

INTERPRETING ARCHAEOLOGY AT ANDERSON FLAT: ONE SEASON, 12 SITES, 44 TOURS AND 1,000 VISITORS

J. Charles Whatford
Anthropological Studies Center
Sonoma State University
1801 East Cotati Avenue
Rohnert Park, CA 94928

ABSTRACT

During the summer of 1992, Sonoma State University's Anthropological Studies Center (ASC), under contract with the California Department of Transportation, District 1, engaged in a program of archaeological investigations along Highway 53 through Anderson Flat in Lake County. Funding provided through the contract and the cooperation and assistance of the California Department of Parks and Recreation enabled ASC's Interpretive and Outreach Services archaeologists/interpreters to conduct on-site tours for over 1,000 members of the public, including groups from local elementary schools. This presentation is a practical guide to how this interpretive program was conducted, and ways these techniques may be used to open other archaeological projects to the public.

INTRODUCTION

During the 1992 field season, the Anthropological Studies Center of Sonoma State University (ASC), under contract with District 1 of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), engaged in a program of archaeological investigations along Highway 53 through Anderson Flat, just north of Lower Lake, Lake County. Caltrans funding along with cooperation and assistance from the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) enabled the Office of Interpretive and Outreach Services (IOS), the interpretive arm of the ASC, to conduct a multifaceted Public Interpretation Program (PIP). Archaeologists/Interpreters Elyn Walker and J. Charles Whatford of the IOS conducted on-site tours for over 1,000 visitors. This presentation is a practical guide illustrating how this interpretation program was conducted, and suggests ways these techniques may be used to open other archaeological projects to the public.

A significant degree of public interest in the Anderson Flat Archaeological Project (AFAP) was anticipated due to its large scale and visibility, proximity to Anderson Marsh State Historic Park, and the broad local interest in and concern for the park and its archaeological resources. Acknowledging the degree of public interest the project would generate, it was decided to take a proactive approach and structure an organized program to manage public interaction. Careful preparation of an interpretive program as part of the project not only resulted in fewer *ad hoc* interruptions by drop-in visitors with resulting work disruptions and safety concerns, but also helped fulfill the legal, ethical and professional responsibility to promote public participation in the project, where appropriate.

Public interpretation of archaeological projects has often been problematical and less than successful, often due to the difference in perspective between the technical and academic

interests of archaeologists and the desire by the public for interpretive programs that are understandable and educational yet entertaining (Jameson 1993:8). The design of the interpretive program of the AFAP was based, in part, upon three basic principles regarding public interpretation of archaeology as articulated by Potter (1991:11).

First, good interpretation is neither easy, natural, nor automatic. It involves much advance designing and planning to be really effective, since each part of an interpretive program needs to be presented as well as possible. There is no substitute for a well-planned and well-presented interpretive program, particularly since the public can and will detect incompetence.

Secondly, on-site archaeological interpretive programs are best done by archaeologists from the field crew, whether students or professionals. After receiving some training in the practical principles of effective communication and interpretation, on-site programs by members of the archaeological field team are more effective and more desirable than using guides who are not members of the field crew. As Potter emphasizes, "a site tour given by an archaeologist offers visitors one of the few chances they get to come face-to-face with people who are in the process of creating knowledge" (ibid.).

Thirdly, since no two archaeological projects are the same, public interpretive programs presented as part of these projects won't be the same either. While the basic structure of the public program may be similar, the content and details will vary with the project. The mechanics and logistics of archaeological interpretive programs will vary according to the particular location and conditions of each project. Based on these variables, each project's interpretive program will involve different combinations of interpretive signs, printed materials, and face-to-face interpretation.

THE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

IOS staff members Vera Mae Fredrickson, Ro Lisk, Elyn Walker, and J. Charles Whatford, made public interpretation of the on-going project an integral part of the archaeological field program. Provision for this innovative interpretive program was written into the contract, and made possible by unprecedented levels of funding by the project sponsor (Caltrans). In addition, an extensive degree of interagency cooperation contributed to the program's success. Members of the local supervisory staff of DPR were very supportive as were the Elem tribal representatives, who actively participated by reviewing the project's interpretive written materials prior to printing and by their role as partners in the interpretive tour presentations.

The interpretive program consisted of three main components: guided public tours, a lay report for the public, and a documentary video. A detailed description of the guided public tours is the subject of this paper and is presented below. The public report is presently in progress and will sum up the project's findings in non-technical language. It will include descriptions of methods and findings, as well as a summary of questions answered and new questions raised. It is intended to provide a format for discussing the archaeology of the Lake County region and its relationship to California archaeology. The documentary video is also in progress at the time of this writing. It is being produced by an Emmy-award winning producer in the San Francisco Bay Area.

GUIDED PUBLIC TOURS

Guided public tours, the centerpiece of the interpretive program, consisted of two types: tours for general public, and tours for fourth- and fifth-grade classes from local elementary schools. Both kinds of tours were carefully planned and scheduled. All tour groups assembled at Anderson Marsh State Historic Park. Each group was accompanied at all times by a trained archaeologist/interpreter, safety considerations being a

prime component of the tours.

