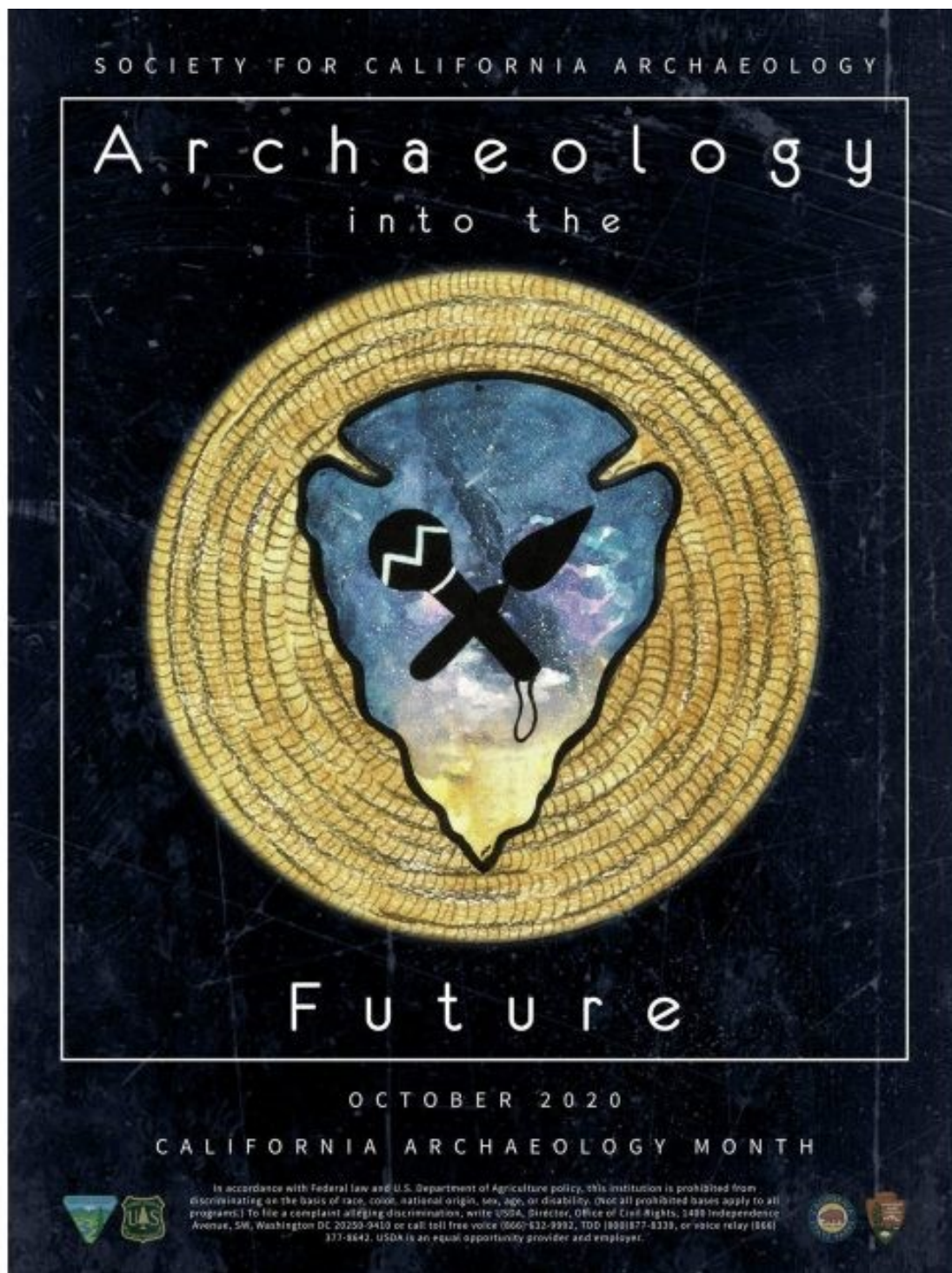




SCAN



The Santa Cruz Archaeological Society Newsletter—Fall 2020



October is Archaeology Month!

