

Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project

Education Initiative

2005-2006



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

The US-Mexico Boundary Commission in the Pima-Maricopa Villages

Part 62

When the Mexican War ended in 1848 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was ratified by the United States and Mexico, no one for sure knew where the boundary uniting the two countries lay since it had yet to be surveyed. As importantly, the United States did not know all of the tribes in the Southwest. When the territory north of the Gila River officially became part of the United States on July 4, 1848, President James K. Polk appointed John B. Wellner as boundary commissioner and ordered him to meet Mexican General Pedro Garcia Condé in San Diego, in July 1849. Wellner and Conde together were to oversee the boundary from the Pacific Ocean to the Colorado River. With the election of President Zachary Taylor, however, a new American boundary commissioner was appointed: John Russell Bartlett.

Bartlett proceeded to El Paso, Texas, to meet Condé in November 1850 only to discover El Paso was incorrectly located on the official map 34 miles too far north and 100 miles too far east, casting doubt over the original boundary survey from the beginning. When this and other concerns were brought before Congress, it cut off funding for the survey in October 1852, but not before Bartlett gathered enough information for a two-volume book entitled *Personal Narrative of Exploration*, in which he described the boundary survey.

When Bartlett rescued a captive Mexican girl named Inez Gonzales in the summer of 1851, he left his work on the survey and traveled to Santa Cruz, Sonora, to restore the girl to her parents. Traveling through Mexico, Bartlett took ill with typhoid fever and, after three months of illness, was taken to San Diego, arriving in February 1852. In the meantime, surveyor Andrew Gray and engineer Amiel Whipple continued their survey down the Gila River. In December 1851, Whipple arrived in the Pima villages while taking astronomical and meteorological observations along the boundary line. Whipple left few descriptions of the people, other than to note the Maricopa living along the Salt River had been killed or driven “in closer proximity to the Pimos.” If protected from Apache and Yuma attacks, they “would gladly return to their fertile fields upon the American side of the Gila,” Whipple reported. In an attempt to protect their people, a group of Maricopa traveled to the capital of Sonora in Ures to petition the governor for guns and ammunition.

While waiting for Bartlett to arrive from the west, in the spring of 1852, C.C. Parry, a botanist and geologist with the Boundary commission, examined the farmland of the Pima and Maricopa, noting the Indian farmers irrigated along the river. Their fields were extensive, with ditches drawing so much water from the river that its flow was noticeably diminished. On either side of the river were mesquite lands, beyond which housed the villages. The extensive fertile plain extended an estimated twenty miles downstream and was several miles in width on both banks of the Gila. The river itself was some forty yards across and two feet deep. Lagoons and marshes lined the river, which was “everywhere bordered with a dense willow growth.”

When Bartlett was well enough, he traveled up the Gila River from Fort Yuma in June 1852. Following the forty-mile desert, he arrived at Maricopa Wells on the morning of June 30. The nearest Maricopa village—Hueso Parado (Bone Standing village) just to the northwest—“manifested a friendly disposition” toward the Americans and the people “seemed very glad to meet among us so many of their old acquaintances.” A number of Maricopa men spoke Spanish and served as interpreters. The Americans purchased green and dried corn, squashes, beans and dried

peas from the Maricopa using white cloth, calico, red flannel, shirts, and blankets as payment. When evening arrived, Bartlett expected the Maricopa to return to their village, which they did not, instead “passing the night in the camp.”

On the following morning, the Americans pushed on from Maricopa Wells to the Gila, expecting to find good grass for their animals. Upon reaching the river, they discovered “not a blade of grass” for “*the Gila was dry!*” With no water in the river until the Pima villages twelve or so miles upstream, Bartlett decided to return to Maricopa Wells. By the following morning, the Pima had heard of the arrival of the boundary commission and brought vegetables, pinole and the “fruit of the petahaya” to trade. Petahaya, or saguaro fruit, was “rolled up in masses or balls as large as one’s fist” and was in great demand as the Americans were “very fond of it, and our Indian friends found a ready sale for all they brought.”

