A CONQUISTADOR'S CANNON

Archaeologists have been debating the exact route of Coronado's march for more than 100 years, because the original journal entries were not clear. No other sites had been confirmed anywhere in Arizona or along the first 1,500 miles of the expedition from Sinaloa, Mexico to Zuni, New Mexico. Archaeologist Deni Seymour has been studying the old manuscripts, surveying and doing terrain analysis in southern Arizona for more than 30 years looking for Coronado sites. However, the site was discovered following the identification of a specific type of iron nail used in the early 1500s, found only at other Coronado sites in Arizona and those dating back to the 1500s in other states. It seems the expedition was carrying hundreds, if not thousands, of these. It is a simple hand-forged nail, called a gable-headed nail or a "two-strike" nail, that was used for a variety of purposes, but most importantly for horseshoes. Seymour next learned that some had been found somewhere in the county, along with a piece of a medieval horseshoe, so the next step was to locate the specific ranch where they were found. On a hunch with good detective work, and leaning on past experience and terrain analysis, she found the source of the nails with the help of a metal detector. The cannon and hundreds of other artifacts were discovered in short order. This is the first time Coronado's entry point into the USA can be confirmed with archaeological artifacts, including crossbow bolt heads, gable-headed nails and hundreds of other items, as well as Carbon-14 and luminescence dating results from structural features.

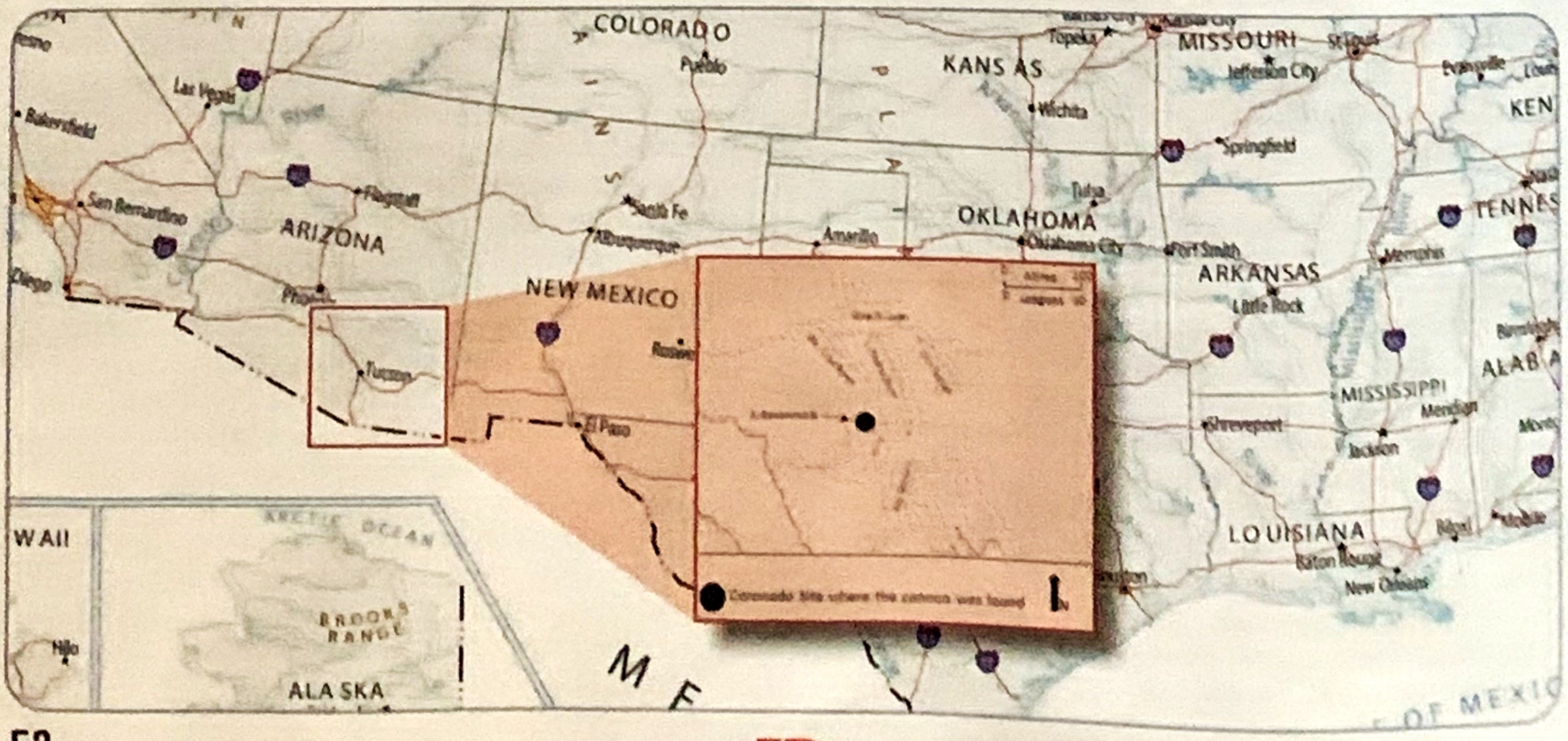
After searching for more than three decades, archaeologist Deni Seymour discovered the cannon in the southern Arizona desert where Coronado had established a town nearly 500 years ago (bottom).

The Hackbut Cannon

The rampart or wall gun is 42" long with a 0.873" (7-gauge) smooth bore. It is made of cast bronze and weighs about 40 lbs., and it is stout enough to handle heavy charges of buckshot or lead round balls. A single ball would have weighed about 775 grains, and sometimes two balls were loaded at once. Second-generation refined blackpowder, not serpentine powder, was in use at that time.

The gun was meant to be fired by hand with a slow-burning match cord, and it had no lock mechanism. There is a flat ledge next to the touchhole on which to place the priming powder, but, interestingly, the pan is not dished out to keep the powder in place while aiming, moving or when the wind was blowing. The conical projection at the rear of the gun (cascabel) was meant to accept a "tiller," or short wooden pole, to help aim the piece by placing the pole either under the armpit or over the shoulder of the gunner. The wooden pole had a socket in the end to press-fit it onto the conical cascabel. There was no half- or full-length gunstock as such. Loading, aiming and shooting the gun was almost certainly a two-man operation, although one well-trained gunner could handle it in an emergency.

The six rampart guns, called *versillos*—the diminutive form of *verso* (a type of cannon)—in the historical record, were brought along on the expedition for three reasons.



Map from U.S. GIS