Tours for the General Public

A total of 44 guided tours were given over a period of 26 days. Although the excavation phase of the AFAP began on June 17th, public tours did not commence until July 18th, due to the need for the interpretive materials to be reviewed by Caltrans, DPR, and the Elem tribal representatives. Tours were scheduled on a consistent basis, with one (1) one-hour tour scheduled each work day, at the same time each day. Two one-hour tours were scheduled each Saturday and Sunday. Tour times were clearly advertised on a sign visible from the highway, on public information boards located at Anderson Marsh State Historic Park, and in the local newspapers. The sign near the highway was designed to be large enough and legible enough to be clearly read from the highway. Measuring four by eight feet in size, the lettering was performed by a local professional sign painter. Maintaining regular and specific times and days for the public tours helped to alleviate potential traffic and safety problems along narrow and heavily travelled Highway 53.

Local supervisory staff of DPR granted permission for tour participants to use the facilities available at Anderson Marsh State Historic Park. These included an off-highway parking lot (the regular parking fee was waived for tour participants), chemical toilets, potable drinking water, and use of a barn with a wooden floor and a roof for shade for the pre-tour orientation and post-tour Native American presentation.

The wooden-floored barn was located adjacent to the parking area and served as a gathering point for tour participants. Clearly designated by a "Tour Sign-In Here" sign (also done by the professional sign painter in colors similar to the road-side sign), the barn provided space for displays of small exhibits of local artifacts, as well as walls for information panels, photographs, and maps of the project area. Included on the information panels were a copy of the safety rules for the tours, copies of the project interpretive brochure, a brief overview of the project, and the

time of the next tour.

The tour structure had eight components:

- (1) Introduction of the archaeologist/interpreter.
- (2) Introduction of the archaeological team.
- (3) Introduction of the project.
- (4) Overview of the project area localities.
- (5) Overview of archaeological concepts and techniques.
- (6) Guided tour of an archaeological excavation in progress.
- (7) Native American presentation.
- (8) Conclusion of tour.

Following the self-introduction by the archaeologist/interpreter, the interpreter explained that an archaeological team from the Anthropological Studies Center was working under contract with Caltrans, in coordination with representatives from DPR and the Elem Indian Community. A brief overview of the Anderson Flat Archaeological Project was then presented, including an explanation of how the proposed widening of Highway 53 by Caltrans necessitated archaeological investigation under Federal historic preservation laws. This was followed by a brief introduction to the ethnography and archaeology of the local area and a short discussion of archaeological concepts and techniques (i.e., stratigraphy, methods of dating archaeological materials, law of superposition, etc.). Once everyone in the tour group had signed in and was wearing a hard hat and safety vest, a guided tour of the excavation in progress at locality SON-72W-C was presented. This locality is situated a few hundred meters to the south of the barn, so that tour participants did not have far to walk in the 100-degree-F temperatures. In addition to its proximity, this locality lent itself well to public interpretation since adjacent to the large area exposure was a backhoe trench excavated at the direction of the project geoarchaeologist. The addition of this trench adjacent to the tour area allowed the interpreters to lead the group's attention beyond the artifacts to a focus on the breadth of the archaeological methods being employed in the project. Explaining how geomorphological studies can add to the ar-

chaeological investigations, interpreters attempted to demystify the process of doing archaeology.

Following the guided tour of the trench the group returned to the shade of the barn. At this time the archaeologist/interpreter introduced the Native American presenter. As a representative from the Elem Indian community and one of the project Native American Consultants, the presenter offered a Native perspective on the project and fielded questions from the group. The tour concluded following this presentation. In this way the last words the tour group heard were from a Native American representative involved with the project.

At the conclusion of the tour, each participant was given a copy of the project pamphlet. This one-page, tri-fold was professionally- produced by IOS. The brochure included a short summary of the project, names of agencies involved, and an outline of local archaeology.

School Tours

Nine tours for 254 fifth- and sixth-grade students from local schools were also provided. The structure of these tours was similar to those offered for the general public, though the content was somewhat expanded and adapted for the younger audience.

Three two-hour school group tours were scheduled per week. These scheduled time slots were filled quickly. As with tours for the general public, the importance of having specific times and days for the school tours was realized. The school tours were scheduled weeks in advance of the actual tour date. Several weeks prior to the tour date, a teacher's packet was distributed to each classroom teacher. This packet included a brief introduction to the AFAP, a summary of the ethnography of the area, discussion suggestions for classroom exercises, a short book list of publications on California archaeology and California native people as well as those dealing with the archaeology of the Clear Lake Basin and the native peoples indigenous to the area, and, lastly, a vocabulary list of relevant terms and

definitions.

In addition to providing their own transportation to and from Anderson Marsh State Historic Park, the school groups agreed to provide one guidance person (parent, teacher, and/or adult volunteer) for six students. The school tours usually ended with a picnic lunch at the park which allowed informal question and answer opportunities for all participants.

