



Teacher Packet

Talking Points



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City of Phoenix

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What's in a Name?

- During your visit, you will see and hear several different names referring to the people connected with the site of S'edav Va'aki- O'Odham, Huhugam, Hohokam, Ancestral O'Odham, and Ancestral Sonoran Desert People
- The O'Odham (pronounced AW-aw-thum) are present-day peoples who live in south-central Arizona.
- Huhugam is a word the O'Odham use to identify deceased ancestors.
- Hohokam is the term used by archaeologists to identify the prehistoric culture that lived in south-central Arizona from A.D. 450-1450.
- Ancestral O'Odham or “the ancestors” is a term the O'Odham use to describe their ancestors. The O'Odham prefer this word over Hohokam as it acknowledges cultural continuity through time.
- Ancestral Sonoran Desert People is a broader term used to describe the many traditional peoples who share a history and lifestyle living in the Sonoran Desert. The modern-day descendants or “culturally affiliated tribes” of this group include the Four Southern Tribes - the members of the Gila River Indian Community, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Ak-Chin Indian Community, and Tohono O'Odham Nation – as well as the Zuni and Hopi.
- Archaeologists call the largest earthen structure of this special place a platform mound. The O'Odham refer to this place as a va'aki (pronounced as VA-ah-kee) or ceremonial house.



Interpretive Trail (2/3 mile in length)

To guide your visit, we have grouped information about the site and the Ancestral O’Odham (Hohokam) into learning stations along the interpretive trail. Each learning station focuses on a theme or aspect of this special place. We recommend walking back in time and exploring the trail in the following order:

1. Bright Anceint House
2. Garden & Desert Oasis
3. Ballcourt
4. Houses: Pithouses & Compound House
5. Canals
6. O’Odham World View
7. Platform Mound
8. O’Odham Historical Traditions
9. Petroglyphs

Be mindful, **respectful**, and stay on the trail as you visit this special place.





Bright Ancient House

- S'edav Va'aki is a special place that is sacred to living peoples. A traditional place is a location associated with the cultural practices, traditions, beliefs, and lifeways of a living culture.
- "Affiliated Tribes" are groups of living people who share a history and lifestyle. Members of the Gila River Indian Community, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Ak-Chin Indian Community, and the Tohono O'Odham Nation are considered culturally affiliated with the site of S'edav Va'aki.
- Archaeological investigations have uncovered information about the site's occupation over time. The site of S'edav Va'aki is linked to the organization and operation of a large canal or irrigation system.
- Archaeologists call the large earthen structure on this site a platform mound. The O'Odham refer to this place as a va'aki (pronounced as VA-ah-kee) or ceremonial house. The structure that stands before you today, at its peak was the size of a football field and about three stories tall.
- The va'aki was first built about 900 years ago, since its initial construction the va'aki has been expanded several times. S'edav Va'aki is one of the few remaining sites containing a va'aki.
- Please be mindful and stay on the trail as you visit this special place. Leave any artifacts untouched and in place. Please do not touch any plants or animals.



