

Malcolm J. Rogers in the Mojave and Colorado Deserts

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Abstract

Malcolm J. Rogers ventured into the Colorado and Mojave deserts early in his career; one of his earliest publications focused on the Mojave River Sink region. The archaeological problems that he first posed concerning the relationships between archaeological cultures of inland areas and those of the Pacific Coast remain basically unanswered today. Rogers' methods of site recording indicate that he was an early proponent of "cultural landscapes," especially in the desert regions. This essay interprets what Rogers saw as the major differences in the archaeology of the two deserts.

Background

Malcolm J. Rogers was trained as a mining geologist and therefore knew his landscapes. Geologists love deserts because they are raw landscapes with little in the way of vegetation to cover their bare geological bones. Rogers certainly was a "landscape archaeologist" before this term became a popular one in archaeology. In California, Rogers ranged from the southern Great Basin to Baja California and from the Pacific Coast to the Colorado River. He saw his sites in terms of landforms and the traces that humans of the past left on these landforms. Some of his sites are huge, covering several square miles; some are small and confined. He looked at the way past peoples traveled, lived on the land, and were connected linguistically and by material culture with other peoples in other places.

Working in the 1920s and 1930s, Rogers oftentimes assigned single site numbers to very large areas; occasionally site numbers with an appended "A," "B," "C," and so forth were used to further define areas within what he saw as a larger landscape area—most

frequently using these subdivisions to indicate sites of different time frames (often based on his sense of landscape). Within his site areas there usually are many more "sites" as we define that term today using the Office of Historic Preservation criteria. For the entire Colorado Desert region, and sometimes beyond, Rogers named his sites using a "C" designation; for the Mojave Desert into the Great Basin, he used an "M" designation. He seems to have recorded more than 190 "C" site areas and 174 "M" site areas.

Although Rogers did not usually date his field notes and site records (Figure 1), some semblance of the chronology of his field work and field itineraries might be worked out from the sequence of his site designations in both deserts. I initially attempted to take the site designations as chronologically sequential and assumed that they were numbered in the order in which they were visited. However, this was not a valid assumption. Rogers obtained information from collectors and looters and assigned site numbers based on these reports before he actually visited an area. For example, based on a report from collectors, Rogers assigned M-142 to an area north of Victorville, but he apparently never visited the area (Rogers ca. 1920–1960). Rogers dated his field notes for only seven of his 174 or so Mojave Desert sites and for only 33 of his 184 Colorado Desert sites, and some of these dates represent multiple visits to the same 21 sites over many years. Had Rogers dated all his notes and site records, we would have a better idea of how his views and ideas developed and how his thinking changed as he gathered additional data.

Mojave SD-I

C-122 - ~~Colthic~~ Region

This number covers 9 sq. miles of territory in the Granite Wash area all of which is Colthic Culture. A strong Indian trail from the Narrows to the Harper's Well region crosses this site. This may account for the occasional shreds that are found in the area. This area includes at least 200 house sites. Counted 300 in a 2 hour walk. Some are grouped in units, occasionally with the walls merged. This area offers the greatest diversification in house form seen; besides the usual circular and oval types are many rectangular houses and some with small cache circles attached to the outer walls and even a few to the inner walls. A few off-center circles occur.

This is a good quartzite chipping industry about these mesa house sites which is probably in part Yuman. They used it for a quarry.

This area ^{also} includes the gravel mesas which flank the Barrel Springs Wash. On both the low terraces and the mesa back of wash are very ancient hearths scattered over considerable territory. Composed of groups of large boulders burnt red - No archaeological material of any nature associated with them. Only one was in the form of a circle 3 1/2 feet in diameter.

M-2

This site is principally on old dunes and involves 2 acres. Both Early + Middle period occupations present but most of it belongs to the Middle Period. Daubed-ware is strong here for the region. The cemetery lies east of the village in a crater and has been nearly destroyed by erosion. Sacrificed material, beads and charred bone is scattered all about. Very little was found in place here. Has been dug over some.

Crem 1 - Almost completely destroyed - pellets left only on two hummocks.

East ←

Cremation No. 1 - Contained one bone awl and carved clam shell beads of Corraline Culture. a few shreds were on the surface but the region is too disturbed to determine if pottery was sacrificed with this cremation. It was of the lentilsular, ungathered type. There are so many shreds on this site that it is probable that most of the cremations had pottery sacrifices. It is impossible to say how many cremations were originally made here but there must have been many and it was the largest cemetery of the region. The area involved covered a rectangle 85' X 40' - an unusual amount of broken and burnt shreds, beads, flint knives, metates and manos is washed about on this area.

