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Glimpse the past at Romero Ruin

Interpretive trail offers half-hour lesson in history

Doug Kreutz Arizona Daily Star Jan 2, 2010



PHOTOS BY DOUG KREUTZ / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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Mike Orlando walks with his 5-year-old godson, Anthony Destrini, along the mostly flat Romero Ruin Interpretive Trail in Catalina State Park. The ruins date to about A.D. 500.

Part of the landscape at Catalina State Park is in ruins.

Not to worry. We're talking about an archaeological site - not environmental damage.

The Romero Ruin Interpretive Trail at the park north of Tucson winds past the scant remains of ancient dwellings built by Indians known as the Hohokam . The three-quarter-mile loop route also takes visitors to the crumbling walls of a house built by rancher Francisco Romero in the mid-1800s.

A half-hour walk around the mostly flat trail offers a subtle look back over centuries of life on a broad hilltop at the foot of the Catalina Mountains. You won't see grand multistory pueblos or still-habitable ranch buildings, but you might come away with a sense of what it took to endure in a rugged land.

A village dating to A.D. 500

Ancient pit-house dwellings, built into the earth, were occupied by Indians about 1,500 years ago, but little remains of these humble homes today except for some scattered stones.

"That's where they lived long ago," said visitor Mike Orlando, pointing out a pit-house site to his 5-year-old godson, Anthony Destrini.

Nearby, the faint remains of a walled part of the village date to about A.D. 1150. The walled village covered about an acre and probably was home to fewer than 100 people, according to an information panel.

Archaeological studies of trash mounds in the area indicate that food sources included agave and corn as well as wildlife such as deer and bighorn sheep.

Game time

It wasn't all about building shelters and toiling for food in ancient times.

A broad, open area along the trail marks the site of an ancient ball court - an 80-foot-long playing field apparently used for a game that was probably as compelling to its players as modern-day football or soccer.

Romero's ranch

Long after the ancient walled village had crumbled mostly to ruins, rancher Romero found the site to his own liking.

When he built his house about a century-and-a-half ago, it was a dozen miles from Tucson and not exactly as secure as the gated communities not far from Catalina Park today.


An information panel notes that challenges faced by Romero included repeated raids by Apaches.

Get to the trail

From Tucson, go north on Oracle Road, which becomes Arizona 77, and continue to the Catalina State Park entrance at Milepost 81. You'll pay a \$6 per vehicle fee and receive a map when you enter the park.

The map shows the way to the trailhead along the main park road near a picnic area.

Contact reporter Doug Kreutz at dkreutz@azstarnet.com or at 573-4192.



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