

FROM SEARCH TO RESEARCH: PROSPECTS FOR ARCHAEOLOGY ON THE FOUR NATIONAL FORESTS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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ABSTRACT

The four National Forests of southern California have changed from token archaeological programs to staffing archaeological positions and providing protection for selected archaeological resources. Research issues are overshadowed by management and funding necessary to protect sensitive archaeological resources. Programs for archaeological site evaluations are uneven across the Forests and are not unified by any common research orientation. A review of Forest Service archaeology in southern California from 1970 to 1990 is provided with a discussion of the goals of the 1990s.

INTRODUCTION

A variety of factors have conspired to keep southern California Forests out of the archaeological research business. The emphasis continues to be on archaeological inventory. A few efforts have been made to channel Forest Service archaeology in a consistent research direction but they have not taken hold. Angeles, Cleveland, and Los Padres National Forests have small cooperative programs encouraging archaeological investigations by external institutions. A regional approach to defining research programs and consistent methods is needed.

This paper reflects experience gained on my personal odyssey through the Forest Service. I began as an archaeologist in 1976, shifted in 1982 to environmental planning and management of other resources, and finally returned to archaeology just 2 years ago. This meandering course has left me with a unique perspective on archaeology as practiced by the Forest Service in southern California--a perspective that involves the history of cultural resource program development from early on, an awareness of the administrative context of Forest Service cultural resource programs, and a certain dispassionate distance from the subject matter.

Originally I was hired by Los Padres National Forest to work in their "fuels program." At the time, massive fuelbreaks were thought to be the best hope for protecting urban areas as well as keeping firefighters gainfully employed during the long off-season. Incidentally, I believe it to be highly revealing of basic organizational values that the Forest Service looks at the incredibly diverse chaparral community and sees "fuel".

In those days I had zone responsibilities--that means that I was loaned out to do piecemeal work on several national forests in what we call loosely the "South Zone". This usually means, from south to north: Cleveland, San Bernardino, Angeles, and Los Padres National Forests. Sometimes the term includes all or part of the Sequoia National Forest. This paper focuses on the 4 most southern forests exclusive of the Monterey Ranger District which is more central Californian in nature. These Forests as well as all others in California are part of the Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), headquartered in San Francisco.

The following discussion provides a background and history of Forest Service archaeology in the South Zone; current work; and observations and recommendations concerning development of archaeological re-

search in the southern California National Forests.

BACKGROUND

What I found most startling upon returning to my role as Forest Archaeologist in 1990 is that, for all practices, time had stood still. Little or nothing had changed.

This is where we were/are as I see it. These observations are generalizations, and there certainly are exceptions. I draw heavily from my experience on Los Padres National Forest and these observations may not apply equally to all South Zone Forests.

1. There is a continuing struggle for compliance with Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act in Forest programs--a situation that demands nearly constant vigilance on the part of the various cultural resources staffs. A large part of our energy is spent being internal cops, a distasteful job made especially difficult because we have no authority other than moral force and strength of personality.

2. We struggle to achieve equal treatment with other resource programs. This is manifest in competition for money, workspace, and program priority. Let me provide an example: archaeology and wildlife biology started out about the same time as newcomers to Los Padres National Forest. For a variety of reasons, wildlife biology has grown tremendously but cultural resources stagnated. The current cultural resources staffing levels on South Zone Forests are much the same as when I left in 1982. We really do not have the staff for a program of research.

3. Cultural resources are not seen by the Forest Service as essential to its mission. I want to share a short tale about this. At a recent Los Padres meeting highlighting the accomplishments, legal requirements, and opportunities available through the cultural resources program, a young and relatively progressive District Ranger who should have known better said, "This is all very interesting, but it doesn't have anything to do with what we need to accomplish on my

District." The point is that a bias against cultural resources runs strong and deep in parts of the Forest Service.

