the well.

In front of the low hills is a broad wash plain, sandy with a certain amount of small pebbles. It is slightly rolling and at one time had mesquites on each hump. The oldest occupation is on this plain or the humps—No
Evidence of house structure left. Metates and manos were found cached in these humps sometimes together.

At the southern end is a great jasper flaking industry. Jasper & reddish eruptives seem to be native here. SherdS are extremely scarce at this end but the ground is badly washed. Where the bedrock outcrops on hill sides are 3 large groups of bedrock mortars. One group had 22 holes. Some are 18” deep. Near them pestles were found cached sometimes in pairs in the ground.

Pestles are very crude and made of breccia. Only one washed out cremation was seen and it was on the gravel plain—adult skull fragments observed, 2 whole olivella beads and one knife present.

A-40-A
North end of A-40—mostly on fossil sand dunes although some occupation was on a gravel bench back of dunes. The occupation on the dunes is later than the rest of A-40—has a higher percentage of arrowpoints—Colonial and Sedentary Red-on-buff is absent and latter Halchidoma sherds form the bulk of the sherds. All matterial [sic] is weathered out on the surface—no house structure present but gatherings of cobbles denoting hearths are present. Charcoal and sherds were nowhere found at a greater depth than 4 inches. Metates here are mostly of the basined type. Mortar hole present in rock outcrop at rear of site.

A-40-B
Located south of Railroad and west on two <parallel> erosional ridges of old lake deposits—surface slightly gravelly. On these ridges which run westernly in a diagonal direction to the Bouse Wash are some mesquites and sand dunes of some antiquity. the occupation between A-40 and A-40-B is continuous and in the entire Bouse site one square mile is involved.

A-40-B is different culturally from the rest of the area in that only basined metates are present and the sherd percentages are different—Verde Black on Grey is a major factor with early Halchidoma[ ] Hohokam Red on Buff fairly strong.

One pestle and 2 broken portable mortars seen. Strong knife culture and some dart points present. Arrowpoints almost absent but local ranch boys have hunted this area considerably.

Excavations at A-2-F, Cave #10

As previously mentioned, Rogers returned to one of the many cave sites he recorded along Secret Pass in the Black Mountains to excavate three trenches (see Figures 2 and 3). His field notes provide a glimpse into his writing style and observations:

Surface material from the talus of #10 is located at the base of a vertical cliff of tuff and faces the north east. It was occupied so long that the large cave became plugged [sic] to the roof and the residential [sic] area finally extended into the open as a mound in front of the drip line. Mound is 70’ long, 30’ wide on the surface and has a maximum depth of about 6’. There is between 4500 and 5500 cu. feet of occupational fill here. This site was located in Oct. 1928 but test trenches not run until Oct. 1941. This established 3 horizons, a basal stratum of BM [Basketmaker] III or Amargosa II (Eastern) and intermediate stratum of prepottery.
Yuman and a top stratum of the Yuman pottery period.

As the Yuman fill approached the ceiling it was periodically scraped out onto the talus which built a mound under the drip. This spoiled the cap of the deposit for stratigraphy as it drew sherds as old as Deadman’s Gray and mixed them with the latest Yuman sherds. Even at greater depth this action might have gone on to some extent as a Buff sherd was found in the third cut. Rat burrows could have accounted for this one sherd. 90 cu. feet screened in all.

The bow and arrow seemed to have been used as early as the BM III or Amar. II capping as small points were found with dartpoints. Dartpoints [sic] get progressively larger from the bottom of the Amargosa back to the top. <Characteristic of the Mohave Desert are too>

**White Tanks**

In 1939 Rogers made his first visit to White Tanks in the Tank Mountains of Yuma Proving Ground (Figure 7). That first visit and subsequent trips in 1941, 1945, 1950, and lastly in 1956 resulted in more than 50 pages of field notes on just this one site complex with its many rock art panels and archaeological loci, spanning San Dieguito I through the ethnohistoric Yavapai (Schaefer et al. 1993). Julian Hayden recounted that Rogers spent part of his honeymoon with his second wife, Francis, at White Tanks (Hayden et al. 2011). Rogers loved the place and hoped to homestead there. It represented his last major field effort after he came out of retirement and before his untimely death in 1960.

**Summing Up**

In his final grand synthesis, although it was brief and likely unfinished at the time of his death, Rogers came...
to view early prehistoric Arizona as a cultural area
different from although related to the Colorado and
Mojave deserts, dubbing it the “Southeastern Aspect.”
His notes show his early and intense interest in every
aspect of the region’s prehistory, examined through the
lens of the culture-historical approach and applying a
migration model for the spread of the San Dieguito I
cultural complex from California into Arizona because
of its limited distribution in the western part of the lat-
ter state. He wrote:

It remains to be explained why this divi-
sion of the San Dieguito domain was made,
and why the Southeastern Aspect was set
apart from the others. Certain geographical,
cultural and climatic factors combined seem
to warrant the division. Geographically, it
occupies an eastern marginal position; from
a cultural standpoint, it appears not to be
an early homeland but an infiltration area.
If the last assumption is a true one, then the
chronology of the cultural phase patterns
should fall later than their equivalents in
the Central Aspect [Colorado and Mojave
deserts].

The only arbitrarily assumed demarcation
is the Colorado River. It is of no cultural
significance, except that it marks the eastern
boundary of the San Dieguito III pattern.
Actually, the boundary on the California
and Nevada side lies some twenty miles
west from the river valley. Neither does the
Colorado constitute a cultural dividing line
when applied to the San Dieguito I and San
Dieguito II phase pattern distributions. Its
north to south course merely passes across
the geographical arrangement of the two
phase patterns, which are present in both
California and Arizona, and the southern-
most part of Nevada [Rogers 1966:67].

Although clearly Rogers ran out of time to absorb
all the information he gathered in Arizona over 30
years of fieldwork, many of his conclusions ring true
today or serve as early formulations from which to
develop new interpretations. For example, early on
he concluded that ceramic scatters along trails were
often not accidents but deliberate symbolic behavior
like earlier trail shrine formation. His early field notes
frequently mention surface collecting or looting even
then, and we can regard his expansive collections
and notes as valuable repositories of information
from sites now long gone or further compromised.
Although only a taste of Rogers’ collected materials
can be presented here, the reader is invited to visit the
San Diego Museum of Man to review his journals and
photographs first-hand and to gain a better under-
standing of the experiences that shaped this pioneer
archaeologist.

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