

TRAVEL

Legacy of the Hohokam seen everywhere in Arizona

By **TERESE L. MCFARLAND**
SPECIAL WRITER

I cruised south out of Phoenix on U.S. 10 toward Tucson. It was straight and flat and brown and dry. My delight at seeing the sun in the winter was slightly offset by the lack-luster scenery dotting the highway.

Whenever I'm on vacation my sense of direction and map reading falters. Perhaps by some divine intervention, I can find obscure places with minimal of no signs. Back in the Detroit-metro area, I have to really concentrate to find downriver.

What seemed like only minutes later, I was already 40 miles south of Phoenix and wandering a course through desert land to the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument in Coolidge, Ariz.

Weathered, tawny monoliths of the prehistoric Hohokam Indians glowed with majestic reverence against the cowgirl blue sky. Named by the Spanish explorers, Casa Grande means "the Great House." This incredible technological feat used a mud mixture of sand, clay and limestone applied on top of a wooden frame, in courses that were as thick as four feet near the base. Casa Grande, deemed the largest existing Hohokam ruin structure, is a splendid example of their final architectural style; their Classic Period (1100 to 1450 AD).

This was my introduction to

the Hohokam, a mysterious ancient people who left behind evidence of an advanced civilization and technology, similar to the more popular Anasazi culture to the north. Strolling the compound ruins and the Great House aroused heart and mind questions about these highly evolved people who date back to 300 AD, according to archeologists. Some believe that the Great Halls, like the Great House at Casa Grande, were astronomical observatories. The people gathered in these reflective arenas to examine their world through strategic openings in the walls and also to give thanks.

For a small fee, the visitors center offered exhibits and artifacts reflecting the Hohokam lifestyle, a desert farming community with well-developed canal and irrigation systems. They were also keen hunter-gatherers, traders and artisans. Unique to the Hohokam were the traditional, decorative red-pigment pots on buff pottery. In the late 1600s, missionaries visiting this site found the Pima Indians living in brush huts nearby the ruins. The Pima claimed their ancestors were the "ho-ho-KAHM," which translates into "all used up." The disappearance of the Hohokam remains a mystery today.

Traveling south on U.S. 10, I exited toward the Tucson Mountain district - or Saguaro

National Park. Remote signs, rugged terrain and saguaro desert giants beckoned. Native to southern Arizona, the saguaro cactus can grow up to 50 feet tall, live for 160 to 200 years and weigh up to eight tons. I had just enough time to drive the nine-mile dirt road known as the Bajada Loop that winds through majestic saguaro, barrel cactus, teddybear cholla, prickly pear cactus and mesquite trees.

I parked my rented brilliant orange Mustang near a scenic path at the base of a small desert mountain that led up to preserved petroglyphs. I was delighted by the prospect of these ancient drawings: Then my mind conjured some crazy people lurking at the mountain's top, waiting to knock me out and rob me, or worse. I realized the horrid influence of TV and started down the path. However, still a city girl, I kept the popper spray in my vest pocket. Emphatic signs to stay on the trail prompted my search for desert wildlife, like roadrunners and gila monsters and the western diamond-back rattlesnake. All I spied were a few cactus wrens making holes in spiny cholla cactus.

The handwork of the Hohokam, the petroglyphs were spectacularly arranged at the small mountain's crest, as if an open-air chapel. I couldn't interpret their designs, but it felt like a happy and thankful story. In silent union with an elderly gentleman and his companion, we stood in awe.

I exited the park and witnessed striking pink blue magenta rays piercing gauzy clouds layering a limitless sky. Caught up in the beauty, I nearly crashed that brilliant orange Mustang. My destination was north to Scottsdale.

The following day I traveled east out of Scottsdale toward the quaint, historic town of Globe, a charming example of the Golden Age of Mining (1870-1920), not to mention the home of the oldest Woolworth store of the west. I visited the local ruin of Bush-Ba-Gowah Archaeological Park, attributed to the Salado Indians who also unexplainably disappeared around 1450 AD.

