

MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO
OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES

**THE SUMMER LIFE COAL MINE:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY NEAR TRES RITOS,
TAOS COUNTY, NEW MEXICO**

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ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

On June 11, 1991, the Office of Archaeological Studies, Museum of New Mexico, conducted an archaeological survey of a small coal mine in the Rio Pueblo Valley, southern Taos County, New Mexico. The area encompasses about 0.6 ha (1.4 acres), including 0.5 ha (1.2 acres) at the mine and 321 m (1,053 ft) of trail 3 m wide totaling 0.1 ha (0.24 acres). The mine and 116 m (380 ft) of the trail are on the Camino Real District of the Carson National Forest. Total area on national forest land is 0.5 ha (1.3 acres). The mine area is a block some 64 m by 77m (210 by 255 ft) in size. The remaining trail is on private land within Camp Summer Life. The survey was conducted at the request of the Abandoned Mine Lands Bureau (AML), New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department. AML plans to close an open shaft at the mine. One person-day was spent in the field.

The mine is located on the north side of State Road 518 between Rock Wall and Sipapu Ski Area. This area is on the Camino Real District of the Carson National Forest. The mine was recorded as an archaeological site, LA 84960 (Carson National Forest Site No. AR-03-02-04-88). The site consists of a large, open shaft and a small gob pile. Also present are a small ditch, an abandoned ditch, and a modern ditch, none of which probably have any actual association with the mine.

The site probably has little archaeological potential beyond that yielded by recording its location and description. However, oral tradition in the area suggests that the site may have been used by a local blacksmith and the coal for home heating. Therefore, the site may have potential for providing ethnohistoric information through informant interview.

AML's planned activities at the site should have no effect on the site and cultural resources clearance is recommended.

MNM Project 41.464

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Carson National Forest Special Use Permit 70-03-02-2017-01-442.

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INTRODUCTION

On June 11, 1991, the Office of Archaeological Studies, Museum of New Mexico, conducted an archaeological survey of a small coal mine in the Rio Pueblo Valley, southern Taos County, New Mexico. The survey was conducted at the request of the Abandoned Mine Lands Bureau (AML), New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department. AML plans to close the mine. The survey included the mine and 321 m of trail that will be used for access to the mine and was conducted by Jeffrey L. Boyer.

The goal of this survey was to identify cultural resources that might be affected by the proposed activities. This report discusses the survey, its results, and recommendations regarding the cultural resources.

Location of the Project Area

The project area is located on the southwest side of the Rio Pueblo and State Road 518, about 1 mile (1.7 km) southeast of Rock Wall and the intersection of State Roads 518 and 75. It is southeast of Camp Summer Life and northwest of the Llanito Frio Campground (listed as Comales Campground in Fig. 1). The legal description and UTM coordinates are located in Appendix 1. The area encompasses about 0.6 ha (1.4 acres), including 0.5 ha (1.2 acres) at the mine and 321 m (1,053 ft) of trail 3 m wide totaling 0.1 ha (0.24 acres). The mine and 116 m (380 ft) of the trail are on the Camino Real District of the Carson National Forest. Total area on national forest land is 0.5 ha (1.3 acres). The mine area is some 64 m by 77 m (210 by 255 ft) in size. The remaining trail is on private land within Camp Summer Life.

