

□ Sites of Contention: Archaeological Classification and Political Discourse in the US–Mexico Borderlands

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Abstract

Recognizing that archaeologies of the contemporary past are inherently political, this paper examines the ways in which site classification plays into archaeological praxis in the US–Mexico borderlands of southern Arizona. Fundamentally, our definition and description of contemporary archaeological sites seeks to organize spatial and material data collected by the Undocumented Migration Project (UMP) as a methodological step in creating knowledge about processes and experiences of undocumented migration across the Sonoran Desert. At the same time, we acknowledge that our classifications exist within a highly contentious field of public discourse surrounding migration from Latin America into the United States. Insofar as naming and describing diverse types of sites helps to shape the objects of this discourse, we suggest that classification may further aid critique and political action.

Mexico is a DUMP and they turn anywhere they go into a dump, starting in our deserts, and then the communities they settle.

(anonymous online comment on Rodriguez 2012)

Most places are in constant ontological change. Their transformations depend on the materiality of the locale as much as on the social context,

Keywords: undocumented migration; archaeological praxis; site classification

the historical circumstances, and the multifarious interests embedded in them. (González-Ruibal 2008, 256)

Introduction

All archaeologies are inherently political (McGuire 2008), but archaeologies of the contemporary are most self-decidedly so. By examining the materiality of modern warfare (Saunders 2004; Schofield *et al.* 2002), protest camps (Beck *et al.* 2009; Schofield 2009), mass killings (Crossland 2000), class conflict (McGuire 1992), derelict cityscapes (Dawdy 2006; Maxwell 2012), homelessness (Kiddey and Schofield 2011; Zimmerman *et al.* 2010), and postcolonial poverty (Richard 2011), among other relics of modernity and supermodernity (González-Ruibal 2008), archaeologies of the contemporary draw the critical attention of publics, politicians, artists, activists, and scholars. Not surprisingly, research focused on clandestine migration across the US–Mexico borderlands shares a similar political and ideological charge—as illustrated by the slough of online responses to an article on the material culture of undocumented migration published in the *Huffington Post* (Rodríguez 2012, see above). Above and beyond a focus on contentious subject-matter, most archaeologists of the contemporary, we included, see themselves as self-reflexive participants in anthropological endeavors where entanglement with political discourse and action are inescapable.

Harrison and Schofield (2010, 142–146) argue that archaeologies of the contemporary intersect with politics in three general ways. First, they operate as “material witnesses” to subaltern histories and experiences prone to be forgotten, obscured, or erased by more hegemonic political forces (Buchli and Lucas 2001). Second, they create the past in the present and, in so doing, offer a critical and potentially cathartic engagement with the violence of supermodernity (Crossland 2000; González-Ruibal 2008). Third, they provide a forum for political commentary both on the past and in the present. This involves highlighting the problems faced by marginalized groups such as the homeless (Zimmerman 2013), as well as identifying the unforeseen problems that may arise from the orthodoxies of capitalism (McGuire 1992) and patterns of (over)consumption (Rathje and Murphy 1992).

The critical power of archaeologies of the contemporary depends in part on applying traditional field methods to the study of relatively recent material objects and spaces (Harrison and Schofield 2010, 54–88). Artifact analysis, site mapping, and regional survey record the traces of events and experiences that might otherwise pass without notice into the shadows of history. Although we may strive through these methods to achieve an objective depiction of the contemporary material record, it is important to recognize that no data exist apart from the theoretical and ideological perspectives that have informed their collection (Adams and Adams 1991; Chippindale 2000). At a most basic level, we call attention to particular subjects simply by deploying archaeological methods, particularly excavation, in the field (Beck *et al.* 2009; Kiddey and Schofield 2011). Yet even for ourselves, the collection of data is both a physical and cognitive process shaped by our embodied habits, cultural dispositions, and social milieu (Berggren and Hodder 2003; Lucas 2004). Furthermore, the ordering of empirical evidence through classification can have much broader political implications insofar as “naming”

things makes them potential objects of discourse (Foucault 1972). All in all, we suggest that it may at times be worthwhile to examine how the seemingly routine practices of measuring, mapping, describing, and classifying play into our more deliberate political engagements—that is, our praxis (McGuire 2008).

A conscious concern with praxis has proven vital to our archaeological research on modern migration between northern Mexico and southern Arizona. Since its inception in 2009, the Undocumented Migration Project (UMP) has drawn upon the mixed methodological approaches of archaeology, ethnography (De León 2013a), and forensic science (Beck *et al.*, forthcoming) to document the social processes, strategies, and experiences of unauthorized migrants and other actors embroiled in the political economic landscape of the US–Mexico borderlands. At the same time, this project attempts to illuminate the many forms of violence and suffering meted out by present-day US border policy through active engagement of the public via local and national news coverage (Rodriguez 2012; Trevizo 2013), museum exhibits (Bosman 2013), and a summer field school program based in the community of Arivaca, Arizona. The political valence of the UMP also emerges from our methods: the physical act of fieldwork along the border and the discursive act of defining “artifacts” and “sites” both work to challenge and enlarge the field of discourse surrounding objects and places in the desert and, by extension, the experiences of border crossers themselves.

We therefore take the opportunity in this paper to situate our methods-as-praxis at the intersection of space, materiality, and political discourse about contemporary archaeological sites in the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona. Although De León (2012, 2013b) has previously discussed the concentrations of clothes, backpacks, water bottles, and personal artifacts discarded by migrants, these sites also include religious shrines, humanitarian supply drops, Border Patrol checkpoints, scenes of sexual assault and death, and many other locales shaped by the political economies of border crossing and border enforcement. Drawing upon archaeological and ethnographic data collected by the UMP,¹ we work to define and describe these sites as a methodological step vital to further study of the spatial strategies and experiences of migrants, humanitarians, Border Patrol agents, environmentalists, and other political actors in the borderlands. At the same time, we argue that this classification is a form of praxis that exists within, and potentially contributes to, a field of discourse about immigration, citizenship, border security, violence, social justice, and conservation. For this reason, we prologue our classification with a discussion of how material culture and spaces have become implicated in political discourse about undocumented migration over the past two decades.

Materiality, space, and discourse about undocumented migration

Public debate in the United States about migration from Mexico dates back to the formalization of the US–Mexico border in 1848 and the subsequent waves of Chinese,

1. We focus explicitly on material culture and typologies in this paper, but our overarching project is equal parts archaeology, ethnography, and forensic science. We remain wary of archaeological studies of the contemporary past that lack a systematic ethnographic component. In this paper we include data from interviews conducted with migrants between 2009 and 2013 in Nogales and Altar, Mexico. All University of Michigan-approved human subjects protocols were followed while collecting interview data and all names are pseudonyms.

Eastern European, and other immigrants who crossed into California and Arizona during the mid- to late-nineteenth century (e.g. Ettinger 2009). Subsequently, the purported threats attributed to unauthorized human traffic and contraband smuggling across this border have mirrored broader political, social, and economic issues in both the United States and Mexico—including prohibition, economic recessions, water scarcity, drug smuggling, narcoviolence, and post 9/11 terrorism fears (e.g. Andreas 2009; Hernandez 2010; Nai 2005; Romo 2005). In this paper we focus on the strands of discourse and the archaeological landscapes that have emerged since *Prevention-Through-Deterrence* (PTD) border enforcement strategies first began to channel border crossers into the remote and dangerous Sonoran Desert of Arizona.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, PTD strategies sought to reduce unauthorized migration by improving border security measures around major ports of entry and urban areas and allowing the hazards of the Sonoran Desert—extreme temperature variability, limited water and shade, rugged terrain, and hostile plant and animal life—to work as natural deterrents to human movement (Cornelius 2001; Dunn 2009). The efficacy of PTD policies remains controversial (Andreas 2009; Cornelius and Salehyan 2007; De León 2013a). Although apprehension rates of migrants by the US Border Patrol in urban areas and traditional crossing areas such as San Diego declined in the two decades following the implementation of PTD, the costs have included an exponential growth in the number of agents and resources devoted to border enforcement, escalating apprehension rates in unpopulated areas, and skyrocketing mortality rates among migrants (see Table 1 in De León 2012). As Roxanne Doty (2011) argues, re-directing migrants across the Sonoran Desert and similar landscapes where the environment deters people through physical suffering and death ultimately provides a “moral alibi” for the structural violence meted out by federal enforcement policies. For humanitarians and other social justice activists, this alibi does little to negate a perception of the desert as a weapon deployed against migrants (Cook 2011). For both proponents and opponents of immigration, the physical reality of the borderlands, whether directly experienced or indirectly imagined, underwrites the discursive construction of this landscape as an impenetrable barrier, if not would-be executioner. Moreover, an increase in border crossings through the Sonoran Desert has led to the mass deposition of migrant material culture and transformations in the landscape that circulate back into representations of undocumented migrants and US border policy.