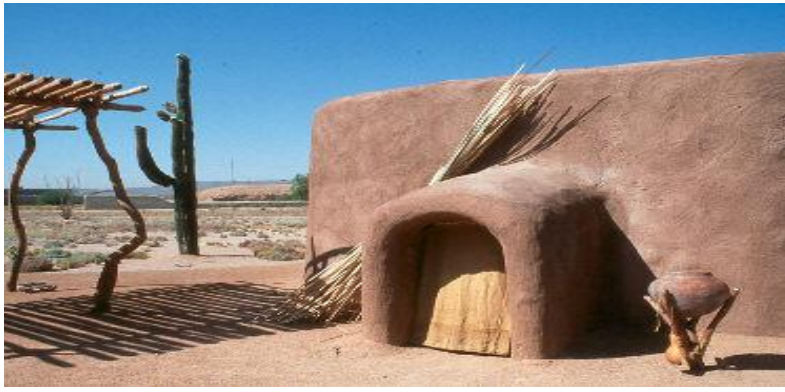
Garden & Desert Oasis

- The Ancestral O'Odham (Hohokam) created the largest prehistoric canal network in North America using wooden and stone tools. Canals were used to bring water to villages and to irrigate agricultural fields.
- The primary food crops included corn, beans, and squash (the three sisters).
- Crops were also grown for non-edible purposes. Cotton was a prized trade item and was used to produce fiber that could be woven on a loom to create cloth. Gourds were dried out and likely turned into household items such as bowls, cups, canteens, storage vessels and musical instruments.
- They also harvested plants from the desert- such as agave (the hearts were roasted in specialized ovens called hornos); prickly pear (pads and fruit); and saguaro fruit which could be turned into a jelly or syrup to provide vitamin C.
- Mesquite and Palo Verde seed pods were collected and ground into a flour using stone tools called manos and metates and then used to create flat bread similar to the tortillas of today.
- Desert plants also served a variety of utilitarian purposes. Saguaro ribs (the 'skeleton' of the cactus) were used as building material, while yucca leaves could be dried out to provide fiber and even be used to make sandals!
- Agave leaves could also be dried out to produce fiber for making rope (cordage), for basket making, or fishing nets. The leaves even provided a built-in needle (spine at the end of the plant) for sewing!
- Rabbits, another food source, may have been attracted to the agricultural fields. Other animals that may have been used include white tailed deer, fish, beaver and big horn sheep.



Ballcourt

- Ballcourts are oval, bowl-shaped depressions in the ground that are found at some Ancestral Sonoran Desert People O'Odham settlements. These depressions are typically 80 to 100 feet long and 50 feet wide.
- From A.D. 750 to 1200, over 200 ballcourts were built by the Ancestral O'Odham in Arizona, including two at S'edav Va'aki!
- The specific function of these courts remains unknown, although they may have been used for ceremonial, social or sporting events that were accompanied by marketplace activities such as trade and feasting.
- Ballcourts may have been the product of cultural exchange with Mesoamerica. They have what appear to be goal posts at each end, so it is possible that stone and rubber balls may have been used in some sort of game.
- Around A.D.1200, ballcourts stopped being used and platform mounds become a central focus of village life. The exact reason for their discontinued use is unclear. Perhaps the ceremonies that were once performed in them stopped. This suggests a change in the way the ancestral peoples viewed the world around them.



Pithouses

- These replica pithouses demonstrate how the Ancestral O’Odham lived throughout the archaeological sequence from A.D. 450-1450.
- Pithouses occurred in clusters or household groups with doorways opening into a central courtyard. Ramadas were likely built to provide a shaded working space where daily activities like food preparation and cooking took place during the hotter summer months.
- Pithouses were constructed by digging a roughly circular pit into the ground about 10 -15 inches deep. The pit was plastered with caliche and then a wooden framework was constructed and covered by adobe. Digging a pit into the ground would provide insulation against the heat and cold.
- When archaeologists excavate pit houses, they typically only find the foundations of the house, because the wooden structures do not preserve well.
- One possible feature in the pithouse floor would be a hearth. A hearth would have been used for warmth and light rather than for cooking, because they tended to be small and there was no hole in the roof for the smoke to escape.
- There are several replica artifacts in the house, particularly pottery and tools used in pottery production. You will also see other items including gourds, reed mats and a saguaro boot.
- This replica house is larger than the Ancestral Sonoran Desert People would have built. They were built to meet present day building codes. You will also notice that one of the replica walls has been cut away, this is an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible entrance. The ancestral people would have entered their houses by crawling through a low entrance.



Compound House

- This replica compound demonstrates how the Ancestral O’Odham lived during the Classic period (A.D. 1150-1450).
- Adobe compound houses differ from pithouses in the following ways:
 - They were built on top of the ground.
 - They tend to be square instead of round or oval.
 - They were built using coursed adobe (mud stacked in layers with stone).
 - The room structures were surrounded by a compound wall instead of the open arrangement seen in the earlier pithouses.
- In adobe compounds, the walls defined the outdoor space more precisely than seen with the pithouses. Pithouses had open, communal courtyards and the adobe compounds had more ‘privatized’ space with the use of walls. This change in architecture may reflect changes in social organization.
- Here are some cool facts about the adobe compounds that have been discovered at the site of S’edav Va’aki:
 - S’edav Va’aki compounds contained up to 17 rooms each.
 - These “apartments” may have been home to as many as 35 people.
 - Most of the compounds are located north and east of the platform mound.
 - Over 20 compounds have been found, and many more probably exist in unexcavated portions of the site.

