



MarkHitsTheRoad

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Arizona Archaeology and Museums Short Getaway Road Trip (A24A)

Normally, I don't travel in the winter months, preferring to spend the shorter days working on projects at home. But this year I decided to take a short getaway to Arizona, spending a couple nights in Phoenix followed by one in Prescott for some archaeological sites, a bit of hiking, and a couple museums.

One the way down, I stopped at Montezuma Well, part of Montezuma Castle National Monument. I was here once before, but it was grey and rainy, and I was still pretty new to exploring ruins sites.

Montezuma Well is a sinkhole filled with water from springs that produce about 1.6 million gallons of water daily. The site features cliffside and rim-top ruins that served as homes for people of the ancient Southern Sinagua Tradition. These ruins date back to the 1100s.



Montezuma Well. Some rim-top ruins sit above Montezuma Well on the opposite side.



Pueblo ruins built into the side of Montezuma Well



Rim-top ruins

A nearby pit house, one of four in the area, dates back to 1050AD, and is similar to those built by the Hohokam people in the present-day Phoenix area about 100 miles to the south.



The floor of this pit house has several holes around the perimeter where wall posts once stood. A pair of larger holes in the middle of the pit house floor were where roof support posts once stood.

In Phoenix, I checked out the Arizona State Capitol and capitol grounds. I had been here once before, but this time I toured the State Capitol Museum, housed in the old state capitol building.



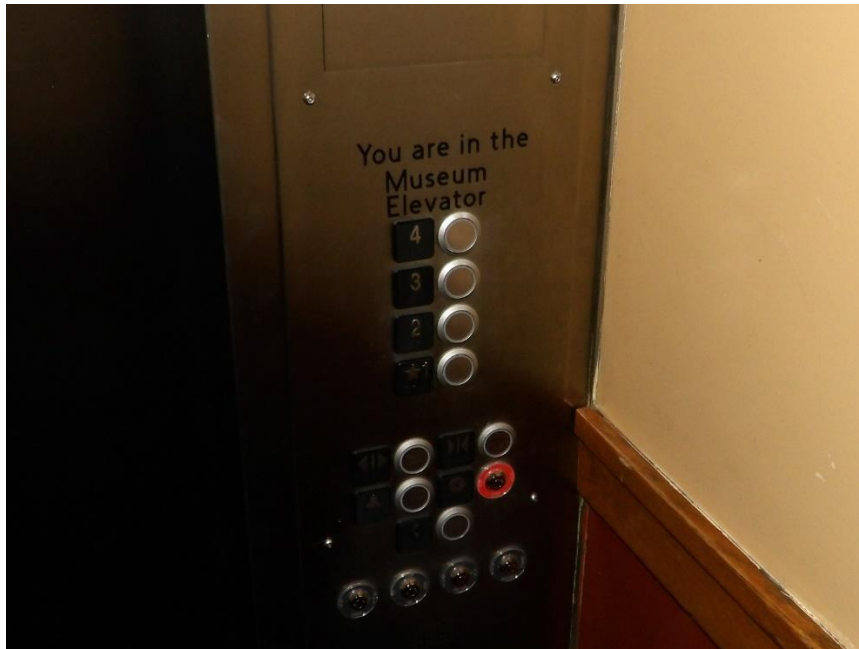
The old state capitol now is home to the State Capitol Museum. The executive building stands behind it, and is where the governor's offices are today. The plaza is flanked by the House and Senate buildings.



The museum puts a lot of emphasis on the political history of Arizona from territorial times into statehood. This was the original House chamber.



The museum also has a substantial exhibit on the USS Arizona, which the Japanese sank in a surprise attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, which prompted our entry into World War II. The ship's flag was salvaged and is now displayed in the museum.



Given where I was when I approached and entered this elevator, and I don't think I needed a sign inside telling me that I was "in the Museum Elevator". After all, there were no signs informing me of when I was in the Museum Rotunda, Museum Hallway or Museum Bathroom. And believe me, I checked!



Wesley Bolin Memorial Plaza is across the street from the capitol buildings. It is the site of a number of memorials and tributes, including this one – Arizona's World War II Memorial.

After finishing up at the state capitol complex, I headed to South Mountain Park/Preserve for some hiking, this time choosing the Holbert Trail, as it reportedly features a lot of petroglyphs. But, part of the trail was substantially rerouted away from some of the rock art for construction purposes, and I had to

cut the hike short when the trail became too steep and rugged for my feet situation, so I only saw one graffiti-marred petroglyph panel and a couple isolated petroglyphs.



View of a horse riding stable and downtown Phoenix from South Mountain's Holbert Trail



A rock art (and graffiti) panel along Holbert Trail. Petroglyphs in this area are usually (but not always) from the Hohokam tradition.

The next morning, I left Phoenix, and headed north about an hour to Agua Fria National Monument. Agua Fria is located along the east side of I-17 between Phoenix and Flagstaff. It consists primarily of Black Mesa, Perry Mesa, and the Agua Fria River canyon that separates the two. I've stopped here a few times in the past for some hiking to check out petroglyphs in the Badger Springs area, among several in the monument. Agua Fria is also home to numerous pueblo ruins sites, which were generally built between 1250AD and 1450AD, when the mesas were abandoned. There are just a few gravel and dirt roads, little in the way of marked hiking trails, no developed facilities, and the Bureau of Land Management only highlights one of the ruins sites, Pueblo La Plata.



Bloody Basin Road is mostly a dirt/gravel road at this point as it leads to Pueblo La Plata from I-17. It can be difficult driving when wet, and most sources recommend a high clearance vehicle, but road conditions were actually pretty good the day I drove it.