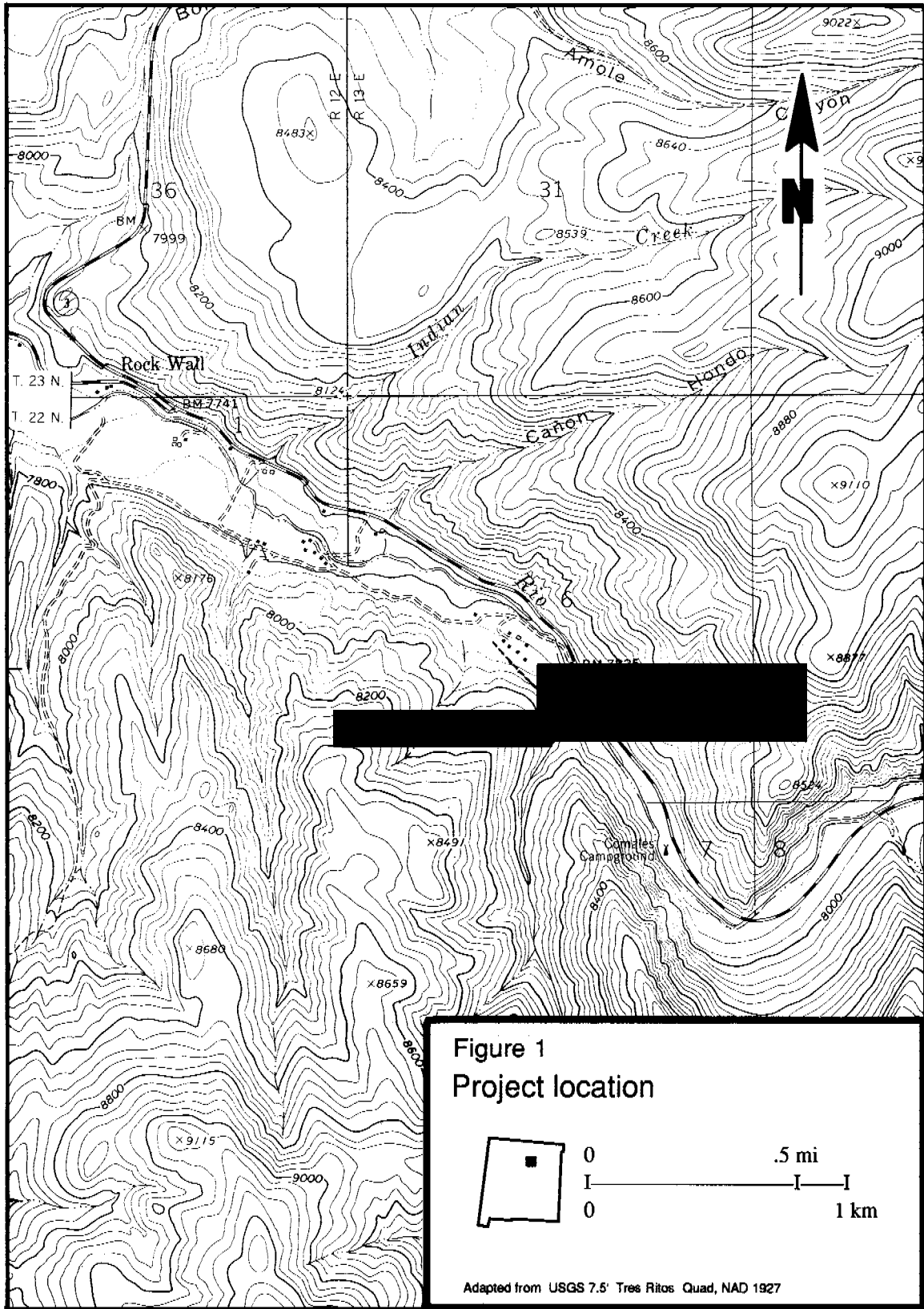


Figure 1
Project location



Adapted from USGS 7.5' Tres Ritos Quad, NAD 1927

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The project area is located on a steep northeast-facing hillside on the south side of the Rio Pueblo. It is found near the mouth of the river canyon before it begins to widen as it runs northeast into the Vadito-Picuris valley. This places the project area at the eastern edge of the valley in an intermountain region of wide valleys separated by large, flat mesas. The region is bounded on the north, east, and south by the Tres Ritos Hills and the Pecos portion of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Major rivers in the region include the Rio Pueblo, the Rio Santa Barbara, the Rio Chiquito, and the Rio de las Trampas. Osha Creek leaves its canyon about 150 m (500 ft) southeast of the mine.

