

84. SHELL-HEAPS NEAR CAPE MENDOCINO, HUMBOLDT COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Charles Rau

ABSTRACT

Reprinted here are several paragraphs from Rau's monograph entitled "Prehistoric Fishing in Europe and North America" (Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, Vol. 25, pp. 254-56, 1885). The portion of this article applicable to California describes a shell-heap complex (forty-two heaps) and includes identification of types of shell recovered from the deposits.

* * * * *

Shell-heaps near Cape Mendocino, Humboldt County, California, were explored, in the interest of the National Museum, by Mr. John J. McLean of the United States Signal Office, and until lately stationed at Cape Mendocino. He communicated, in October, 1883, the following description of these deposits:

"About a mile south of a small creek which empties into the Pacific, and from which the Cape Mendocino light-house can be plainly seen, there are a large number of aboriginal shell-heaps. Their site covers an area extending about one-quarter of a mile north and south between sand-dunes parallel to the ocean beach, and about fifty yards in average width. Forty-two distinct heaps, great and small, are scattered about within this limited space. There is no regularity in their distribution, as they were formed as it happened to suit the convenience of the shell-fish eating Indians.

"Nine of these heaps have been built up in a conical form by successive layers of shells, bones, and charred timber. Numerous smaller heaps are scattered around generally, prolonged or flattened out under the lee of the contiguous sand-dunes.

"Not more than a dozen varieties of shells appear in the remains. Very large specimens of mussel-shells seem to predominate. Next in point of frequency are the common clam and cockle-shell. The common sea-snail frequently occurs. A conical shell is also quite numerously represented. A univalve with spiral curve, very thick and semi-transparent, comes next in abundance.

The latter is generally broken at the side, the aperture forming a hole through the center at right angles with its mouth. This mutilation is noticed in nearly all of the spiral-curved shells, and was probably made for the purpose of extracting the mollusk; but the shells may have had a subsequent use for ornamental purposes by stringing them together. A great many fragments of the abalone-shell (Haliotis) are also found. The mussel and snail-shells, especially the former, are very much broken up, and exceedingly friable when found whole.

"Numerous portions of whale-skeletons are met with, the jaw bones of one, fully fifteen feet high, forming an arch to the entrance of the Ocean House Hotel. It was carried from the shell-heaps to its present position. There are no specimens of pottery found in or in the vicinity of the shell-heaps.

"This locality was not only resorted to for capturing and consuming the daily food, but was also a workshop of the aborigines, where their implements of war and the chase were manufactured, as numerous flint chips and imperfect arrow and spear-heads prove. Within the radius of a mile these specimens are to be found, more than a thousand of them having been picked up by the writer. Business and pleasure must have been combined in no small degree by these ancient coast-dwellers. Thousands of Indians must have helped to add to the height of this immense mass of debris through many generations.

"Several of the mounds were carefully examined. A trench was dug across the apex, and then another at right angles with the first cutting. The largest heap thus explored showed a combination of shells, bones of animals, and charred timber to the depth of four feet. The shells and bones fell in pieces upon being exposed to the air. Other mounds showed a similar combination of material, differing slightly in the depths of the layers.

"There are no shells of any description found along the beach for five miles southward and three miles northward, excepting those on and in the mounds. Careful examination of the rocks opposite the heaps at low tide only shows one kind of shell-fish, namely, the conical-shaped univalve.

"The flint chippings and arrows and spear-heads are not confined to the immediate vicinity of the heaps, but may be found at numerous places for five miles along the beach in a southerly direction, especially on the sheltered side of a sand-dune or bluff. It would seem that the Indian sat down to manufacture his implements wherever the material was most convenient and abundant. None of the larger implements, such as axes, hammers,

pestles, or mortars have been found, excepting one, a weather-worn axe of soft stone. The latter was found near the mouth of a creek."

The collection of stone objects sent to the National Museum by Mr. McLean comprises chips, flakes, rude implements, broken leaf-shaped implements, scrapers, and arrow-heads, of green, brown, and yellowish jasper, and other silicious material. The shells taken from these heaps were identified by Mr. Dall as those of Mytilus californianus, Purpura crispata, Purpura saxicola, Acmaea pelta, Acmaea spectrum, Acmaea mitra, Tapes staminea, Parapholas californica, Fissurella aspera, Chrysodomus dirus, Haliotis rufescens, Chlorostoma funebreale, Chlorostoma brunneum, and Helix townsendiana. There were further found plates of Cryptochiton stelleri and of an undetermined species of chiton, a fragment of an echinus-shell, and some teeth of canine animals.

85. PART OF THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN J. A. SUTTER
AND COL. T. T. HENLEY, SUPERINTENDENT OF
INDIAN AFFAIRS, SAN FRANCISCO, 1856

ABSTRACT

The two letters printed here are true copies of handwritten communications from J. A. Sutter, the founder of the original establishment at Sacramento named New Helvetia. Both pertain to the condition of the Indians around Hock Farm, the first white settlement in Sutter County, California. Hock Farm was one of Sutter's ranches located about eight miles below Yuba City. The burden of the two letters is whether to retain the local Indians, with some degree of formal control over them by Sutter, or to remove them to reservations safely away from the fleshpots of Marysville. The letters are now in the National Archives, Washington, D. C.

* * * * *