In the wake of PTD, the Sonoran Desert has also entered the public imagination as a fragile environment under threat of destruction by both border crossers and Border Patrol agents. In the first instance, the migrant backpacks and water bottles now “littering” Organ Pipe National Park and the Coronado National Forest fuel a public perception that migrants destroy pristine ecosystems or, perhaps worse, pollute natural resources owned by US citizens (Sundberg and Kaserman 2007). In the second instance, environmental activists point to the more permanent damages caused by Border Patrol vehicles and infrastructure, including roads and walls, that cause floods and disrupt animal migrations (Meierotto 2012). In both cases, political discourse draws upon material dimensions of the Sonoran Desert, namely biodiversity and natural beauty, to construct a landscape filled with life, rather than one of imminent death.

Beyond their perceived threat to the environment, the objects carried and consumed by undocumented migrants have increasingly found their way into the discursive production of social boundaries and representations. According to Sundberg (2008), the news media typically refer to these objects as “trash” (e.g. Banks 2009) and thus perpetuate a view of Mexicans and other immigrant populations as “dirty,” despite the fact that such objects are either personal belongings (e.g. rosaries, family photos) or tools needed for survival in the extreme conditions of the Sonoran Desert (e.g. backpacks, clothes, water bottles). Some anti-immigration activists have even collected and displayed these materials as proof of an ongoing “invasion” across the US–Mexico border (Sundberg 2008, 877–878). At the same time, humanitarian groups and environmental activists contribute, whether consciously or not, to the trope of the “dirty” immigrant when they organize events to pick up “trash” in the desert. As Sundberg concludes:

because the term “migrant trash” is used to label the objects, undocumented immigrants are produced as those who do not comport themselves appropriately and leave things behind; they must be cleaned up after. These practices...summon geopolitical boundaries between “us” and “them,” “Americans” and “those who trash America.” (2008, 883)

Moving full circle, the material strategies through which migrants have responded to PTD policies now help to underwrite the anti-immigration discourse that initiated such policies in the first place.

Against this narrative of migrant “trash,” artists and activists interested in drawing attention to the experiences of migrants have defined objects found in the desert as “personal belongings” (Sundberg 2008, 883–886). These works emphasize the everyday nature of backpacks, toys, clothes, water bottles, and other items discarded in the desert, allowing observers to connect with, rather than distance themselves from, border crossers. Similarly, our own definition of these materials as “artifacts” emphasizes their historical importance and potential to reveal otherwise hidden social processes and experiences through archaeological analysis. The political valence implied by a shift from “trash” to “artifact” is not lost on the general public: local and national news coverage (Rodriguez 2012; Trevizo 2013) and an art installation called *States of Exception* (Bosman 2013) featuring artifacts recovered by the UMP have elicited responses ranging from empathetic support to visceral disgust.

Given the ways in which landscapes and artifacts have been drawn into discourse about migration across the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona, it should come as no surprise that the *sites* made and unmade by undocumented migrants, drug smugglers, Border Patrol agents, humanitarians, and environmental activists have been politicized as well. After all, it is not single objects that conjure the image of Latinos “trashing” the pristine desert or US society, but rather their concentration into “heaps” of rubbish marking avenues of clandestine movement. At the same time, the different sorts of sites defined by such artifacts and activities make possible our archaeological study of place-making and the spatial strategies employed by the aforementioned social actors. It follows that our classification of sites, as a form of praxis, must remain attuned to the ways in which this methodological exercise occurs within, and potentially contributes

to, a broader field of political discourse about the physical realities of undocumented migration.

Archaeological approaches to the US–Mexico borderlands

The UMP study area currently comprises a corridor of unauthorized travel from the US–Mexico border to the city of Tucson between the official ports-of-entry in Nogales and Sasabe (Figure 1). According to statistics published by the US Border Patrol (2013a), the number of migrant apprehensions along the 281 miles of border in the Tucson Sector, which includes the UMP study area, increased more than fourfold between the advent of the regional PTD strategy known as *Operation Safeguard* in 1994 (139,473 apprehensions) and 2000 (616,346 apprehensions). Although numbers have slowly declined over the past five years, likely the result of the 2008 economic crisis, the 102,303 migrants apprehended in 2012 continue to make the Tucson Sector the most heavily trafficked corridor through the borderlands (see Andreas 2009 for critical discussion of apprehension statistics). A much grimmer statistic is the number of human remains recovered each year in this sector (USBP 2013b), a figure that has steadily climbed from 29 in 1998 to a total of 177 in 2012. Recent taphonomic experiments by the UMP suggest that these statistics grossly underestimate the actual number of people who die in the desert and whose bodies are never recovered (Beck *et al.*, forthcoming). Regrettably, the ever-growing number of deaths, most due to heat-related illness, is commensurate with the sheer difficulty of traveling for several days on end through the Sonoran Desert where rugged terrain, extreme daytime temperatures, and limited shade combine to painfully impede movement.

In response to these physical and political conditions, migrants and other border crossers have developed several strategies for successfully surviving the Sonoran Desert, as well as the violence imposed by cartels and law enforcement agencies both in the US and in Mexico. Social strategies, for example, involve mobilizing different forms of capital (e.g. human, social, economic) by traveling with relatives for protection, getting advice from people with previous migration experience, and paying high fees to *coyotes* [human smugglers] for guidance (De León 2013a; Singer and Massey 2009; Spener 2010). Many migrants also draw upon their religious faith as a sort of spiritual capital before, during, and after their travel into the US (Hagan 2008).

Material strategies include the tools, techniques, and practical knowledge needed to survive the desert and evade border surveillance. Before setting out from towns such as Nogales and Altar in northern Mexico, migrants fill their small backpacks with water, energy drinks, salt-rich foods, first aid items, spare socks, and other supplies. However, these meager items are never enough for a comfortable journey across the desert. As De León (2012) has emphasized through the study of artifacts collected by the UMP, these material strategies are dynamic adaptations to a complex and shifting set of parameters. For example, undocumented border crossers now wear dark clothes and carry black water bottles to reduce their visibility and risk of apprehension by Border Patrol, even though this strategy increases body temperatures and the risk of death from dehydration and hyperthermia. Border crossers also employ material strategies to hide their identities in various ways (De León Gokee and Schubert forthcoming).