The project area lies on the southern side of the Tres Ritos Hills, a low-lying segment of the Sangre De Cristo Mountains. While the Sangre de Cristos are largely made up of granites, schists, and quartzites, the Tres Ritos Hills are interbedded sandstones, shales, and limestones. In comparison to the adjacent Taos Range of the Sangre de Cristos, the Tres Ritos Hills have generally lower elevations, ranging from near 7,000 ft (2,133 m) in the Talpa-Ranchos de Taos area to crests around 10,000 to 11,000 ft (3,050 to 3,350 m). Schilling (1960:23) states that small, impure lenses of coal occur in the Sandia and Sangre de Cristo formations in the Tres Ritos Hills. Both formations consist of thick beds of sandstone, shale, siltstone, and limestone (Schilling 1960:17). Schilling (1960:97) notes that these impure coal lenses have been mined in the Rio Fernando de Taos Canyon and in other areas, but that the coal is too thin and impure for commercial use. Jack Boyer, a local informant, told me that coal from the Rio Fernando de Taos prospect was so impure that large rocks were left after burning.

The project area is located in Terrestrial Ecosystems Survey (TES) unit 816. According to Edwards and others (1987:330-331), the soils in this unit are deep gravelly loams derived from sandstone and shale. They are found on steep hillsides with 15 to 40 percent slopes. Mean annual precipitation is 650 to 750 mm (25.6 to 29.5 in), with about half coming from snow from October through March. The unit experiences continuous snow cover from October 15 to April 15. Mean annual temperature is 3 to 5 degrees C (37.4 to 41 degrees F) and the frost-free season averages 90 days. These conditions support a forest community consisting of white fir (*Abies concolor*, 30 percent), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii glauca*, 30 percent), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*, 15 percent), aspen (*Populus tremuloides*, 10 percent), and gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*, 10 percent).

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The southern valleys of Taos County make up one of the most poorly known regions of the state from an archaeological standpoint. Archaeological work has been primarily limited to small clearance projects in the valleys and Forest Service timber sale and road closure surveys in the surrounding mountains. The major exception to this is Dick's (1965) work at Picuris Pueblo, from which the prehistory of the region was defined and is still considered the standard reference for the region. The reader is referred to Dick (1965), Cordell (1978), Stuart and Gauthier (1981), and Young and Lawrence (1988) for more detailed regional syntheses. Because the project area centers on a historic coal mine, this discussion will focus on the historic period. Schroeder (1974) provides a detailed history of Picuris Pueblo.

Picuris Pueblo has been occupied almost continuously since about A.D. 1375, when the "big houses" at the pueblo, located about 100 m north of the modern village, were built. In its isolated situation, Picuris was not contacted by Spanish colonists until the ill-fated expedition of Gaspar Castaño de Sosa in 1590-1591. Castaño de Sosa visited Picuris in January 1591 and his description makes it the tallest of the New Mexican pueblos--seven to nine stories. The Spaniards were not allowed within the pueblo walls and were generally treated coldly, so much so that they decided it prudent to leave the area swiftly (Schroeder and Matson 1965; Schroeder 1974:1-2).

The pueblo received its first Catholic priest, Fray Francisco de Zamora, in 1598. The priest also served the mission at Taos Pueblo. By the 1620s, Picuris had gained the reputation as "the most indomitable and treacherous (pueblo) of this whole kingdom" (Schroeder 1974:4). Just when Spanish settlers began moving into the valley is not clear from Schroeder's discussion, although during the 1680 Revolt the rebellious Indians murdered not only the priest but several Spaniards and mulattos and plundered Spanish farms (Schroeder 1974:4). In June 1696, the northern pueblos attempted to stage another rebellion against the Spanish. It was quelled by Don Diego de Vargas, but in October the Picuris abandoned their pueblo, moving to El Cuartelejo, an Apache settlement in western Kansas where the Taos had gone from 1640 to 1662. This abandonment resulted in a considerable population decrease for the tribe. Population estimates before the 1680 Revolt range from about 2,000 in the 1620s to 3,000 in 1680 (Schroeder 1974:7). However, a 1706 census reported that only 300 people had returned from El Cuartelejo. By 1744, the population had grown to 400.

