Chapter 5
Before Kinishba: Two Late Pithouse Period Settlements Near Fort Apache

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This chapter presents the results of excavations by the Museum of Northern Arizona (MNA) between 1983 and 1984 at two Mogollon pithouse villages in the vicinity of Kinishba and Fort Apache, Arizona. Buh bi laá (NA17,903) and East Fork Villages (NA17,962) were inhabited during the transition between the Forestdale and Corduroy phases (Table 2.1). Three distinct periods of occupation are represented dating from A.D. 750 to A.D. 875. Investigations at these sites presented the first opportunity since the 1940s to investigate Mogollon pithouse villages in the Forestdale region and to apply modern analytic techniques to the study of early Mogollon culture. Data recovered from these two villages provide insights into early cultural development in east-central Arizona, especially the important roles Hohokam and Anasazi influences played in the development of the Mogollon archaeological tradition.

BACKGROUND

In the introduction to his report on Kinishba, Cummings (1940:1-2) briefly characterizes cultural history in the Kinishba region. He divides the development sequence into three “great epochs that may be designated as Archaic, Pithouse, and Great Pueblo,” the latter culminating in towns like Kinishba. According to Cummings (1940:2), “the Archaic extended from some unknown time B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era, whereas the Pithouse epoch extended from the “beginning of the Christian era to approximately 900 A.D.” Cummings noted evidence for pit houses in three locations near the vicinity of Kinishba, but did not investigate them.

For the first deliberate efforts to understand Kinishba’s predecessors, we must turn to Emil Haury’s investigations in the nearby Forestdale Valley (located about 30 km north of Kinishba). In the same year that Cummings completed his book on Kinishba, Haury was completing excavations at the Bear Ruin, a village of approximately 15 pithouses and a “proto” Great Kiva in the Forestdale Valley. A year later, in 1941, Haury finished excavation of the Tla Kii Ruin, a small pueblo and kiva built over four earlier pit houses. At about the same time, Haury began excavation of the Bluff Site, a Forestdale Valley pit house village that predated the Bear Ruin. The excavations of these three small sites formed the basis for the definition of the Forestdale Branch of Mogollon culture (Haury 1940, 1985; Haury and Sayles 1947; Wheat 1955). The Bluff Site provided evidence for the establishment of the Hilltop and Cottonwood phases, which repre-