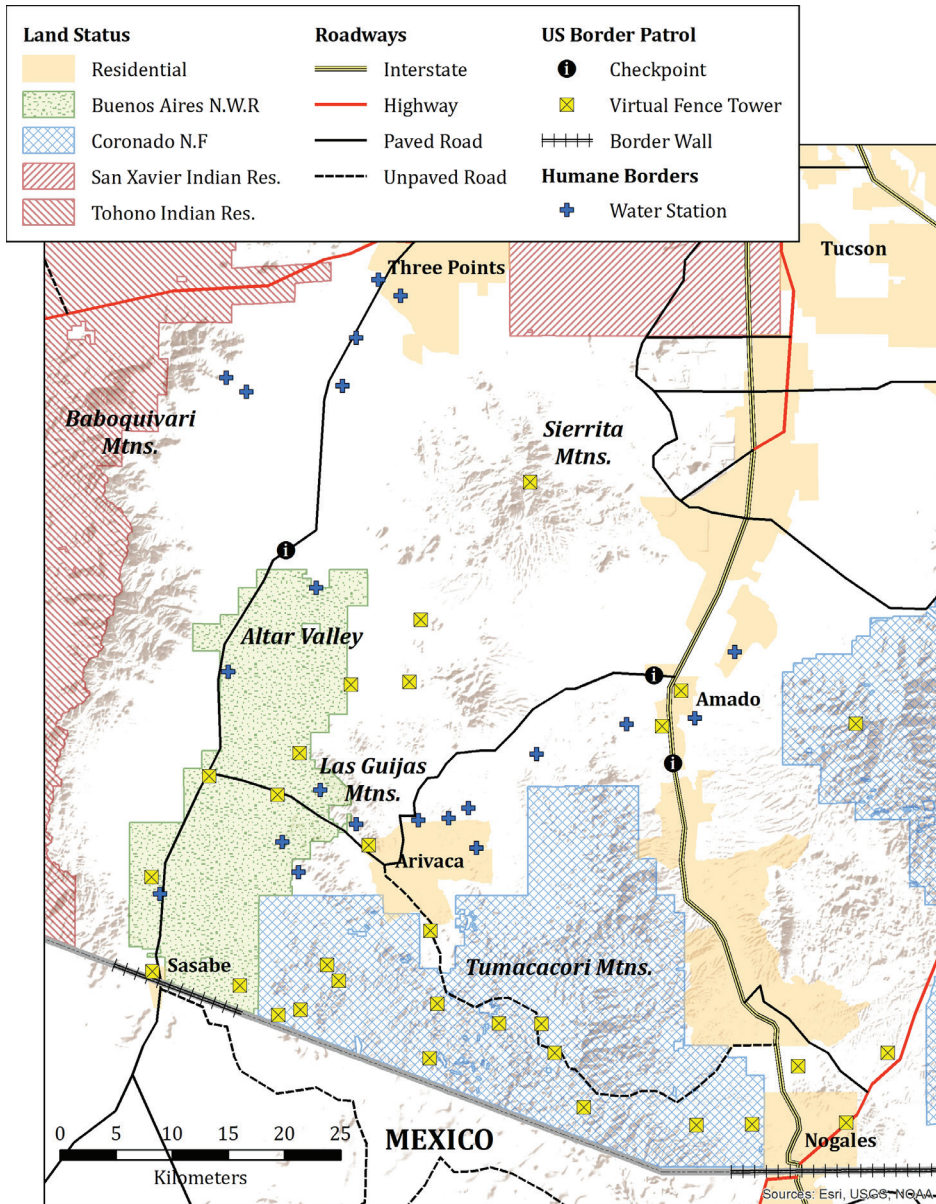


FIGURE 1. Map of the Nogales–Sasabe corridor (UMP study area)

For many migrants, carrying a change of clothes and personal hygiene products at the expense of additional water provides a way to clean up their appearance and “blend in” with the general American population when they are finally picked up by smugglers in vehicles after several days of walking in the desert. In some cases, non-Mexican migrants choose either to carry false identification papers, or no papers at all, in order to pass themselves off as Mexican nationals and thus avoid deportation back to their home countries. Altogether, these material strategies comprise one part of a “migration-

specific habitus” (De León 2013b; Spener 2010) that evolves as migrants *actively* adapt to the borderlands as a physical and political space.

Spatial strategies likewise frame the reproduction and evolution of migration-specific habitus. Since border crossers must traverse a vast expanse of desert without maps, compasses, or other navigational devices that could identify them as *coyotes* or drug smugglers, they must rely upon first- or second-hand knowledge of routes across a landscape in which getting lost too often ends in death. At the same time, migrants must balance a desire to move quickly across open spaces or along trails, especially at night, with a need to remain hidden from Border Patrol agents, drone planes, and local citizens. This is usually accomplished by traversing more rugged or difficult-to-access terrain. Even choosing a spot to rest involves strategy since shaded areas or routes used by previous migrants may now be monitored. As a young migrant named Abel comments:

Sometimes there is too much foot traffic on the trails. Too much Border Patrol. It's better to walk off the trail, although it's a lot harder... We got chased by Border Patrol on the trail and threw all of our stuff down. We ran into the mountains. It was freezing and we didn't have anything. Thank God we found a little cave and slept in there without blankets or anything.

The sites resulting from these spatial strategies offer a phenomenological window onto the production and experience of space by migrants and others. At first glance, movement through many of these sites appears to represent dislocation from the landscape or an exclusively antagonistic relationship with the natural environment. However, a closer inspection of artifact consumption and discard, religious practice, graffiti, and shelter-building all point to place-making (Grabowska, forthcoming)—the process through which people give value to space as a source of subjective experience, personhood, identity, and memory (Preucel and Meskell 2008). Recognizing that contemporary archaeological sites in the Nogales–Sasabe corridor may be in “constant ontological change” (González-Ruibal 2008, 256), we leave open the question of their relative “placeness” to focus in this paper on how the material and spatial dimensions of these sites create the *possibility* for political discourse and archaeological praxis.

Even as we think about strategy and experience, we do not wish to overstate the agency of undocumented migrants relative to the structural violence of border policy. Spatial strategies and practices of place-making by border crossers invariably intersect with those of other actors. For example, hand restraints, border walls, surveillance towers, and checkpoints all provide more permanent evidence of the dynamic policing strategies that US Border Patrol agents employ to ensure that the borderlands remain a space of exception (De León Gokee and Schubert forthcoming; see also discussion of militarized zones in Schofield 2005). Meanwhile, humanitarians, environmentalists, and we as anthropologists rely upon the spatial arrangement of sites to plan supply drops, organize clean-ups, and study the process and experience of migration. In so doing, we actively reshape the landscape that migrants must traverse and, by extension, the ongoing production of places within it.

Our classification of contemporary archaeological sites proceeds from a recognition that they are dynamic and heterogeneous *assemblages* of material things and human

agencies (Harrison 2011). As a methodological step, we see classification as a way to highlight material and spatial relationships within sites-as-assemblages that we believe, based upon ethnographic interviews and observations, recursively shape migrant-specific habitus and complex strategies—spatial, material, social, and religious—for surviving and evading surveillance in the Sonoran Desert. Taking a cue from studies of contemporary homeless sites that alternatively privilege *etic* (Zimmerman *et al.* 2010) and *emic* (Kiddey and Schofield 2011) approaches to classification, we embrace a dialectical approach (Adams and Adams 1991) that consciously tacks back and forth between recurring associations in material assemblages at multiple scales and ethnographic understandings of the human agency and the experiences that permeate them.

Beyond enabling our study of undocumented migration across the Sonoran Desert, archaeological classification plays an important role in the praxis of the UMP. More specifically, a dialectical approach to classification, we argue, allows us to interrogate public perceptions of space in the borderlands, and thereby examine the ways in which sites are drawn into political discourse and/or erased from history. By exploring the diversity of these sites and calling them “archaeological,” we hope to shift objects of discourse about the borderlands away from “migrant trash,” “environmental degradation,” and even “bare life,” to narratives that view undocumented migrants, humanitarians, Border Patrol agents, local citizens, politicians, and anthropologists as active architects of an historical landscape in the making.

Contemporary archaeological sites in the Nogales–Sasabe corridor

Over the course of four archaeological field seasons between 2009 and 2013, the UMP has collected material and spatial data from 341 locales associated with undocumented migration and border enforcement in the Nogales–Sasabe corridor. Each year our field methods have evolved around new research questions and greater familiarity with the landscape and the material assemblages of migration. Archaeological reconnaissance in 2009 explored the types and uses of migrant artifacts as well as the spatial structure and contents of more than one dozen sites identified with help from ranchers, humanitarian groups, Border Patrol, and others familiar with the local terrain. Looking specifically at the material strategies of border crossing in 2010, we recorded less than two dozen sites using hand-held GPS units (+/- 5 meter resolution), but collected some 9365 artifacts, including large systematic samples from three medium to large migrant sites (BK-03, BW, LOBO). Analyses of these data and their use wear have already formed the basis for several studies (De León 2012, 2013b) of the material strategies deployed by undocumented border crossers in the Sonoran Desert.

Although we continued to collect some artifacts in 2012 and 2013, we developed a two-step protocol for recording artifact assemblages at individual sites. First, we estimated the frequencies of major artifact classes (Table 1) along an ordinal scale ranging from 0 to more than 200. Second, we selected a subset of these sites for more detailed inventories of artifacts sorted according to their functional class (e.g. clothing, hygiene product, aid), subclass (e.g. shirt, dental care, pharmaceutical), and type (e.g. t-shirt, toothpaste, pill bottle); we recorded backpacks and beverage containers on a more detailed inventory including size and brand. Altogether, the UMP has documented more

| Artifact Class | Description | Examples |
|----------------|--|--|
| Aid | Pharmaceuticals and other artifacts for mitigating pain or giving first aid | Aspirin pill packet, tensor bandage |
| Backpack | Backpacks and shoulder bags for carrying water, food, and other supplies | Backpack, duffel bag, purse |
| Beverage | Plastic bottles, aluminum drink cans, and other containers for holding beverages | Water or Gatorade bottle, Red Bull can |
| Border Patrol | Equipment employed by US Border Patrol agents for apprehending and searching migrants | Hand restraint, blue latex glove |
| Clothing | Articles of clothing, including underwear, outerwear, footwear, and headwear | Sock, jeans, bra, t-shirt, baseball cap |
| Cosmetic | Make-up, hair accessories, and other artifacts for improving physical appearance | Lipstick tube, compact mirror, hair tie |
| Electronic | Cell phones, phone accessories, CDs, and other artifacts for use with electronic devices | Cell phone, phone card, CD case |
| Food | Consumables and containers for consumables, including plastic wrappers and tin cans | Orange peel, tuna can, tortilla wrapper |
| Humanitarian | Gallon water jugs with inspirational messages and other supplies left by humanitarians for consumption by migrants | Gallon water jugs bottled in the USA, applesauce cups, socks |
| Hygiene | Soap, deodorant, dental supplies, and other artifacts for maintaining personal hygiene | Deodorant, toothbrush, tampon wrapper |
| Narcotic | Burlap bags, pipes, and other artifacts for carrying or consuming narcotics | Burlap bag, marijuana pipe |
| Personal | Documents, jewelry, currency, and other small items for individual use or personal identity | Birth certificate, keychain, Mexican coin |
| Recreation | Tobacco products, games, books, and other small items for entertainment | Cigarette pack, playing cards, plastic toy |
| Religious | Religious texts, devotional objects, and candles for practicing religious rituals | Bible, prayer card, rosary, votive candle |
| Utility | Tools and assorted artifacts for assisting with survival in the desert | Eyeglasses, plastic sheeting, spoon, matches |

TABLE 1. Summary of artifact classes defined by the UMP.

than 30,000 artifacts, of which nearly 12,000 have been collected for analysis and curation at the University of Michigan.