4. With a few exceptions, cultural resources are not seen by the Forest Service as resources worthy of management in their own right. The various cultural resource programs exist and are tolerated primarily because they facilitate the projects and programs of others (e.g., prescribed fire, recreation, and special use permitting.)

5. The Forest Service does not prize efforts by professionals, any professionals, to maintain a strong identity with their fields. In fact a survey of Forest Service values indicates that maintaining a strong professional identity is among the least rewarded values while teamwork and loyalty to the Service are among the most highly rewarded (Kennedy and Quigley 1989). In this kind of organizational culture, it is easy for a professional to become isolated from peers, to rarely crack a book, and to develop a blissful ignorance of developments in the field.

6. The cultural resources staffs of the South Zone Forests have truly incredible work loads. On Los Padres National Forest we are involved in virtually every project and I firmly believe that our workload is the heaviest of any of the Forest's various staff groups. With such workloads, it is not surprising that research has not been seriously embraced.

These conditions, along with a host of others, have contributed to the virtual absence of research programs in the South Zone Forests. What we have in lieu of a program of research is, in essence, a "search" program. By this I mean active archaeological survey efforts. These seem to have several characteristics in common:

1. Most surveys are done by "paraprofessionals", Forest Service employees from different fields who are given minimal training in technical documentation of archaeological sites and who operate more or less under the direction of a professional archaeologist. While many of these paraprofessionals have developed an admirable level of skills, they tend to lack orientation to archaeological re-

search--they are focused on getting Section 106 compliance out of the way so that other projects can proceed.

2. Survey areas are defined by the concept of "Area of Potential Effect" or "APE" which, in turn, is strongly conditioned by the project area as defined by Forest Service managers. It would be largely accidental that an APE might coincide with a land unit having meaning in a program of regional research.

3. Sites are described primarily from surface expression only. Little active subsurface testing is done for either detailed description or for determination of National Register eligibility.

4. Sites are, or shortly will be, documented using a site data base software called MINARK. MINARK prompts us to make detailed field observations which essentially constitute test implications for some invisible middle range theory. For example, we are asked to describe site function from a list of normative functional categories (e.g., "alignment/ring, hunting" or "alignment/ring, food processing") that seem to be driven by some implicit theory of hunter-gatherers which, in turn, is probably traceable to microeconomic or optimal-foraging theory. We seem to have gotten the cart before the horse with the use of this new software and it is unlikely to lead us toward a research orientation.

Attempts have been made to break the "search" program mold. The first that I can recall was in the late 1970s. Don Miller, then- Regional Archaeologist, was frustrated over the empirical generalizations that characterized much internal and almost all contract archaeology for the Forest Service at the time. As a partial remedy, Don actively encouraged the various Forest Archaeologists to agree at the very least on a general theory of culture that would, somehow, guide fieldwork. If you recall the debate within archaeology at that time was concerning itself over material versus historical models of culture.

I remember quite clearly that Don had a private vision of the 17 Forest Archaeologists bobbing on a pond like ducks, all point-

ing into a prevailing wind of theory. The prevailing wind, the one Don encouraged in a now-lost presentation paper (Miller and Horne 1978), was cultural materialism. As a general theory it was as good as any and better than most--and it had the twin virtues of compatibility with ecologically oriented research and the demonstrated capacity to energize archaeological thinking.

Ultimately Miller was unsuccessful in this effort, mostly for reasons beyond his control. At the Regional level, Miller's energies were consumed by his role as a combat archaeologist fighting compliance and budget wars. It also failed because then as now there was a prevailing lack of interest in archaeological research on the part of individual Forest archaeologists and because the path linking general theory and daily field archaeology was not made clear. You cannot match archaeological facts to a theory lacking test implications.

We had a second chance to get our ducks lined up with a short-lived and little-known process entitled "Resource Protection and Planning Process," or simply "RP3". RP3 had a broad scope of purpose, being envisioned as a holistic underlying logic for California's historic resource planning. An important part of RP3 was the development of research objectives for the archaeology for a region.