Safety Measures

Safety measures were integrated into all aspects of the interpretive program. These included planning the times and location of all tours to prevent interference with the ongoing work. A safety notice and a list of safety rules was posted on the information board in the parking lot at Anderson Marsh State Historic Park, as well as in the barn where the tour groups assembled. All tour participants were asked to sign the Tour Sign-Up List. This provided a record of the number of tour participants but more importantly served to inform tour participants of our safety concerns and rules. In addition, since the Sign-Up List included a release statement, signing this sheet constituted the signing of a legal release of liability for all the agencies involved in the project. Lastly, as required by Caltrans and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, orange vests and hard hats were worn by all participants during the guided visit to the excavation locality.

OTHER TYPES OF PUBLIC INTERACTION

It is our experience that had the project team not taken a proactive approach to public relations and public interpretation, the project would have been interpreted anyway, with the local public drawing their own conclusions. This insight applies particularly to interactions with the local news media. Reporters for the local newspapers were very interested in the project, and several news articles appeared in local papers before the

field phase of the project was underway. Project interpreters organized a special guided tour for visiting State Senator Mike Thompson and members of the Lake County Chamber of Commerce several weeks after the project had begun. This served to attract even more media attention to the project.

One lesson learned about dealing with members of the press was the importance of being very clear about project objectives. We found we had to continually reiterate that we were interested in finding out how people had lived in the past in that area, not how they died. The press came to interview us with several of the usual assumptions about our work already in mind: we were looking for human graves, we were looking for the oldest/largest/richest site. Useful guidelines regarding public relations for archaeological projects are presented in DeCicco (1988) and Potter (1990).

Anderson Marsh State Historic Park is a busy place during the summer. A number of visitors to the park were interested in the ongoing excavations but were not able or willing to wait for the scheduled daily tour. To accommodate these visitors, an observation area was set up a safe distance from the nearest excavation locality with fencing and yellow caution tape. An information panel was set up in this area with project pamphlets for distribution and with safety rules and the next tour time posted on it.

In addition to those who didn't stay for the formal tours, there were nearly 200 walk-up visitors who stopped along the roadside at various project localities, curious about the work being done. An archaeologist/interpreter was assigned to the field crew at the more accessible and visible project area localities. When drive-by visitors showed up, the crew chief relied on the interpreter to respond. Intercepting the visitors before they reached the activity area, he or she answered their questions, gave a very brief explanation of the project, offered the visitors a project pamphlet, and extended an invitation to come to Anderson Marsh State Historic Park for the regularly scheduled guided tour.

The benefits of this kind of on-site interpretation were several. Having an archaeologist/interpreter on the field crew designated to respond to drive-by visitors resulted in a consistency of public message about the project and its activities, and helped avoid potential work stoppages, confusion, and inconsistent responses from the field crew. This arrangement also benefited the project budget, by saving the crew chief's time. Thus the crew chief's attention could remain on the task of supervising the field crew, and at the same time the public's curiosity and interest was addressed in a constructive way.

Ongoing Public Interaction

Though the field phase of the project ended in late September 1992, follow-up interaction with the public has continued. As a result of the local publicity during the field season, project interpretive specialist Elyn Walker has given several presentations to local civic groups within Lake County about the project and its findings. There is also a growing degree of interest in the forthcoming public report and documentary video.

CONCLUSIONS

Public interpretive efforts such as this are an effective way to further public understanding, respect, and support for cultural research and the need for preservation. The interpretive arm of the Anderson Flat Archaeological Project created a positive image for the agencies and groups involved and for California archaeology in general. However, these benefits are the result of a labor-intensive effort. Public programs such as this are not simple to do and take almost as much prefield logistical planning, field coverage, and post-field follow-up as do the technical fieldwork efforts. Though public programs in almost any context are not inexpensive, the benefits are many and can act as important support for the field work by providing a recognized and accepted avenue of public interactions.

It is our hope that the interpretive program of

the Anderson Flat Archaeological Project is only the first of many archaeological projects to take an active role in public participation as part of the data recovery program. Comprehensive programs like this, involving both archaeologists and local Native Americans doing interpretation for the public, go a long way towards alleviating stereotypes as well as building a constituency for historic preservation for the future.

1991 Archeology Goes Public in Annapolis.
Federal Archeology Report 4(3):10-13.

Potter, Parker B., Jr., and Mark P. Leone
1987 Archeology in Public in Annapolis: Four Seasons, Six Sites, Seven Tours, and 32,000 Visitors. *American Archeology* 6(1):51-61.

NOTES

I wish to acknowledge the insights gleaned from the writings of Parker Potter and Mark Leone about their experiences interpreting archaeology in Annapolis. The inspiration for the title of this paper came from a paper of theirs published in 1987 (Potter and Leone 1987). I thank my colleague, Elyn Walker, for her assistance, encouragement and for the invitation to present this paper.

REFERENCES CITED

- DeCicco, Gabriel
1988 A Public Relations Primer. *American Antiquity* 53:840-856.
- Jameson, John H., Jr.
1993 Public Interpretation Initiative: New Horizons. *Federal Archeology Report* 6(1):8-11.
- Potter, Parker B., Jr.
1990 The "What" and "Why" of Public Relations For Archaeology: A Postscript to DeCicco's Public Relations Primer. *American Antiquity* 55:608-613.