By sampling artifact assemblages, we were able to focus on mapping spatial relationships within and between sites. Regionally, we undertook systematic pedestrian survey around known sites and natural travel corridors such as canyons, passes, ridges, and washes. We also revisited four sites where human remains had been recovered in the past five years. Locally, we recorded site boundaries, artifact concentrations, and features using a hand-held GPS with sub-meter resolution. In some cases, we employed a digital total station for detailed mapping, particularly at sites featuring small shelters built from tree limbs, brush, and black plastic sheeting. In addition to these spatial data, we also described the setting, vegetation, depositional and post-depositional processes, estimated dates of use, and air and ground visibility for each site.

Our dialectical classification of sites began with their distinction from *isolates*—one or few artifacts representing a single short-term event or secondary deposition. Many

| Site Type | Area | | | Features | | | Artifact Count | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|----------|----------|--------------|------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| | <i>n</i> | Mean | Max Size | Hiding Areas | Structures | Shrines | Sites Sampled | Mean | Range |
| Isolate | 99 | — | — | — | — | — | 60 | 4.4 | 1–18 |
| Migrant Site | 189 | 790 | 9514 | 35 | 21 | 3 | 81 | 292.3 | 6–4678 |
| <i>Camp Site</i> | 81 | 637 | 5427 | 24 | 12 | 3 | 38 | 254.3 | 6–1813 |
| <i>Rest Site</i> | 36 | 1012 | 6038 | 2 | — | — | 15 | 62.1 | 9–265 |
| <i>Pickup Site</i> | 48 | 1062 | 9514 | 9 | 9 | — | 23 | 535.7 | 10–4678 |
| <i>Apprehension Site</i> | 4 | 682 | 2394 | — | — | — | 4 | 40.0 | 11–79 |
| <i>Border Staging Area</i> | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 216.0 | — |
| <i>Narco-trafficking Site</i> | 1 | 66 | — | — | — | — | 0 | — | — |
| Shrine | 8 | 160 | 490 | — | — | 8 | 4 | 139.8 | 11–262 |
| Humanitarian Water Drop Site | 23 | 347 | 4485 | — | — | — | 18 | 16.5 | 3–43 |
| Border Patrol Turn-off Site | 10 | 3486 | 17,249 | — | — | — | 9 | 119.6 | 9–432 |
| Trail | 8 | — | — | — | — | — | 6 | 47.3 | 12–169 |
| Death Site | 4 | — | — | — | — | — | 4 | 0.0 | — |
| Sexual Assault Site | 0 | — | — | — | — | — | 0 | — | — |
| Total | 341 | — | — | 35 | 21 | 11 | 182 | 145.0 | 1–4678 |

TABLE 2. Summary of site types defined for the UMP study area.

isolated water bottles and food wrappers appeared along trails where people discard items while walking, while others turned up in seasonal washes where wind and water act to re-deposit artifacts. Although the UMP systematically recorded isolated artifacts along several trails (see below), we otherwise only noted and collected 99 isolates (averaging 4.4 artifacts) with a unique appearance or visible use wear—mainly clothes, backpacks, and beverage containers (Table 2).

In contrast to isolates, *sites* were assemblages of artifacts and features attesting to the intensive, long-term, or repeated use of a particular locale. Beginning with the primary activities and agents responsible for sites, we assigned each site to the types listed in Table 2 based on the presence of features, such as shrines, structures, or trails, as well as the numbers of artifacts that were produced or utilized by specific groups (e.g. Border Patrol hand restraints, humanitarian water jugs). In fact, the proportions of at least two artifact classes were found to differ significantly for each of the main site types sampled by the UMP (Table 3). A discriminant analysis using these variables was further able to correctly assign all but three sites to their established types; we explain these “outliers” on a case by case basis below.

| Artifact Class | Isolates | | Migrant Sites | | Shrines | | Humanitarian Water Drop Sites | | Border Patrol Turn-off Sites | |
|----------------|----------|---------|---------------|---------|---------|-----------|-------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|----------|
| | n=60 | | n=81 | | n=4 | | n=18 | | n=9 | |
| | Mean % | Range % | Mean % | Range % | Mean % | Range % | Mean % | Range % | Mean % | Range % |
| Aid | 2.3 | 0–55.6 | 2.4 | 0–13.3 | 0.4 | 0–1.5 | 0 | — | 0.9 | 0–3.6 |
| Backpack | 4.0 | 0–33.3 | 6.4 | 0–40.8 | 0.3 | 0–1.1 | 0.4 | 0–5.6 | 0.3 | 0–1.6 |
| Beverage | 32.4 | 0–100 | 25.8 | 0–88.0 | 5.1 | 0–20.2 | 6.4 | 0–50.0 | 28.0 | 0–66.7 |
| Border Patrol | 0 | — | 0 | 0–1.3 | 0 | — | 0.4 | 0–7.7 | 6.0 | 1.6–11.1 |
| Clothing | 26.3 | 0–100 | 17.2 | 0–50.0 | 8.8 | 0–26.0 | 1.8 | 0–27.8 | 2.4 | 0–8.0 |
| Cosmetic | 1.0 | 0–25.0 | 0.6 | 0–9.5 | 0 | 0–0.3 | 0 | — | 0.1 | 0–1.1 |
| Electronic | 0 | — | 0.2 | 0–3.9 | 1.0 | 0–3.4 | 0 | — | 1.2 | 0–4.8 |
| Food | 12.4 | 0–100 | 30.1 | 0–94.4 | 6.3 | 0–24.8 | 1.3 | 0–23.8 | 9.8 | 0–31.0 |
| Humanitarian | 2.0 | 0–100 | 2.7 | 0–73.1 | 2.1 | 0–8.4 | 88.7 | 50.0–100 | 0 | — |
| Hygiene | 8.2 | 0–100 | 4.4 | 0–37.5 | 0.4 | 0–1.5 | 0 | — | 2.0 | 0–6.5 |
| Narcotic | 0.8 | 0–33.3 | 0.3 | 0–7.1 | 0 | — | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| Personal | 3.0 | 0–100 | 1.4 | 0–45.5 | 10.3 | 0–27.3 | 0 | — | 1.5 | 0–11.1 |
| Recreation | 1.3 | 0–80.0 | 0.4 | 0–6.0 | 0.3 | 0–1.1 | 0 | — | 7.0 | 0–25.7 |
| Religious | 0 | — | 0.1 | 0–3.1 | 63.4 | 12.6–89.8 | 0.1 | 0–2.4 | 0 | 0–0.7 |
| Utility | 5.5 | 0–66.7 | 7.7 | 0–66.7 | 1.4 | 0–3.4 | 0.8 | 0–6.3 | 30.7 | 9.7–89.3 |

TABLE 3. Summary of artifact class proportions by site type; highlighted proportions differ significantly ($p = 0.05$) from those for other site types (isolates excluded) according to a Wilcoxon nonparametric pairwise comparison.

Migrant sites

When border crossers make their way through the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona, they typically hike for long periods (sometimes 10 to 12 hours) under the cover of night. Some guides, however, prefer to hike during the day when summer temperatures can exceed 100°F. As one smuggler recounted during an interview: “We walk when it’s the hottest because we know the Border Patrol agents are in their trucks with the air conditioning on.” Insofar as *coyotes*, drug smugglers, and/or self-guided migrants re-use similar routes and landmarks to navigate this landscape, they inevitably make and re-make *migrant sites* as they build small shelters and consume, discard, or re-use artifacts—empty water bottles, food wrappers, worn-out clothing and backpacks, first aid supplies, and so forth.