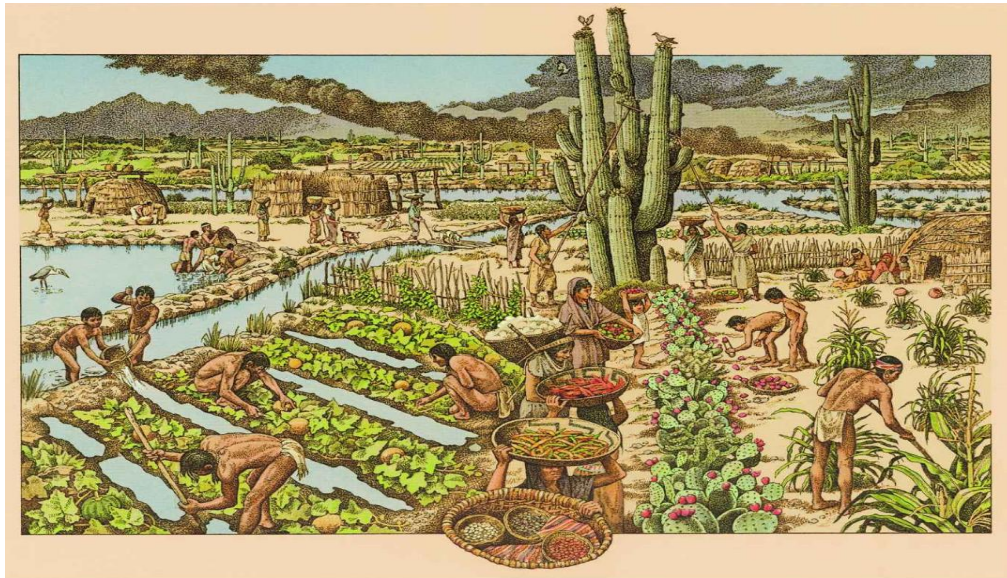


Illustration by Michael Hampshire

Canals

- The Ancestral Sonoran Desert People(Hohokam) created the largest prehistoric irrigation system in North America! Most of the canals near S'edav Va'aki were built from A.D. 750 to 900.
- The canals irrigated large agricultural fields and brought water to the villages.
- Canals were maintained, abandoned and rebuilt over several centuries. Some methods used to improve the control of water along the canals included:
 - **Weirs** – a barrier across a channel that changes the flow of water
 - **Head gates** – woven logs and brush set into the canal bank. Gates were used to control the speed and amount of water flow in a channel.
 - **Distribution canals** - narrower channels used to transport water from the main canal to the fields
 - **Lateral canals** –smaller channels that released water directly in the fields
- A complex societal organization would have been needed to maintain these irrigation systems and allow the people of the valley to flourish.
- The village of S'edav Va'aki is located on bedrock; the topography of the area played an important role in establishing the location of the head gates for the largest canals.
- The longest canal constructed extended 20 miles from S'edav Va'aki to modern day Glendale!
- Many of the canal systems used in modern day Phoenix follow a similar course as the prehistoric canals!

O'ODHAM WORLD VIEW

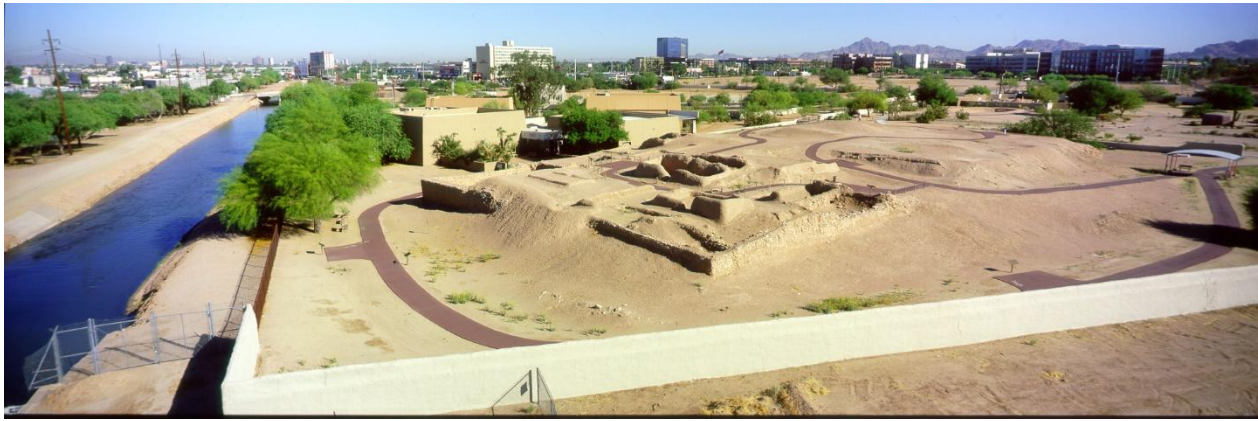


Artwork by Jacob Butler

Illustration by Jacob Butler

O'Odham World View

- The raised, rectangular earthen structure that stands before you today is called a platform mound by archaeologists. The O'Odham call the largest visible structure of this village a va'aki (pronounced VA-ah-kee) or ceremonial house.
- The va'aki likely ties into the O'Odham cosmology belief system. In the illustration the sun rises in the east, the ocean is visible to the west, and the mountains to the north are the San Francisco Peaks
- The O'Odham cosmology identifies three levels of being
 - Kaacim Jeved (pronounced KAA-chim Jôô-vôôđ) - the natural world
 - Daam Kaacim (pronounced DAAM Kaa-chim) - sky above
 - Si'alig Veco, (pronounced SEE-a-lig VÔÔ-cho) - the world below
- In this world view, people and animals coexist in the natural world sandwiched between the sky and the world below.
- The orientation of S'edav Va'aki's raised platform mound (va'aki) from east (Si'alig Veco) to west (Huduñig) illustrates the cyclical passage of the sun and moon.
- S'edav Va'aki is one of a few sites containing a va'aki that remains.



