

RESPONSE TO CRISIS:
THE BAY AREA ARCHAEOLOGICAL COOPERATIVE

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My purpose here is to examine the archeological crisis in the San Francisco Bay Region and to discuss the formation of the Bay Area Archaeological Cooperative, a multi-agency consortium which arose in response to the crisis.

The Problem in the Bay Area

No one knows exactly how many archaeological sites have been destroyed in the counties bordering San Francisco Bay. It is clear, however, that certain localities have suffered far more than others. As an example, N.C. Nelson located about 450 middens, most of them undisturbed, when he surveyed the shore of San Francisco Bay in 1908. Today, archaeologists would be hard pressed to locate tattered remnants of 40. Only a scant half-dozen of the original number have escaped damage, and virtually all of these are jeopardized by the same urban sprawl which has already claimed their peers. There are probably not more than five sites remaining in all of San Francisco County. In another case, the Santa Clara Valley has witnessed a population explosion of incredible magnitude with essentially no concomitant program of archaeological salvage.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that some land developers have actually exploited archaeological resources for

financial gain or publicity. In 1969, an enterprising Sonoma County firm advertised its coastal property in a full-page, color newspaper spread which advocated "Indian relic collecting" by the "kiddies" while mom and dad were to be inspecting real estate. Or consider the Marin County entrepreneur who spent the early 1960's bulldozing local Indian mounds and selling dump truck loads of the richly organic midden to be used as top soil by unwary home owners. Unfortunately for the latter, it turned out that the alkaline midden soil was herbicidal for most domesticated plants.

On the other hand, there have been altruistic land developers who have funded archaeological surveys and excavations or scheduled construction to avoid known sites. In general, though, the onslaught of ticky-tacky and macadam has been escalated to the point where the majority of sites crucial to the understanding of Bay Area prehistory have vanished.

The somber facts concerning site destruction by developers, vandals, the Highway Department, etc. are well known to local archaeologists. The detrimental impact of archaeologists themselves, however, is seldom considered.

At present, there are nearly 30 institutions conducting archaeological fieldwork in the San Francisco Bay counties. This number includes avocational societies, universities, state colleges, community colleges and at least one high school. During the past few years, the number of local archaeological

programs has rapidly multiplied in response to student interest, a growing public concern for the preservation of non-renewable resources, and the urgent need to salvage evidences of the past jeopardized by urban expansion.

Prior to 1971, there was only minimal inter-agency cooperation or coordination. The unhappy result has been that a burgeoning number of sites were annually damaged or destroyed by student training projects; no regional research programs were developed; methodologies were often idiosyncratic and archaic to the extent that many data were lost and comparative studies were obstructed. Furthermore, only about 10% of the schools involved in digging seemed to have the wherewithall to produce creditable fieldwork reports.

In addition to these difficulties, the Bay Area has never been systematically surveyed for archaeological sites. There is no archaeological "clearing house" to coordinate research and salvage programs with anticipated urban developments. A final problem is that the lay public has not materially benefited from local archaeological knowledge. The richness of the Bay Area's cultural past is preserved largely in esoteric technical reports, which underscores the conspicuous need for accurate popular books, lectures, films and exhibits in community cultural centers. Thus, the current situation intensifies, rather than mitigates, the rate of destruction of archaeological remains and precludes adequate interpretive work following most excavations.

The Bay Area Archaeological Cooperative

Working independently during the summer of 1971, investigators in the northern and southern parts of the Bay Area proposed the creation of a multi-agency organization to deal with the sorts of archaeological problems outlined above. Accordingly, the Bay Area Archaeological Cooperative--a consortium of local institutions with archaeological programs--was established last fall to accommodate the specific needs of urban archaeology in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay counties. The essential goals of the BAAC are: (1) to coordinate research programs with anticipated site destruction in order to maximize data retrieval; (2) to develop inter-agency cooperative fieldwork programs so that fewer sites will be damaged by archaeologists and so that better research strategies and methods may be employed; (3) to enhance the quality of training available to students; (4) to develop programs of public education at all levels with respect to central California archaeology and prehistory; (5) to establish ethical and technical standards for future archaeology in the Bay Area; (6) to found a central repository for manuscripts, photos, maps and other data which are now scattered and largely inaccessible; and (7) to publish high quality reports, both professional and popular, concerning the Indian cultures and archaeology of the Bay Region.

The BAAC is presently seeking funds to establish a permanent Bay Area Archaeological Center--possibly to be affiliated with

the California Academy of Sciences--to coordinate and administer programs of research, conservation, interpretation and public education in the Bay Area. Our proposal would encourage new levels of multi-institutional cooperation in a systematic effort to manage prehistoric remains in such a way that the needs of the public, Native Californians, and professional archaeologists are considered.

Specifically, the Bay Area Archaeological Center would integrate the activities of all member institutions with the anticipated schedule of urban developments. The professional staff at the center would advise local institutions of impending projects; coordinate reconnaissance work; provide a liaison with government and developers; design exhibits and other interpretive materials for Bay Region schools; compile and publish papers; and solicit funding for ongoing and proposed research and educational endeavors.

Conclusion

It is obviously premature to anticipate the success of the BAAC, but it might be worthwhile to view the BAAC against the overall picture of California Archaeology.

Approximately simultaneous with the inception of the BAAC, two other cooperatives have appeared: The California Desert Archaeological Committee and the Santa Monica Mountains Committee. Tom King of U.C., Riverside, recently summarized the common elements of these cooperatives:

All aim to view the archaeological discipline systemically rather than hierarchically. Rather than see state colleges as lesser universities, community colleges as lesser colleges, secondary schools as lesser colleges, and amateurs as free-floating archaeologists' helpers, the co-op model portrays such entities and others as subsystems, each with a special role and structure but all articulated to form the overall system. There are things an avocational group can do better than any university and vice versa; a hierarchical structure fails to recognize or exploit these fruitful differences, but a co-op system is based on them (T.F. King, A Cooperative Model for Archaeological Salvage. Read at SAA Meetings, Miami, Fla., 1972).

Logical coalitions of archaeological agencies might also be envisioned for the Sacramento Valley, the North Coast Ranges and other California regions, but as yet these remain disintegrated.

At the State level, the Archaeological Task Force has been charged by law to examine the status of California Archaeology and to recommend a comprehensive archaeological program to the legislature. It could well be that cooperative systems such as those now operative in Southern California and in the Bay Area will provide the organizational basis for future archaeology in California.