An Introduction to the Burro Flats Traditional Cultural Property

by Albert Knight

Introduction

The creation of a National Register of Historic Places-listed Burro Flats Traditional Cultural Property (hereafter BFTCP), has been proposed in recognition of the existence a large Native American ceremonial site complex, which is of outstanding cultural, archaeological, and and/or historic importance. The proposed BFTCP is located in the eastern Simi Hills, in southeast Ventura County, California (Figure 1). Much of the complex is in an area that is owned by the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (hereafter NASA), which has created and submitted a nomination for the entire former Santa Susana Field Laboratory (hereafter SSFL), which includes both the NASA owner area, and also a large area owned by the Boeing Company. The proposed BFTCP is located only some 20 miles WNW of Los Angeles. The proposed BFTCP includes an area of 2,850 acres (not quite 4.5 square miles). The natural environment consists of a series of up-land peaks, potrerros (meadows), small canyons, and arroyos, extensive oak woodlands, and large expanses of chaparral; small springs, caves, and rock shelters are common. The most well-known geographic feature is Burro Flats, for which the TCP has been named. This article will provide an overview and summary description of the cultural resources at the proposed BFTCP and explain the reasons for the nomination.



Figure 1

History

In 1795, during the period of Spanish rule, the 113,000 acre Rancho Simi was granted to 63 year old Santiago Pico, a soldier from the 1775 de Anza expedition. In 1821, Rancho Simi was re-granted to Santiago's three sons. Pio Pico, the last governor of Alta California under Mexican rule, and the Mexican General Andres Pico, subsequently one of California's first State Senator, were his grandsons. There were several subsequent changes in ownership, in both the Mexican and American Periods. By 1888 the Simi Land and Water Company acquired the old Rancho. The Company subdivided the ranch and set up Simi Valley itself for agricultural development, while maintaining the stock ranches in the hills. In "Subdivision A," of the 1888 map they produced to help sell the various tracts, one can see the words *Potrero del Burro*, "Pasture of the Burro." This was apparently the first time that the

time the term *Burro Flats* was put into print. A couple of decades later, in 1910, Eddie Maier, a well-known millionaire beer brewer from Los Angeles, purchased one of the large tracts in the southeast corner of Simi Valley, in *Cañada de los Alisos* (Sycamore Canyon), and named it *Rancho Potrero del Burro*. His huge BBQs and parties, often with hundreds of guests, were famous in their time.



Figure 2 Coca Test Stand (2017)

Sage Ranch and Sky Valley Ranch

Other land sales and transfers took place in the area within a few years. The most important of these for our purposes was in 1939, when Dr. (Doc) Henry Silvernale, a 57 year old dentist from Santa Monica, his son Max, and a family friend named William (Bill) Hall purchased the upland portion of Tract A, including Burro Flats itself, from Maier: the price was 1,060 acres for \$3 an acre. They named their spread “Sky Valley Ranch.” Marcia Silvernale McGillis, one of Henry’s granddaughters told me that, “My grandfather and Bill did everything on the ranch. We had a very large hay field and several hundred head of Hereford cattle and horses. My grandfather raised pigs,

chickens and had a large vegetable garden. They did a lot of deer hunting up there.” Their neighbors to the east were the Sage family, who also ran cattle, and planted orange and avocado orchards. Their spread, Sage Ranch, is now Sage Park, which is open to the public. Orrin Sage Jr. can be seen, with maps, explaining local ranching history to a group of researchers near the Coca Test Stand in Figure 2 (in 2017)

Ranching—Movies

Beginning in the 1940s, and because of the many scenic and interesting rock formations and panoramic views, Sky Valley Ranch became one of several places in the Simi Hills where Western movies, and later TV shows (e.g. *How the West was Won* and the *Lone Ranger*) were filmed. Local researchers have identified at least 43 movies that were filmed at Burro Flats. So if you like westerns, you have probably seen the area without knowing it! (Figure 3, next page.)