Some material used here during early period. Tortoise, rabbit, and a little dog horn shells used during Middle Period.

Figure 1. (left) M. J. Rogers' field notes for his site C-122. Note the lack of date, change in chronological designation. (right) Rogers' notes from M-2 site at Cronese Lakes. He describes cremations and a two-acre area. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

From the few chronological clues available, it seems that Rogers worked in the Colorado and Mojave deserts almost simultaneously. Rogers' C-1 site is the Black Mesa Pass area along the Colorado River (Figure 2); his work there began well before 1926. The first area he visited in the Mojave Desert was East Cronese Lake (M-0, M-1 through M-7), and likely the visit also was before 1926.

Rogers and the Yuman Chronological Scenario

From his Mojave Desert fieldwork and experience, Rogers thought a later Yuman population migration replaced the original Amargosa people of the area; this

is the basis upon which he developed his ideas about agriculture and ceramics in the Mojave Sink region (Rogers 1929a). He believed that the Yuman presence in the sink occurred sometime between AD 900 and 1400, this based on his work at the turquoise mines and at Cronese Lakes. Rogers' Yuman I/II/III scenario was founded on his observations of ceramics on trails and stratification within "trail shrines" across the Desert West. In this scenario, Yuman I traits originated in New Mexico, traveled westward to around the Palo Verde Valley, westward through the Banning Pass, and to the coasts of the Pacific and Gulf of California (Rogers 1945:180-185). The Yuman II period was the strongest and longest-lived and occurred during

fillings of ancient Lake Cahuilla (Rogers' Blake Sea); the dates he assigned were approximately AD 1150 to 1500 (Rogers 1945:189). The Yuman III phase was believed to coincide with the drying up of lakes in the Colorado and Mojave deserts (Rogers 1945:192). In his timing of this latter phase, he was partially mistaken. He felt that permanent drought forced people back to the Colorado River Valley between AD 1500 and the eighteenth century and that Yuman boundaries expanded to the east as the Numic people replaced the Yumans who were living in Nevada and northeastern California, northwest of the Colorado River Valley.

At about the same time (i.e., sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), Rogers believed Yuman populations also migrated westward and forced the descendants of the coastal La Jollan people southward into the Baja California peninsula (Rogers 1945:193). In Rogers' view the fact that the people of southern Baja California continued to use the atlatl into the late eighteenth century, coupled with the marked difference in physical appearance between the people of southern Baja

California and the Yuman peoples, supported the idea that those of southern Baja California were the remnants of La Jolla populations (Rogers 1966:5–8). This was the ethnographic picture that Europeans encountered when they first arrived in the area.

Because of the enormity of Rogers' work in both deserts, comments below are confined to a few desert areas where this author has worked and that were visited earlier by Rogers.

Mojave Desert: Rogers' Work in the Mojave River Sink

After his first work at East Cronese Lake, Rogers moved on to West Cronese Lake (M-8 through M-13) and then to the Cucero/Mesquite Springs/Razor Ranch area (M-14 through M-17). The data he gathered in those places, along with his later work at the turquoise mines in 1928 (M-20 through M-28), were presented in his 1929 monograph, *Report of an Archaeological Reconnaissance in the Mohave Sink Region* (Rogers 1929a).