Although the UMP recorded 189 migrant sites,² it was only possible to collect and/or inventory a systematic sample of artifacts for 80 sites. Existing discourse often works to homogenize migrant sites as “lay-ups” or “trash dumps” (see Sundberg 2008; Wilson 2013, Chapter 1), but we quickly noticed remarkable variability in the size, structure, and material assemblages of these sites. In order to define migrant site subtypes, we first looked at the ordinal measure of major artifact classes to distinguish among sites dominated by plastic bottles (rest sites), tin food cans (camp sites), and backpacks and

2. In previous publications we typically referred to all migrant sites as “migrant stations.”

| Artifact Class | Camp Sites | | Rest Sites | | Pickup Sites | |
|--------------------------|------------|----------|------------|---------|--------------|-----------|
| | n=38 | | n=15 | | n=23 | |
| | Mean % | Range % | Mean % | Range % | Mean % | Range % |
| Aid | 2.3 | 0–13.3 | 1.6 | 0–7.1 | 2.9 | 0–12.5 |
| Backpack | 1.6 | 0–11.3 | 0.7 | 0–4.4 | 16.4 | 0–40.1 |
| Beverage | 22.1 | 0–55.6 | 49.1 | 0–88.0 | 18.1 | 0–59.5 |
| <i>Electrolyte</i> | 6.0 | 0–17.7 | 11.6 | 0–23.8 | 4.7 | 0–27.3 |
| <i>Energy drink</i> | 2.3 | 0–10.1 | 9.7 | 0–28.0 | 0.8 | 0–9.1 |
| <i>Juice</i> | 2.1 | 0–16.5 | 2.6 | 0–10.0 | 0.4 | 0–3.2 |
| <i>Soft drink</i> | 2.5 | 0–16.7 | 1.3 | 0–8.2 | 1.4 | 0–9.1 |
| <i>Water</i> | 7.4 | 0–27.3 | 20.7 | 0–55.6 | 8.4 | 0–53.9 |
| <i>Unknown bottle</i> | 0.8 | 0–9.1 | 2.3 | 0–28.6 | 2.3 | 0–36.4 |
| <i>Other</i> | 1.0 | 0–8.5 | 1.0 | 0–10.0 | 0.2 | 0–1.7 |
| Border Patrol | 0 | 0–0.1 | 0.0 | — | 0.1 | 0–1.3 |
| Clothing | 12.8 | 0–40.0 | 10.2 | 0–34.8 | 28.3 | 11.4–50.0 |
| <i>Pants</i> | 0.9 | 0–4.0 | 1.0 | 0–7.9 | 3.0 | 0–10.0 |
| <i>Shirt</i> | 0.9 | 0–3.8 | 1.7 | 0–10.0 | 4.2 | 0–18.2 |
| <i>Sweater / Jacket</i> | 1.5 | 0–13.6 | 0.8 | 0–7.7 | 2.7 | 0–14.3 |
| <i>Underwear (F)</i> | 0.2 | 0–1.3 | 0.3 | 0–4.0 | 2.1 | 0–12.5 |
| <i>Underwear (M)</i> | 0.3 | 0–1.7 | 0.2 | 0–2.0 | 1.8 | 0–9.1 |
| <i>Sock</i> | 6.6 | 0–20.0 | 2.5 | 0–20.0 | 4.6 | 0–11.4 |
| <i>Footwear</i> | 1.4 | 0–26.7 | 2.3 | 0–15.4 | 3.2 | 0–15.0 |
| <i>Other</i> | 1.0 | 0–16.7 | 1.5 | 0–10.0 | 6.7 | 0–45.5 |
| Cosmetic | 0.1 | 0–1.5 | 0.7 | 0–9.5 | 1.2 | 0–5.7 |
| Electronic | 0.1 | 0–0.6 | 0 | 0–0.5 | 0.6 | 0–3.9 |
| Food | 47.2 | 5.3–94.4 | 17.2 | 0–40.4 | 12.5 | 0–53.2 |
| <i>Bread / Tortilla</i> | 0.4 | 0–6.0 | 0.2 | 0–1.9 | 0.3 | 0–5.1 |
| <i>Condiment</i> | 0.6 | 0–3.6 | 0.7 | 0–9.1 | 0.6 | 0–3.8 |
| <i>Fruit / Vegetable</i> | 1.3 | 0–10.0 | 0 | 0–0.7 | 0.4 | 0–5.7 |
| <i>Protein</i> | 13.8 | 0–50.0 | 3.6 | 0–11.6 | 2.7 | 0–20.0 |
| <i>Snack / Candy</i> | 6.7 | 0–29.2 | 2.8 | 0–17.4 | 3.8 | 0–29.1 |
| <i>Unknown can</i> | 24.5 | 0–94.4 | 9.8 | 0–34.6 | 4.7 | 0–33.3 |
| <i>Other</i> | 0.1 | 0–1.0 | 0.1 | 0–1.4 | 0 | 0–1.6 |
| Humanitarian | 1.8 | 0–21.1 | 9.2 | 0–73.1 | 0.2 | 0–4.4 |
| Hygiene | 2.1 | 0–18.2 | 1.0 | 0–7.5 | 9.6 | 0–37.5 |
| Narcotic | 0.5 | 0–7.1 | 0.2 | 0–2.6 | 0 | — |
| Personal | 0.1 | 0–2.3 | 0.9 | 0–13.9 | 3.5 | 0–45.5 |
| Recreation | 0.5 | 0–6.0 | 0.5 | 0–3.9 | 0.2 | 0–1.6 |
| Religious | 0 | 0–0.5 | 0 | 0–0.7 | 0.2 | 0–3.1 |
| Utility | 2.9 | 0–12.5 | 8.4 | 0–36.4 | 5.9 | 0–20.0 |

TABLE 4. Summary of artifact class proportions by migrant site subtype; highlighted proportions differ significantly ($p = 0.05$) from those for other subtypes according to a Wilcoxon nonparametric pairwise comparison.



FIGURE 2. A migrant camp site in the Tumacacori Mountains (Photograph by M. Wells).

clothing (pickup sites). Following the reclassification of some sites to conform to the results of discriminant analysis, we found that the proportions of these artifact classes, and several of their subclasses, differed significantly among the site subtypes (Table 4).

Camp sites (n=81) featured high proportions (47.2%) of cans and packaging from protein-rich foods (e.g. tuna, sardines, beans), fruits and vegetables (e.g. peaches, chiles), and snack and instant foods (Figure 2). Beverage containers such as plastic bottles and aluminum cans were also present in significant numbers (22.1%). Backpacks (1.6%) and clothes (12.8%), particularly socks (6.6%), appeared in more modest frequencies. Although 42 of the camp sites received medium-high to high noontime shade cover, twelve sites further included one or more small shelters whose construction was described during an interview with a *coyote*: “I find a big rock or tree that is far away from any path...we only build in the mountains or in washes. Never when it’s flat... It’s easy. Just to sleep. I stay maybe one hour, maybe three.” Altogether, these data show that border crossers consider protection from the sun and aerial surveillance as they set up camp sites for resting/sleeping, eating meals, and perhaps changing socks and administering first aid (Grabowska, forthcoming).

Rest sites (n=36) included artifact scatters with a large proportion (49.1%) of beverage containers, particularly electrolyte (e.g. Gatorade, Electrolit) bottles, energy drink (e.g. Red Bull) cans, and water bottles of various sizes (Figure 3). High numbers of humanitarian water jugs at two of these sites (JUR-02, NT) led a discriminant analysis to misclassify them (see above), but their secluded settings and strong association with imported bottles suggests that people moved humanitarian supplies to these sites for more covert consumption. Interestingly, only 17 of the rest sites had medium-high to high noontime shade cover, suggesting nighttime use, and they frequently appeared



FIGURE 3. A migrant camp site in the Tumacacori Mountains (Photograph by M. Wells).

on saddles and passes where border crossers stop briefly, yet repeatedly, to drink and discard empty bottles after a long climb or extensive hike.

*Pickup sites*³ (n=48) contained high proportions of backpacks (16.4%) and clothes (28.3%), as well as fairly large and diverse assemblages of hygiene (9.6%), cosmetic (1.2%), electronic (0.6%), and personal (3.5%) items (Figure 4). Although only 13 of the pickup sites received medium-high to high noontime shade cover, this could reflect their proximity to trails and roadways in the rolling plains north of the Tumacacori Mountains (Figure 1); in fact, nine of them had small shelters to provide some protection from the sun and aerial surveillance. Beyond their settings, the diverse array of artifacts at these sites suggests they were rendezvous points where migrants cleaned up their appearance, abandoned incriminating material culture (e.g. black t-shirts, backpacks), and loaded into vehicles for transportation out of the borderlands.