Archaeology - Rock Art and the Solstices

It is of some interest that the “old” Sky Valley Ranch families knew members of the local Native American community. Frank Knapp, Bill Hall’s father-in-law, was interviewed by ethnographer Bob Edberg, and provided interesting information about the status of the west San Fernando Valley native community in the early 20th century. The ranch families became the steward’s of the best-known site in the Simi Hills, the beautiful Chumash Painted Style Burro Flats Painted Cave. Indeed, given that the families were on good terms with the local native community, it is quite possible that the name “Sky Valley” was a translation of the Chumash name for the eastern Simi Hills plateau. The name is, as anyone that has visited the area can attest, a quite appropriate “poetic” description of the uplands area.

During the mid-1950s, the Silvernales and Halls allowed the Archaeological Survey Association of Southern California (ASASC) to perform excavations in a meadow near Burro Flats Painted Cave. Although the ranch was sold in 1954 (see following) a second round of excavations was performed under the direction of Dr. Charles Rozaire, of the Los Angeles County Natural Museum, in 1959-1960. Several thousand artifacts were recovered during these projects (the artifacts are now curated by the Autry Museum of the American West). An analysis of the artifacts show that the Burro Flats area has been occupied and utilized by the Chu-

mash people for over 5,000 years. The presence of the beautiful Burro Flats Painted Cave, and the recovery of the numerous artifacts, prompted the listing of a core 25-acres on the National Register of Historic Places, in 1975 (as #76000539).

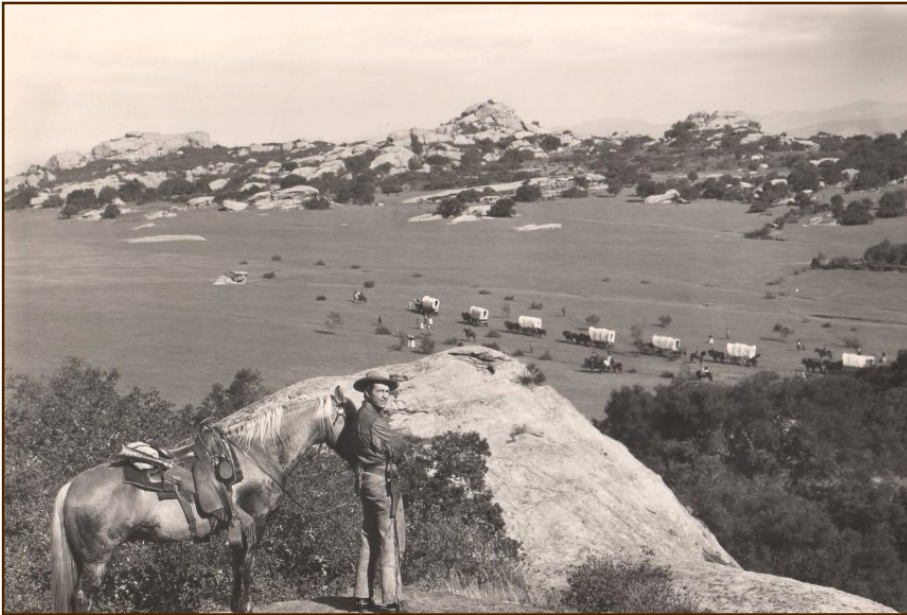


Figure 3

**Promotional photo for the movie
CALIFORNIA in Technicolor.
Starring Ray Milland, Barbara
Stanwyck, and Barry Fitzgerald.
A John Farrow Production,
a Paramount Picture.**

**Copyright 1946. Permission granted
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The SSFL to be

In 1949, some years before the ASASC excavations, North American Aviation (hereafter NAA) had acquired an area east of Sky Valley Ranch and adjacent to Sage Ranch. This eventually became SSFL Area I. At that time, NAA was one of the largest airplane manufacturers in the world. World War II had ended a few years before, and “The Hill,” as it would become known, isolated from public access, would become one of the most important liquid-fuel rocket engine testing areas in the world. Indeed, the first rocket-engines tested by NAA were captured German V-2 engines (the V-2s had been used by the Germans to bomb London during the war). The first NAA test-stand (at “The Bowl,” in Area I) was a near-duplicate of the German testing facilities in Thuringia. Several former-German engineers, including the well-known Werner von Braun, who had worked for Adolf Hitler only a few years earlier, helped created and operate the test-stands and rocket-engines in Area I. Hitler indirectly helped us get into space by bankrolling von Braun, who used the knowledge he had gained during the war to get mankind to the Moon.