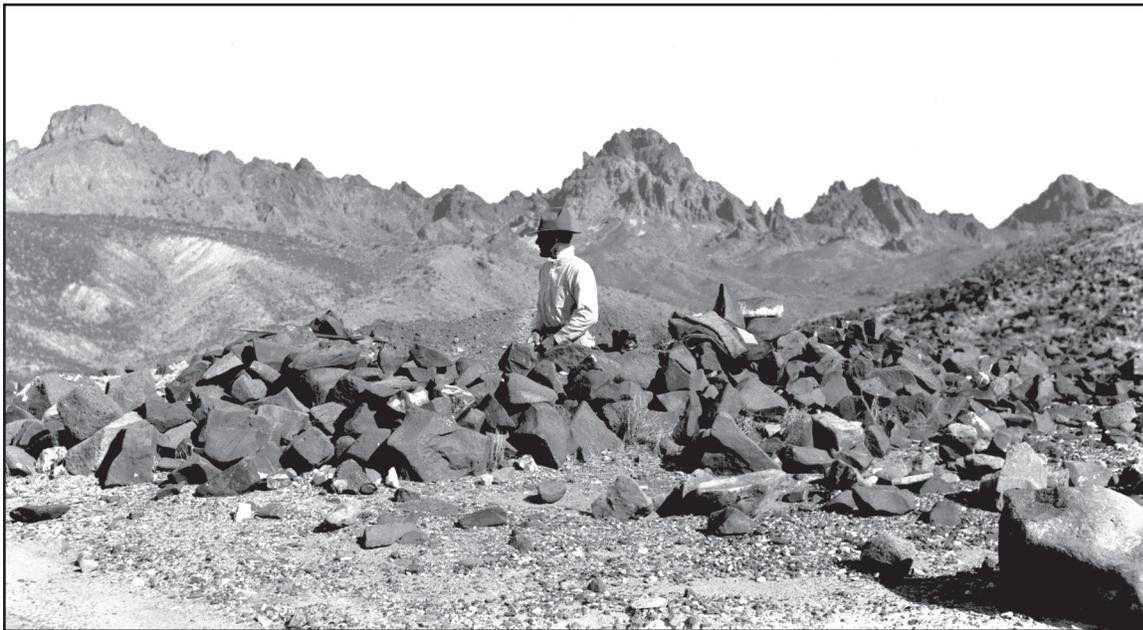


Figure 2. Malcolm Rogers at his C-1 site, Black Mesa, along the eastern side of the Colorado River. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

Rogers apparently never ventured into Afton Canyon on the Mojave River, although he certainly did write about both ends of the canyon. Considering that it is a place of permanent water and has a strong historical record of trail and trade connections, this is puzzling. There are several prominent sites within the canyon (see Schneider 1989).

Colorado Desert: Rogers, the Lower Borrego Valley Rock Circles, and the San Dieguito Scenario

Rogers puzzled at the seemingly ubiquitous cleared circles, some ringed with rocks, on stable desert surfaces. He worked out a “San Dieguito” type chronology using certain characteristics of the features (Figure 3). The highest concentration of these features appears at his site C-122 (he called the location Granite Wash) in what is now Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (ABDSP). The features and their topographic



Figure 3. One of the rock rings at Rogers' site C-122, located in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

situations have long puzzled archaeologists working in the Colorado Desert, especially Robert S. Begole.

Rogers and Begole in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

How did the “San Dieguito controversy” in the Colorado Desert get started, and what is our perspective today? A good portion of the controversy arose out of the work of Begole and his pioneering efforts during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to record what he believed were “early” sites in the Colorado Desert, especially those in ABDSP. He had read *Ancient Hunters* (Rogers 1966) and the earlier monograph, *Early Lithic Industries* (Rogers 1939). Begole used Rogers' classifications to assign chronological (and ethnic) affiliations to sites that he recorded in ABDSP (e.g., Begole 1973). Begole, however, did not fully understand that Rogers had changed his views regarding the age of the San Dieguito complex and that the technological differences were very great between the lithic assemblage from the San Dieguito type site and those Begole identified as San Dieguito.

As a result, the sites that Begole recorded in ABDSP are often attributed to a relative chronological framework that was developed by Rogers, applied by Begole, and mistakenly labeled with chronological/ethnic designations. G. Timothy Gross and Claude N. Warren (Gross 2001) conducted a preliminary comparative study of site assemblages from Begole's and Rogers' sites and concluded that the assemblages were different in material, technology, and other important characteristics:

One reason there is so much confusion about the San Dieguito Complex is that Rogers called this material by different names at different times. When he first described it on the San Diego coast, he referred to it as Scrapper Maker (Rogers 1929b:458), and this name occurs regularly in the site records at the

Museum of Man and in Rogers' notes. In his 1939 discussion of material from the Colorado and Mojave Deserts he described the *Malpais* industry as the oldest material, followed by the Playa Industry (Rogers 1939). He indicated that his conclusion was that the Playa materials were related to what he was by then calling the *San Dieguito* on the coast by referring to the San Dieguito-Playa Complex. The Playa Industry was divided into two phases: Playa I and Playa II.

By 1950 Rogers was calling the Malpais and Playa material *San Dieguito* [Gross 2001:5].

Furthermore, Rogers later reclassified his Malpais as San Dieguito I, Playa I as San Dieguito II, and Playa II as San Dieguito III. The Gross (2001) preliminary study concluded that what both Rogers and Begole were terming "San Dieguito I" is probably quarrying and prospecting debris and only fortuitously associated with circular features. Gross also concluded that San Dieguito II and III should not be separated but should be combined. According to Gross, there is some similarity of San Dieguito II and III to the coastal phenomenon of San Dieguito.

