

## CERAMICS FROM THE LORENZEN SITE

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### ABSTRACT

A small collection of pot sherds, ceramic pipes, ceramic figurines and pipe fragments was recovered from the upper levels of the Lorenzen site in 1960. At the time it was an unexpected occurrence. Today ceramics from the upper Pit River form part of a growing distribution of pottery, ceramic pipes and ceramic figurines in northern California and southwest Oregon. The pottery from the Lorenzen site is similar to pottery on the upper Klamath River and upper Rogue River known as Siskiyou Utility Ware. It is proposed that the Lorenzen pottery can be considered a variant of Siskiyou Utility Ware based on similarities in vessel shape and manufacturing techniques.

Over the years ceramics from California's archaeological sites and particularly ceramics from northern California have been virtually ignored due to their rare occurrence. It is only in the last 15 years that the nature of these ceramics has begun to be investigated. In the mid 1970s during the analysis of materials from the upper Klamath River the need for recognition, description and detailed analysis of ceramics from northern California was recognized (Mack 1978, 1983). Part of the artifact assemblage from 35KLL6, a house pit village on the upper Klamath River, consisted of over 200 pot sherds and 22 figurine fragments from the partial excavation of three multifloored house pits. In the course of analysis and interpretation of the ceramic materials from Border Village, a search of the published and unpublished literature for descriptions of ceramics from southwest Oregon and northern California was made. There was very little on ceramics from this region, a little on ceramic figurines and almost nothing on pottery. Yet in talking to archaeologists in northern California and private collectors and archaeologists in southwestern Oregon, it became clear that there were a few sites which were known to contain ceramics. One of the few reported and analyzed sherds from northern California was from 4SIS13 reported by Wallace and Taylor in 1952. Because this appeared to be the earliest report of pottery in the region and it resembled the pottery from Border Village, the name Siskiyou Utility Ware was given to the pottery from the upper Klamath River drainage.

During the search for other sites in northern California, a reference to ceramics recovered from the Lorenzen site was noted. A few years later with the help of Suzanne Griset the Lorenzen ceramics were

examined at U.C. Davis. At that time it seemed likely that the ceramics from the Lorenzen site were closely related to the ceramics from the upper Klamath River. Recently, again with the assistance of Suzanne Griset, a loan of the ceramics from the Lorenzen site was arranged so they could be described, analyzed and compared to the growing body of ceramics from the southern Cascade region of northern California and southwest Oregon (Figure 1).

### Lorenzen Site (4MOD250)

The Lorenzen site, located in the upper Pit River drainage, was excavated in 1960 under the direction of Dr. Martin Baumhoff by test pits using six inch levels. It was excavated to investigate the linguistic separation of Achumawi and Atsugewi and the possible time they entered northeast California by Dr. Baumhoff and Dr. D. L. Olmstead. Published articles resulting from the excavation dealt with the project's methods, objectives and conclusions (Baumhoff and Olmstead 1963, 1964). An unpublished manuscript on the Lorenzen site was prepared in 1968 by Dr. Baumhoff and Dr. Jerry Johnson. None of these reports the presence of pot sherds or figurine fragments though they are pictured in the 1968 manuscript.

The description and analysis of the ceramics from the Lorenzen site were undertaken for two reasons. One, it was important to complete a detailed analysis and description of this collection as there are so few instances of ceramics in an archaeological context in northern California. Two, the analysis and description were necessary so the collection could be compared for possible relationships, if any, between the Lorenzen ceramics and other ceramics from the southern Cascades of California and Oregon.

### Description

Ceramics are usually defined as "products of the clay and silicate industries". The ceramic artifacts from the Lorenzen site are all made of clay. The artifacts are of five categories: pottery, pipes, figurine fragments, daub and pit linings. By definition pottery is a clay vessel hardened by heat. The pot sherds from the Lorenzen site come from vessels which have been fired.

The ceramic artifacts from the site are found primarily within the top 36 inches of the deposit. The pot sherds, with one exception, were recovered from the top 30 inches of the site's deposit which was determined to be at least 114 inches deep in places. This places the pottery and most of the other ceramics within the two upper midden strata. It was within these upper strata that a house floor was identified. A single radiocarbon date 510± 70 years was taken from charcoal recovered from the upper midden strata at 18 inches (Baumhoff and Johnson 1968). This roughly dates the ceramics to the Late Prehistoric period around A.D. 1400.