In March 1954, NAA also purchased Sky Valley Ranch, and the Silvernale and Hall families were forced to move out. The ranch became Areas II, III, and IV; the Department of Energy eventually took over the test facilities in Area IV, although Boeing retained ownership. Over the following decades, all of the rocket engines used by the United States, including the Redstone, Atlas, Thor, Jupiter, Apollo, and Saturn rocket engine systems, as well as the engines for the United States Space Shuttle, were tested on “the Hill.” The Coca Test Stand, seen in Figure 2, was the largest of these. Over the following years, there were several changes in ownership, and the principal engine testing facilities were eventually acquired by either NASA or by the Boeing Company. The last rocket engine test was in 2006.

Nukes

As The Hill was developed, new experimental facilities were established. At the height of operations, approximately 600 buildings, test stands, etc. were in place, and about 6,000 people were employed, with the majority of the facilities being located in Burro Flats (Figure 4). The facilities included several small-scale,

experimental, test nuclear reactors, which were built and operated between 1953 and 1980. These reactors included an experimental liquid-sodium cooled reactor. In 1957, “Sodium Reactor (SRE)” became the first nuclear reactor in the world to produce electrical power for a civilian commercial power grid, by powering the nearby city of Moorpark for about three months. In 1959, the SRE was also the first reactor in the world to suffer a partial core meltdown. During the accident, fortunately, coolant continued to circulate throughout the reactor core and the reactor vessel remained intact, preventing an uncontrolled complete meltdown. Unfortunately, it was necessary to vent the reactor facility, so some radiated air was intentionally allowed to escape into the atmosphere. Moorpark was downwind at the time, by the way. During the following months, the SRE was repaired and operations resumed. The SRE continued to operate until 1964. The SRE facility, including all radioactive materials, were entirely removed by 1981. All nuclear testing at the SSFL ended in 1988.



Figure 4

**Looking northeast across
Burro Flats in the late
1970s.**

The Burro Flats Traditional Cultural Property

The Burro Flats Painted Cave was brought to the attention of the Southwest Indian Museum in Los Angeles in 1914. Both the archaeologist Mark. R. Harrington and the ethnographer John P. Harrington knew of its existence (see following). Following the two periods of excavation in 1954-1955 and 1959-1960, more people became aware of the paintings (the site is now recorded as CA-VEN-1072, Locus 10). During the 1970s a new generation of archaeologists became aware of the site, and one of these people realized that at the winter solstice, an arrow of sunlight illuminated a particular part of the painted panel (Figure 5). As Dr. Edwin Krupp, Director of Griffith Observatory, wrote in his 1983 book, *Echoes of the Ancient Skies: the Astronomy of Lost Civilizations*, “An astronomical element in the paintings at Burro Flats was first noticed in early 1979 by John Romani, a graduate student in archaeology at California State University, Northridge. He thought a natural cut -- a kind of bottomless window -- in the overhang above the western end of the panel paintings looked like it might let sunlight pass through and strike a part of the otherwise shaded panel -- at about the time of the winter solstice.”

This information was shared with several other researchers (including Dr. Krupp), some of whom made their own observations. Romani and several colleagues, including local Native American representative's were also allowed to examine the entire 25-acre National Register area. It was at this time that it was realized that the area that had been recorded as CA-VEN-155 (now CA-VEN-1072, Locus 5) was a second solstice “observatory.” Note: it was not the sky that was being observed, but the effects of a shadow cast

across a boulder with a row of cupules, which enters the largest of several bedrock mortars, the heel of a bear-paw pattern, at first light on the morning of the summer solstice. In other words, Romani had thus shown that the site complex includes places where both the winter and summer solstices can be observed.

