

Cultural and Historic Resource Acquisitions



Anza expedition at Los Morteros 1775 - Illustration by Bill Singleton

Los Morteros

Site: 121.4 acres

Cost: \$1,379,490

Acquired: Final acquisition, December, 2004

Fund: 1997 and 2004 Bond Funds

Background

Using 1997 bond funds, the County purchased a total of 30 parcels in the Town of Marana encompassing the core area of the prehistoric Hohokam village of Los Morteros. Of these parcels, the Los Morteros Conservation Area is comprised of 19 contiguous parcels, forming approximately 120 acres of conserved land northeast of the intersection of North Silverbell Road and West Linda Vista Boulevard. Eleven outlying parcels in the neighboring La Puerta Del Norte Subdivision were also acquired to preserve buried portions of the site. The County-owned land includes the central core of the prehistoric site and contains many important undisturbed archaeological features, including the buried remains of hundreds of habitation structures, or pithouses, as well as a large, oval-shaped ballcourt.

Cultural and Historical Significance

Los Morteros is situated on the floodplain of the Santa Cruz River near the north end of the Tucson Mountains. Archaeologists named the site “Los Morteros” for the many bedrock mortars on boulders and outcrops found within the site. The Hohokam people used these features to grind and mill seeds, corn, and other plant resources found in the area. Los Morteros was a large Native American village that stretched north and south along the Santa Cruz River and extended west of the river past the current right-of-way of Silverbell Road. The site was occupied during prehistoric times between about A.D. 850 and A.D. 1300. For centuries, Los Morteros was a large village and the center of an extended “community” of related sites along the Santa Cruz River.

The Los Morteros location was the scene of important events in the history of the Tucson Basin and southern Arizona. For example, the famous expedition in 1775-1776 of the Spanish explorer, Juan Bautista de Anza, made a major encampment, called the Llano del Azotado campsite, along the Santa Cruz River in the area north of today’s Coachline Boulevard. This area is part of the Juan Bautista de Anza Trail identified by the National Park Service as a National Historic Trail and Pima County is currently planning its development for public use. In the nineteenth century, the historic Point of the Mountains stagecoach station was established in this location, near present day Oasis Street and Coachline Boulevard.

Biological Resources

The property is entirely within the Conservation Lands System categories of Multiple Use, Important Riparian, and Biological Core Management Areas. It is an important link in the wildlife corridor between the Santa Cruz River to the east, and the Tortolita Mountains.

Management

The Los Morteros Conservation Area is currently managed as Open Space and as a Cultural Resources Conservation Area. Archaeological preservation efforts were supported by 2004 bond funds, including perimeter security fencing and signage in 2006. Additional signage will be erected in 2010. The existing network of old ranch roads and pathways within the property form a series of connected informal trails linked to the pedestrian gates that will be developed into a formal interpretive trail system as part of a future bond project. Future management initiatives will include developing a self-guided tour using interpretive signs and wayside exhibits at the site’s important prehistoric and historic features. A comprehensive Management Plan is also slated for development.



This unique “stirrup pot” was recovered and reconstructed during archaeological investigations at Los Morteros - Photo by Henry D. Wallace.

Value to the Community

Los Morteros is a uniquely important cultural resource whose undisturbed, buried remains contain a huge reservoir of information about the prehistory and history of the Tucson Basin. Equally important, the Tohono O’odham Nation considers Los Morteros an ancestral site. Los Morteros is one of the “Last of the Best” of Pima County’s cultural resources. The core area of the prehistoric village, the Anza campsite, and the historic stagecoach station were acquired with 1997 bond funds, with additional funds approved in the 2004 bond election to preserve and manage the resources. The archaeological and historic resources will be protected as a Pima County Conservation Area to save them from encroaching development, and to preserve them for the future of Pima County.

Ongoing Property Activities

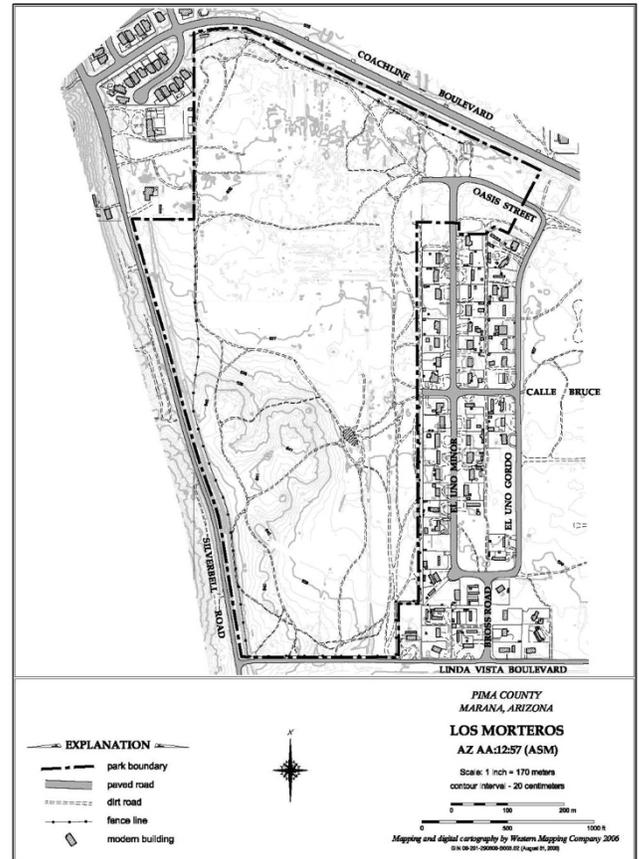
Current activity at the Los Morteros Conservation Area involves site monitoring or site protection and property maintenance through intensive clean up efforts to restore the property to a natural desert oasis within the urban setting of Marana.



Bedrock mortars give the site its name, Los Morteros - Photo by Cultural Resources Office staff.

Completed and Planned Projects

- Completed inventory, mapping including GIS database
- Security fencing – combination wildlife friendly wire fence and pipe-rail fence
- Trail planning underway
- Entrance signs
- Development of management plan



The Los Morteros Mapping and GIS Project produced detailed maps of the natural and cultural resources at the Conservation Area - Map by Desert Archaeology, Inc.



Panoramic view of the Los Morteros Conservation Area, view to the east. Silverbell Road meets Linda Vista Boulevard, which extends to the east in the lower right. - Photo by Cultural Resources Office staff