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## Book review

**Fragile Patterns: the Archaeology of the Western Papaguera,** Jeffrey H. Altschul, Adrienne G. Rankin (Eds.). **Statistical Research Inc.: distributed by The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Tucson, Arizona (2008). 730 pp., 280 figures, 39 tables, 6 1/2 × 91/2, US\$49.55 cloth, ISBN: 978-1-879442-98-6**

Relative to many parts of the world, few large gaps remain in the archaeology of southwestern North America. The Western Papaguera, comprising southwestern Arizona, U.S. and northwestern Sonora, Mexico has been one exception, and this volume represents a considerable step in filling that gap. A detailed review of a book consisting of 31 chapters with contributions by 42 authors is not possible in this short space. Instead I will offer a brief description and some thoughts on the major contributions of this volume and its broader significance.

*Fragile Patterns* is a compilation of predominantly Cultural Resource Management (CRM) research that has been driven in large part by the government agencies who own much of the Western Papaguera. In the U.S. these include the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Marine Corps. In Mexico they include the Alto Golfo of California and Colorado River Delta Biosphere Reserve and the Pinacate and Gran Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve. In recent decades, management programs undertaken by these agencies have led to a quite substantial body of information on the cultural and natural resources of one of the world's spectacular deserts. The editors have brought together an impressive group of scholars who have recently contributed to the archaeology of this area.

Among the more typical CRM contributions are chapters on ceramics, rock art, settlement pattern, ecology, geomorphology, and management plans. Although the ideas and models presented will surely be debated by archaeologists for many years, these sections generally appear to be thorough and well-researched. What sets this book apart from standard contract reports, however, are the chapters that move beyond the compliance requirements of CRM. Included here are fascinating biographies of colorful early researchers in the region, including Malcolm Rogers, Paul Ezell, Julian Hayden, and Norton Allen. It also incorporates insights from under-represented populations in Southwestern archaeology including Mexican and Native American scholars, and evidence from museum collections donated by the Allen family. In addition the book is nicely illustrated with many high quality maps, drawings, paintings, and modern and historical photographs.

There is a lot to like about this book. It exhibits many of the hallmarks of good CRM work, including abundant data and experience, as well as methodological and analytical proficiency. It also explores such intriguing anthropological domains as identity

and place in a cultural periphery. The title refers to the rich yet ephemeral quality of the archaeological record in a place many people passed through, but few made home for very long. The Western Papaguera has been occupied more or less continuously since the Paleoindian period ~12,000 years ago. More recently it was located on the boundary of three more densely settled regions including the Hohokam, Patayan and Trincheras culture areas, all of whose inhabitants used it frequently for travel, resources and spiritual practices. Throughout this ingress the area was also home to relatively small local populations who bore cultural similarities to each of their more numerous neighbors.

Research in the Western Papaguera thus not only fills a data gap in the archaeology of the Southwest, but it also fills a gap in our understanding of places that often lie at the periphery of our attention as archaeologists. The liminal qualities of life at the edges of the inhabited world provide an important perspective on the relationships among material culture, demography and identity.

*Fragile Patterns* has such breadth and thoroughness that it will be a valuable reference to local archaeologists interested in this area for years to come. I would also recommend it to archaeologists in other regions who are interested in desert adaptations, and similarly fragile traces of human presence in marginal areas. I think much of the material would be accessible to interested non-professionals alike. It may, however, fall slightly short of becoming an ultimate regional authority for a couple of reasons.

It is hard to ask much more of a 730 page book, but some readers may be left with unanswered questions. One consequence of the agency missions structuring this work is that it is strongly focused on surface manifestations recorded by inventory survey, with a relatively small contribution from excavations. This focus is also affected by the extensive but ephemeral nature of much of the record. The dominance of survey in this area is not the fault of the editors, but there have been excavations of stratified deposits such as at Ventana Cave and other sites associated with the Papaguera Project of the 1930s and 40s. The history of this project and the characters involved, especially Emil Haury, are described in some detail, but relatively little attention is given to the details of the evidence recovered.

Similarly, the broader cultural context of the region includes important sites such as Cerros de Trincheras and La Playa in Sonora, Mexico to the southeast. These receive relatively little attention compared to the Hohokam, more familiar to American archaeologists. Finally, an index would be very useful in such a large volume. These are minor quibbles, though, and it is clear that the editors have strived to be as inclusive as reasonably possible. Overall, *Fragile Patterns* documents a truly fascinating place and is a pleasure to read. One of its more appealing qualities is the evident love of the

Western Papagueria that its authors feel and this affection is contagious.

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