Over the next several decades Dr. Krupp was allowed to take small groups of people (a dozen or so at a time) to see the paintings, at which time he provide an interesting in-depth description of Chumash astronomy and compare the Burro Flats to other similar sites in the United States and other parts of the world. The first three times this author visited Burro Flats, in the early 1990s, was in the company of Dr. Krupp. I note here, with modesty, that on my second visit, that I was allowed to bring Rozaire's site records for the area, and



Figure 5 Burro Flats Cave at the Winter Solstice

to wander away from Dr. Krupp and the tour group. Over the course of about over an hour, I located three more loci of rock art, all of them minor. NASA was nice about the whole thing. The time had come, they knew, to figure out what they really had.

Decommissioning, clean-up, lawsuits, surveys, research

The Santa Susana Field Laboratory was coming to the end of its days. When the first NAA facilities were established, the eastern Simi Hills was surrounded mostly by cattle ranches or farmland. That is why it was established to begin with—there were very few people in the area and those few were fairly easy to keep out. But in the ensuing years, the entire surrounding area, including the west San Fernando Valley, Simi Valley, the Agoura Hills area, had been developed; the area was now surrounded by suburbs. Both NASA and Boeing decided to conclude their operations and move on. The Field Lab was decommissioned and in 2007, Boeing, NASA and the Department of Energy signed a cleanup agreement with the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), who determined that some parts of

the former SSFL were contamination by, 1- Trichloroethylene (TCE), which had been used to clean the engines before and after each test fire, and 2- small amounts of residual radiation, following the removal of all of the test reactors and most of the support facilities. The cleanup efforts to date include the demolition and removal of some 500 buildings and support facilities and the establishment of a storm water treatment systems, which are in place in all drainages that descend into the surrounding canyons. Over 900 acres have been restored with native plants to reinstate the watershed and habitat, and oak saplings are actively being planted in numerous places, to help restore the oak woodlands (this work is being done by the aptly named Sky Valley Volunteers, of which the author is a founding member).

In addition, twelve years ago, Boeing announced it would preserve its portion of the former Santa Susana Field Laboratory as open space, to protect the wildlife habitat and the site's rich cultural heritage. To this end, in April 2017, Boeing established a conservation easement, held by North American Land Trust, that permanently preserves the nearly 2,400 acres Boeing owns at Santa Susana as open space. The conservation ease-

ment is a legally enforceable document that, among other restrictions, forever prohibits residential or agricultural development on-site. The easement permanently binds the property, regardless of who owns the land in the future.

The NA community

The closing down of the former SSFL has generated quite a bit of paperwork, as one can imagine. I will not take the time here to discuss lawsuits . . . The good news is that quite a few EIR documents were required by the various permitting agencies, Federal, State, etc. These requirements resulted in a series of archaeological surveys, and several periods of archaeological monitoring, that showed that the National Register-listed 25-acres is only the core of a much larger complex of sites. These sites are found across the entire former SSFL as well as in the adjacent parts of the uplands. And remarkably, it was “discovered” that there is some very interesting ethnographic information available, concerning the BFTCP area. Specifically, during his 1917 tour of the west San Fernando Valley, the anthropologist John P. Harrington collected ethnographic information from local native people; these included Juan and Juana Menendez. Juan Menendez was the grandson of the Chumash Odon Chihuya, the senior grantee of the Mexican-period land-grant called *Rancho El Escorpion*.

Specifically, Menendez told Harrington that “. . . at the *Potrero de los Burros* there used to be a very large Rancheria,” and that, “There are painted caves which [the] informant knows near the Potrero de los Burros.” Harrington also recorded that, “Menendez knows a rock . . . where the footprints of our savior and a burro are to be seen . . . ” and “. . . the informants have visited a place where on a big flat rock are a child's tracks, also the tracks of a burrito.” And most remarkably, “Menendez says that when *El Señor* first came to this earth the earth was not yet dry, and these are his tracks” (quotes from Harrington 1986). Note that the English translation of the Spanish *El Señor* is “God,” and “Our Savior” is clearly a reference to Jesus. In other words, the import of what Menendez told Harrington is that Burro Flats is a sacred place.