In 1979-80, with pilot area funding from the Historic Preservation Office and some logistic support from Los Padres National Forest, Mike Glassow, Mark Raab, Dave Fredrickson, and I worked on an RP3 document that focused on Santa Barbara County. The end product was largely Glassow's (n.d.) and was essentially a regional research design focusing on problem domains. This document ultimately was incorporated into the archaeological element of the Santa Barbara County Heritage Management Plan.

Since I left archaeology around the time the work was completed I am not sure what happened to statewide plans to undertake RP3 planning. Certainly, support was dropped by the Historic Preservation Office. One other thing is clear as well; the process made very little difference in the conduct of

archaeology on the National Forests of the South Zone. Presently the ducks point any which way they please.

RECENT RESEARCH

To find out about recent research I did an informal census of my fellow Forest Archaeologists in the South Zone. While the census was neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, I think we managed to develop a reasonable idea of the current situation. There were few surprises. First, there are no pure, problem-oriented research projects. Every project is a balancing act between management information needs and the interests of research. Second, no organized regional approaches to archaeology are reported for the South Zone Forests--instead I heard reports of nearly random acts of archaeology.

I have selected a few examples from the Angeles, Cleveland, and Los Padres National Forests:

Angeles National Forest

The cultural resource staff of the Angeles National Forest used funding from the California Off-Highway Vehicle Commission ("Green Sticker" money) to fund excavations and detailed surface investigation at Rowher Flat in the Santa Clarita watershed.

No other programs are in progress and none are anticipated, according to Mike McIntyre, Forest Archaeologist.

Cleveland National Forest

Several recent research projects have favored the Cleveland National Forest, where archaeological research is more advanced than on the other South Zone Forests. Fullerton State University has worked for several field seasons at the Los Pinos prehistoric site. Dorothy Hall, ex-Forest Archaeologist, directed volunteers at excavations of the Tenaja village site, using one-time special funding to address National Register eligibility.

The very active San Diego County Archaeological Society (SDCAS) tested 2 late, high elevation sites in the Laguna Mountain

Recreation Area under the direction of Tim Gross of Affinis. This work has not yet been published, but Gross reports (personal communication, 1992) that the focus of the research is on chronology and the settlement system, including defining the social units using the sites, determining seasonality of use and resource procurement strategies, and modeling trade (cf. Hall n.d.). Enough research has been done in the mountainous interior of San Diego County to allow comparison with lower elevation mountain sites, specifically a number of sites on the Roberts Ranch in the Descanso Mountains.

Los Padres National Forest

UCSB has excavated sites in the San Ynez Valley portion of the Forest but results are still preliminary. This work is geared toward training students and is not part of a larger program of research. The Forest's cultural resource staff, using "Green Sticker" and Forest Service trail funding and the assistance of many volunteers, has conducted test excavations at 10 sites. The focus of research is similar to the SDCAS Laguna Mountain work--chronological placement and basic subsistence-settlement questions. The key distinction between the Los Padres and Cleveland situations is the former's lack of interior region comparative collections and defined assemblage types. A great deal of work remains to be done.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

My first observation is that not a great deal is going on but I detect an upturn in interest. Second, the future of archaeological research on the National Forests of the South Zone lies in "partnerships" among the Forest Service, avocational groups, volunteers, and external research institutions. Unconventional sources of funding must be developed to foster these partnerships. Third, for the foreseeable future, research will be basic, focusing on chronology and description of assemblage types. Despite some advances, the archaeological record on National Forest land in the South Zone is very poorly understood. And fourth, I believe that we have a critical need for an organizing framework for archaeological research,

perhaps a general regional research design for South Zone Forests with more specific components for each Forest. Explicit minimum research questions and reasonably consistent methods need to be specified. The prognosis for such development is good, as the Forest Archaeologists of the South Zone have committed in principle to developing such a research design.

NOTE

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