In 1749, 50 Spanish settlers were listed with an estimated 400 Indians at Picuris. A year later, the census shows 150 settlers and 247 Indians. In 1760, Bishop Tameron reported that Picuris consisted of 51 Indian families with 328 people and 37 Spanish families with 108 people. In 1778, in response to heavy Comanche raiding, Governor Mendinueta proposed a defense plan that included a presidio near Taos and stationing 15 soldiers at Picuris in the summer months. The presidio was never built; whether Picuris received its soldiers is not clear. What does seem clear, however, is that during the eighteenth century the Spanish presence in the region was largely restricted to the immediate vicinity of Picuris Pueblo. As at Taos during the same years, the settlers

apparently lived in or near the pueblo as they are enumerated with the Indians in the eighteenth-century censuses. At Taos, this was a result of raiding by Comanches and other Plains groups that precluded successful establishment of Spanish settlements until around the turn of the nineteenth century. It seems likely that this may have been the case at Picurís as well.

However, by 1808, a census revealed 309 Indians at Picurís and 626 Spanish settlers *in the region*. In 1821, the pueblo claimed 320 Indians, with 1,047 settlers in nearby communities. Clearly, the Spanish population was growing and expanding beyond the immediate vicinity of Picurís. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Martinez (1968:1, 7-10) states that the Las Trampas grant was given to 12 families in 1751. This grant bordered the Picurís grant on the south and the Sebastian Martín grant on the west and reached almost to Santa Cruz de la Cañada. The Santa Barbara grant, on the other hand, was not given until 1796. This large grant was bounded on the north by the Rio Pueblo and on the west by the Picurís and La Trampas grants and would have represented Spanish expansion from the immediate Picurís area. This period, again as at Taos, saw the emergence of land and water rights disagreements between the Indians and the settlers (Schroeder 1974:12-14). Exactly which Spanish communities were established in the early 1800s is not clear. Pearce (1965:31) states that Chamisal was established about 1851 but gives no establishment dates for Peñasco, Vadito, Rodarte, Llano de San Juan, or Rio Lucio. Chamisal got its first post office in April 1904, 53 years after its supposed establishment (Dike 1958-59). Post offices were begun at Peñasco in 1870, Llano de San Juan in the 1890s, and Rodarte in the 1910s.

In 1907, A. B. McGaffey formed the Santa Barbara Tie and Pole Company to provide timber to the AT&SF railroad. The name came from the Santa Barbara grant on which McGaffey initially concentrated his lumbering. In a few years, McGaffey sold the operation to the railroad, which subsequently expanded onto the adjacent Rio Grande del Rancho grant north of the Rio Pueblo. Until the 1920s, some 400,000 rail ties were taken annually from the mountains north and south of the Rio Pueblo. In 1928, the last year of operation, the Santa Barbara Tie and Pole Company moved only 106,000 trees down to the Rio Grande (Myrick 1970:173-174).

Schilling (1960:97) mentions two small limestone quarries along the Rio Pueblo, one near Tres Ritos and the other near Angostura in the upper valley. He apparently did not know of coal mining in the valley.

Related Projects

Boyer (1989a) discusses the results of research in the open valleys near Vadito, Picurís, and Peñasco that point to extensive use of the region prehistorically. A search of the New Mexico Archaeological Records Management System files and the Carson National Forest Cultural Resources Atlas reveals only a few sites in the vicinity of this project area. East of the project area in the Cañon Tio Maes is a sawmill camp probably used by the Santa Barbara Tie and Pole Company. A slash and mill slab pile

is present, as are remains of small cabins. The sawmill structure was probably removed when the camp was abandoned. A similar but larger site is located in Flechado Canyon to the east. At the mouth of Cañon Tio Maes is a large early twentieth-century artifact scatter perhaps representing a homestead. The site also has a prehistoric lithic component of unknown age. Boyer (1989b) recorded another small coal mine, LA 71762 (AR-03-02-04-48), .2 mile (.4 km) north of this project area on the north side of State Road 518 across from Camp Summer Life.