Although most migrant sites could be confidently classified as one of these subtypes, an additional 17 sites were unclassifiable, and several others were somewhat unique. Two *border staging areas*, for example, lay on or just over the international boundary in Mexico. These sites had fire rings, religious shrines, and an assortment of used clothes and consumables indicating that migrants, smugglers, and drug mules camp for several hours to several days while waiting for the right time to cross into the US. One site encountered (and quickly departed) in the Altar Valley was a *narco-trafficking site* with several bales of marijuana wrapped in burlap bags and smugglers no doubt hiding nearby. Although we occasionally found empty burlap sacks at migrant sites, evidence for drug trafficking was relatively rare, and, contrary to assertions by some

3. Some migrants refer to these sites as “*levantons*,” which in Spanish may also connote abduction by a smuggler.



FIGURE 4. A migrant pickup site in the Las Guijas Mountains (Photograph by M. Wells).

anti-immigration commentators (Banks 2009), we never found any weapons associated with smugglers or terrorists in the desert. Lastly, four *apprehension sites* included backpacks filled with food, water, and clothes—consistent with migrant reports of Border Patrol agents forcing them to abandon all of their possessions upon apprehension, even when their backpacks contained identification, medication, or food.

For many people, the number of migrant sites in the Sonoran Desert, combined with the sheer amount of material culture they represent (Table 1), makes them emblematic of the problem and/or plight of undocumented migrants. We have already discussed how the popular classification of such sites as “dumps” works to perpetuate a derogatory view of migrants as unclean or uncivilized, despite the fact that many objects were never meant to be left behind (Sundberg 2008), but other terms also carry ontological baggage. Border Patrol agents and anti-immigrant activists often refer to migrant sites as “lay-ups,” thereby conjuring an image of criminals lying low to avoid facing the justice of law enforcement. As with artifacts, we propose that speaking about migrant “sites” in archaeological terms and exposing the diversity of these locales constitutes a form of praxis by calling attention to the historical significance, material and spatial strategies, and diverse experiences, whether suffering, fear, camaraderie, or loss, produced within them.

Shrines

Shrines included features and artifacts, often with Roman Catholic iconography, documenting religious practices such as commemorating deceased migrants, burning votive candles, and placing devotional objects (Figure 5). In the course of reconnaissance and systematic survey, the UMP recorded, but did not remove any materials from,



FIGURE 5. An alcove shrine near Lake Arivaca (Photograph by M. Wells).

eight independent shrines sites and three shrine features set within migrant camp sites (Table 1). We classified these 11 shrines into three subtypes on the basis of their setting, relative formality, and artifact diversity (Table 5). In addition to those shrines made and maintained by undocumented border crossers, a fourth type, which we discuss below, includes memorials erected at sites of death.

Alcove shrines (n=3), such as the one shown in Figure 5, were formal spaces set within natural or hand-carved alcoves and centered on one or more devotional objects such as a crucifix, an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe or Santa Muerte, or a portrait of Santo Toribio Romo (a patron saint of migrants from Mexico). The careful placement of candles, prayer cards, rosaries, scapulae, personal mementos, coins, and other small offerings next to these devotional objects attests to the long-term use and maintenance of these shrines by migrants and smugglers as they pray to God or petition saints for safe passage through the desert. In addition, local humanitarian groups often help to modify and maintain these sites by leaving water, food, and candles nearby. Importantly, the setting of these shrines within alcoves allows for the sanctification of a discrete space resembling the bye-altars tucked into the bays of large Catholic churches. Practically

speaking, the seclusion of these shrines also provides shade and cover from border surveillance—a vital consideration when lighting votive candles.

Altar shrines (n=4) lacked *central* devotional objects, but included glass candles, prayer cards, and offerings placed on stone cairns. Some of these candles may be carried by migrants, but many were probably supplied by humanitarian groups. Since altar shrines occupy much more open spaces than alcove shrines, the performance of religious rituals may take on a greater role in the sanctification of these places than their natural setting (Hagan 2008, 117). In this regard, altar shrines may bear a greater resemblance to the small shrines found in many Latino households where religious practices sanctify a place (Turner 1982), than to bye-altars where a religious place sanctifies the practice. In fact, two of the altar shrines documented by the UMP lay within migrant camp sites (CTS, FSS) where people otherwise undertook “domestic” activities such as sleeping, eating, and changing clothes.

Iconographic shrines (n=4) were relatively informal spaces centered on a religious icon—a cross painted on a boulder, a crucifix mounted in a tree, or even a t-shirt depicting Jesus Christ propped up on some branches. Since these shrines had no artifacts attesting to long-term religious activity, they likely represent spontaneous acts of prayer or commemoration. Although one iconographic shrine lay within a migrant camp site (JUR-01), the remaining three were relatively isolated events near well-established trails.

In contrast to many other types of sites found within the US–Mexico borderlands, shrines do not figure negatively within political discourse about undocumented migration. Given their similarity to household religious shrines found in Mexico, the presence of Christian iconography may make them less likely to be viewed as piles of “trash” to be cleaned up by US citizens living in the borderlands (although see negative online responses to Trevizo 2013). Furthermore, the careful placement of objects and ongoing maintenance of shrines makes them more likely to last as monuments to twenty-first century migration.

Migrant death sites

The strategies employed by migrants never completely eliminate the risk of apprehension or death. The two to four gallons of water carried by the average migrant, for example, are simply insufficient for several days of hiking in the Sonoran Desert (De León 2012, 485–486). Not surprisingly, the most common causes of migrant death in southern Arizona are heat-related illnesses such as dehydration and hyperthermia (Anderson 2008), particularly during the summer months when daytime temperatures routinely exceed 100°F. While the actual number of migrants who die attempting to cross the Tucson Sector is unknown, it is no doubt greater than the average 206 bodies actually found each year from 2000 to 2012 (Beck *et al.*, forthcoming). These *migrant death sites* vary from fleshed individuals and their personal belongings to scatters of skeletonized remains (Figure 6), all depending on the time elapsed since death and the vagaries of postmortem processes.

Whatever the case, the collection of human remains and artifacts, a necessary step in identifying and repatriating an individual (Anderson 2008), ultimately works alongside taphonomic processes to scrub material evidence of death from the landscape (see

| Religious Artifacts | Alcove Shrines | | | | Altar Shrines | | | |
|------------------------|----------------|-------|-----|-------|---------------|-------|-----|-------|
| | BMS | | BTS | | HMS | | TCS | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Candle | 124 | 70.5 | 8 | 10.7 | 2 | 28.6 | 32 | 97.0 |
| <i>Generic Candle</i> | 36 | 20.5 | 1 | 1.3 | 0 | — | 32 | 97.0 |
| <i>Votive Candle</i> | 88 | 50.0 | 7 | 9.3 | 2 | 28.6 | 0 | — |
| Devotional Object | 26 | 14.8 | 51 | 68.0 | 4 | 57.1 | 1 | 3.0 |
| <i>Cross/Crucifix</i> | 0 | — | 7 | 9.3 | 1 | 14.3 | 0 | — |
| <i>Figurine</i> | 2 | 1.1 | 0 | — | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| <i>Picture</i> | 3 | 1.7 | 4 | 5.3 | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| <i>Rosary/Necklace</i> | 21 | 11.9 | 25 | 33.3 | 3 | 42.9 | 1 | 3.0 |
| <i>Scapular</i> | 0 | — | 15 | 20.0 | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| Text | 26 | 14.8 | 16 | 21.3 | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| <i>Bible</i> | 2 | 1.1 | 0 | — | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| <i>Prayer Book</i> | 0 | — | 3 | 4.0 | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| <i>Prayer Card</i> | 24 | 13.6 | 13 | 17.3 | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| Wooden Frame | 0 | — | 0 | — | 1 | 14.3 | 0 | — |
| Total | 176 | 100.0 | 75 | 100.0 | 7 | 100.0 | 33 | 100.0 |

TABLE 5. Summary of religious artifacts for sampled shrine sites BMS, BTS, HMS, and TCS.

discussion in Beck *et al.*, forthcoming). A systematic re-survey of four recent migrant death sites by the UMP, for example, found no artifacts or other traces of the deceased individuals (Table 2). The vast majority of migrant death sites will only be remembered as a pair of geographic coordinates whose precision ranges from five meters to five miles, although small shrines, such as the one built by the UMP for a woman discovered during survey in 2012, occasionally arise to commemorate the dead.

