

## THE KASHAYA POMO INTERPRETIVE TRAIL PROJECT

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*This paper explores the creation of an interpretive trail detailing the culture history of the Kashaya Pomo tribe and their encounters with the Russian colony of Fort Ross (1812-1841). Situated in the Fort Ross State Historic Park in Sonoma County, the proposed interpretive trail offers an exceptional opportunity for the public to view the archaeological remains of a multi-ethnic colonial community, and to understand how the first mercantile colony in California impacted local Indian peoples. The project is a collaborative effort of California State Parks, the Kashaya Pomo tribe, Caltrans, UC Berkeley, and SFSU. The purpose of the paper is to address several critical issues involving the development of the interpretive program. A significant challenge is the presentation of multiple histories of Fort Ross derived from archaeological research, native oral traditions, and archival documents. Another challenge is the public viewing of archaeological remains — is it possible to interpret and protect archaeological sites at the same time? What are the best mediums for conveying information to the public while walking the interpretive trail? An important issue is how to develop an efficient interpretive program that is cost effective in light of the current economic recession.*

This paper introduces a proposed interpretive trail in the Fort Ross State Historic Park that highlights the culture history of the Kashaya Pomo and their encounters with the Russian mercantile enterprise of Colony Ross (1812-1841) and other colonists. The goal of the interpretive trail is to employ archaeological information, archival sources, and native narratives to tell multiple stories of the entanglements that took place between the Kashaya Pomo and successive waves of foreigners. The Russian-American Company, a commercial monopoly representing Russia's interest in the lucrative North Pacific fur trade, established Colony Ross in 1812 in the heart of Kashaya territory along the coastal stretch of what is now western Sonoma County. For the next 29 years, Russian merchants and their multi-ethnic workforce hunted sea otters along the northern California coast, raised crops and livestock, and established a small manufacturing center to produce goods for trade with the Franciscan missions in Alta California. The Russians exploited local Indians as manual laborers and as spouses for the colonial workforce. When the Russian closed their California colony in 1841, the Kashaya encountered new colonists with the founding of Mexican ranchos and the subsequent migration of Euro-American ranchers into the area.

Recent archaeological research is addressing the long-term implications that colonialism has had on the Kashaya Pomo people. Through the collaborative efforts of the California Department of Parks and

Recreation, the Kashaya Pomo Tribe, the University of California at Berkeley, and CALTRANS, a growing corpus of archaeological work is presenting new insights on the ancient and recent histories of the Kashaya (Dowdall and Parrish 2003; Farris 1989, 1997; Lightfoot, *et al.* 1997; Parkman 1993, 1996/1997; Parrish, *et al.* 2000). The idea of developing an interpretive trail grew out of the archaeological research and discussions with Kashaya tribal scholars and elders. An exceptional opportunity exists to tell the stories of what happened to native peoples who were incorporated into the first mercantile colony in California. By employing the rich archaeological record, native oral traditions, and Company documents we can vividly show how the Kashaya Pomo's multi-ethnic experiences and laboring practices produced material innovations and cultural transformations — how they adopted new foods and artifact forms, labored in agricultural pursuits and manufacturing activities, interacted with diverse peoples from across the North Pacific, and established inter-ethnic households comprised of native women and colonial men. We can also show how the Kashaya maintained a strong sense of “Indian” values and meanings that continued to direct their lives throughout their encounters with colonists.

The proposed interpretive trail builds upon one of our most significant findings. Within a 1½ mile radius of the Fort Ross Visitor's Center are found a diverse range of Kashaya Pomo sites nestled among some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in California.

These include shell middens, lithic scatters, cupule rocks, and village sites that vary in age from the oldest (6000-8000 B.P.) to the youngest sites in the park. Other archaeological sites illustrate the various work areas and residential places of the pluralistic work force of Colony Ross (Russians, Native Alaskans, Kashaya and other Native Californian peoples), as well as later Mexican and American period ranchers.

The creation of the interpretive trail will appeal to park visitors for two reasons. First, the current interpretive program at the Fort Ross State Historic Park emphasizes a Russian history of Colony Ross with its reconstructed stockade and buildings where the elite Russian managers resided. The interpretive trail will take park visitors beyond the stockade walls to walk in the hinterland of the colony where working-class Russians, Creoles (people of mixed Russian/Indian ancestry), Native Alaskans, and Kashaya Pomo lived and labored. Second, there are very few places in California where the public can view interpreted archaeological sites. We will broaden the scope and experience of park visitors by featuring a diverse range of archaeological sites that present a flow of history from the earliest prehistoric sites to the interactions that the Kashaya had with the multi-ethnic peoples of Colony Ross and later ranchers.

With support from the California State Parks, the Kashaya Pomo tribal council, the California Council for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Archaeological Research Facility at UC Berkeley we will develop a master plan for the Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail this summer. A summer field school in the Fort Ross State Historic Park will carry out the following three tasks.

The first task is the training of Kashaya Pomo and UC Berkeley students in the practice of archaeology. A coordinated team of Kashaya and Berkeley students will work on the interpretative plan for several sites along the trail system. The field program will not only provide training in archaeological field techniques and the methods of site interpretation, but it will emphasize to both Indian and non-Indian participants the crucial importance of collaborative research.

