

Ring's Reflections

by Bob Ring

San Pedro River Getaway

One evening in mid-April Pat and I were sitting at the welcome-dinner table at a Bed and Breakfast right in the middle of southwestern Cochise County's bird watching paradise. Virtually all of the B&B's 20 guests were birders, there expressly to find a variety of birds and document their sightings.

I told the people near us at the table that Pat and I were not there to see birds, but instead ... Before I could finish my sentence, the lady across from me, said, "Wait, let me guess!" Five minutes later, she reluctantly gave up and I told her that we were there for Mammoth hunting. She thought I was making a smarty remark, but ... I wasn't kidding.

Let me back up a little. Pat and I were looking for a nice B&B in southern Arizona to celebrate both of our birthdays, mine in March, Pat's in May. After an internet search, we selected Casa de San Pedro, a few miles southeast of Sierra Vista, along the San Pedro River, in Hereford. We wanted a couple of days of relaxation; bird watching was the farthest thing from our minds.

Within a very short drive of our B&B were two 11,000-year-old Mammoth-kill sites. Since I had recently written about early Arizona hunter-gatherers (March 14th *Star* regional sections), I was anxious to see a couple of places where ancient humans killed giant mammoths and bison, and left evidence discovered millennia later - Clovis spear points and butchering tools.

So the morning after my "Mammoth hunting" declaration, Pat and I visited the Lehner and Murray Springs mammoth-kill sites, both designated National Historic Landmarks and operated by the Bureau of Land Management "for the benefit and education of the public." The Lehner site was excavated in 1955 and again in 1974-75. The site is currently fenced with barbed wire behind an identifying plaque. We decided not to climb the fence, simply observing from afar the arroyo containing the kill site.

The Murray Springs excavations were done in 1966-1971. This site is more visitor-friendly, with an interpretive trail around the kill site and associated campsite.

It was exciting to be able to visualize how our ancient ancestors hunted so long ago!

Pat and I next turned our attention to the town of Hereford, established in the 1870s as a railroad siding to load cattle and later a stop for rail travelers between Tombstone and Naco. During World War II an Army Airfield at Hereford provided specialized night training for medium bombers.

Unfortunately, virtually nothing remains today of the old townsite and airfield except a one-lane automobile bridge over the San Pedro River, that now serves only as a shortcut to Bisbee.

The San Pedro is one of Arizona's most important and historic rivers, one of only two rivers (the other is the Santa Cruz River) that flow north from Mexico into the United States. Originating just south of the

border in Sonora, the river flows northward 140 miles to meet the Gila River in Winkelman. It is the last major free-flowing undammed river in the American southwest.

The San Pedro Valley has served as the home of ancient Clovis and Cochise cultures, and later, Native Americans. Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's Spanish expedition traveled northward from Sonora along the San Pedro River to explore the American southwest in 1540. The first Americans along the San Pedro were beaver trappers in the 1820s, followed by miners and ranchers. The famous Mormon Battalion that re-supplied U. S. troops in California from New Mexico during the American War with Mexico in 1846 traveled northward along the San Pedro to Tucson.

Since 1988 the San Pedro River, from the international border to St. David, has been designated as the San Pedro Riparian Conservation Area to "protect and enhance the desert riparian ecosystem." According to the Bureau of Land Management, "The river's stretch is home to 84 species of mammals, 14 species of fish, 41 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 100 species of breeding birds. It also provides invaluable habitat for 250 species of migrant and wintering birds."

Pat and I got our look at the San Pedro River on a short walk right out the back door of the Casa de San Pedro B&B. With much of the river now dry much of the year until the summer monsoon, we were surprised to find water flowing and an impressive canopy of green-leaved trees and fauna. We also saw a bird or two.

Overall, we appreciated the beauty and serenity of the upper San Pedro Valley.

The Casa de San Pedro B&B is an upscale romantic getaway with a Mexican flavor. Ten well-appointed guest rooms are arranged around a garden courtyard, where many birds of the area come to visit. (Contact at 888-257-2050 or bedandbirds@gmail.com.)



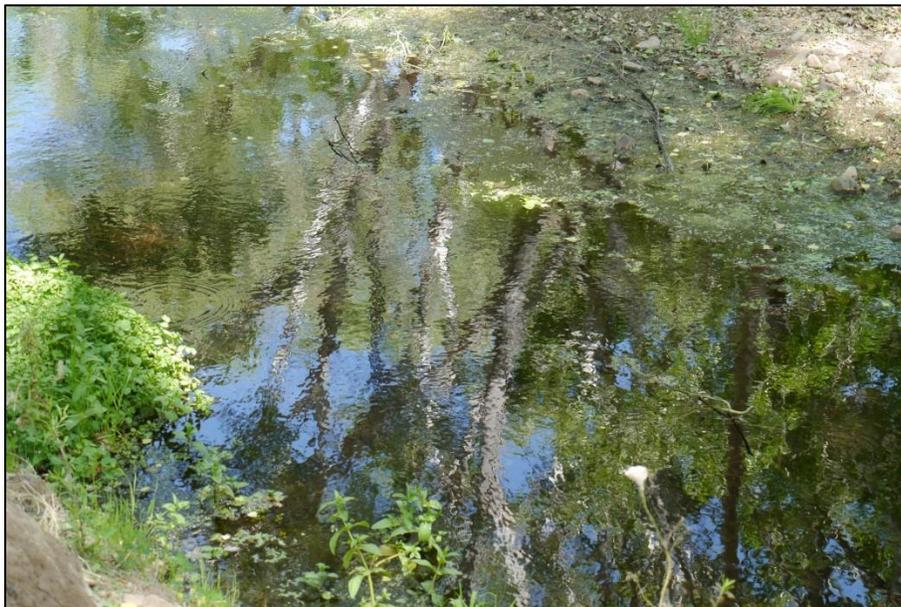
The Murray Springs mammoth-kill site, now eroded into a steep-walled arroyo, was originally a muddy, spring-fed water hole dug by mammoths. (Courtesy of Bob Ring)



The one-lane bridge at Hereford, originally built in 1913, has been rebuilt several times due to collapsing under a heavy truck load and periodic severe flooding. (Courtesy of Bob Ring)



The San Pedro River showed us a pre-monsoon flow of water and an impressive green canopy of trees and fauna. (Courtesy of Bob Ring)



Shimmering reflections give this photo of the San Pedro river-bed a kind of impressionistic quality. (Courtesy of Pat Wood)



*The Casa de San Pedro B&B has 10 guest rooms arranged around a garden courtyard.
(Courtesy of Bob Ring)*