

CYPRESS REPLACEMENT PROJECT: CALTRANS MEETS THE CHALLENGE

Janet L. Pape
Environmental Planning-Archaeology Branch
California Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 23660
Oakland, CA 94623-0660

ABSTRACT

As many of us remember, on 17 October 1989, just as the Giants and As took the field to play the fourth game of the World Series, the great Loma Prieta earthquake struck, destroying the I-880 Cypress freeway structure in West Oakland. The quake also severely damaged the surrounding West Oakland neighborhood. When CALTRANS announced that they would rebuild the freeway, the local community voiced strong opposition and proposed that an alternative freeway route be selected to go around their neighborhood. Ultimately, CALTRANS developed a new route that bypasses most of the residential district. The new route has created a planning nightmare with incredible construction constraints and scheduling conflicts. The Cypress Replacement Project is very complex politically, environmentally, seismically, and even archaeologically. Tackling these issues, CALTRANS is implementing a novel approach to historical archaeology that is proving to be extremely productive and exciting.

October 17, 1989—the day the Loma Prieta earthquake struck! On this day many lives changed, not only on a personal level, but on a professional level, too. I would have never thought, as a result of this earthquake, that I would be managing the cultural resources for the largest archaeological project on the West Coast and managing a multi-million dollar contract.

The Loma Prieta earthquake caused, among many calamities, the collapse of a section of Interstate 880 known as the Cypress Freeway in West Oakland. The freeway collapse has presented many interesting challenges to the Department of Transportation and continues to do so. Some of the first challenges after the cleanup were the redesign and the decision of where to rebuild. The community did not want the freeway built along the same alignment. After many public hearings, it was decided to rebuild along a new alignment, called the railroad corridor. The majority of the alignment is within railroad yards and bypasses most of West Oakland's residential district.

This project is an immense undertaking for the Department of Transportation. Due to political and community pressures, a project that would normally take more than 20 years from start to finish is being designed and built in less than half that time. All new right-of-way land had to be purchased, railroad tracks relocated, and businesses moved; while a few houses, a church, and a fire station also need to be moved. Lengthy negotiations were made with a number of large entities, such as the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART), since the freeway will now go over BART near Fifth and Union streets and under BART at Seventh and Cedar streets; five different railroad companies, including Southern Pacific, Amtrack, and Union Pacific, since tracks need to be moved and hazardous materials cleanup is a major factor in the railroad yards; the U.S. Army, since a portion of the Oakland Army Base Supply Station is within the project area; and the Oakland

Main Post Office, since the alignment is going through the post office parking lots.

It is difficult for most people, even some CALTRANS personnel, to grasp the magnitude and complexities of building several miles of freeway through an urban area. The project is so large that it was broken down into seven contract areas, plus several minor named projects, such as the extension of Middle Harbor Road, building a haul road, constructing the post office parking garage, relocating the fire station, and so on. The contract areas were given the letters A through G, beginning at I-980. Each contract will be going out to bid to a different contractor and will be managed by a separate group of CALTRANS engineers and inspectors, approximately 200 engineers in total. Fortunately, only two contract areas are involved for historical archaeology, Contracts A and B.

Time constraints, the presence of hazardous materials, construction logistics, and many other factors have totally altered what would be considered a normal project sequence of events. Tasks that would usually follow a prescribed sequence have been compressed into simultaneous or overlapping time frames. Archaeological investigation is one such task that is overlapping with construction and presenting many challenges.

My role in the Cypress Project began with initial archaeological studies of the project area in the summer of 1992. I quickly realized the magnitude of the possible historical cultural resources within the project area. It was my job not only to convince higher management of this potential, but to figure out how to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. I was working on the San Francisco 480 Project at the time, another result of the earthquake, in which I had engaged the services of Adrian Praetzelis and the Sonoma State University Academic Foundation (SSUAF). I persuaded upper management to allow me to again issue a task order

through our existing contract with Sonoma State to prepare a preliminary study of the Contract A and B areas, which contained more than 40 city blocks. With the results of the preliminary report in hand, the next major steps were (1) to convince upper management that we had to address these cultural resources—no small feat since the environmental document had already been completed, and they believed no more environmental studies were necessary; (2) to inform management and the Federal Highway Administration that the cost for the historical studies would likely be several million dollars; and, after picking them up off the floor, (3) to convince them we could do historical archaeology and not hold up the construction of a major freeway artery and a politically sensitive project.

After gaining the support of the District Chief for Archaeology, Robert Gross, I decided it would be most expedient to put all my Goliaths in one room and take the swipes all at once. A meeting was set up with CALTRANS upper management, the Federal Highway Administration, and CALTRANS lawyers, in which we discussed the issues. Using Robert for a shield, I came out of the battle with only minor bruises and ready to move on.

The next step was to figure out how to tackle Section 106 and the determinations of eligibility. The only approach we could take was the one Adrian Praetzelis was instrumental in designing for the San Francisco 480 Project. The construction of the San Francisco project fell through; therefore, we immediately issued a task order with SSUAF to begin historical studies on the Cypress Project. I developed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Federal Highway Administration, the State Office of Historic Preservation, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation that provided for a treatment plan and research design for historical archaeology and a unique strategy for determining site eligibility in the field. This strategy was discussed in an article in a recent issue of the Society for the California Archaeology Newsletter. I worked closely with the SHPO and ACHP in order to expedite the MOA, as the construction start date was soon approaching.