### Pottery

The pottery from the Lorenzen site is a very crude, hand-modeled brownware lacking any kind of decoration. There is some variation in certain attributes such as surface and core color, thickness of the sherds and hardness. Some of this variation may be explained by the probable poor control over firing.

There were 24 pot sherds recovered from the site--eleven rim sherds and 13 body sherds. This does not at all represent a complete sample from the site. Apparently, during the first several days of excavation the ceramics were not recognized by the field crew. A visitor to the site during the excavation pointed out that there were ceramics in the backdirt piles. It is therefore from some time after the approximate midpoint of the excavations on that the ceramics were recovered from the excavated deposits.

The pot sherds can be described, using the Munsell Soil Color Charts, as having a surface color ranging from reddish yellow through yellowish red to light to dark brown and a few shades of gray; most are some shade of brown (5yr 5/6; 7.5yr 5/6, 5/4, 4/2; 10yr 5/4). There is also some variation in core color, but most sherds have reddish yellow cores, with a few having brown, yellowish red and pink cores (5yr 6/8, 5/6, 6/6; 7.5yr 7/6, 6/6; 10yr 4/2). The variation in the surface color of the single large sherd indicates the variation of surface color is likely due to a lack of control in the firing atmosphere. The range of core color may reflect the use of different clay sources as well as variation in firing.

The vessels range in hardness from 2.5 to 4.0 on the Mohs Scale of Hardness; most falling between 3 and 4. The surface texture of the sherds is grainy and the apparent paste texture is medium to coarse causing irregular fracture of the pottery. The sherds have a dull to matte surface luster. There was no slip used.

The vessel form is a wide-mouthed, shallow bowl ranging roughly in diameter from 15 to 32 centimeters. The depth of the bowls is somewhat less than nine centimeters. The base was probably gently rounded; one large sherd allows a fairly accurate interpretation of the base shape for at least one bowl. The rims are irregularly rounded; often they are uneven. All rims are slightly incurved. The walls of the vessels vary in thickness from 0.4 to 1.4 centimeters. The vessel rims are thin, 0.4 to 0.8 centimeters; the body walls are thicker. The single large sherd ranged from 0.5 at the rim to 1.3 centimeters at its base.

An examination of the sherds gives a good indication of the manufacturing techniques used. The clay used was apparently neither cleaned nor kneaded before construction. The outer walls have surface cracks, and there are occasionally impressions of plant parts within the walls. The construction method was by hand modeling; finger depressions are occasionally visible. The surface of the vessels was smoothed, but not wiped before firing. Non-plastic inclusions in the clay may be temper, but it is likely the non-plastic inclusions occur naturally in the clay. The clay body of the pit linings and daub contains the same non-plastic inclusions. This is what gives the paste of the pottery its medium to coarse texture. The vessels were fired in an uncontrolled or poorly controlled firing atmosphere, evidenced by surface smudging and incomplete oxidation of the clay.

The possible function of these vessels is not clear. Only two of the 24 sherds are blackened on their outer surface, indicating direct exposure to fires or hot coals. Therefore, cooking can not be seriously considered as the main function of these vessels. Their shallowness and wide open mouthed shape is probably best used as a serving or eating bowl, though they may also have been used for storage of small quantities of food stuffs. Similarly shaped bowls in pottery assemblages from the southeastern U.S. have recently been described as being used for cooking, serving and eating vessels for liquid foods including stews and mush (Hally 1986).

## Pipes

There were three ceramic pipe fragments and one complete pipe found in the site. The complete specimen was associated with a burial. The excavators report this burial pit was dug from around the 48 inch level. This places it chronologically earlier than the pottery. The pipe fragments were all found between 30 and 42 inches, also below the pottery, and therefore probably slightly older.

The pipes are the short, tubular, conical shape variety. The complete pipe is 7.6 centimeters long and 1.3 centimeters in diameter at its mouth. The large pipe fragment is also 1.3 centimeters in diameter at its mouth and approximately 4.5 centimeters long. Both these pipes have been decorated with incised lines. Some of the lines encircle the pipes near their mouths and bowl ends. There are other short incised lines set in rows down the length of the pipes. The two smaller fragments have no visible decoration.