The Salado are well known for their incredible and highly decorative utilitarian pottery. I



PHOTOS BY T.L. MCFARLAND

All aglow: A luminous sunrise shrouds Castle Rock, one of several vortices found in Sedona, Arizona.

lurked through rooms (some reconstructed) and climbed the two-floor structures of the prehistoric Indian settlement. Near the compound's edge stood an enigmatic sunken chamber. Similar to the kivas of the ancient Anasazi, it was a room dug deep in a pit with an altar against the wall and a small hole to allow the spirits smoke to enter and leave. I envisioned their sacred ceremonies. Prior to the Salado (between 900 and 1100 AD), evidence suggests that the Hohokam inhabited these same grounds in their pit houses.

My plans to continue about an hour and a half farther east to the Kinshaba ruins located on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation were thwarted. It was simply too late. I returned to Scottsdale.

Time limitations forced choices. The next morning I headed

north toward Sedona but detoured to visit what is perhaps one of the best preserved structures in the Southwest, Montezuma's Castle. Ochre cliff mountain dwellings fronting an azure sky, this magnificent accomplishment by the Sinagua Indians dated back to 1125 AD.

I found myself wondering about their daily lives in these cliff-side dwellings. Never mind the obvious questions of hauling all their provisions up those steep walls, how did they keep their toddlers from walking off the edge and dropping to their death?

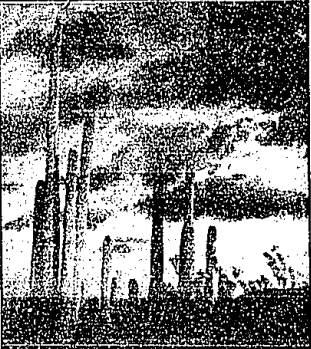
Prior to dwelling in cliffs, these farming people had lived in the surrounding valley area, which I discovered had also previously been occupied by those mysterious Hohokam. In fact, it is believed that the Sinagua lifestyle was dramatically

altered when they adopted the Hohokam irrigation system.

It was obvious that the prehistoric Hohokam had influenced the Sinagua, the Salado, the Pima and more than likely many other Native American people. Actually, I found myself becoming intrigued by their mysterious existence that was technologically advanced yet simple and spiritual. I wanted to visit other obscure ancient ruins throughout Arizona, to learn more about their lifestyle. But the reality of a plane to catch in Phoenix, baby-sitters to relieve and responsibilities awaiting me, loomed. I knew that my time, like that of the ancient Hohokam, was "all used up."

Therese L. McFarland is a freelance writer living in Farmington Hills.

Reaching high: These giant saguaro, native to Arizona, can grow up to 50 feet tall, live 150-200 years and weigh up to 8 tons.



BIRMINGHAM BLOOMFIELD
ArtCenter

Have you always wanted to learn how to draw a car?

Now you can - right here at the BBAC. Robert McMahan, Chrysler designer and Director of Chrysler's Summer Internship Program will teach **Basic Auto Design** from January through March. No need to feel intimidated by this fascinating course which includes hands-on practice and demonstrations. Developed for high school students and adults, this class is offered on Tuesdays from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. beginning January 12 for 11 weeks. Come and see how **you** can create a car!

ENROLL FOR WINTER CLASSES NOW!
More of what you want at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center

1516 South Cranbrook Road, Birmingham, Michigan 48009
ph.(248)644-0866 fax(248)644-7904
Visit our web site at www.bbortcenter.org

Meet Your New
Business Partners

Contemplating a web site for your company?

Get help from the experts.

The Observer & Eccentric Online has created over 100 web sites for businesses. We can create or host a web site designed to grow your business. Our experts will tailor a site to fit your communication needs and budget, and help you promote your site as well. Our partner, CompUSA Computer Superstores, will guide you along the way with training to help you manage your business by computer and understand electronic commerce on the Internet.

Be among the first three companies this month to sign a contract with OE Online for web site development* and receive a free computer training course of your choice at the Metro Detroit CompUSA Training Centers.

Call 734-953-2038 for details.

* Site set up fees must be received in full to qualify for this offer.

©1998 HomeTown Communications Network