

THE ROLE OF AN AVOCATIONAL SOCIETY IN THE CURATION CRISIS, OR
WHAT'S A NICE SOCIETY LIKE YOU DOING WITH ALL THAT MONEY?

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ABSTRACT

In September 1990, the San Diego County Archaeological Society (SDCAS) received a check for \$168,000 as part of an out-of-court settlement between the County of San Diego and a developer. An understanding exists between SDCAS and the County that these funds will be applied toward seeing that existing archaeological collections from sites throughout the County are properly curated. What is the role of an avocational society like SDCAS in the creation of the curation crisis? In its solution? This paper will summarize the approach being taken and the status of efforts being made by SDCAS to fulfill the commitment it made in accepting the donation.

WHAT IS SDCAS DOING WITH ALL THAT MONEY?

To answer this question requires a brief review of the recent history of the archaeological sites on the Lake Rancho Viejo project. The property containing the sites is in the Fallbrook area of northern San Diego County, at the base of the western side of Lancaster Mountain and the junction of the San Luis Rey River and Keys Canyon. The intersection of Interstate 15 and State Route 76 is just northwest of the sites.

Archaeological studies of the property were conducted in 1979 by Brian Smith (1979), in 1981 by Charlie Bull (1981), and in 1984 by Marie Cottrell (1984). Cottrell's mitigation recommendations included preservation of two sites, SDi-684 and SDi-9854, as a condition of project approval. SDi-684 and SDi-9854 are both described as late prehistoric Luiseño habitation sites with milling features and midden (Smith 1990).

About 1 year ago, the County discovered that SDi-684, which had not been previously disturbed or even plowed, had been subjected to brush clearing and had been disced. It was also discovered that SDi-9854 had been severely damaged by construction of a pipeline through the site. The County required a testing program, which was conducted by Brian Smith and Associates (Smith 1990), to document the damage. Smith's recommendations were that SDi-684 should be placed in an open

space easement and capped, and that SDi-9854 had been destroyed and required no further work.

Negotiations ensued between the developer and the San Diego County Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU). DPLU recognized that prosecution would have yielded relatively small fines, which would go into the County's general fund and do nothing to compensate for the lost resources. However, the developer's map was nearing expiration, which would have forced him back into the CEQA process and cost a substantial amount of money; DPLU recognized this and used this leverage during the negotiations.

The County's approach in the negotiation was to have the developer purchase land containing similar sites for a conservancy group, or to contribute in dollars 20% of what salvage of the damaged areas would have cost. These damaged areas amounted to 111 m² for SDi-684 and 334 m² for SDi-9854. Off-site mitigation proved to be financially infeasible, so the contribution route was pursued. The amount was negotiated down to \$168,000, plus the cost of the testing and mitigation programs.

The recipient of the contribution was originally intended to be San Diego State University, to be used for curation of their existing collections. However, it was the County's understanding that the route for the contribution, via the San Diego State University Foundation, would have resulted in a substantial percentage of the funds going to the Foundation. This led the County to propose that the recipient be SDCAS. The SDCAS Board of Directors voted to accept the money and the responsibility, in accordance with its by-laws, which state that one of the Society's purposes is to "establish a central location for the collection and preservation of field site data".

SDCAS received a certified check for \$168,000 from the developer on September 28, 1990. Technically, it is just a contribution to the Society and there is no legal commitment in the transaction. However, the Society feels a strong moral commitment to see that the funds go for the intended purpose, helping to deal with the curation crisis in San Diego County.

WHAT IS SDCAS DOING WITH ALL THAT MONEY?

The simple answer to this question is that the funds were put into a 6-month certificate of deposit, which is now expiring. We will take the funds, which now come to about \$174,000, and roll them over into new CDs. Eventually, when the path is clearer, we will invest it differently.

What are we (SDCAS) doing to fulfill the moral commitment we made in accepting the money?

The SDCAS Board of Directors formed a Repository Planning

Committee. As guidance for the Committee, the Board adopted a statement of purpose that its intention is to "provide for the long-term curation of archaeological collections from San Diego County in a repository meeting National Park Service Standards for Museum Collections". (Note that the intent is not for the Society to operate the repository. Rather, SDCAS would seek to create a separate non-profit entity or to find an existing non-profit institution to do so.) Membership of the Committee includes 6 individuals who have dealt with cultural resources from the perspectives of federal, state, and local agencies, museums, academic institutions, and commercial CRM. In addition, the SDCAS Board provides 3 members of the Committee, including the chairperson and secretary.

Repository Planning Committee actions to date include an organizational meeting in January 1991, when it was decided that the first issue to deal with was determining the physical size of the problem. To do so, a survey form was developed and mailed out to all persons and organizations who had been obtaining records searches at San Diego State University and the San Diego Museum of Man, plus others who had or may have had collections from sites in the county. The survey form seeks information on collections, including "orphaned" ones, and any others the Society may have overlooked. The Committee is also using a PERT project management process to identify and prioritize tasks and to create a schedule for establishing the repository.

The next steps to be taken include utilizing the survey responses to determine the required physical size of the building, and investigating possible existing structures and possible sites for a new building. We will also be compiling a list of similar facilities elsewhere, to learn how they operate.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AN AVOCATIONAL SOCIETY LIKE SDCAS IN THE CURATION CRISIS?

First of all, we have helped to create the problem. Over 15 years of environmental review by SDCAS has, if it has been effective, increased the amount of CRM work and, thereby, the number and volume of collections to curate. On a personal level, having done environmental reviews on behalf of the Society for 13 years, I feel a special obligation to work on the solution.

Avocational societies may have a real contribution to make in the solution of the curation crisis, too. I feel that, in general, an avocational society may have resources in its membership, or be networked into resources, which are not in the professional community. Such expertise may include highly relevant skills like facility planning and design, project management, and fund-raising. Also, the avocational society may have a formal affiliation with a museum (although SDCAS does not). It probably also includes a fair segment of the local professional community in its membership. This could allow the

avocational society to serve as a vehicle to dilute professional rivalries which would probably be an impediment to establishment and operation of a curational facility. This might even help to overcome the reputation that, as a State Park ranger recently joked to SDCAS members, the only thing that 2 archaeologists can agree on is that a third archaeologist is wrong.

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

It is going to take a lot more money than we have right now. Finding the rest, including enough to endow rather than just establish a facility, will probably be the major challenge.

Once such an entity is created to operate a repository, this or any other, why not also have it accept open space easements on sites? I would suggest that this is really the same concept, except that the easements attempt to conserve the resources in situ rather than in a structure. Both the easement and the repository require the existence of their institution in perpetuity and a keen awareness by the institution of the value of the resources being preserved.

It seems to me that the professional and avocational communities need each other to pull this off and having a museum as part of the project would also help. We will have greater success, I believe, when we go out seeking funds if the effort represents a combined effort.

Finally, the bottom line is that this is a big task, but one that is simply too important to not do.

REFERENCES CITED

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