

## Cultural and Historic Resource Acquisitions



*Tumamoc Hill lands purchased with Pima County Historic Preservation Bonds - Photo by Cultural Resources Office staff.*

### Tumamoc Hill

**Site:** 277 acres  
**Cost:** \$5,209,640  
**Acquired:** June 25, 2009  
**Fund:** 1997 and 2004 Bond Funds  
**Grant:** Arizona State Parks Growing Smarter

#### Background

In 2009 the County acquired the land parcels encompassing the western slopes of Tumamoc Hill, the famous Tucson landmark and location of the 870 acre Carnegie Desert Laboratory. In 1904, the Carnegie Desert Laboratory was established because it had the richest and most diversified vegetation in any area of the desert Southwest and Sonora. Now, it is the longest-lived scientific environmental research center in the country, administered by the University of Arizona. The exceptional natural, archaeological, and cultural values and national research significance of the Carnegie Desert Laboratory has been recognized through its designation as a National Historic Landmark in 1965, its listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1966, and its identification as both a National Environmental Study Site in 1976, and Arizona State Scientific and Educational Natural Area in 1981.

Urban Tucson steadily encroaches upon Tumamoc Hill and threatens its endangered landscape through conflicting uses, development, gas pipelines, communications towers, and increasing urban recreational demands. In 2006, the Arizona Preservation Foundation identified Tumamoc Hill as the “2006 Most Endangered Historic Place” in Arizona. The County acquisition assures protection in perpetuity of the entire National Historic Land Mark.

The acquisition by Pima County forms a County Conservation Area measuring 277 acres and serving two principal uses: the continuation of the University of Arizona’s existing research mission, and the preservation of the property’s natural open space and significant archaeological and historic resources in a rapidly developing area of the City of Tucson.

#### Arizona State Trust Land

The property that Pima County acquired was State Trust land and was threatened by development. The land was put up for auction and luckily, the County was the only bidder. A matching grant from Arizona State Parks, specifically for State Trust land, funded half the cost. In addition, the City of Tucson agreed to take ownership of an old landfill on the property. All of these steps and partners were necessary to the success of this purchase.

#### Cultural and Historical Significance

The significance of Tumamoc Hill in the cultural history of the Tucson area has long been recognized. The word tumamoc is a Tohono O’odham word for horned toad, and the shape of the hill resembles this desert creature. Tumamoc Hill and its slopes reveal ancient settlement and agricultural systems that supported indigenous peoples more than 2,000 years ago. The hilltop, enclosed by a massive wall with remnant foundations of more than 160 prehistoric structures, is the earliest known trincheras village in the American Southwest.

In addition to the trincheras village, Tumamoc Hill has hundreds of petroglyphs, prehistoric dwellings and burial areas, stone quarries, historic wagon roads, and an extensive system of prehistoric agricultural fields and water control features that is one of the best preserved examples of dry farming field systems in the Southwest. Today, prehistoric trails can be traced from these fields to the hilltop village. Finally, the buildings, structures, and even the permanent experimental areas of the Carnegie Desert Laboratory are important historic resources.

#### Biological Resources

Tumamoc Hill is situated on the west side of the Santa Cruz River, and the entire Conservation Area is within the Conservation Lands System category of Multiple Use Management Areas. The property has been identified in Pima County’s Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan as an important tract of natural open space, and is a key component of the Tucson Mountains Biological Corridor, a county initiative intended to link the 19,000-acre Tucson Mountain Park to nearby parcels of natural open space such as Tumamoc Hill to protect crucial wildlife movement corridors and habitat..



*Tumamoc Hill petroglyphs - Photo by Cultural Resources Office staff.*

## Management

Tumamoc Hill is currently managed as open space and as a County Conservation Area to protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources. Archaeological preservation and management efforts will be supported by 2004 bond funds remaining from the acquisition, including security fencing and signage to counter the property's vulnerability to potential impacts from surrounding residential neighborhoods as recreation pressure increases in urban Tucson. The best strategy for preservation is to keep the property and its resources secure and closed to casual public access. A comprehensive Management Plan is also slated for development.

## Completed and Planned Projects

- Completed cultural resources inventory and mapping
- Security fencing and signage
- Development of management plan



*Tumamoc Hill and adjacent area - County-owned Tumamoc Hill Conservation Area is highlighted*

## Value to the Community

Tumamoc Hill has a unique combination of important natural and cultural resources that collectively inform us about the natural and biological resources and the prehistoric indigenous occupation and use of the of the Sonoran Desert landscape. The Conservation Area's reservoir of important cultural resources illustrates the great time depth of human occupation in the Tucson Basin and the systematic agricultural use of the landscape. The Tohono O'odham view Tumamoc Hill as an important and sacred place that has been occupied by their ancestors since time immemorial.

Tumamoc Hill truly is one of the "Last of the Best" of Pima County's cultural and natural resources and will be protected as a Pima County Conservation Area to save the resources from encroaching development, and to preserve them for the future of Pima County.



*Tumamoc Hill trincheras site, prehistoric rock terraces - Photo by Cultural Resources Office staff.*