Conclusion

On August 14, 2020, the Commissioners of the State of California Office of Historic Preservation (the SHPO) voted 8-0 in favor of the creation of the BFTCP. The nomination, when finalized, will advance to the Keeper of the National Register for a final determination. The creation of the BFTCP will not confer Federal Status on the land, including status as a Reservation. That requires the acquisition of the land, if it is not already owned by the federal government, and an act of Congress, and this is not likely to happen. Boeing and the North American Land Trust will continue to be the owners and responsible for the final clean-up of their area. NASA, for the time being, will remain owner of its part of the facility. Although the government has declared that part of the property to be surplus, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) will dispose of the property if and when “the clean-up” (actually a series of several clean-ups) is completed. There processes will be in consultation with the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, the only Federally recognized tribe on the south-central California coast, and with the several other Native American groups and individuals that are party to the relevant consultation agreements. The exact relationship between the various Native American tribes, agencies, interested parties, and stakeholders, and the exact management system that will be established, is TBA.

And please note: the beautiful Burro Flats Painted Cave is only just more than “a stone’s throw” from the Coca Test Stands (Figure 2), the largest of all of the test stands on The Hill. Taken together, Painted Cave and the Coca Test Stand comprise a very significant entity in their own right. According to Dr. Edwin Krupp, “The paintings, which record the involvement of the Chumash with the sky, are separated by just a ridge from the stands on which the huge [Saturn] moon-rocket and Space Shuttle engines were test fired. The Coca test stands, and the Burro Flats painted shelter . . . comprise the only place on earth where our modern world heritage in space converges with the prehistoric reach for the sky. The cosmographic and astronomical pairing of

these two cultural resources in this way transforms the landscape into a remarkable and unique expression of the human bond with the celestial realm, from prehistoric California to the Space Age. For that reason, the place is irreplaceably significant in the history of space exploration, in the history of NASA, in the history of California, in American history, and in the history of the world. The co-location of Burro Flats and the Coca test stand is exceptional and found nowhere else on earth. There will never be another first time to the moon, and the Coca test stand/Burro Flats pairing will never be duplicated.” Clearly then, the nomination of the Burro Flats Traditional Cultural Property to the National Register of Historic Places is entire justified.

Please note that this short article is based on the author’s own research over the last quarter century. Some of this research has been supported by the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians; NONE of this research was paid for by either NASA or Boeing, although both NASA and Boeing have facilitated the research by allowing the author to access to the former Field Lab for research purposes on numerous occasions.

Further reading:

Bryne, Stephen

2012 From the Stone Age to the Space Age: Santa Susana Field Laboratory Cultural History. Society for California Archaeology 26:272-280.

Knight, Albert

2017 The History of Sky Valley Ranch. Available on-line at www.Academia.edu.

2020 An Introduction to the Cultural Resources of Sky Valley. Available on-line at www.Academia.edu.

Boeing website <http://www.boeing.com/principles/environment/santa-susana/index.page>

DTSC website http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/SiteCleanup/Santa_Susana_Field_Lab/

And Google “Santa Susana Field Laboratory” . . .



Figure 6 Burro Flats Painted Cave. Photo by Devlin Gandy

The San Francisco Presidio Archaeology Lab update

by GeorgeAnn DeAntoni

In mid-March 2020, California hit “pause” on so many things that I had been accustomed to; no more social gatherings, no more going out to eat, no more in-person classes, and— most importantly— no more long-awaited trip down to Riverside for the Society for California Archaeology Annual Meeting! A tumultuous time to be sure.

While March saw all of our lives shift in pretty dramatic fashion overnight, the timing was quite startling for me, as I had literally *just* started my dream job as one of the archaeologists at the Presidio Trust in San Francisco two weeks before the Shelter In Place started. Like many people have experienced, I felt a lot of uncertainty about what the pandemic would mean for my livelihood, but I am happy to report that I have been



able to keep as busy as ever working as an archaeologist in the park, even if the job is slightly different these days from what it had been in months and years past.