Begole, in addition, applied a typology based on comparative complexity of rock-circle features to sites in ABDSP; he used the typology from Rogers' publications. Therefore, site designations on current site records for circular rock features might be "San Dieguito I-III" or "Yuman I-III," depending on the physical characteristics of the circular features and minimal consideration of the associated artifact assemblage (if any) (see Schneider 2010).

Rogers and Rock Art

Rogers certainly was an archaeologist with varied interests. He was a student of ethnography, linguistics, geology, and ceramics. Many of his photographs are of rock art panels, and these photographs are used today to judge the ongoing effects of weathering and visitors' impacts, as at C-127, Dos Cabezas Valley, and the Piedras Grandes "Horse and Rider" pictograph site (Schneider 2005). Rogers made many extensive line drawings of rock art in his field notes (see Figure 4).

Rogers' first foray into the Colorado Desert concerned the petroglyphs in Black Mesa Pass. His interest in rock art also included ground figures and pictographs and continued throughout his career. It was his interest

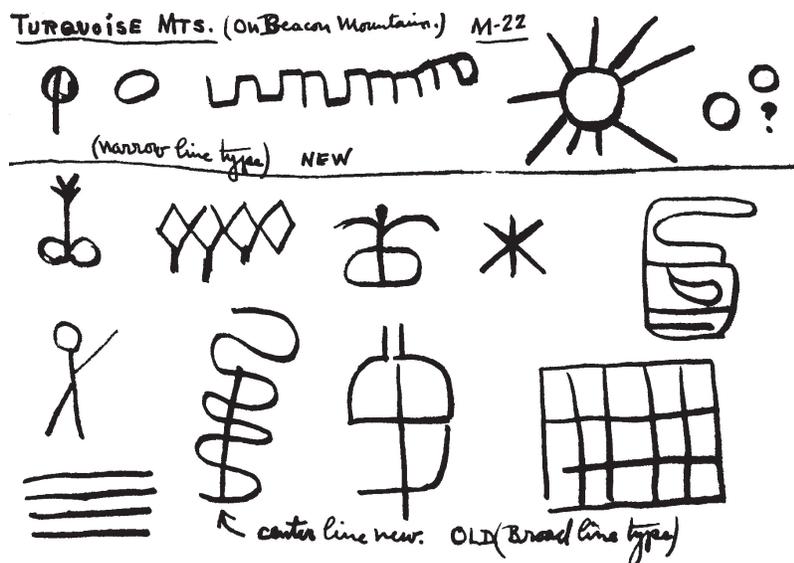


Figure 4. An example of drawings of rock art from Rogers' M-22 field notes. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

in petroglyphs that led Rogers to Antelope Hill on the Gila River in western Arizona. His site record and field notes from Antelope Hill indicate that he did not recognize the primary characteristic of the hill as a site and that it was a monumental, sandstone milling stone quarry for tools found throughout the area (Schneider 1993, 1996; Schneider and Altschul 2000). He is certainly not the only archaeologist who missed that fact! Could it be that Rogers was not very well versed in ground stone tool technology? He evidently did not recognize this technology, which was abundant albeit undescribed at the time at Antelope Hill, Palo Verde Wash, Picacho, and other areas along the Colorado River that he visited to record rock art.

Rogers and Excavation

Rogers excavated many burials and cremations. He would hear of looters working in an area and would rush to that area to do a little excavation of his own. Although he made disparaging remarks about looters, he had virtually no qualms about digging up Native graves from relatively recent periods; his photographs document these activities. With regard to the Vallecito Valley (ABDSP), he was even aware of the Native name of the area, and he understood that direct descendants of the past peoples still lived nearby. Within a new ABDSP Cultural Preserve, Rogers' C-165 and C-144 sites still bear evidence of Rogers' (and others') extensive burial excavations. The materials he collected went to the San Diego Museum of Man but have since been repatriated. Many other locations also bear the scars of this type of excavation, a common practice at the time. ABDSP in 2010 placed all the Vallecito Valley owned by State Parks into an enormous cultural landscape preserve.

The innovative and careful (for the time) excavation techniques employed by Rogers at the Harris site have been discussed elsewhere (Warren 1961; see also Warren's article in this double-issue). These techniques certainly do seem not to have been applied to burial

and cremation contexts. Perhaps Rogers' geological training made the Harris site of greater interest to him because it was more of a geological puzzle than the later burial and cremation sites.

