

2 - Village Life

Farming, Gathering and Trade



Village Structure

The Sinagua settled this area about A.D. 600, and between A.D. 900-1150 their population increased significantly, similar to other prehistoric Southwestern groups. Pit house villages became common in the region, and these villages increased in size until circa A.D. 1150 when the Sinagua began living in cliff dwellings.

Investigations conducted here at the Homestead village site indicate a formal community organization, with pit houses clustered together. At least eight pit houses have been identified at this site, and more are likely to be present, buried below the ground surface. In fact, two additional pit houses were discovered during excavation of the water main along Homestead Parkway.

The initial survey of this property identified the eight pit house structures in the cluster pattern shown here, as well as a ninth "feature" of unknown type.



Farming Changed Their Lifestyle

Village life centered around water and nearby fields. This explains why most dwellings are found along the Verde River and perennial streams and creeks such as Oak Creek, Clear Creek and Beaver Creek.

The Sinagua took to the agricultural way of life relatively slowly compared to others in the Southwest, probably because of this area's rich array of resources. Agave, yucca fruits, walnuts, berries, piñon nuts, acorns, cactus fruits and various small seeds are only a few of the wild-growing foods that sustained gatherers.

About A.D. 600, farming became the main focus of subsistence. Corn, beans and squash were the basic cultivated plants. Cotton was also grown by the Sinagua for its fibers -- and cotton seeds could be eaten.



Tools for processing food changed as well. Grinding stones evolved into the rectangular trough metates for grinding corn as shown here. More information on farming is given in the Garden area.

Even after they began farming, the Sinagua continued to utilize wild plants that comprised a substantial portion of their diet.

Local Resources and Trade

Important local resources included salt, argillite (soft red stone suitable for carving), copper ores and other mineral-based pigments, especially kaolin, a white clay widely used for pottery making, body paint and rock markings.



Salt from the prehistoric Verde Salt Mine



Carving of a beaver in argillite found in the Dyck Cliff Dwelling in Rimrock

The Sinagua developed a thriving exchange with surrounding cultural groups and emerged as one of the most successful traders of the prehistoric Southwest.

Among the items received were decorated pottery, shell jewelry, copper bells, and live macaws (parrots from Mexico) for which the Sinagua exchanged salt, pigments, cotton cloth and argillite.



Two samples of finished cotton textiles found in the Dyck Cliff Dwelling in Rimrock

Pottery Styles Found in the Verde Valley



Tuzigoot smudged bowl

The Sinagua developed a unique brown-colored pottery tradition called Alameda Brown Ware. Using local clays tempered with sand and other materials to prevent cracking, this pottery was made with coils of clay flattened with the paddle-and-anvil technique.

Unlike most cultures of the ancient Southwest, the Sinagua never made significant amounts of decorated pottery. Among the items exchanged were decorated pottery from the Ancestral Puebloans in the Four Corners area, the Mogollon Culture on the Mogollon Rim, the Hohokam in the Phoenix Basin and others. Some samples are shown here.

This exhibit is sponsored by George and Carole Dvorak

You may see some pottery sherds along the trail. It is okay to pick it up for a closer look, but please place it back where you found it. We do periodic surface surveys to collect pottery sherds that have made their way to the surface after a rain.



Wingate Black-on-Red bowl



Flagstaff Black-on-White pitcher



Flagstaff Black-on-White bowl