The surface and core colors of the pipes are quite different from the pottery. The complete pipe is very dark gray to black with red ochre rubbed into the incised lines. Two of the fragments are pinkish gray and pinkish white in both surface and core color. The third fragment is reddish yellow much like the core color of most of the pottery. Because of the burning of tobacco or other substances in these pipes, their surface and core colors probably do not reflect their original firing. Their firing does appear to be uniform and not merely the result of the smoking of tobacco. They all have a hardness of 4 on the Mohs Scale.

The pipes seem more carefully made than the pottery. The body of the pipes is made from clay which seems to have been both cleaned and kneaded before the pipes were modeled. The surface of the pipes has been smoothed carefully and decoration applied to some. The surface and paste texture are fine to medium. There are no coarse non-plastic inclusions in three of the four pipes. Their thickness is also more uniform, between 0.3 and 0.6 centimeters.

## Figurine Fragments

There were two fragmentary conical cylinders excavated from the Lorenzen site. Both are decorated with short incised lines similar to those on the pipes. One was found in the same level as one of the pipe fragments. One figurine fragment is probably the leg from an animal or human figure; the other is much larger, being over 2 centimeters at its widest broken end, and may be part of a body.

In comparing the physical characteristics of the figurine fragments and the pottery no difference is indicated in the technology used to make the two classes of ceramic artifacts. The surface colors are reddish yellow and light brown; the core colors are reddish yellow and strong brown. They both have a hardness of 4 on the Mohs Scale. Their surfaces are grainy due to the medium to coarse nature of the paste and only being smoothed when still plastic. They both have medium to coarse non-plastic inclusions. The firing atmosphere was an uncontrolled oxidizing atmosphere creating some outer surface smudging.

## Miscellaneous Fired Clay

The daub and other miscellaneous pieces of fired clay are of interest primarily because of their similarity in paste texture and surface and core color to the pottery and figurine fragments. They were probably accidentally fired with the pottery or when they fell into a fire hearth or house fire. Several of these are of interest because they have impressions of close twined basketry and possibly impressions of tule matting. One pot sherd also has a small area impressed by close twined basketry.

## Comparisons

Even though a refiring experiment and the thin section analysis of the Lorenzen ceramics are not yet complete, enough of the analysis has been completed to compare this collection with other ceramic collections in the southern Cascades of northern California and southwestern Oregon.

The pottery and figurine fragments are very similar to the ceramics found elsewhere in the region which was named Siskiyou Utility Ware in 1978. The pottery from the Lorenzen site fits the description of Siskiyou Utility Ware.

The ware has been described as a very crude, hand-modeled brownware with a grainy, dull to matte surface and a paste texture which is medium to coarse. The vessel shapes are a shallow, wide-mouthed bowl and a small cup with irregularly rounded, slightly incurved uneven rims and a round base. Fingernail impressions are occasionally used as decoration around the inner surface of the rim in the upper Rogue River drainage (Mack 1986).

There are a few differences between the pottery from the Lorenzen site and the other variants of Siskiyou Utility Ware, though they may not turn out to be significant due to the very small sample from the Lorenzen site. The rims of the Lorenzen site sherds are slightly thicker, 0.4 to 0.8 centimeters as compared to 0.2 to 0.4 centimeters on the rim sherds from the upper Klamath River and 0.3 to 0.4 on the rim sherds from the upper Rogue River drainage. There is a higher percentage of bowls with diameters over 23 centimeters at the Lorenzen site and no cups, which do occur in sites within the other two drainages.

There are also differences concerning the sherds' surfaces. Many of the sherds from the upper Klamath and Rogue sites show extensive exfoliation or surface erosion on the outer surfaces, while the inner surfaces seem more carefully smoothed and never show evidence of erosion. The sherds from the Klamath and Rogue sites are also occasionally wiped when plastic. None of the Lorenzen sherds show any erosion or exfoliation on their outer surfaces, nor do they show any evidence of wiping on their surfaces. Because of the thicker rims and lack of exfoliation, the Lorenzen sherds appear more sturdy than the sherds of the Klamath and Rogue drainages.

Generally, the pottery from the Lorenzen site has those characteristics which fit it easily into Siskiyou Utility Ware: vessel construction techniques, firing atmosphere, paste texture and vessel shape. The lack of decoration causes it to fit more closely with the pottery from the upper Klamath River than that from the upper Rogue River drainages. The two figurine fragments are also almost identical to the figurine fragments from those sites. In addition, all radiocarbon dated

assemblages of Siskiyou Utility Ware from the upper Klamath and Rogue River drainages date to around A.D. 1400, as does the Lorenzen assemblage.