During his stay among the Maricopa, Bartlett observed a division of labor among the people. “[T]he women do the principle part of the work,” the commissioner explained. “Beside taking care of the children and attending to the household matters, they grind corn, make baskets, gather mezquit beans, help till the ground, and sometimes spin and weave.” Grinding corn on a *metate* was “a work of great labor, and comes hard on the poor women, who are obliged to get upon their knees, and exert the whole of their arms and bodies in the task.” Women were also responsible for bringing water to the villages, carrying it in large ollas upon their head.

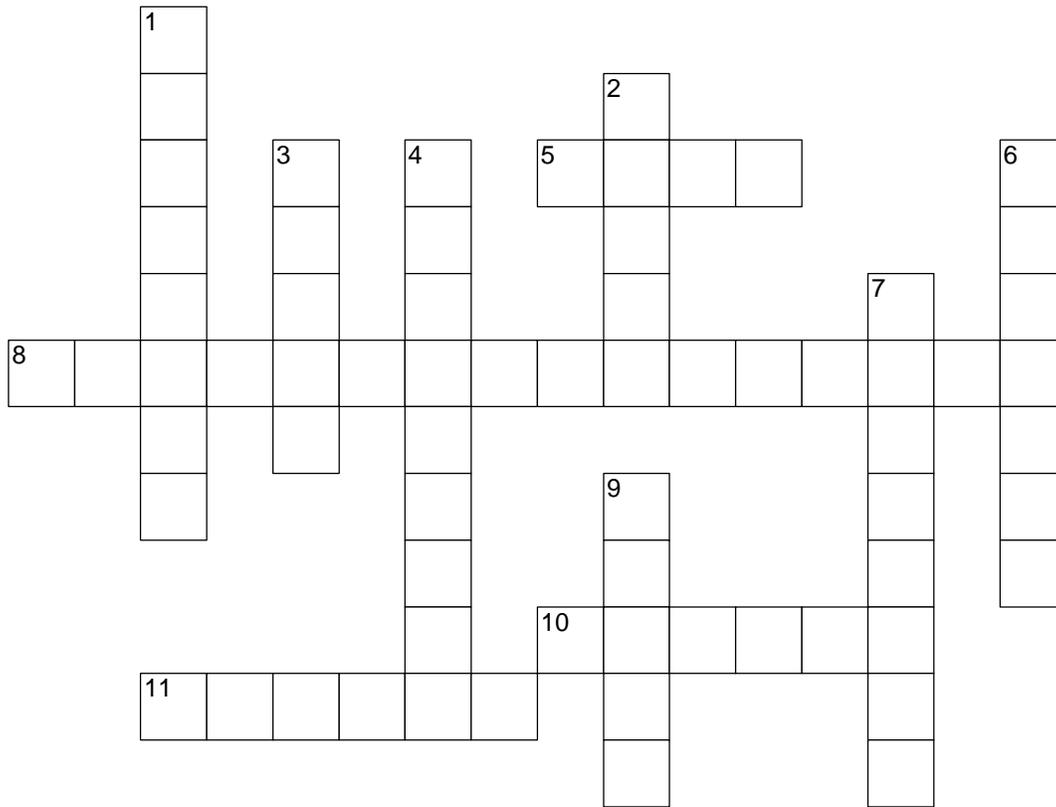
Men, on the other hand, “plant and gather the crops, and take care of the animals.” Bartlett incorrectly assumed this was all they did. Nonetheless, he did observe the men had acquired “implements of husbandry” that included “steel hoes and axes which they obtain from the Mexicans, and harrows and occasionally a long-handled spade.” Among the crops grown was cotton, which was spun and woven into blankets, cloth and headbands by the old men. Due to their value, the Maricopa “set a high price upon their blankets, asking for them ten or twelve dollars in money or a new woollen blanket of equal size.”