Platform Mound (*va'aki*)

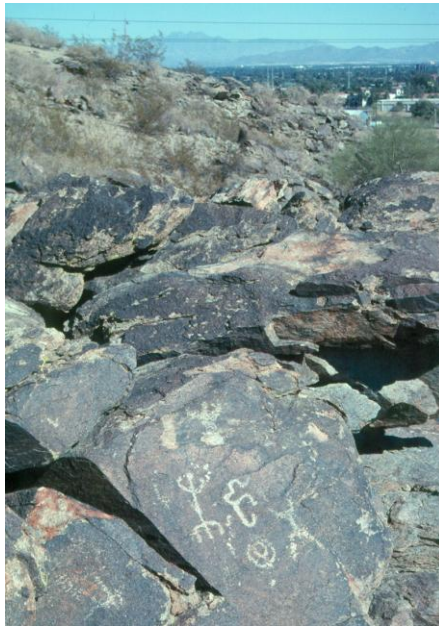
- The platform mound (*va'aki*) was tied to the organization and operation of the irrigation system. Platform mounds in the Lower Salt River Valley are situated along major canal systems roughly every three miles
- Some archaeologists believe that the religious leaders may have lived on top of the *va'aki*, suggesting they may have been more religious than secular in function. The rooms on the *va'aki* tended to be separated from each other indicating a desire for privacy as well as an aspect found in religious architecture.
- The structure that stands before you, at its peak was the size of a football field and about three stories tall.
- In the Sedentary Period (A.D. 900-1150) a small circular *va'aki* was built at the site. During the Classic Period (A.D. 1150-1450), the circular mound was expanded and remodeled into the larger rectangular form.
- The *va'aki* was built within a larger compound - a large rectangular area with high enclosed walls.
- Archaeologists found a public plaza on the eastern section and a series of rooms placed just to the west of the *va'aki*.
- Long passageways were often constructed to provide access from the public plaza to the rooms.



Illustration by Jacob Butler

O'odham Historical Traditions

- The O'odham use oral traditions to pass along information about their history. These oral traditions include the site of S'edav Va'aki.
- According to their oral traditions...
 - **Stoa Viig** (pronounced STO-a VEEG, White Plume Feather) was the first *sivañ* (leader) of S'edav Va'aki. He gathered the people to irrigate and plant corn.
 - **Oam Nui** (pronounced O-am NYU-ee, Yellow Buzzard), the final *sivañ*, (leader) used a spell to trap his people inside his ceremonial house (va'aki).
 - The ancestral O'odham revolted against their leaders as they became increasingly oppressive.
 - **Hevacud Namkam** (pronounced HÔÔ-va-chuđ NAM-kam, Blue Grosbeak) was a medicine man of the O'odham living south of S'edav Va'aki.
 - Hevacud Namkam was not able to break the spell used by Oam Nui.
 - **Wuihom Namkam** (pronounced WEE-hom NAM-kam, Lightning) was the medicine man who freed the people trapped inside the ceremonial house on top of the platform mound (va'aki) at S'edav Va'aki.
- Understanding this O'odham world view allows us to experience spiritual connections between the platform mound, the mountains and other universal spiritual places above, below and in all four directions

