



## Fossil Coral

### Introduction

Only four fossils have been recorded in Saguaro National Park (SNP). Two of these fossils are of lichens. The third, and fourth, discovered in 2014, are of fossilized coral. The SNP fossils include specimens of the matted lichen *Pannaria conoplea*; *Parmelia coronata*, a type of foliose lichen with leafy body parts; and *Syringapora sp.*, a tabulate coral. The new coral (new to the park) is a Rugose Coral<sup>1</sup> or Horn Coral (Order: Rugosa, Genus: unknown).

The new fossil was found on a prehistoric Native American site and may represent an instant of human curiosity, when a prehistoric Native American found an object intriguing enough to pick it up and carry it away. Finding fossils and man-made artifacts that may be hundreds if not thousands of years older than the Native American site on which they are found, is not unusual. Native Americans seemed to have been as inquisitive about oddities, whether they are natural or man-made, as we are today.

### Description

The size of the fossil is approximately 1 inch (25.4 mm) by 0.8 inch (20.32 mm) and is embedded in a limestone cobble that is approximately 3.8 inches long and 2.5 to 3 inches in diameter.

The cobble was found in the Cactus Forest, and was not directly associated with any limestone outcrop. Closest limestone outcrops are around Lime Falls and the Cactus Forest Trail near the historic lime kilns over 2.5 miles from where the new fossil was found. The limestone around Lime Falls is part of the Horquilla Limestone formation, and is between 318 to 258 million years old. These limestones were deposited as a fine calcium carbonate sediment when this part of North America was covered by a shallow sea.<sup>2</sup>

The limestone cobble may actually have been used as a hammerstone, a prehistoric tool used as its name implies, as a hammer. The cobble has facets along one end similar to those found on a typical hammerstone. But, because



Figure 1. Limestone cobble with fossilized coral. The fossil was found in 2014 in the Cactus Forest.



Figure 2. Detail of fossilized coral found in the Cactus Forest. Scale is 1 inch.

## Cultural Resource Brief

limestone is affected by exposure to rainwater (which is



**Example of a Horn Coral, complete, with side view and top. This one was found in Nebraska. Maximum height is 13 mm (1/2 inch).** naturally slightly acidic and erodes limestone) the facets on this cobble are not as well defined as a typical hammerstone, therefore its identification as such is somewhat problematic.

<sup>1</sup> Ron Ratkevich, personal communication

<sup>2</sup> John V. Bezy 2005. A Guide to the Geology of Saguaro National Park. Arizona Geological Survey, Down to earth 18. p.30

---

For more information contact:

Ronald Beckwith                      ph: (520) 733-5160  
Archeologist                              email: ronald\_beckwith@nps.gov  
Saguaro National Park  
3693 S. Old Spanish Trail  
Tucson, AZ 85730