Rogers and the Earlier Portion of the Archaeological Record in the Deserts

That Rogers was able to recognize landforms and relate different occupations to them seems apparent. For example, at the C-123 site on the old Fish Creek drainage, he remarked that cremations and fish bone were found in association with a sand dune but that most of the obsidian materials were found at an old lake-floor surface that was 12 ft lower in elevation, exposed after the disappearance of Lake Cahuilla (Blake Sea).

Rogers' work at Lake Mojave (Silver Lake) and Pinto Wash followed in the footsteps of Elizabeth Campbell. We know that Rogers kept himself informed about the work of others and immediately visited areas where other archaeologists were working. Claude Warren has studied the work of both Campbell and Rogers and has analyzed the conflicts between these two pioneer archaeologists (Warren 2005). Rogers' character included an inability to dispense with "one-upmanship" behavior; he followed the careful investigations of Campbell, who worked with an interdisciplinary team that included well-known geologists and other scientists associated with the Southwest Museum. Visiting the area of Campbell's research at Late Pleistocene–Early Holocene Lake Mohave, Rogers made his own calculations, which resulted in an error in dating the shoreline occupation. Rogers likely played a large part in preventing Campbell from presenting her findings at an Early Man Conference in Philadelphia (Warren 2005).

The following quote refers to Rogers assigning a relatively late date to the shoreline occupation:

The author, who was the pioneer proponent for the great antiquity of man in Southern California, has had to revise his opinions with time and the acquisition of more adequate data, until he now occupies the unique position of supporting a relatively recent date of the advent of man in this region [Hardy 1939:v–vi].

Rogers' Heritage in the Mojave and Colorado Deserts

When archaeologists say, “it’s a Malcolm Rogers site,” they mean that it is certainly an important site that was obvious at the time Rogers visited it and that it may have chronological placement, according to Rogers, because of its specific characteristics. Many of Rogers’ sites are today included within county, state, or federal protected areas, and thus at least a good portion of his archaeological heritage is preserved for future research. Other sites have been lost forever to looting and development. What Rogers originally recorded in the early and middle twentieth century is still considered archaeologically important in contemporary times. In late 2010 ABDSP created seven new cultural preserves, five of which are landscapes that include many of Rogers’ original Colorado Desert

sites: Angelina Springs, Hawi-Vallecito, Little Blair Valley, Coyote Canyon, and Piedras Grandes.

Most of the Rogers materials (maps, field notes, site records, photographs, and collections) are located at the San Diego Museum of Man (Figure 5). We are not altogether sure of the exact locations of some of his sites; many have been heavily collected, and others are completely gone. We know he changed his mind often as he struggled to make sense of what he saw on the ground. We are all aware of the difficulties in chronology building using surface materials before the days of radiocarbon dating. Rogers certainly made his errors, but his monumental efforts at puzzle solving assure his place in the history of California archaeology.

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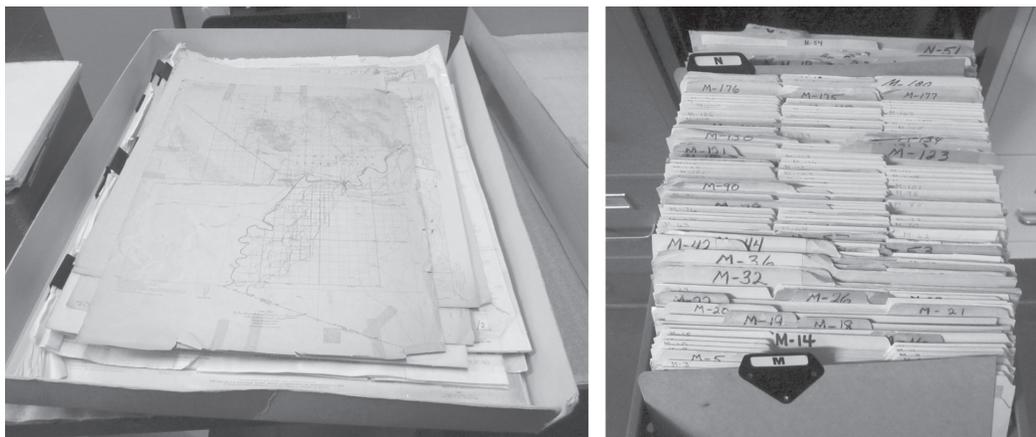


Figure 5. Some of M. J. Rogers' field maps (left) and Mojave Desert field notes (right) in the archives of the San Diego Museum of Man. Photographs with the permission of the San Diego Museum of Man.

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