The second task will be to collect narratives of Kashaya Pomo history. A very rich oral tradition exists among the elderly generation of tribal members, and this corpus of stories is a powerful source for examining how colonialism impacted the Kashaya people, and how they negotiated and survived colonial encounters over multiple generations. These stories represent a living oral history of the Kashaya Pomo community—one which defines who they are and how they have

maintained a strong tribal identity despite many decades of challenges and difficulties resulting from colonial oppression, loss of land, racial abuse, exploitation as laborers, and disease. However, outside of Robert Oswalt's (1966) pioneering work in the 1950s, few of these stories have been recorded and transcribed. The oral tradition that plays such an important role in defining the Kashaya Pomo community is being lost as the current generation of elders disappear. We have identified six elders – Violet Parrish Chappell, Adrian Franklin, Leslie Marrufo, Lester Pinola, Ina Scott, Vivian Wilder – who are experts in the language, cultural practices, history, and oral traditions of the Kashaya Pomo tribe. Representing a total of almost 500 years of Kashaya experiences, they were raised at the Stewarts Point Rancheria and grew up speaking their language, participating in feasts, ceremonies, and dances, and listening to their parents and grandparents tell stories that had been handed down about Fort Ross.

In addition to presenting native narratives, the Kashaya elders will also be consulted about the archaeological sites included on the trail and where to place interpretive stops in telling the culture history of the Kashaya Pomo tribe. A critical component of this work is identifying sites that may contain sacred or sensitive remains that should not be part of a public interpretation program. Kashaya and Berkeley students will work with the native elders to produce “memory maps”—spatial representations of memories and stories of the past and present as told about specific geographical places along the trail system.

The third task is to consult with various experts on the logistics of constructing the trail and the best mediums for conveying information to the public. California, State Park, CALTRANS, and museum specialists will be brought up to field school to participate in workshops with tribal elders and archaeologists.

In developing a master plan for the interpretative trail we recognize three significant challenges.

1. How do we develop an interpretive program that provides public interpretation and access to archaeological sites in a state park, yet also provides for the long-term protection and stewardship of these cultural resources? The inclusion of archaeological sites (especially those relating to Native American ancestry) on interpretive trails is rare in California. In part this stems from a real concern to protect the location of sites from the public to prevent looting and vandalism. It also stems from some Native California tribes who have voiced concern about public access to ancestral sites. Fort Ross State Historic Park

provides a unique opportunity to showcase a very rich and diverse archaeological record in full coordination with the Kashaya Pomo tribal council. But the challenge remains: how can we both interpret and protect cultural remains in a way that allows the public to enjoy and experience the archaeological record.

2. Another challenge is that of presenting multiple histories based on different lines of evidence drawn from archival documents of the Russian-American Company and other European accounts, native oral traditions, and archaeological research. An exciting part of the collaborative effort is working with tribal members in presenting alternative histories of the Kashaya Pomo and Colony Ross to the public. For example, we may want to interpret an archaeological site from the perspective of a Kashaya Pomo story, from Company documents, and from archaeological findings. We recognize that different historical perspectives may be generated from these sources and that a more balanced and sophisticated interpretation may result from their inclusion in the interpretive narrative. But a major challenge is how to employ these diverse sources in our interpretive program without making the story so complex that we lose our targeted audience. Workshops with Kashaya elders, interpretive specialists, and archaeologists will take place to explore how these alternative historical scenarios might be presented to the public.

3. The final challenge is developing the nuts and bolts of the trail – how do we present these multiple or alternative histories to the public? James Clifford (1997) recently wrote in his book, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, that any interpretation of native history in the Fort Ross State Historic Park will pale in comparison to the imposing reconstructed Russian stockade. The Kashaya elders have already rejected the idea of reconstructing or rebuilding a full scale Kashaya Pomo village in the park, arguing that they do not want to denigrate Kashaya history by turning it into a Disney or “Kashaya” land. We have considered the possibility of exposing features and stratigraphy of selected archaeological sites to public view, but this is probably unrealistic given the current budgetary situation and the challenges of maintaining such exposures over time. One viable option is the placement of permanent panels containing texts, maps, and pictures along the trail system.

But probably the simplest and least costly option is to place numbered posts along the trail. While at first discounting the numbered post option as outdated, we will be giving it serious thought this summer in our meeting with various museum and interpretive specialists. Not only is it the least costly solution, which is an important factor given the dire outlook for the state’s economy, but it is the least

obtrusive in presenting the broader archaeological landscape to the public. It also represents a flexible system with numbered posts keyed to a pamphlet and/or booklet that can be readily updated. Furthermore, as Barbara Bender—a noted archaeologist and expert on cultural landscapes—recently stressed to us, multiple pamphlets may be produced that present alternative histories or different memory maps of Kashaya elders. Finally, numbered posts may be incorporated into the cutting edge of archaeological interpretation given the rapid development of wireless computer technology that could allow us to develop a web site for the trail that will take “connected” visitors on simultaneous “real” and “virtual” walk into the archaeological landscape.

Since the presentation of this paper at the Society for California Archaeology meeting in March 2003, the field school proposed for the summer of 2003 had to be canceled when two key members of the research team were immobilized by injuries/illness. The field program has been rescheduled for a four week period for the summer of 2004 (first four weeks of June), and we invite you to come up to Fort Ross to assess our progress in developing the master plan of the Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail.

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