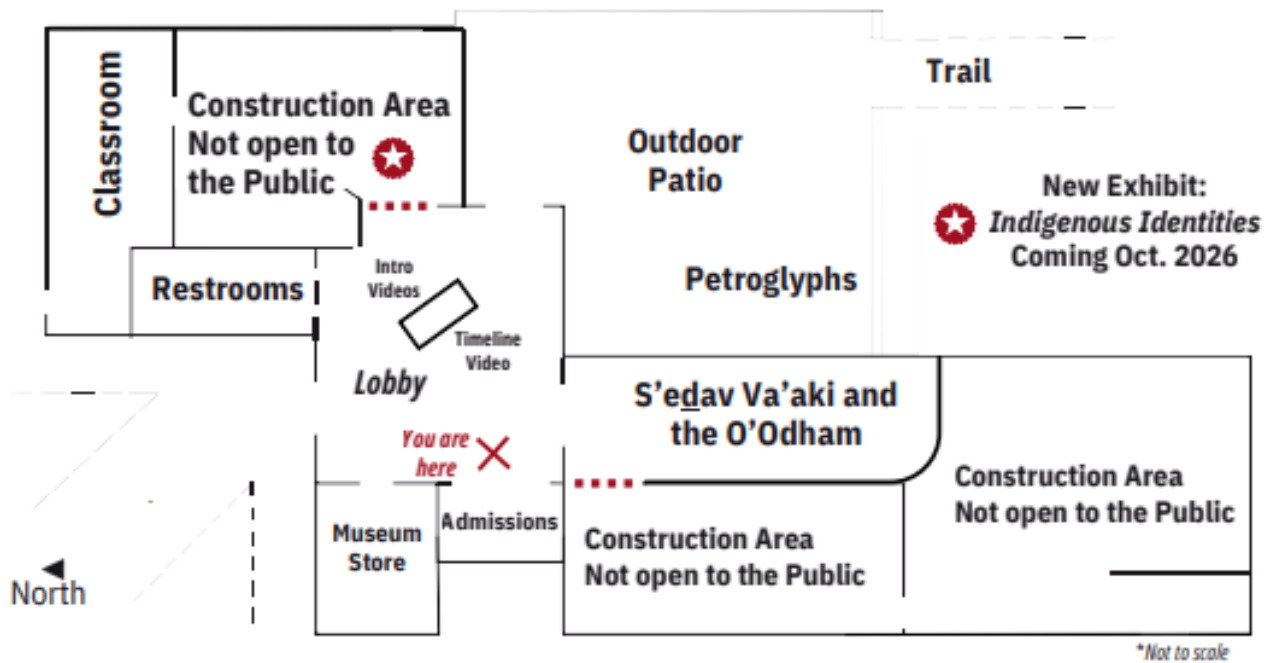


Petroglyphs

- Petroglyphs are designs on rock that communicate something about a place or location. The O'Odham refer to designs on rock as Hohodi 'O'ohadag (pronounced HO-ho-dee O-o-ho-duhk) - 'O'ohadag are designs and hohodi means stone.
- Petroglyph O'ohadag (designs) are made by removing a portion of the rock's outer surface (or patina) to reveal a lighter colored area of the stone.
- Hohokam style petroglyphs (also known as Gila style) include images of human-like beings (anthropomorphs), animals (zoomorphs) and geometric designs. Many of these design elements can also be found in basketry and pottery.
- Petroglyphs were used by the Ancestral O'Odham for an extended period, AD 700 – 1900. These designs on rock continue to be a deeply significant way of communicating feelings and information.
- Petroglyphs are prehistoric resources that must be protected against vandalism and the encroachment of urban development. It is very important that we do not touch them when we see them as the oil on our fingers can damage them.
- Removing a petroglyph from its original location is disrespectful, disconnects it from the special place for which it was created, and erases traditional knowledge.

Indoor Exhibit Galleries

The indoor exhibit galleries are ideal for providing your group with both an introduction to archaeology and to the people connected to the site of S'edav Va'aki. The following talking points may assist in guiding your discussions as you visit the indoor portion of the museum in small groups.



**** S'edav Va'aki Museum will be experiencing renovations throughout the next year and into 2027, which may be accompanied by loud noises and gallery closures. Please call or email us before your visit to get a better idea of what state the museum will be in during your field trip. ****

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S'edav Va'aki and the O'Odham

