FRANKLIN FENENGA AND CALIFORNIA ARCHAEOLOGY

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Franklin Fenenga’s involvement in archaeology began early in life. Interested in relic hunting, he had a couple of years experience in fieldwork in the Middle West while still a high school student. As one of a group of high school students assembled to talk about potential careers, he spoke on archaeology before a meeting of the National Educational Association. Present in the audience was Jeremiah B. Lillard, president of Sacramento Junior College. Anxious to build an archaeological program at the college, Lillard began a correspondence with Fenenga, urging him to come to Sacramento, which Fenenga eventually did. During his stay at Sacramento Junior College, Fenenga helped to direct archaeological crews excavating Indian mounds in the Sacramento Valley on Saturdays and Sundays. It was here that he began a long and close friendship with Robert F. Heizer, who had also been recruited by Lillard. The end result of the archaeological work was the publication in 1939 of An Introduction to the Archaeology of Central California by Lillard, Heizer and Fenenga and published by the college’s Department of Anthropology. This volume outlined the first clear-cut cultural sequence for the Sacramento Valley. In the same year, a summary article “Archaeological Horizons in Central California” co-authored by Heizer and Fenenga appeared in American Anthropologist.

Following several years at the junior college, Franklin Fenenga enrolled as an anthropology major at the University of California, Berkeley. At the university, he renewed his association with Heizer, who was now a member of the faculty.

When the Smithsonian Institution extended its program of River Basin Surveys to the Far West, Fenenga was hired to survey four proposed reservoir areas—Pine Flat, Isabella and Success in the San Joaquin Valley; Coyote in Mendocino County. Brief reports on each of the investigations were prepared.

With the founding of the University of California Archaeological Survey, Fenenga was enlisted as the first archaeologist, a post he held for two years, 1948 to 1950. This was a busy and productive period for him. In addition to conducting surveys and excavations in central and northern California, he prepared two useful guides—Methods of Recording and Present Status of Knowledge Concerning Petroglyphs in California and Methods of Site Survey in California—both printed as UC Archaeological Survey Reports.

Drawing upon information collected in the field during this period, Fenenga published “Artifacts from the Excavations of Sutter’s Sawmill” (1947), “Survey of Building Structures of the Sierran Gold Belt, 1848-70” (with R. F. Heizer, 1948) and “The Archaeology of Slick Rock Village, Tulare County, California” (1952). Additionally, he compiled reports on archaeological resources of five proposed reservoir areas, four in the San Joaquin Valley and one in Mendocino County. These papers did not appear in print.

After a long absence from the state, Fenenga returned to California in 1965 to teach in the Department of Anthropology at California State University, Long Beach. There he developed an active archaeological program and won the respect and admiration of students, not only as a teacher but also as a friend and confidant. A major research activity, carried out between 1969 and 1975, included five profitable field sessions at Hidden Reservoir in Madera County. Following his retirement from teaching in 1987, Fenenga remained active in the field of California archaeology as consultant, advisor and participant in various projects. Finding it hard to give up contacts with former students, he kept in close touch with many of them.

In 1985, as recognition for his numerous contributions to the profession, Franklin Fenenga received the Society for California Archaeology’s Lifetime Achievement Award.
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