



Quitobaquito Pond and Springs

RESOURCE BRIEF

Importance

As a dependable source of water in an arid climate, the Quitobaquito springs provide a welcoming environment for a diverse variety of plants, birds, mammals, and aquatic species. They also have served as an important resource for humans for over 1,000 years. The Quitobaquito pond and springs are not only a harbor for endangered species such as the Quitobaquito pupfish but also retain the memory of human presence in the area in the artifacts scattered nearby, the traces of irrigation ditches, and the very form of the pond itself.

Desert Oasis

When people first began to obtain water at Quitobaquito, the springs were undeveloped seeps, oozing from muddy ground. Many prehistoric groups probably made use of the springs, including the Hohokam, who developed large-scale irrigation works and settlements in the larger region. The first culture to make extended use of the springs and develop sedentary villages nearby was the Tohono O'odham and the Hia Ced O'odham, both part of the Pima Indian culture.

The arrival of the Spanish in the Southwest in the 1600s introduced impacts from domestic livestock grazing to the environment around Quitobaquito. The Jesuit missionary Fray Eusebio Kino traveled to the area in 1698 and left the first written description of the springs. Kino traveled with numerous horses and mules that grazed at the springs, and Kino also oversaw the establishment of a mission nearby, which kept a herd of cattle.

Grazing intensified once the area became a United States territory in 1854. American emigrants moving west, accompanied by their livestock, often stopped at the springs. In 1863 A. N. Dorsey, the first Anglo settler to build by Quitobaquito, joined the Indian community still living there and opened a store. Dorsey dug a pond at the springs and installed a dam and irrigation ditches, perhaps adding on to features already present. Settlers continued to use the pond and ditches after Dorsey left. Grazing remained an important influence on the vegetation in the area as well. Many settlers kept livestock, and in 1919 Robert Louis Gray, Sr. established a large ranch, covering all the land that became Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Grazing continued at Quitobaquito until around 1962, although trespass cattle remain a problem.



O.L.O.H.D. S&H

Quitobaquito Pond

In 1949 the U.S. Bureau of Animal Industry established a station at Quitobaquito to prevent cattle trespass from Mexico. Bureau employees constructed a new concrete dam across the spring. Quitobaquito was added to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in 1957. By that time, it had been almost one hundred years since Dorsey built the retaining berm, and with the removal of domestic livestock, which may have kept emergent plants under control, the pond began filling with sediment and bulrush. In 1962 the Park Service drained the pond, excavated it, and raised the height of the dam. Over the protests of some employees, the superintendent ordered all the historic structures around the pond razed.

In 2006 the water level of Quitobaquito pond once again dropped precipitously. After several unsuccessful attempts to reverse the trend, it was determined that a leak was probably occurring in the southeast corner of the pond by the retaining berm. Employees drained the pond in that area and widened the retaining berm. The effort has proven successful and about sixty-five percent of the 1962 depth and surface area has been restored as of 2010. Another limited renovation is planned for late 2010 in a remaining area of suspected leakage.

An important historical and biological resource, Quitobaquito pond and springs continue to provide a home to many species and human memories.

References

- Bennett, Peter S. and Michael R. Kunzmann. 1989. "A History of the Quitobaquito Resource Management Area, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Arizona." Tucson: Cooperative National Park Resources Studies Unit, University of Arizona. Technical Report No. 26.