SURVEY PROCEDURES

I was accompanied in the field by Mr. Raymond Rodarte of AML, who showed me the mine and the trail to be used for access. After inspecting and recording the mine, I inspected the immediate area and surveyed the trail in a single transect along its centerline. For management purposes, it is necessary to classify cultural material as *archaeological sites* or *isolated occurrences* in order to ensure appropriate treatment. Because the survey included National Forest land, criteria set forth in the *Forest Service Cultural Resources Handbook* (FSH 2309.24) were used to make the distinction. The handbook defines a site as "a location of purposeful prehistoric or historic activity. An activity is considered to have been purposeful if it resulted in a deposit of cultural materials beyond the level of one or two accidentally lost artifacts." It then specifies characteristics of sites in terms of features and artifact density. Cultural resources that do not meet the definition and characteristics of sites are considered to be isolated occurrences.

Once defined as an archaeological site, the mine area was recorded on Laboratory of Anthropology and Forest Service site forms, mapped using compass and pacing, photographed, and located on the USGS quadrangle.

SURVEY RESULTS

LA 84960 (AR-03-02-04-88)

LA 85940 is a small, abandoned coal mine. The site is located at the base of a short slope on a narrow terrace overlooking the Rio Pueblo (Fig. 2). Four features were defined at the site. Feature 1 is the vertical mine shaft (Fig. 3). The shaft is 4 to 4.5 m (13 to 15 ft) in diameter and 6 m (20 ft) deep. Whether it was once deeper is not known. The upper 3.5 to 4.5 m (12 to 15 ft) of the shaft cuts through large rocks and gravels that form the terraced hillside. These rocks were deposited alluvially from the nearby mountains. The lower 1.5 to 2.5 m (5 to 8 ft) cuts into a coal seam interbedded with sandstone and probably shale. The edge of the shaft opening is in active collapse so that the opening is expanding.

Feature 2 is the gob pile located downhill to the west and southwest of the shaft. The top of the pile is about 17 m (56 ft) long and 8 m (26 ft) wide. At its northern and southern ends, the pile is less than .5 m (18 in) deep, but west of the shaft, it is about 2 m (6 ft) deep. The pile contains at least 170 m³ of waste material.

Feature 3 is an abandoned ditch that ran to the northwest at the base of the gob pile. The ditch is about 1 m (3 ft) wide and less than .5 m (18 in) deep. A modern ditch, probably replacing Feature 3, is located about 10 m (33 ft) from Feature 3 at the edge of the narrow terrace (Fig. 4). The ditches are apparently acequias to carry water from the Rio Pueblo and perhaps from Osha Canyon to fields on the south side of the valley.

Feature 4 is a small ditch running across the hill above the mine (Fig. 5). The ditch is about 30 cm (1 ft) wide and 20 to 25 cm (8 to 10 in) deep. Although it has not been used in a few years, as evidenced by the pine needle duff and leaves in it, its sides are still straight, suggesting that it is not old nor has it been recently remodeled. Its location suggests that it carries water from Osha Canyon.

A campfire complex consisting of a ring firepit and several logs placed in concentric semicircles is present on the terrace above the mine. The complex is located along the trail from Camp Summer Life. It was not recorded as a feature because it is used by the camp and is probably not very old. No other cultural resources were recorded along the trail.

Discussion

No artifacts are present on the site and there is no evidence of structures. Consequently, it is impossible to assign a date to the site based on archaeological evidence. The size of the mine suggests that this site, like the nearby mine at LA