After spending nine days among the Maricopa, Bartlett moved his camp among the Pima, who lived upstream on a plain containing their villages and cultivated fields. The land was intersected with “irrigating canals from the Gila, by which they are enabled to control the waters, and raise the most luxuriant crops.” Bartlett confessed Pima and Maricopa agriculture was “more extensively and methodically practiced” than anywhere else. While other tribes were engaged in agriculture, the Pima and Maricopa had “made agriculture more of a system. Their lands are better irrigated, their crops are larger, and the flour which they make from their wheat and maize” was better. The south bank—home to the villages—contained the best agricultural land, with less bottomland on the north bank, which was consequently more difficult to irrigate.

The villages consisted of twenty to fifty homes “surrounded by gardens and cultivated fields.” Fields nearest the villages were fenced, although “large patches of wheat, a long distance from any village ... were not.” In addition to individual homes, each family had a storehouse or granary in which to keep surplus food, with each being about eight feet tall and round with the interior purposely left open to provide air circulation. The outside was coated with layers of mud to protect the food from the elements. Wheat and shelled corn were stored in baskets as large as three-to five feet high and holding as many as fifteen bushels. On top of the granaries were large caches of mesquite beans being dried in anticipation of being ground into flour.

Other than increasing their herds of horses and cattle (and some mules), Bartlett found the Pima and Maricopa much like earlier writers had found them—cultivating the soil and utilizing the waters of the Gila River to irrigate their land. They were peaceably living in their villages along the river and continued to demonstrate hospitality and friendship to all who passed through their villages. Character descriptions of virtue, honesty and industriousness were by no means news to those familiar with the River People.

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Constructed using Crossword Weaver

Down:

- 1. This sweet food was made from the fruit of the saguaro and was in great demand by Americans:
- 2. This bank of the Gila River was under US control after 1848:
- 3. These earthen vessels were made to hold water, which women carried on their head:
- 4. How Pima and Maricopa agricultural lands were described by the boundary commissioners:
- 6. These wet, marshy lands were found all along the Gila River:
- 7. These Maricopa woven goods made from cotton commanded \$10 to \$12 a piece:
- 9. This crop introduced by the Spanish could be ground into flour:

Across

- 5. This traditionally grown crop was also ground into flour:
- 8. The name of the treaty ending the Mexican War and setting the boundary on the Gila River:
- 10. The stone bowl upon which women would grind flour:
- 11. The estimated length of the irrigated plain of the Pima-Maricopa fields (in miles):

Teacher Plan for “The US-Mexico Boundary Commission”

Terms to know and understand

- Ratify
- Metate
- Caches
- Husbandry
- Botanist
- Geologist

Critical Thinking:

- The Maricopa woven blankets could be acquired with \$10 or \$12 in money or in exchange for a woolen blanket. What does the expectation of payment in gold coin tell you about the economy of the villages by the early years of the 1850s? How is this different from that which existed in the late 1840s?

Activities

- While camped at what would become Maricopa Wells, Bartlett entertained a number of Maricopa leaders. Francisco, a chief and interpreter, was especially noteworthy to Bartlett, for reasons made clear in the paragraph below. Read it to your students and discuss the social and cultural implications.

“There was one practice of this chief that was not so agreeable to me, namely, that of helping his friends to the choicest bits from my table. When we took our places, they all assembled, and sat or stood gaping around. Francisco, during the meal, occasionally handed them a piece of bread or meat; and when we had finished, he coolly piled up his plate, and passed it around among his friends. At first, I was rather amused at the fellow’s impudence; but on a subsequent occasion, he carried the joke still further, not only giving them what he had collected on his own plate, but stripping the table of all that remained, so as to leave nothing for my cook and servant. As our supply of provisions was limited, I had no idea of feeding so many hungry mouths, which had an abundance at home; consequently my second invitation to the chief, was the last. Yet he made his appearance regularly every morning while we remained, and gave many hints about being hungry, expressing his surprise to the cook that he did not have a seat at my table. I told him, finally, that it was not the custom among Americans, when they asked a friend to their table, to feed his whole tribe.”

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. Explain how the US-Mexico boundary affected the Pima and Maricopa.
2. Draw social and cultural differences between the Maricopa and the American commissioners.

Objectives