Archaeology in the Presidio has long provided the unique opportunity to engage in a very public type of archaeological discourse and interpretation. For nearly a decade, researchers in the park have really centered the experiences of visitors, with seasonal excavations taking place in the heart of the park where the general public was invited to talk with archaeologists as they uncovered rooms from the Spanish fort. The team hosted weekly tours of the site and archaeological facility, held a number of annual events and programs which highlighted the Presidio’s unique role as an archaeological and historical place, and

El Presidio under a pall of smoke on Sept 9, 2020. Photo by G. DeAntoni

worked alongside a very robust volunteer program where people of all ages and experience levels could come to the park and get their hands dirty screening, cleaning, or sorting artifacts (after some training, of course). Beyond this work with the public, the Presidio Archaeology Lab staff also developed an internship program which has served as a training ground for freshly minted archaeologists to develop their field and laboratory skills while they decide which archaeological sector they may want to pursue. Presidio Archaeology Lab alumni post-internship careers have run the gamut from finding employment at National Parks across the country to pursuing graduate degrees or joining the Cultural Resource Management field. Some former interns— like myself— have even come back to the Park years later as archaeology staff! Even beyond these many internship “graduates” are the generations of field school students who passed through the Presidio’s gates and learned about archaeological methods in a site very significant to California’s colonial history. In fact, a number of current Santa Cruz Archaeology Society members have worked in the park on numerous archaeological projects, and I happen to have one of the Cabrillo College Field School photos from the Presidio Chapel right next to my desk in the lab speckled with some familiar faces. It is a place where many California archaeologists have gotten their footing, and I’m grateful to play a part in that legacy.

Beyond the beautiful landscape, the views of famed San Francisco landmarks, and state of the art



Snaffle (see text) Photo by G. DeAntoni

archaeological equipment, it's the complicated history of the Presidio— and the way that archaeology can help shine a light on sometimes difficult stories— that drives my desire to work here once again. In particular, talking with site visitors about the impact of colonialism on California's Native peoples and landscapes is so meaningful, an educational connection that can best be nurtured by standing in the place where that history was shaped.

During our current reality of COVID and hellacious wildfire smoke, the Presidio archaeology team's plans have had to shift. What once would have been our public excavation season has now turned indoors to our lab where the current interns are tirelessly working away at organizing documentation from former Presidio archaeology projects and keeping the collections in great shape. When we ordinarily would have been prepping for everybody's favorite holiday (Hint: International Archaeology Day is October 17!), we are now thinking of ways to host our tour and other programs online. Now, instead of working with our docents and volunteers on an almost daily basis, we gather weekly for a virtual coffee hour and casually catch up. So much has changed for us at the Presidio Archaeology Lab, but I feel fortunate that I've been able to continue coming into the park most days to monitor some of the Trust's ongoing construction projects which are focused on restoring wetlands down by Crissy Field. One of the highlights for me was the recent discovery of half of a bit from a horse's bridle called a snaffle. Looking through historic photos I found images of Presidio soldiers with their mounts using the exact type of bit, as well as photos of horses and mules grazing in an area very near to where the construction was taking place. As a former horse-girl, it was so fun to see my two of my worlds collide in the shape of a rusted metal artifact.

While it isn't the summer that I had originally planned, it's been great to be outdoors doing work in a place that I really love and whose history matters to me. As an archaeologist, what more could I ask for?

News From Partners for Archaeological Site Stewardship

The founders of the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP), have founded a new umbrella organization, Partners for Archaeological Site Stewardship (PASS), which now administers CASSP, and also works with site stewardship organizations around the country to promote and train archaeological site stewards to help protect our cultural heritage. Site stewards come from all walks of life, and although there is some training required, one does not need a degree or specific background, just a love of history and archaeology, and a desire to participate.

On October 14-15, 2020, PASS will be conducting an inaugural two-day webinar featuring site stewards and their work around the US. You are invited to attend this meeting if you are currently a site steward, are interested in becoming one, or are an archaeologist. The webinar is free, but attendees must register.

The webinar will cover the following topics: site stewardship and best practices, panel of site steward coordinators, site steward presentations, and a panel of site stewards. Participants in the talks and panels are from Nevada, Texas, Arizona, Utah, California, New Mexico, and Florida.

For more information about PASS and this opportunity to learn about site stewardship, visit the following links:

<https://www.sitestewardship.org/>

<https://www.sitestewardship.org/workshop.html>

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