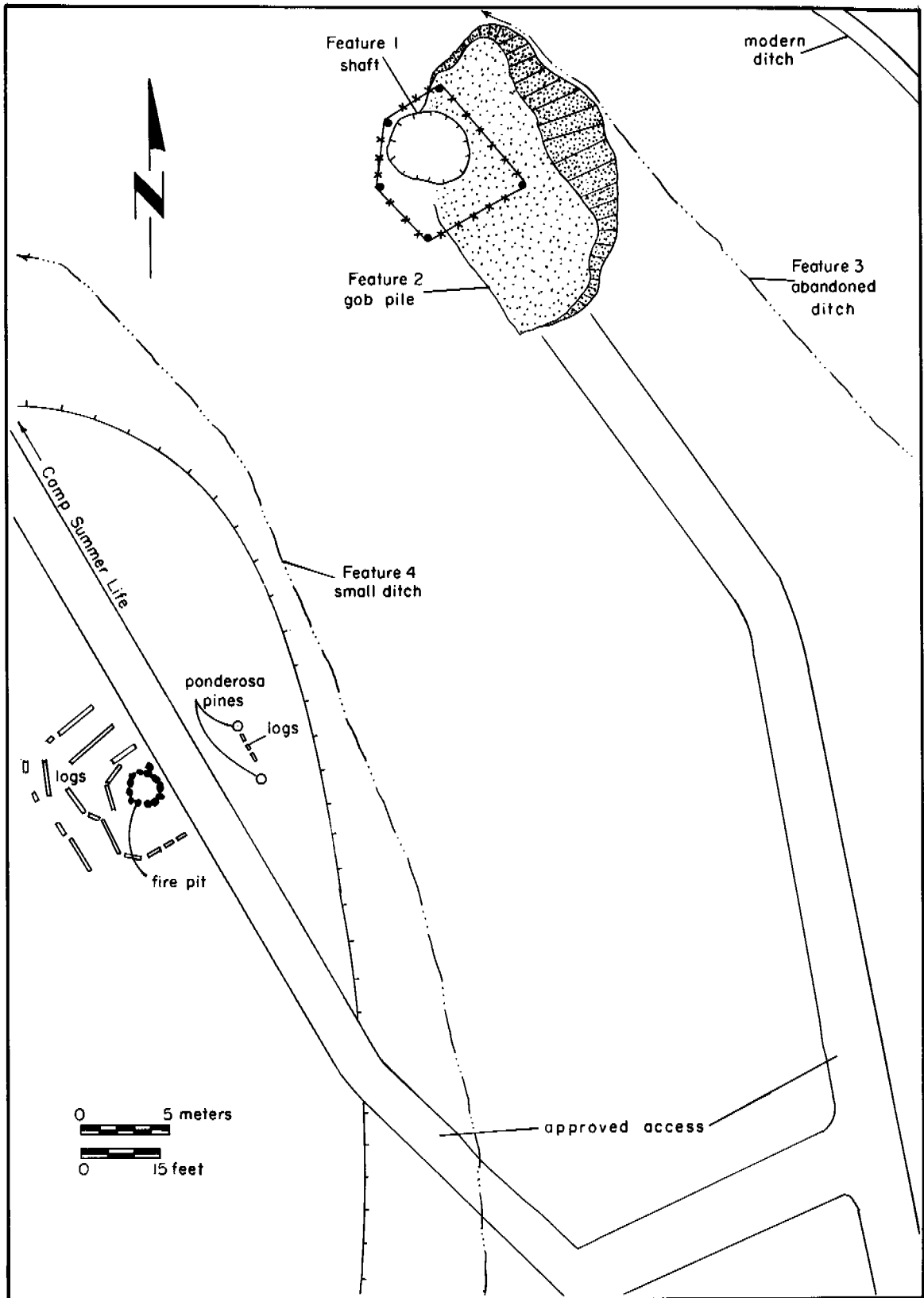


Figure 2. LA 84960, site map.