The Research Design and Treatment Plan, which was edited by Mary Praetzelis, deserves an award equal to an Oscar. There were a number of contributors to this Treatment Plan, but I feel that Nancy and Roger Olmsted merit special mention for doing an exceptional job in researching and illuminating the history of West Oakland. I am very proud to have had a part in this work and it was a pleasure to review.

Forty-three blocks were researched for potential eligibility to the National Register. After this portion of the identification process was completed and project impacts were evaluated, the number of blocks to be investigated in the field was reduced to 22. To date, we have completed investigations of seven and one-half blocks.

Although historic archaeological investigations will take place only in Contracts A and B, the entire project area is sensitive for prehistoric archaeology. I was responsible for preparing a prehistoric treatment plan, with contributions by Greg White and Adrian Praetzelis. Basin Research Associates con-

ducted a field reconnaissance of the project area and provided an Archaeological Study Report. We are testing for prehistoric archaeology in Contracts A and B and are monitoring during construction in the other contract areas.

I thought Section 106 was our biggest challenge until the problem of hazardous materials raised its ugly head! This has been the largest and most costly problem on this project. The majority of the industries within the project area have generated waste products, mostly in the form of petroleum hydrocarbons and lead. Very little hazardous material testing had taken place in the direct impact areas of Contracts A and B, where archaeological testing would take place. We asked ourselves: What safety precautions did we need to take? How toxic were the hazardous materials? What effect do the hazardous materials have on the artifacts? And would the information a site could yield be worth a health risk?

One of the first sites that we would be working on, the Post Office Garage site, contained some high levels of lead. We could not begin our work without a health and safety plan, which is a story in itself. With input from representatives of CALTRANS and Sonoma State, a safety plan was developed by a private consultant specializing in this field. It was decided that the key personnel involved in the field work would take the 40-Hour Hazardous Material Training Course as required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). After taking this course, we were better informed to make decisions about safety equipment and precautions in the field.

Another problem that raises its ugly head from time to time on urban archaeological projects is vandalism. Prevention of vandalism is a real challenge to CALTRANS. On Block 1, a power auger was used by pothunters to drill every 3 feet in a grid pattern for over 300 holes. It seemed obvious to us from the pattern of the drilling that a Sanborn insurance map had been used to lay the grid, but fortunately the grid was off by about 10 feet. Less organized pothunting in the backyard of houses to be moved or demolished is also a problem and often happens just after the house is vacated. This has been a nightmare coordination problem for me with the Right-of-Way Department.

Dumping has been a continual problem within the project area. Once a block is cleared, I work with the appropriate department to have fencing put up, not only to help prevent dumping, but to try to keep pothunters out. I am finding, however, that dumping is an effective way to protect a potential site.

Managing the cultural resources takes an enormous amount of coordination, not only with cultural resource consultants, construction contractors, and the press, but also within CALTRANS: upper management (who, of course, want everything done in half the time and for half the money); design engineers (whose plans we spend months trying to figure out, only to find them changed or added to once we are in the field); and construction engineers and inspectors (whom we try to keep informed about just what we are doing out there, why we need to be ahead of the contractor, and why we need

advance notice when the contractor will be excavating in sensitive areas that require monitoring).

Other departments with which I am in constant coordination are the Survey staff, who stake out from the Sanborn map the corners of the block; the Right-of-Way Department, which handles parcel purchases and building demolition contracts; the Maintenance Department, which has provided us with equipment and operators; and many others, including the Public Information Office and the Hazardous Materials Department. I am also in constant contact with our headquarters staff, particularly Judy Tordoff, CALTRANS' chief historical archaeologist, who, in addition to providing technical support, is working with us on the determinations of eligibility in the field.

However, the heart of my job, and what makes it all worthwhile, is the cultural resource management. CALTRANS District 4 not only has a legal obligation to comply with the Section 106 process, but it has a vested interest in this community—their community. This is why we have made a special effort for public outreach. We have set up site tours during the archaeological excavations for some local community colleges and the Oakland Heritage Alliance. I arranged for the CALTRANS Audio Visual Department to take raw footage of the archaeological excavations to be included in a video we will be making on historical archaeology. We are working with Robert Haynes, Director of the African-American Museum and Library, to provide a mobile display of artifacts associated with African-American history within the project area. We are also working with the Oakland History Museum to provide a possible permanent display of artifacts from the project area. Also, Sonoma State University's folklorist,

Karana Hattersley-Drayton, has a team of interviewers who are conducting oral histories of people who lived in the project area in the early years of the 20th century.

Arrangements were also made to have historical architectural studies done on several houses that will be moved or demolished for this project. Dr. Paul Groth of U.C. Berkeley and Marta Gutman, assisted by a team of architectural students, evaluated several houses and made some measured drawings.

We began archaeological field investigations in April 1994 at the Oakland Main Post Office Garage site. We then followed behind the demolition crews, working until mid-December. We will be starting up again this April. There are five historic blocks remaining to be investigated in Contract A. We are presently waiting for an approximately 20-foot-high soil embankment to be removed from these blocks.

One of the misconceptions CALTRANS management had concerning historical archaeology in the project area was that "there is nothing out there!—This is an old marsh area, it is mostly railroad yards, and the existing freeway has destroyed any features!!" Not only were we able to prove these misconceptions wrong, but the level of preservation has exceeded all our expectations! Block 1—on which the existing freeway was demolished and which still contains a freeway off-ramp, 24 footings in all, and which also suffered the ravages of pothunting—was one of our richest blocks with 59 refuse pits, 15 of which appear eligible. We are finding so many artifacts, that we are now working on a Curation Discard Plan, which is discussed in another paper. Analysis of the artifacts is just beginning, so stay tuned.