

Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project

Education Initiative
2003-2004



Restoring water to ensure the continuity of the Akimel O'otham and Pee Posh tradition of agriculture

Reflections of the Forty-Niner Years

Part 59

“The California travel has effected a great change in the habits and appearance of these Indians.... You rarely see one... who has not on a shirt, coat or pair of pants.”

C. C. Cox, emigrant

Thousands of soldiers and emigrants traveled through the Pima and Maricopa villages between 1846 and 1852, finding food, forage and friendship. The villages also represented the last opportunity for emigrants to acquire the supplies needed for the ten to thirty-day trip down the Gila to the confluence of the Colorado River and the ten-day sojourn to Warner’s Ranch, in Southern California.

While the *jornada* from Tucson to the Pima villages was more difficult and deadly, the trail west of Maricopa Wells to the Colorado River was much longer and more dangerous. Here the traveler might encounter the less friendly Yavapai, Mohave and Quechan, with some emigrants—most of the Oatman family for example—not surviving to tell of their hardships. Many emigrants purchased gourds from the Pima and Maricopa to carry water across the Forty-Mile Desert. Smaller groups often congregated in the villages and caravanned together down the Gila River. Lieutenant Cave Coutts, traveling up the Gila in the fall of 1849, met thousands of emigrants traveling downstream of the Pima and Maricopa villages, some of whom related “terrible accounts of the emigrants whom they have passed.” Many emigrants remained in the Pima villages without the means of transportation and lacking any resources. One emigrant wrote, “One-fourth of the thousands who are behind [me] will come to the Colorado [River] in distress.” Hundreds of animals died enroute and the emigrants continued discarding personal possessions along the final leg of the journey across the Arizona desert.

The Pima and Maricopa response to the mass migration of foreigners traveling across their land was tempered by several factors. Unlike post Civil War emigrants who stayed and established permanent settlements above the Indian villages, the 49’ers did not. Much like earlier Spanish missionaries and American mountain men who simply passed through the villages buying and trading for such items as they needed, the forty-niners were transients. As a result, the Pima and Maricopa agricultural market—although still lacking access to the new technology and education needed to farm more efficiently—was enhanced. Furthermore, forty-niners needed rest from the *jornada* from Tucson before embarking on another *jornada* down the Gila to the Colorado River.

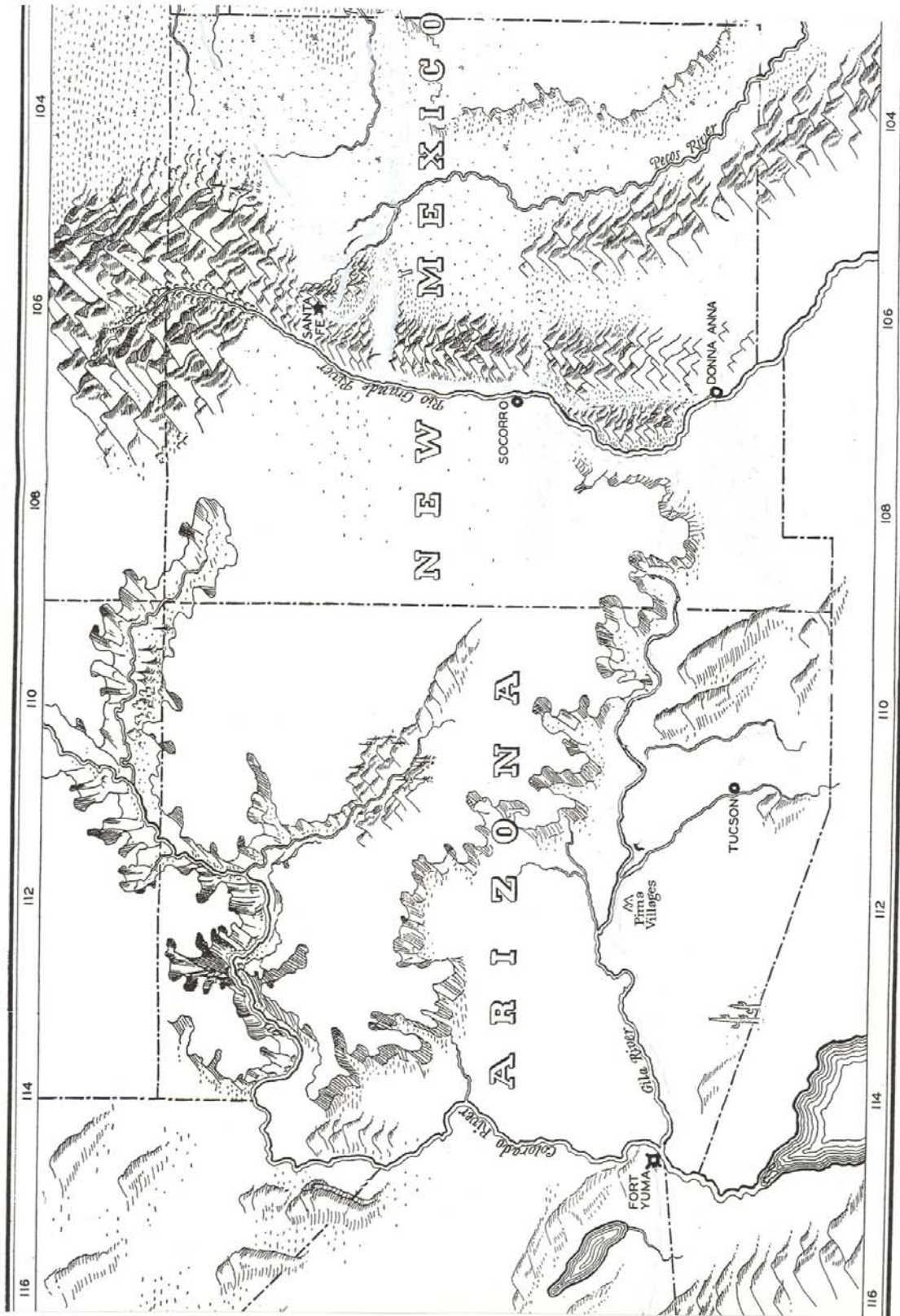
The Pima and Maricopa villages were oases where both man and animal could rest. And since the emigrants sought protection from the Apaches to the south and east of the villages and the Quechan, Yavapai and Mohave north and west of the villages, the Pima and Maricopa increased in stature. The Pima and Maricopa, as the hereditary enemies of these tribes, found it to their advantage to provide such protection. Thus, the Pima and Maricopa villages served not