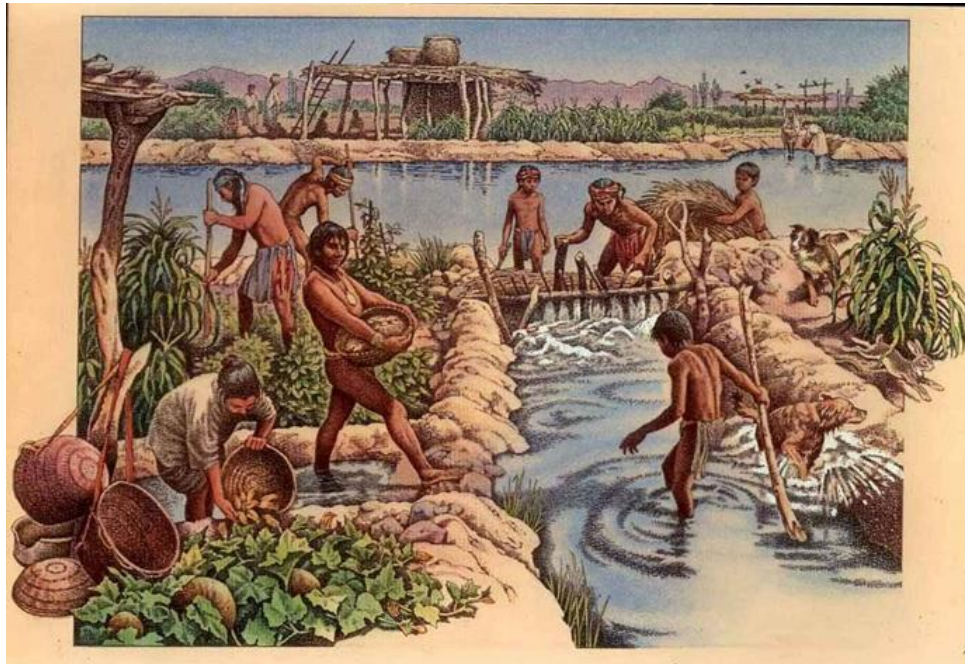


Canal Map & Sonoran Desert

- Archaeologists refer to the archaeological culture who lived in Phoenix Basin around A.D. 450 to 1450 as the Ancestral O'Odham (Hohokam).
- The Phoenix Basin is within the northern section of the Sonoran Desert. The Sonoran Desert extends from central Arizona into southeastern California and down into northern Mexico.
- Rainfall in the Sonoran Desert ranges between 3 and 15 inches a year. The small amount of rain received highlights the importance of rivers in the desert.
- The Ancestral O'Odham lived in the Sonoran Desert and created the largest irrigation system in North America. Hundreds of miles of canals were constructed to provide water for their villages and to irrigate their crops.
- On this map you can see the Salt River which flowed year-round, and you will notice red shapes representing archaeological sites. The thin blue lines represent canal segments archaeologists have located; not all canals depicted on this map were actively used at the same time.
- The village of S'edav Va'aki was placed at the head gates of Canal System 2 which controlled water for many of the villages on the north side of the Salt River.
- The Salt River no longer flows year-round; Theodore Roosevelt Dam was constructed (1905-1911) preventing the river from flowing and changing the environment along the riverbed.

Canals Map (continued)

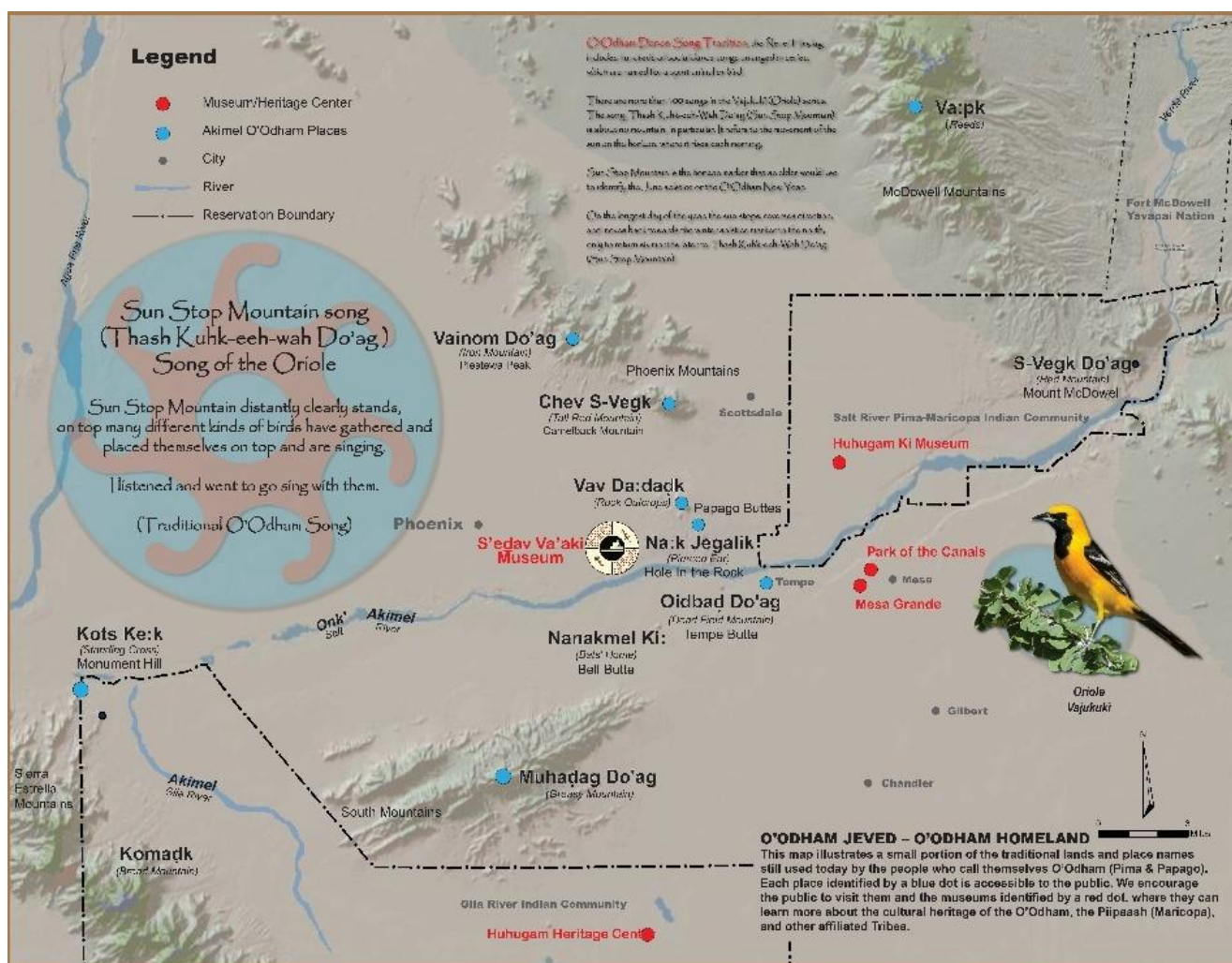
- The Ancestral O’Odham constructed a main canal with headgates, distribution canals that transported water to fields, and lateral canals which released water directly into the fields.
- The canals were dug by hand with stone and wooden tools, such as three-quarter grooved axes and digging sticks.
- The Ancestral O’Odham had to constantly keep an eye on the canals, clean them out from time to time. Floating debris, rocks, and even fine slit brought along with the water could potentially clog up a canal and stop water flowing to the fields.
- One theory why the Ancestral O’Odham stopped using or maintaining the canals is that a massive flood destroyed the canals and forced the people to leave the area. Culturally affiliated tribes believe the ancestors didn’t disappear, but rather that they dispersed into smaller communities and their descendants are still living in today’s Tribal communities.



