



A View From The Roof



Multiple Points Of View

Climb to the roof at Tuzigoot and explore the vista that surrounds you. What you see may depend on your perspective: a geologist notices the terrain shaped by powerful natural forces; a botanist might look for vegetation patterns in the distant hills. The view today is a strong link with the first residents of Tuzigoot, the people of the Sinagua culture. But like the land, perspectives and the view from Tuzigoot continue to change through time.

A family living here 1000 years ago might view this landscape as an area with limitless boundaries and resources, supplying all their needs. With water, fuel, and ample food harvested from native plants and animals, life was good for many generations.

View To The North

The Tuzigoot ruins are aligned on a limestone ridge that runs north-south. When standing on the roof, you are looking north if you are looking over the top of the museum. Looking this direction, you will see a series of other steep, highly eroded limestone ridges. These are the remnants of sediment deposited when the Verde Valley was an ancient lake. Old lacustrine limestone in the higher elevations was dissolved and transported into the lake where it precipitated out of solution as freshwater limestone.

The northern ridge defines part of the old oxbow of the Verde River before the river ran south of the ruins prior to human occupation. This ridge shows layering limestone and sparse vegetation including juniper and other desert plants.

At the base of the ridge, a series of small springs presently produces between 1.2 and 1.6 cubic feet per second of water, feeding the basin east of the ruins.

View From The North To The East

This view includes the ridge which continues to wrap around the basin referred to as Tavasci Marsh. Today the vegetation of this basin varies considerably depending on the available surface water. As you scan the east basin from north to south you will see different vegetation patterns starting with grasses which give way to open water surrounded by cattail, sedges, and other water-loving species. As you move south along the watercourse the vegetation changes to a few scattered cottonwood trees. Some of the cottonwoods died in the marsh when the Verde River flooded their roots for an extended period of time. Near the river there is a drier area where the cottonwoods still grow. On either side of this wetter area you will see dense growths of mesquite and catclaw.

The east basin was the river bed prior to the

change in its course and likely resembled the riparian system along the present waterway. It is possible that the vegetation of the east basin looked much like it does today prior to the arrival of agriculturalists into the Verde Valley.

The Sinagua people cleared and farmed this rich bottomland extensively, growing corn, beans, squash, and cotton. After their departure, the area presumably reverted back to its natural state.

From the late 19th century, the area was again cleared and farmed until around 1990. Once farming activities ceased, invasive plants (native and exotic) began spreading through and changing the marsh area. The cattails that you can see resulted from artificially flattened pasture land and stable water levels.

View To The South

Before you is the entire expanse of the Verde Valley with the Verde River crossing the end of the ruins turning abruptly south and meandering into the distance.

Try to imagine experiencing this vista prior to the mid-1800s. The valley was a broad riparian oasis with marshes and a large variety of deciduous trees, bordered by native desert vegetation which filled the space between the riparian area and the higher terrain forming the valley.

Sixty percent of all species in the valley are dependent on the riparian areas. The abundance of plant and animal species would have been considerably different when the

Sinagua occupied the area compared to today. The last century and a half of development in the valley has taken a serious toll on our streamside habitat.

The dominant species of the riparian ecosystem are deciduous trees such as cottonwood, ash, walnut, sycamore, willow, alder and many lower story shrubs and herbaceous plants. These trees provide important habitat for many wildlife species. Throughout the three centuries of Sinaguan occupation, the climate went through cyclical phases of dry and warm to cool and wet. This natural cycle of change would have altered the size and density of this ecosystem.

View To The West

A large part of what you see has been altered in the last century by mining and processing of rich metal ores in the distant Black Hills as well as by modern human habitation.

Individual communities such as Jerome on the slope of the mountains, Clarkdale with its cement plant and old smelter buildings, and Cottonwood stretch down the valley. In addition, you can see the black slag pile by the river and the flat expanse across from the ruins, where the tailings from the smelter operations were deposited. This area was covered in 2007 with a few feet of soil and seeded with native vegetation. Given time, this

area should resemble the land adjacent to it on the north, which is covered mostly with mesquite and creosote bush.

In the distant past, much of this land was possibly covered with irrigation ditches and stone grid or waffle gardens. Early archaeologists from the 1800's noted possible irrigation ditches in this area, now destroyed by modern development. In the distant hills there is more evidence of stone grid gardens; those gardens serve as evidence that the Sinagua harnessed the power of gravity to direct water to their fields.

The Panorama From The Top

Try to visualize this magnificent sight without any present-day human activity: the river with its rich riparian vegetation; the low hills closest to the ruins covered with mesquite and creosote bush; the sparsely vegetated foothills up to the dark forests of ponderosa pine and oak of the higher mountain range, known as the Black Hills.

Despite all the changes to the land in the past 1000 years, the view from the roof of Tuzigoot is still an inspiring one. Today it inspires one to think of what life must have been like when these ruins were home to a thriving Sinaguan village.