

## Introduction: Southern Deserts Historical Archaeology

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During November 2014, the IV Southern Desert Conference was held in the province of Mendoza, Argentina. The conference held every few years for scholars working on Southern Hemisphere deserts including archaeologists, paleoecologists, geomorphologists, and others. During the five days that the conference took place, a total of 101 papers and posters were presented in ten interdisciplinary sessions that promoted interactions among attendants. Oral presentations were intended to provide synthesis on regional long-term interdisciplinary work, while posters were thought for more specific technical papers. Several key archaeological syntheses have arisen (Barberena et al. 2016; Borrazo et al. 2016; Veth et al. 2016).

We organized a session entitled *Historical Challenges for Desert Peoples: Towards the Comparative Study of Responses to Intrusions and Ecological Change*. We considered that the Southern Deserts Conference provide radically different opportunities for a comparative study of how various desert peoples dealt with change in the historical era. For the session proposed we were interested in the arrival of various “outsiders” who occupy, neighbor, or influence the lives of deserts dwellers. In some places these encounters follow millennia of desert interaction with neighboring societies, often practicing farming and herding economies. In others, desert societies were articulated through trade and exchange networks, all greatly disrupted at “contact.” The growing field of contact archaeology provides case studies and models for cultural change but few attempts are comparative analyses. In the session we considered at a continental and intercontinental level how historical contacts between desert societies and others can be considered in a comparative manner. Are there common initial reactions to

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“outsiders”? Are the various theoretical models of resistance, accommodation and ethnogenesis appropriate to these historical contexts as a whole? What explains the similarities and differences apparent in taking an extra-regional comparative perspective?

As a result, papers describing historical archaeological research in the deserts or semi-arid regions of southern Africa, Australia, and South America were presented. Although developing on different regions, all of the papers focus in how desert people have dealt with challenges; encompassing ecological and environmental challenges, challenges arising from the colonial era, and engaging both indigenous or colonist topics.

In this Special Collection, *Southern Deserts Historical Archaeology*, we proudly present the papers authored by Peter Mitchell, Raquel Gil Montero, Flora Vilches and Héctor Morales, Jill Kinahan, and Alistair Paterson.

Peter Mitchell, in his paper entitled *I Rode through the Desert: Equestrian Adaptations of Indigenous Peoples in Southern Hemisphere Arid Zones*, analyses the adoption of the horse since the fifteenth- to nineteenth-century by the Indigenous inhabitants of Patagonia, the Karoo and Kalahari of southern Africa, and the deserts of Australia. Taking into account the variability of this equestrian adaptations, this vast study explores from the necessary conditions to adopt the horse, to the impact of its adoption in the social, economic, and political dominion.

Raquel Gil Montero, in her paper entitled *Regional Impact of Mining Activity During Colonial Times in the Highlands of Southern Bolivia*, focuses on demography and socio economic activities to analyze the effect of the introduction of mining activities in the highland desert of Lipez after the Spanish conquest. The author develops a thorough analyses of censuses information of the different regions of Lipez from 1603 onwards, in order to analyze a transformation from a distribution pattern of the population related to natural resources, to one highly related to mining activities.

Flora Vilches and Héctor Morales, in their paper entitled *From Herders to Wage Laborers and Back Again: Engaging with Capitalism in the Atacama Puna Region of Northern Chile*, also examine the mining industry and its impact on indigenous Atacameño society from the end of the nineteenth century. By a comprehensive study of the architecture and archaeological record of four sulfur and *llareta* extraction sites, they analyze how the Puna herders engaged with these industries on their own terms.

Jill Kinahan, in her paper entitled “*No need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself...*” *Discourses on Knowledge and Power in the! Khuseb Delta on the Namib Coast, 1780–2016 CE*, develops an exhaustive analysis of the Topnaar’s long history throughout four time periods: early contact at the end of the eighteenth century, middle contact, late contact, and recent times; considering both oral history, archaeological record and historical accounts.

Alistair Paterson, in his paper entitled *Unearthing Barrow Island’s past: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial-Era Exploitation, Northwest Australia* considers the human uses of the vast maritime desert along the coast and offshore islands of Australia’s Northwest. Historical archaeological sites on Barrow Island are described to develop new understandings of how colonial-era pearl fisheries operated, and relied on forms of unfree labor.

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