Artist's rendition by Michael Hampshire depicting agricultural fields.

Homeland Map

- This map depicts a small portion of the traditional lands and names of places still used today by the O'Odham.
- The O'Odham live in four reservations within their former territory. These reservations are known as the Four Southern Tribes
 - **Akimel O'Odham** (Pima) live on the Gila River Indian Community
 - **Onk Akimel O'Odham** live on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community
 - **Tohono O'Odham** (Papago) live on Tohono O'Odham Nation
 - **Ak-Chin** live on the Ak-Chin Indian Community
- The Ancestral O'Odham archaeological culture as archaeologists define it was no longer present at the time that Spanish explored southern Arizona in 1540. The culturally affiliated tribes believe the ancestors are still here – they dispersed into smaller communities and their descendants are still living in today's Tribal communities.



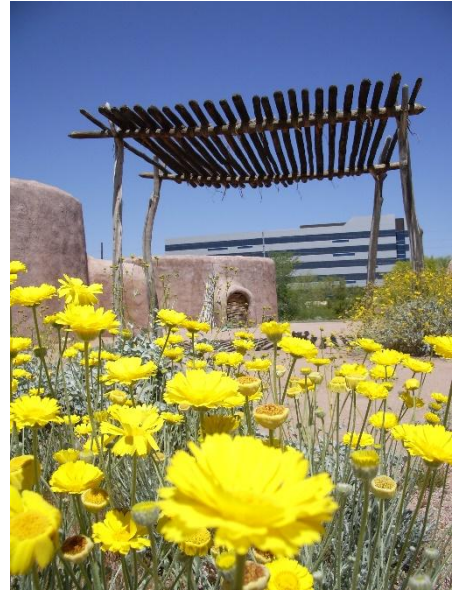


Harvesting

- The Ancestral O’Odham were the first farmers of the desert! They were very resourceful and used the desert environment to grow at least two or more seasons of crops.
- The Ancestral O’Odham grew more than corn, squash and beans. In fact, they grew more plant species than any other prehistoric culture north of Mexico; archaeologists have identified at least 12 different plants that were cultivated.
- The ancestors also harvested plants and animals from the riparian environments found along the Salt River. They used a variety of animals including deer, bighorn sheep, turtles, squirrels, rabbits, quail, heron, toads, and fish. These animals also provide artistic inspiration and can be seen on the pottery, jewelry, and petroglyphs of this amazing group of people.
- Some of the wild desert plants harvested produced seasonal fruits, buds, and pods such as the prickly pear, cholla, saguaro, and the mesquite tree.
- Every tool they used had to be handmade! The Ancestral O’Odham (Hohokam) didn’t work metal; they relied heavily on stone for their tools. Stone could be worked using a grinding method (axes) or it could be flaked (projectile points).

