



Indigenous Trail Networks and the Engineering of Cultural Landscapes of the Sonoran Desert

Presentation by Preservation Anthropologist Aaron M. Wright, PhD



Archaeology has long fixated on places – settlements, ceremonial centers, the bounded spaces where people congregated. But what about the spaces between?

This presentation turns attention to movement itself, examining how ancestral O'odham and Yuman communities built and traveled the trail networks that connected their world. Drawing on recent fieldwork in southern Arizona, the talk argues that these routes were far more than footpaths worn into desert soil.

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*A constructed trail corridor atop desert pavement in southwestern Arizona
(Photo by Aaron Wright)*

This presentation will not be recorded.

Thursday August 20, 2026

7 pm ARIZONA/Mountain Standard Time
(Same as Pacific Daylight Time)

To register for the Zoom program, click on this link:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_PhtiWS2ZSfGcl8ngeFcWwg

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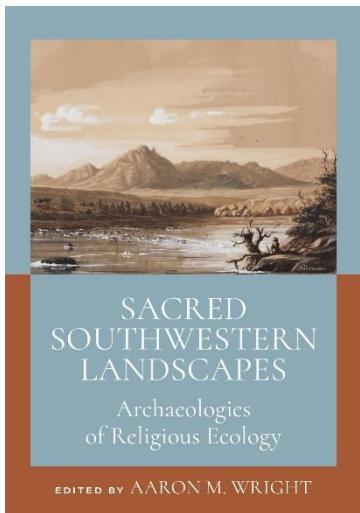
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Evidence of planning, construction, and sustained maintenance points to a deliberate built infrastructure – corridors that organized travel, transport, and communication across a vast and deeply interconnected landscape.

To follow these trails is to see the desert not just as empty space, but as a cultural environment actively engineered by the people who lived within it – and to broaden our understanding of Indigenous infrastructure well beyond monumental architecture.



*Volunteers flagging trail-side debris through a pass in the Maricopa Mountains
(Photo by Aaron Wright)*



Our Third Thursday presenter Aaron M. Wright, PhD

is a preservation anthropologist with Archaeology Southwest, a nonprofit organization based in Tucson, Arizona. He specializes in the cultural landscapes of southern and western Arizona, focusing on the Huhugam and Patayan archaeological traditions.

Aaron’s book-length publications include *Leaving Mesa Verde: Peril and Change in the Thirteenth-Century Southwest* (2010, co-edited with Tim Kohler and Mark Varien), the award-winning *Religion on the Rocks: Hohokam Rock Art, Ritual Practice, and Social Transformation* (2014), *The Great Bend of the Gila: Contemporary Native American Connections to an Ancestral Landscape* (2016, with Maren Hopkins), and his most recent work, *Sacred Southwestern Landscapes: Archaeologies of Religious Ecology* (2024).

Old Pueblo Archaeology Center’s Third Thursday Food for Thought Zoom webinars on the Third Thursday evening of each month feature presentations about archaeology, history, and cultures. If you would like to be added to Old Pueblo’s list of persons who receive semimonthly email announcements about Old Pueblo’s Third Thursday and other activities (and other southwestern archaeology organizations’ activities), you can visit www.oldpueblo.org, scroll down to the Subscribe box, and enter your name and email address there. One can unsubscribe from our emailing list at any time.