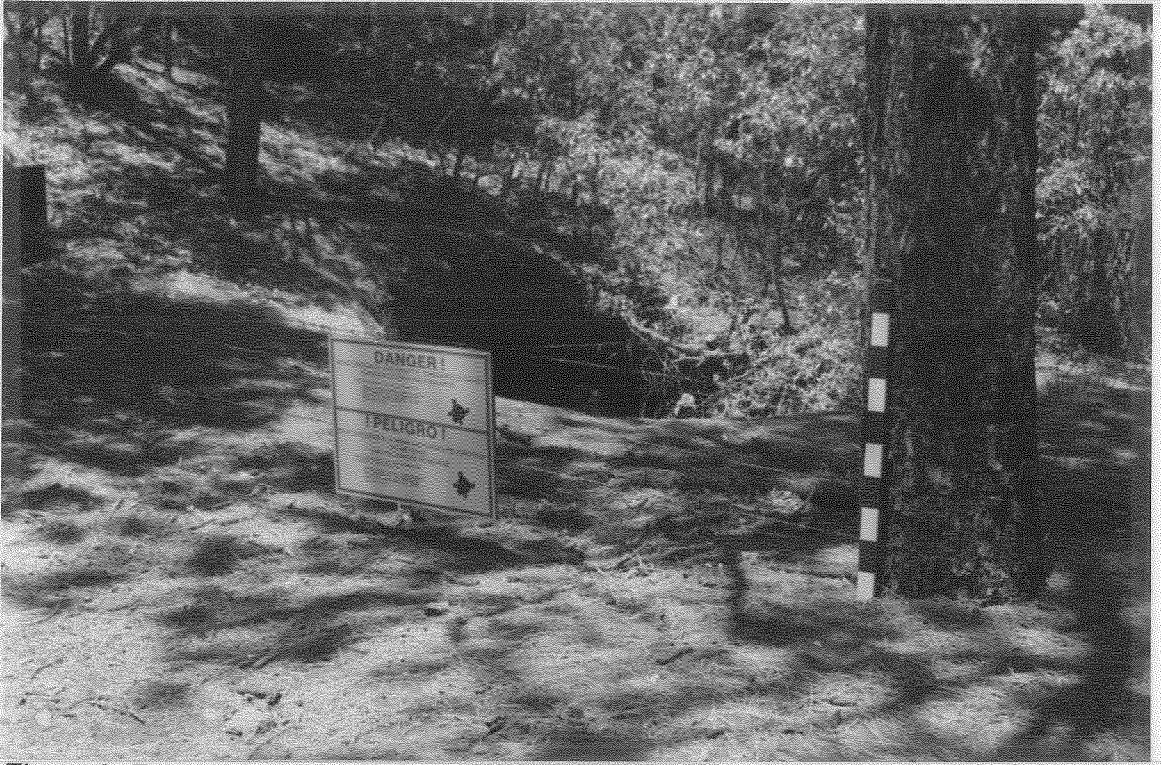


Figure 3. Feature 1, mine shaft; view to the northwest.



Figure 4. Modern ditch; view to northwest.