Migrant death sites, usually referred to as “recovered human remains” by first responders and forensic scientists (Dupras *et al.* 2011), figure prominently in discourse surrounding undocumented migration and border enforcement policy. The quantity and types of migrant deaths in southern Arizona have been cited as: a logistical problem for the county coroners and local agencies obligated to process unidentified bodies (Anderson 2008); a massive humanitarian crisis (Androff and Tavassoli 2012); and evidence that US border policies are killing migrants (Cornelius 2001), or creating the intended deterrent to unauthorized border crossing (Whitaker 2009, 366–367). We would, however, suggest that referring to migrant death sites as “human remains” may work to sanitize precisely the sorts of necro-political and structural violence that a dead body in the desert should be calling attention to.



FIGURE 6. Skeletonized human remains and worn-out shoes in Nogales–Sasabe corridor (Photograph by the UMP).

Humanitarian sites

In response to the surging number of migrant deaths across southern Arizona during the early 2000s, a number of humanitarian, social justice, and environmental organizations began to actively seek out and offer first aid and supplies to those in need of help (Cook 2011). One common strategy involves establishing “water drops”—caches of water, juice, refried beans, fruit snacks, and socks—along active migrant trails. Another strategy, pioneered by the group Humane Borders, involves building permanent water tanks in the desert and placing maps to their locations at migrant shelters across northern Mexico. The effectiveness of these strategies is difficult to measure since many migrants perceive them as traps laid out by the US Border Patrol, yet they may be a last resort for someone verging on fatal dehydration.

Although the UMP did not visit any of the 22 *water tank sites* maintained by Humane Borders in the Nogales–Sasabe corridor (Figure 1), we did document 23 humanitarian *water drop sites* in the course of systematic survey and guided reconnaissance (sometimes with members of humanitarian groups). As illustrated in Figure 7, these sites were defined by the presence of square gallon water jugs, often with hand-written motivational messages in Spanish, as well as cans of refried beans, Ziploc-bag snack packs, and socks (Drummond and De León 2013). While the presence of half-empty and empty water jugs suggests that migrants do frequent these water drops, at least two sites had jugs marked with military-style boot prints or punctured by a knife—damage presumably representing vandalism by Border Patrol agents or others hostile to migrants (see



FIGURE 7. A humanitarian water drop site in the Tumacacori Mountains (Photograph by the UMP).

Lemons 2013). In fact, the number of humanitarian aid supplies discarded outside of water drop sites (Table 3) suggests that people remain wary of surveillance or harassment. Rather than stop for rest at these sites, migrants appear to quickly replenish their water supply and grab snacks for consumption along the trail or at small migrant sites some safe distance away.

Since the people who maintain humanitarian sites are primarily US citizens, associated discourse tends to focus on matters of legality—whether the sites are lawful aid, unlawful litter, or outright acts of sedition. For humanitarian groups in need of volunteers and funding, the sites provide concrete examples of aid in a landscape where measuring the overall effectiveness of relief efforts are otherwise impossible. For government agencies, such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service, these sites may constitute an act of littering, and in fact several humanitarians were prosecuted for leaving water jugs on the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (Figure 1) in the late 2000s (Cook 2011). Although an appeals court ultimately found in favor of the volunteers, the presence of humanitarian aid sites across southern Arizona continues to be a point of contention for anti-immigrant commentators who claim water jugs and tanks encourage the “invasion” of the United States by undocumented migrants and therefore comprise an act of treason (Whitaker 2009, 367). Although ethnographic evidence suggests that humanitarian sites do not actually influence migrants’ spatial strategies (Whitaker 2009, 368), this strand of discourse may play into the vandalism of water jugs as described above.

Border Patrol sites

As the agency charged with stopping illegal entries into the United States, the US Border Patrol employs more than 20,000 people and operates a fleet of 4x4 vehicles,

unmanned Predator drones, and other military-grade equipment for surveillance and combat (Rosenblum 2012). Following the passing of the Secure Fence Act in 2006, the Border Patrol now has unprecedented authority to override other federal laws protecting the environment, archaeological sites, private property, and privacy in pursuit of unauthorized border crossers within 100 miles (160 km) of any international border (Maril 2011). Suffice it to say that the Border Patrol now has the technological and legal capacity to execute their own complex spatial strategies for apprehending migrants and/or dispersing them into places where the Sonoran Desert can exact its toll.

The *Border Patrol sites* observed by the UMP ranged from permanent infrastructure to roadside turn-offs. Although we avoided *infrastructural sites* during survey (Figure 1), these included stations at official ports-of-entry in Nogales and Sasabe (Figure 8), as well as pedestrian border fences stretching east and west from these ports. Responding to political discourse about globalization and migration, as well as spatial strategies of border enforcement, the border fence in Nogales has evolved over the past two decades from a veritable “picket fence” to a fortification of steel bars that stop the movement of migrants, even as they provide an enticing view of life in the United States (McGuire 2013). Other infrastructural sites commonly encountered in the Nogales–Sasabe corridor are two tactical checkpoints on Arivaca Road and Sasabe Highway and a permanent checkpoint on I-19. At these checkpoints Border Patrol agents stop to interrogate all northbound traffic along the three paved roads out of the study area, effectively creating a “second border” some 30–50 kilometers north of the actual US–Mexico geopolitical boundary. These checkpoints are well-known to migrants and smugglers and they serve as boundary markers signaling how far someone must walk before they can be safely picked up in a vehicle. In addition, at least 30 surveillance and relay towers further form a “virtual fence” through this area.



FIGURE 8. A border surveillance “virtual fence” tower near Arivaca, Arizona (Photograph by M. Wells).



FIGURE 9. A Border Patrol turn-off site on Arivaca Road showing artifacts collected from the surface (Photograph by the UMP).

As illustrated in Figure 9, roadside *turn-off sites* ($n=10$) represent places where Border Patrol agents temporarily park their vehicles while waiting for, pursuing, or detaining unauthorized border crossers (Schubert *et al.* 2013). The UMP recorded three turn-off sites along Arivaca Road and an additional seven turn-off sites on unpaved roads through the Coronado National Forest and other public lands. Alongside their conspicuous placement directly beside roads, these sites yielded a number of artifacts associated with border policing and recreational activities (Table 3): temporary hand restraints for arresting migrants; drag tires for sweeping roads and identifying subsequent vehicle tracks; walkie talkie fragments; and even bullet casings.

As visible landmarks paid for by American tax dollars, infrastructural sites regularly play into discourse surrounding US border policy. Arguing for greater infrastructural development, grassroots organizations and elected officials who support heavy border enforcement, for example, point out that investments in border fencing and surveillance towers during the late 2000s correspond with a decrease in apprehension statistics, and perhaps overall levels of immigration (see discussion in Andreas 2009, 85–112). Opponents, however, point to the exorbitant costs, overall ineffectiveness of surveillance technologies in so vast a landscape, violation of citizens' rights to privacy, and the environmental impact on fragile desert ecosystems (Meierotto 2012). Whatever the case, the intended durability of these sites makes them likely to persist as monuments to twenty-first century border enforcement.

Despite their relative unobtrusiveness, roadside turn-offs may play into perceptions that the Sonoran Desert is nothing more than a “battlefield” for the Border Patrol (Sundberg and Kaserman 2007). In some cases, these sites trample plant and animal communities

in federal lands ostensibly protected by law from such uses. Since the locations of turn-off sites change over time, they may contribute to local citizens' sense of being monitored. At the very least, we propose that defining these informal turn-offs as archaeological sites can help us to critically examine the ways in which space becomes enrolled into strategies of border enforcement and the subjugation of migrants to the power of the state.

Sexual assault sites

As they fall prey to drug cartels, human smugglers, Mexican police, the US Border Patrol, and American vigilante groups, migrants find themselves exposed to various forms of violence that translate into horrific acts of robbery, beating, kidnapping, psychological abuse, and rape (e.g. Doty 2011; Falcón 2001; Slack and Whiteford 2011). In this latter regard, sites called "rape trees" have become objects of public discourse about the vulnerability of women, and the base nature of smugglers and Latino men (see Wilson 2013, 66–95). Although journalistic reports of such trees hung with "trophies" of female undergarments are rare (Tietz 2012), they have become a lightning rod for anti-immigrant activists (e.g. Kirby 2007; Stix 2010) who appropriate the suffering of undocumented Latina women as a way to justify the need for more enforcement measures while simultaneously masking the racism that tends to be implicit in many of these movements.

Moreover, the inferential claim that female undergarments in trees represent sexual assault is dubious. In 2013, UMP researchers showed photographs of supposed "rape trees" to 40 migrants (men and women) in Nogales, Mexico. Only one person, an 18-year old male, identified the images as sites of sexual assault, stating with confidence: "Those are where women are raped." Follow-up questions about this conclusion, however, revealed that he had never personally seen such a site: "I saw it on a video that they showed us in [federal immigration] detention" (see discussion in Grabowska *et al.* forthcoming). Unfortunately, some well-intentioned, but misguided, social scientists and people sympathetic to migrants have uncritically begun to use the term "rape tree" in much the same way as anti-immigrant activists (e.g. Rosario 2009).