only as a center of trade and rest but also as an important policing center. Since the villages were the only places between Tucson and Warner's Ranch where good food and forage could be purchased and water was available, they served a vital life-sustaining function.

The Pima and Maricopa clearly understood they were the center of activity and their goods were in demand. For this reason they sought to take advantage of their position by seeking to upgrade their technology to better provide for the emigrant market. If their water had been protected, the confederated tribes may well have remained the breadbasket of the region. As it was, by 1850 the Indian farmers lagged behind their American counterparts only in access to technology (i.e., agricultural equipment) and in the technical skills required to engage in modern farming. That they understood the land and how to cultivate an abundance and variety of crops was well established.

The emigrant rush of 1846 to 1852 profoundly impacted the Pima and Maricopa. Already an agricultural people, the economy of the confederated tribes shifted. Once traders and barterers, the Pima and Maricopa were now entering the cash economy. And their agricultural economy was no more one of simple subsistence and trade but was, rather, one based on commercial agriculture. As importantly, over the course of the 1850s the Indian farmers continued to request agricultural tools and equipment—and the instruction in how to properly use them. Not until 1859, after more than eight years of unfulfilled requests, did the United States Government appropriate \$10,000 to buy “suitable presents” for the Pima and Maricopa. That fall, Lieutenant Sylvester Mowry distributed 444 axes, 618 shovels, 516 hoes, 240 sickles, 270 harrow teeth, 48 iron rakes, 15 plows and 15 sets of harnesses to the Pima and Maricopa.

In reply to the presents, Antonio Azul—who succeeded his father Antonio Culo Azul as chief in 1855—expressed gratitude and a promise that he would teach the “young men to use the implements sent to them.” Clearly the Pima and Maricopa desired to increase production and continue to provide food and forage throughout the growing region of Arizona. And whereas the Pima and Maricopa once were hesitant to accept American coin, by 1855—because of the “large emigration passing through”—they had “learned the value of American coin” and used “it in the purchase of anything.”



Courtesy of Grant Foreman, *Marcy and the Gold Seekers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939)

Teacher Plan for “Reflections of the Forty-niner Years”

Terms to know and understand

- Transients
- Hereditary
- Economy
- Cash economy
- Caravan

Critical Thinking:

- Look at the quote of C. C. Cox at the top of page 73. Interpret the words. What do you believe it says? Does it seem logical? Possible? Would it represent all of the Pima and Maricopa? Explain.

Activities

- Review with the students the Southern and Gila trails through the Pima and Maricopa villages. Be sure to point out the Colorado, Gila, Santa Cruz, San Pedro and Rio Grande rivers. Then note the main towns and villages (Santa Fe, Socorro, Tucson, Pima villages, Fort Yuma). The map provides you with some degree of the topography. After you have done this, have the students draw in a bright color the route of the Gila Trail from Socorro to Fort Yuma. Do the same for the Southern Trail in another bright color (you can add the two cutoffs if you choose). Discuss with the students how these trails were the “Interstate 10” of their day and how—much like today—all traffic came through the Pima and Maricopa villages. In the mid 19th century the villages were the breadbasket for travelers. Considering the growth of central Arizona towns and cities, could the Community once again become the breadbasket of the region? Discuss with the students how the Gila River Indian Community’s goal is to indeed become the breadbasket of the region. The Community has a large area (up to 146,330 acres) of irrigable land and will soon have a large volume (653,500 acre-feet) of water that positions the Community to be a major producer not only for the region but also for world markets. Close by noting the Community is not reinventing the wheel in this respect. It was the main breadbasket over a century and half ago.

About P-MIP

The Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project is authorized by the Gila River Indian Community to construct all irrigation systems for the Community. When fully completed, P-MIP will provide irrigation for up to 146,330 acres of farmland. P-MIP is dedicated to three long-range goals:

- Restoring water to the Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh.
- Putting Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh rights to the use of water to beneficial use.
- Demonstrating and exercising sound management to ensure continuity of the Community’s traditional economy of agriculture.

Students will be able to:

1. Describe Pima and Maricopa agricultural fields and crops they produced.
2. Explain ways Pima and Maricopa agriculture was changing in the mid 19th century.

Objectives