

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE RAVEN

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ABSTRACT

After 25 years of government archaeology, this is a look back at one of the pioneers. Christopher Corson blazed a trail that is still the definitive work for the Surprise Resource Area and the Great Basin. He was able to accomplish more inventory with less budget than we have twenty years later. Chris set the standard for reports and correspondence with the fledgling State Offices of Historic Preservation. Chris wrote much of the book that we use today, and did the random stratified surveys that are still the basis for site density and significance determinations. He was able to get the reluctant bureaucracy to fund the all-important baseline data gathering effort. A most important part of the legacy that Christopher left at the Surprise Resource Area is a preserve solely for the archaeological resource contained on 1600 acres. Even after twenty years, that is a remarkable achievement for an area dominated by the livestock industry. His eloquence charmed the most antagonistic, and even today he is revered and remembered by them.

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When the Bureau of Land Management began to hire archaeologists some 25 years ago, among the first was a recent Ph.D. graduate of UC Berkeley named Christopher Robert Corson. He went to work on what was then called the Susanville District as the District Archaeologist to help in the planing effort. Soon he saw that the best of the best archaeology was located in northwest Nevada, on the Surprise Resource Area. Christopher convinced the District Manager that he should be reassigned to Cedarville as the Surprise Resource Area Archaeologist.

Christopher set out to learn all he could about this area. He had already spent three field seasons with Richard Ambro and James O'Connell, running surveys and developing a basic chronological sequence in the area. Christopher got the funding and backing to lay out and implement an extensive, area wide, stratified random survey. He and his crew located and recorded nearly 500 sites, representing one of the best samples of northern Great Basin archaeology.

One of the direct outcomes of the Environmental Impact Statement was a series of

extensive developments for livestock management. Chaining, seeding and water developments all required survey and mitigation. While devising mitigation plans, Christopher wrote the prehistory of the Surprise Resource Area, and opened dialog with the Nevada and California State Historic Preservation Officers. He worked hard to educate and sensitize his fellow BLM employees, managers, ranchers and the public about the archaeological values of this great area. Last summer, one of his greatest antagonists in Surprise Valley pointed at the soil where we were standing and told me that, "Christopher said that it had been changed to this color from all those Indians living there for thousands of years." That had changed his perspective forever. This rancher now takes an interest in the stewardship of this huge site on his private land.

Christopher was instrumental in getting High Rock Canyon designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, as well as having livestock excluded from this archaeologically important region. This is also the location of extremely sensitive and fragile portions of the Lassen/Applegate Trail.

At Massacre Lakes, 1600 acres was set aside and excluded from grazing because of the unique

and fragile archaeological resources. And this in an area dominated by the livestock industry!!

When Christopher Raven left the Bureau of Land Management to pursue more creative endeavors he left behind many tools. These include the two exclosures mentioned, plus four National Register eligible districts, and numerous sites, surveys, records, and reports, not to mention a popularizing of the resource, and respect for the profession. It has been my pleasure to follow in his footsteps.

Today, there is no Susanville District and our administrative unit is called the Surprise Field Office. We still manage 1.5 million acres of Nevada, with a handful of specialists, but we have come a long way.

A programmatic agreement with the California SHPO will reduce consultation by as much as 105 days.

Our Memorandum of Understanding with the Fort Bidwell Paiute Tribe provides a protocol for Government-to-Government relations. A cooperative agreement with the University of Nevada, Reno has provided many, many hours of student labor and eight MA theses have resulted.

We are moving forward to nominate all four districts identified by Christopher to the National Register of Historic Places.

The 1600-acre archaeological preserve has been protected from artifact collectors, as well as wild horse and livestock trampling.

All collections have been curated.

Two ranches with significant archaeological and historic resources have been acquired and treatment plans and nominations to the National Register of Historic Places are being written.

Exciting interpretive initiatives are planned for the National Historic California Trail – the Lassen/Applegate – because truly outstanding resources remain essentially unchanged in 150 years.

Efforts to inventory and record resources have matched those of the earlier effort, but we have also added aggressive law enforcement to curtail vandalism and collecting of artifacts, as well as an outreach program to educate and sensitize the public.

All in all, Christopher should be proud of his legacy and our subsequent efforts to maintain, enhance and manage this world class Resource Area.