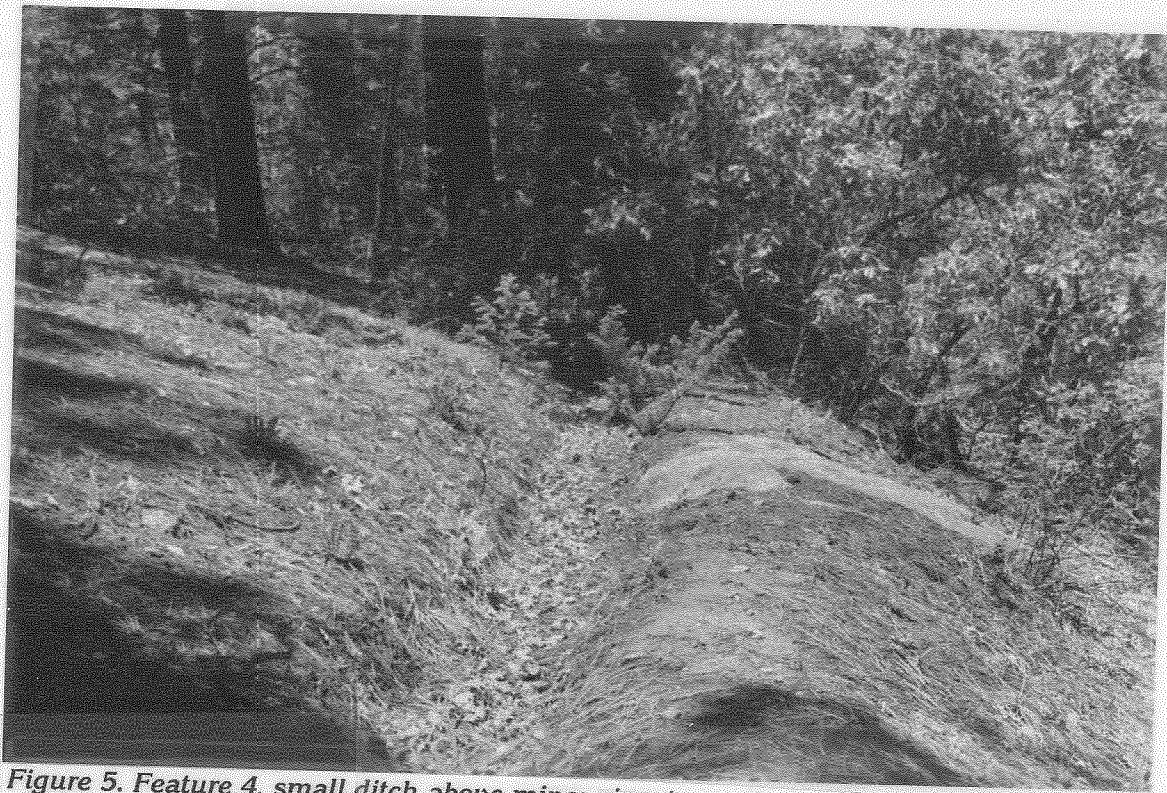


Figure 5. Feature 4, small ditch above mine; view to northwest.

71762, was a small local or family operation supplying coal for household or blacksmith use. The mine is not located on a patented claim and no record of it exists in the Carson National Forest's Mineral Claims Records.

LA 84960 represents a little-known industry in north-central New Mexico. Although the region has a well-known history of mining (Schilling 1960; Pearson 1986), this industry seems to have largely been restricted to hard-rock mining. Schilling (1960:97) identifies only the small coal mine in the Rio Fernando de Taos Canyon but does mention that the Sandia and Sangre de Cristo formation coal lenses were prospected in other locations. He does not identify those locations and does not shed much light on the local industry.

In 1989, after recording another small coal mine in the Rio Pueblo Valley near LA 84960, I met a resident of Vadito whose landlord's grandfather had been a blacksmith in Vadito. This man apparently used coal in his forge that he obtained from a mine in the region. The grandson had not been taken to the mine and did not know its location. He also did not mention when the mine was in use, although his age, about 70 at that time, suggests the first and possibly second quarters of the twentieth century and perhaps the late nineteenth century. Mr. Raymond Rodarte of AML, who accompanied me to LA 84960, said that his grandmother, also of Vadito, told him that her father came to the site to mine coal, which they used to heat their house. The mine in the Rio Fernando de Taos Canyon was worked in the early twentieth century by an individual who attempted to sell the coal for domestic use. Jack Boyer told me in 1989 that the coal was of poor quality, leaving a great deal of clinker after burning, and sales were low. This corresponds to the evaluation of Mr. Rodarte's grandmother.

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

AML plans to close the shaft by filling it with waste coal from the gob pile. Initial calculations indicate that there is more than enough material to fill the shaft. AML plans to drive a backhoe along the trail from Camp Summer Life to the site. Two gates, leading into the camp's survival course and from the course onto National Forest land, will be removed because they are too narrow to allow passage of a backhoe. They will be replaced after completion of the project. No other alterations will be made to the trail on National Forest land, as the trail is wide enough for the backhoe. Minor brush trimming may be necessary on land belonging to Camp Summer Life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Significance

Because there are no artifacts or structures associated with the mine, it appears that LA 84960 has little archaeological data potential beyond that recovered by recording its location and description. However, Mr. Rodarte's information indicates that there are residents of the area that know of the mine, the miners, and the products. Therefore, the site may have good potential for ethnohistoric information gathered through informant interview. Ethnohistoric research focused on LA 84960 could be expected to provide important data on the site, its miners and products, its temporal placement, and its role in the local socioeconomy. Consequently, the site should be considered significant under criterion (d) of 36 CFR 60.4 and should be treated as such for purposes of Section 106 consultation.

Recommendations

Given the archaeological potential of the site, AML's planned activities at LA 84960 should have no effect on the site's significance. Assuming this to be acceptable to the Carson National Forest and the State Historic Preservation Division, cultural resources clearance is recommended for closing the shaft at LA 84960.

The *New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties* and the *National Register of Historic Places* have been consulted and no sites currently on or nominated to either register are found within or adjacent to the project area. This project complies with the provisions of the National Environmental Protection Act, the National Historic Preservation Act as amended, Executive Order 11593, and the Archeological Resources Protection Act.

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