Pueblo La Plata is about 9.5 miles off the highway, and then there is about a half mile walk from the parking area to the ruins themselves. The pueblo consisted of about 80-100 rooms, and was built with basalt rocks. There are some other small ruins nearby as well as some petroglyphs. The site was occupied by people of the Perry Mesa Tradition, who farmed atop the mesa. Some of the early published research I read seemed to suggest that these people were of Hohokam origin, but more recent research suggests that their origins were more diverse.



Pueblo La Plata ruins, including an interior doorway. The outer walls have no entrances. Instead, the people entered their homes through openings in the roof. Individual families may have lived in 2-3 connected rooms.

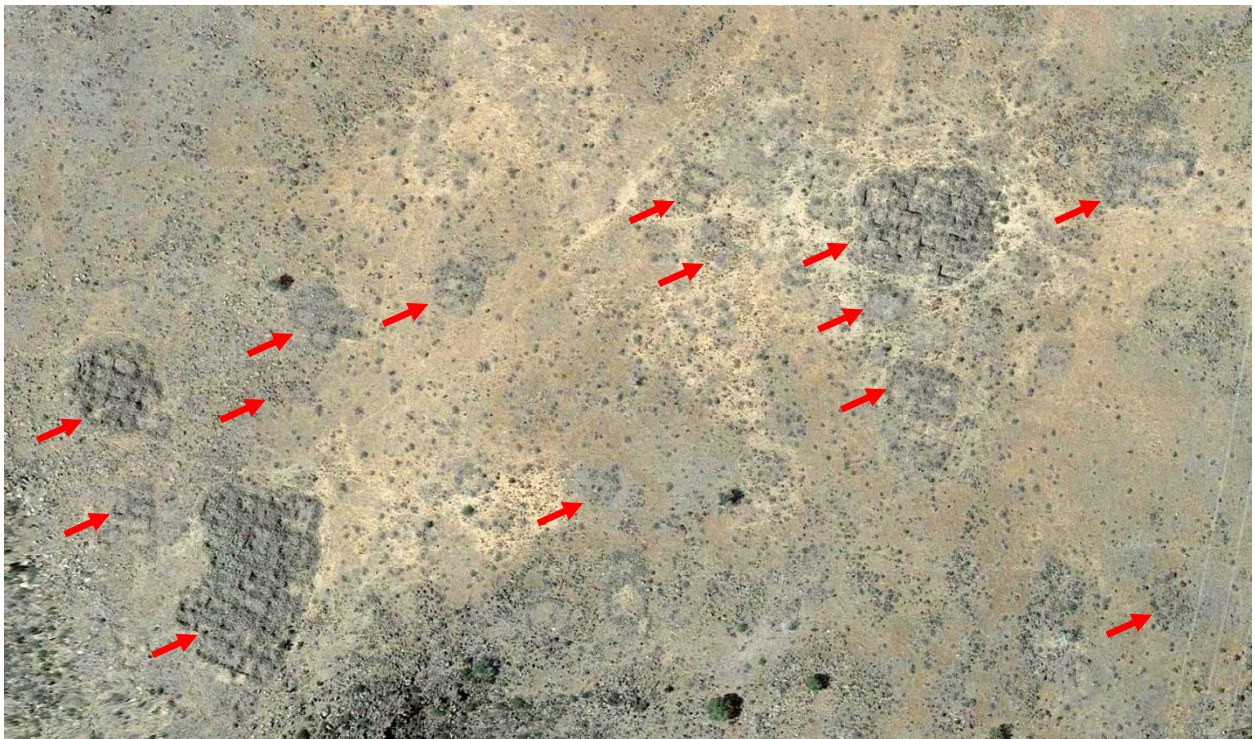


Pottery sherds litter the ground around the ruins. (Although “shards” is acceptable, archaeologists prefer “sherds” when discussing ancient pottery fragments.)



A small petroglyphs panel near Pueblo La Plata

There are about 400 archaeological sites at Agua Fria, many of them ruins and rock art sites, but it's hard to find detailed information on where they are at or how to get to them.



But as I do for other places, I find that studying Google Satellite images can help to locate them, such as this spot about 2 miles southwest of Pueblo La Plata that has more than a dozen ruins, including the ones I've highlighted with red arrows. Maybe someday I'll figure out how best to get to this location.

From Agua Fria, I headed to Prescott to check out a museum focused on regional Native American archaeology, but the museum was closed for construction when I got there. I don't know why some places can't update their websites when they're temporarily closed.

So, I set off for my final plans for the afternoon, some hiking at nearby Watson Lake Park, a reservoir created when Granite Creek was dammed at the Granite Dells, a Precambrian granite outcropping that has eroded into a somewhat lumpy appearance. I actually first heard of Watson Lake and the Granite Dells earlier this year, and the photos I saw really caught my eye, but the color-enhancing sun disappeared behind clouds shortly after I got here.



With some daylight left, I headed for downtown Prescott to explore its historic downtown and visit its Western Heritage Center before checking into my hotel.



Prescott's Montezuma Street is home to Whiskey Row, once lined with taverns that catered to the local miners. A 1905 fire burned much of it down, but rebuilding started within a week. What we see today is pretty much what was built at that point.



Prescott hosted its first rodeo in 1888, and claims that it is the oldest rodeo in the world.



The Western Heritage Center is sort of a cross between a museum and visitor center, combining history and cultural exhibits (this one highlights movies filmed at least in part in the county) with displays promoting local events and museums.



In Sleepy Hollow, New York, tales of the Headless Horseman instill a bit of fear in some of the local children. Here in Prescott, the Headless Gingerbread Man and Headless Snowman serve a similar role.

I had a couple minor sightseeing stops planned for the drive home, but after a night of severe insomnia, I decided to head straight home, so this ended my sightseeing for the trip.