The UMP did not identify any "rape trees" or unequivocal evidence of sexual assault during reconnaissance and survey. We did, however, record female undergarments at 41 migrant sites (Table 4), three isolates, and two Border Patrol roadside turn-off sites, so further analysis could reveal whether these were discarded during routine changes of clothing or torn off during violent acts of assault (see Daly *et al.* 2009). At the moment, the former interpretation seems warranted for many pickup sites where female undergarments lie next to backpacks, personal hygiene items, and food wrappers.

It is not our intention, however, to downplay sexual assault in this context. During interviews and participant-observation with migrants in Nogales, De León (2013a, 18) found that many people had witnessed sexual attacks and some women had injuries suggesting assault: swollen and bruised faces; bruises on arms and wrists; trauma that rendered some women virtually catatonic. According to Ruiz Marrujo (2009, 31), some 80–90% of the women who attempt to cross undocumented into the United States through northern Mexico suffer sexual violence. While this issue still remains difficult to access ethnographically, we hope that an archaeology of undocumented migration, by working to correctly identify sites of sexual assault, can offer substance



FIGURE 10. A migrant trail through the Sierrita Mountains (Photograph by M. Wells).

to ongoing debates about immigration and, more importantly, call further attention to the pervasiveness of rape.

Roads and trails

Numerous paved and unpaved roads, including hundreds not illustrated in Figure 1, transect the Nogales–Sasabe corridor where, alongside hiking and horse trails, they aid and/or impede the movement of hikers, forest service personnel, Border Patrol

agents, human smugglers, drug traffickers, humanitarians, environmental activists, and anthropologists, among others. For example, Border Patrol agents use formal roads to monitor the borderlands in sport utility vehicles, while humanitarians use them to access areas for supply drops or search and rescue operations. Although migrants generally avoid roads en route across the desert, human smugglers ultimately depend on them to transport people out of the borderlands, perhaps explaining the proximity of migrant pickup sites to dirt roads.

Pedestrian routes through the Sonoran Desert include established and informal trails. Although ethnographic interviews suggest that people often avoid the former, the significant number of isolates ($n=39$) observed on informal trails suggest that migrants through the Nogales–Sasabe corridor do, in fact, use them, particularly as they traverse the rugged Tumacacori Mountains. Following trampled foliage and solitary artifacts, it was sometimes possible to discern informal trails through seasonal washes and along ridges (Figure 10). One of the six informal migrant trails sampled by the UMP (Table 2) yielded a high proportion of humanitarian artifacts (29.0%), but for the most part artifacts included beverage containers (31.6%), food packaging (29.6%), and clothing (23.4%); cosmetics, religious objects, and personal effects were entirely absent. Insofar as these artifact distributions resemble those of camp sites and rest sites, they point to practices of food and beverage consumption en route, as well as secondary deposition from migrant sites, particularly in washes.

Conclusion: Site classification as praxis in the US–Mexico borderlands

Archaeologists everywhere employ classification to highlight specific material and spatial patterns in the archaeological record (Adams and Adams 1991; Chippindale 2000). The classes, types, and taxa resulting from this methodological exercise provide a basis for interpreting the diverse human and material agencies responsible for their production, consumption, and destruction. In this paper we have attempted to demonstrate that a dialectical approach to classification also plays an important role in archaeological praxis—the process through which we as archaeologists create knowledge, critique, and take action in the world (McGuire 2008). This perspective has underlain our own self-reflexive approach to classifying contemporary archaeology sites in the Sonoran Desert as we think ahead both to the ways in which site types frame our understanding of the experiences of migrants, but also the ways in which these classifications intersect with broader discursive fields.

Foremost, our classification of sites in the US–Mexico borderlands allows us to create new knowledge about clandestine processes of migration across this physical and political landscape. By highlighting material and spatial relationships within the sites variously assembled by undocumented migrants, drug smugglers, Border Patrol agents, humanitarians, and activists, our classification provides a basis for examining the behaviors, strategies, and experiences of these various actors. For example, the artifact assemblages found to characterize camp sites, rest sites, pickup sites, and shrines reveal the dynamic strategies employed by migrants to survive and evade surveillance as they cross the desert. Shelters, graffiti, and patterns of discard at some of these sites further allude to embodied habits and subjective experiences of place-making.

Meanwhile, humanitarian supply drops, which may reduce migrants' risk of death, but increase their risk of apprehension, document the nuanced strategies of interaction between activists and migrants, as well as the Border Patrol agents and anti-immigrant activists who vandalize water jugs left at these sites.

Although our classification relies upon patterns in contemporary archaeological data, the emic perspectives of migrants have been crucial to our interpretations. During hundreds of interviews conducted since 2009, migrants have helped us to understand how they use specific objects and sites and how they experience the Sonoran Desert. For a number of reasons, however, many migrants have not seen the range of desert terrain and site types documented by the UMP: they may not have come through the Nogales–Sasabe corridor; they may have only crossed once or twice; they may have been apprehended early in their journey; and they may have been too focused on hiding from law enforcement and trying not to die. As a result, our classification does not always mesh well with migrant perceptions of the desert, but rather provides an important complement to ethnographic narratives. It also contributes to a broader perspective on undocumented migration as a dynamic *process* composed of many individual events and experiences. Without the ethnographic insight of undocumented border crossers, our definition of site types would be nothing but a voyeuristic attempt to reduce traumatic human experiences into water bottle counts and spatial statistics.

We hope that our classification of contemporary archaeological sites contributes to praxis insofar as naming sites can help to situate them as objects within political discourse about undocumented migration. By casting border crosser, Border Patrol, and humanitarian “sites” in archaeological terms, we move to emphasize the historical value of such places as monuments to twenty-first century migration. Furthermore, the diverse locations, structures, and contents of migrant sites show that they are more than “trash heaps” made by “dirty” migrants or “lay-ups” where criminals hide, but rather different parts of a complex border-crossing process. Similarly, we propose that the term migrant “death site,” as opposed to “recovered human remains,” can help to draw attention to the numerous forms of physical, structural, and necro-political violence that intersect in the event of someone’s death, rather than simply the recovery of their body. We also suggest that naming Border Patrol turn-offs and apprehension sites can help call attention to the ways in which federal agents harm the environment and violate the rights of migrants.

Finally, we believe that our classification contributes to a highly politicized and poorly understood meta-historic record of undocumented migration that has been steadily erased by desert conservation projects since the early 2000s (De León Gokee and Forringer-Beal forthcoming). These environmental “clean up” efforts, alongside a current shift in migration patterns towards Texas (Associated Press 2013), mean that the archaeological record of this process in the Sonoran Desert will soon be gone. Ideally, the documentation and definition of diverse site types both preserves some of this record and further enables the comparison of strategies and experiences through time and across space, especially with migrant sites found elsewhere along the US–Mexico border.

Classification is not an objective interpretation of patterns within archaeological data, but rather a dialectical process through which one identifies relationships relevant to the questions at hand and engages with existing fields of discourse. This rings especially

true for the archaeology of contemporary migration across the US–Mexico borderlands where space and materiality intersect with political discourse about issues of migration, legality, citizenship, violence, cultural patrimony, and environmental protection. We suggest that archaeologists working on all times and places must, whether they like it or not, contend with classification as an indelible form of praxis.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Rodney Harrison and the editorial board at the *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* for encouraging us to write this paper. We also wish to thank Haeden Stewart, Sam Grabowska, Magda Mankel, Randy McGuire, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful and constructive comments on drafts of this manuscript; any omissions or errors are solely the fault of the authors. The research presented in this paper was funded by the National Science Foundation (award #0939554), the University of Washington's Royalty Research Fund, the University of Michigan, and the Institute for Field Research. We would like to thank all of the students who participated in UMP fieldwork between 2009 and 2013 and Mike Wells for sharing several of the images used in this article. We thank Bob Kee, Kathryn Ferguson, and the Tucson Samaritans for all of their insight into the humanitarian efforts in the desert. We would like to thank the folks of Arivaca who have supported our archaeological work over the years including (but not limited to) Fern Robinson, Penny and Steve Shepard, Maggie and Rich Milinovitch, Shaun Quintero, Shawn Rojas, Vanessa Carpenter, La Gitana Cantina, Jill Farrell and the Arivaca Action Center, Danny McGuire, Ronnie, Kenny, Gary, and Octavio. We especially thank Drew Can Do for spiritual and automotive guidance. Finally, this work would not be possible without the trust of the hundreds of migrants that we have spoken to and worked with over the years. We thank them for sharing their powerful stories with us.

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