

THE HOHOKAM AND THE RISE OF PHOENIX

Who are the Hohokam?

The Hohokam were a prehistoric people group living in central Arizona. The term Hohokam is actually an archaeological term given to this ancient people group. The word comes from the O'odham word *Huhugam* which means "that which has perished". The Hohokam culture was thriving during 450 and 1150 C.E. The Hohokam were an agricultural people group. Living in the desert they needed to find inventive ways to survive with the lack of water. They built a series of canals off of the Salt River.



The Hohokam and Canal Systems

The Hohokam built ingenious canal systems throughout the Phoenix Basin. These canals allowed the Hohokam people to create vast farming lands in an otherwise arid environment. Archaeologists have documented over 500 miles of ancient canals, some of which were 20 miles long. These canals are not only the largest prehistoric irrigation systems in North America, but also the most sophisticated.

Because the Hohokam were able to manipulate the waters of the Salt River, they were able to live a sedentary, agricultural lifestyle. They grew quash, corn, cotton, and beans.



The Founding of Phoenix

Mining and farming were important elements of Arizona's economy in the late 1800's. Mining towns and farming communities were developing in northern Arizona. After the construction of Fort McDowell in the Phoenix Valley, new farming communities in the Phoenix area were necessary to support the fort's need for supplies and basic necessities. This was when a former confederate soldier, Jack Swilling, entered the scene. Swilling realized the agricultural potential of the Salt River. After discovering the inventive irrigation system of the Hohokam, he decided to dig out the canals so that they could be used again. Because of the Hohokams innovation, Anglo-Americans were able to settle and farm in the Phoenix area. There were many names that were considered for this new settlement, but ultimately the name Phoenix was chosen. Just like the mythical phoenix will rise from the ashes of their fiery death, the city of Phoenix was reborn from the ingenuity of the Hohokam.

The Engineering Behind Building Canals

Building a canal requires innovation, and there is quite a bit of engineering involved. Canals are able to work by using the force of gravity to your advantage. Water flows downhill, and the Hohokam used gravity and the Phoenix terrain to move the water far beyond the riverfront. The canals splintered into several different directions. Using the canal not only allowed the Hohokam to farm the land, but it also allowed them to grow as a civilization.

Activity

Test your knowledge! Solve the crossword puzzle below. The clues in this puzzle can be found in the lesson.

DOWN

- 1 An O'odham word that means people who have passed on
- 2 The are in Arizona where the Hohokam built the canals
- 4 A man-made structure that channels water

ACROSS

- 3 An ancient people group living in Arizona
- 5 He was the founder of Phoenix
- 6 Hohokam society was _____. This means that they were farmers.
- 7 The river that feeds the canals