Village Life

- Ancestral O'Odham constructed two house styles - pithouses and compound houses. These structures may have been places where people slept and kept their possessions; some may have served as storage areas.
- Pithouses occurred in clusters or household groups with doorways opening into a central courtyard. This style of house was constructed throughout the Ancestral O'Odham time sequence, A.D. 450 – 1450.
- Compound houses were groups of rectangular-shaped rooms built on top of the ground and enclosed by a wall. These room groups were constructed later in the Ancestral O'Odham time sequence, between A.D. 1150-1450.
- Communal food preparation areas found in the courtyards of house groupings indicate that cooking was often a group activity. Food was believed to have been prepared under ramadas and cooked in outdoor fires and large earthen ovens (hornos).
- The life of a desert farmer is linked with the flow of water. Therefore, creatures connected to water may have held a special significance to them and been represented in their art. Fish, water birds, turtles, frogs and geometric patterns representing water are all found as designs on pottery, baskets, and petroglyphs.



Community Architecture

- The Ancestral O’Odham constructed structures used by the community; these structures were created for specialized uses and are referred to as public or community architecture. The va’aki (platform mound) and uhdi vaup (ballcourt) are two such structures found at S’edav Va’aki.
- The activities associated with public architecture and the meaning of the activities are what provide a deeper significance to the structures.
- Va’aki was a major building achievement of the Ancestral O’Odham. These structures were about the size of a football field and stood approximately 3 stories tall.
- The va’aki constructed at S’edav Va’aki was built out of river cobbles, caliche and chunks of granite and sandstone. This structure is one of the largest of the 50 known va’aki in Arizona.
- Villages with va’aki are found approximately every 3 miles along major prehistoric canals; these mound villages probably acted as administrative centers overseeing the distribution and maintenance of the canals as well as ceremonial activities.
- The features of a va’aki or platform mound included
 - A wall restricting access
 - Food storage rooms
 - Small number of residential rooms
 - Large open plazas for ceremonies
 - Ceremonial rooms
- Uhdi vaup (ballcourts) are oval, bowl-shaped depressions surrounded by raised earthen berms and plastered interior surfaces. They were constructed and used from about A.D. 750 until 1200.
- Archaeologists are not certain of what uhdi vaup (ballcourts) were used for, but they believe they served to promote market activities or exchanges. O’Odham say these features were dance floors.



Tools, Jewelry, and Crafts



- The Ancestral O’Odham were master craftsmen and experts at working many different types of desert materials including – clay, stone, bone, shell, and plants. They crafted items that were functional and artistic - pottery, censers, jewelry, and baskets to name a few.

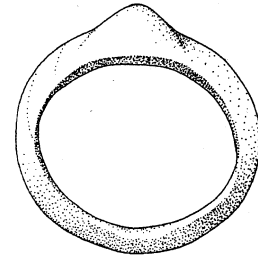
- The ancestors also spun their own yarn and made all their own clothes. Back strap loom, spindle whorls, and raw cotton were used for making fabric.

- Once cotton was picked it was turned into yarn using special spindle whorls made of pottery and stone. The yarn could then be woven into fabric using a loom.
- Ancestral O’Odham pottery comes in all different shapes and sizes and can be divided into 3 different types: plainware, redware, and red-on-buff.
- Plainware pottery was continuously made over time and is considered the ‘everyday’ pottery and makes up about 90% of pottery recovered.
- Redware, the second most common pottery type, gained in popularity and dominated time periods after A.D. 1150.



- Red-on buff pottery is the best-known Ancestral O’Odham pottery. In its earliest form, it is gray pottery with reddish brown colored decorations; around A.D. 700 the distinctive red-on-buff color appears.
- In archaeology pottery equals people. Different cultural groups all make/ decorate pottery differently and this is very useful to archaeologists. Style/designs also change over time which can be helpful for archaeologists in developing a temporal chronology (how cultures change over time).

- The Ancestral O’Odham were experts at creating jewelry! Look at all the jewelry –rings, earrings, beads, pendants, necklaces, nose plugs and lip plugs.
- Imagine how long it would take to make a shell bracelet. They would take large *Glycymeris* shells, turn them over and wear down the center portion of the shell by abrading it against stone to produce a bracelet or ring from the left-over band.
- The Ancestral People also created beautiful designs by acid etching the shell.



Trade Networks

- Archaeologists believe that the Ancestral O’Odham at S’edav Va’aki not only traded raw materials and finished craft products, but also exchanged ideas.
- We know that shell, turquoise, obsidian, and minerals were all incredibly important to the Ancestral Sonoran Desert People; however, these materials are not readily available in this area. They probably traveled long distances or traded to obtain these items.
- For shell they would walk hundreds of miles to the Gulf of Mexico or Pacific Ocean. Turquoise sources would have been from northern and western Arizona as well as California. Obsidian sources would have come from western and northern Arizona.