The pottery and the figurines from the Lorenzen site are part of the ceramic horizon found within the southern Cascade region of northern California and southwest Oregon. Therefore, the upper Pit River drainage will likely yield other sites with ceramics, as supported by such finds during the recent testing done at Lake Briton (Nilsson 1987).

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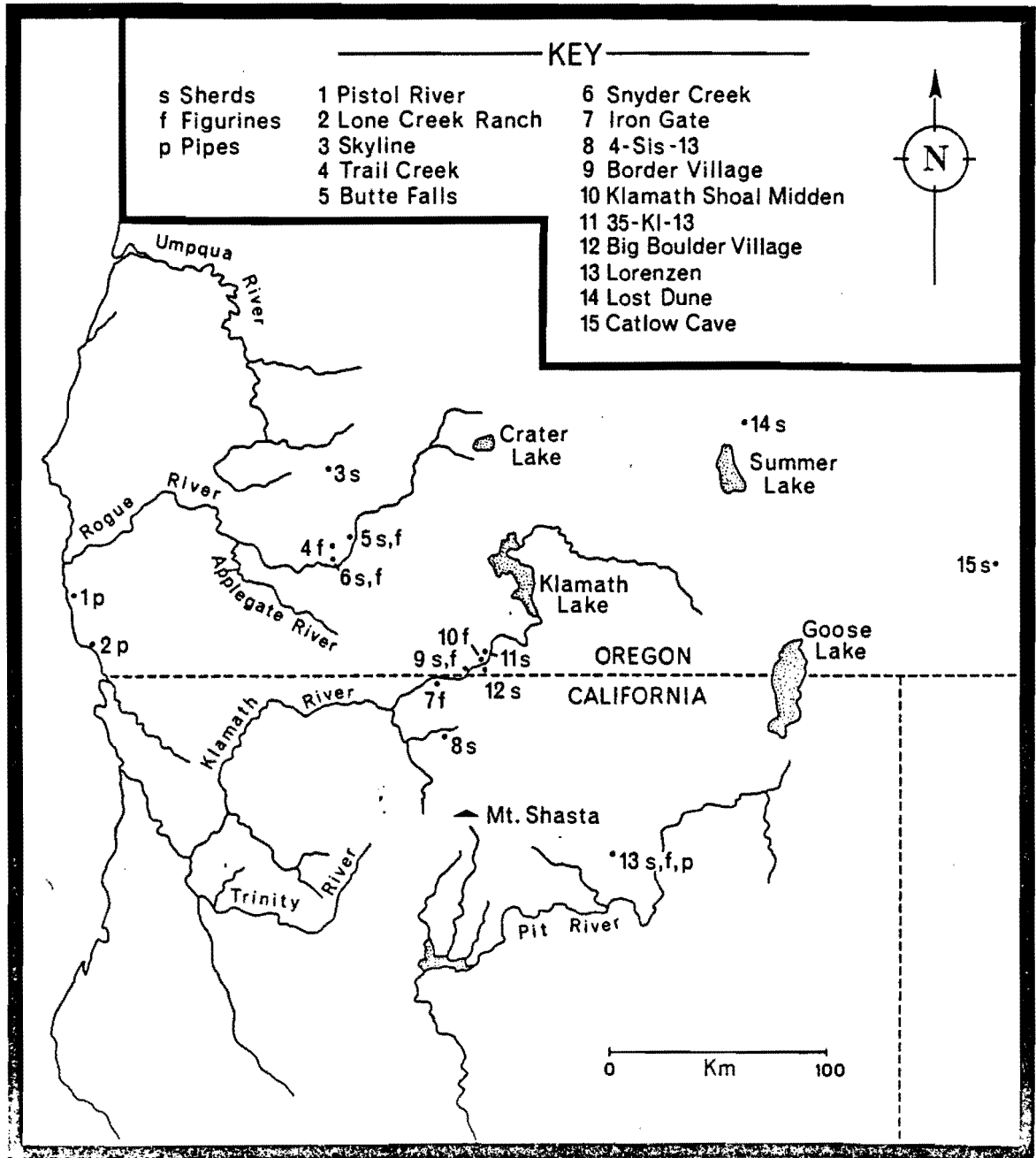


Fig. 1. Sites containing fired clay artifacts in southern Oregon and northern California.