

## KEEPING WATCH IN KERN COUNTY: SITE STEWARDSHIP AT TOMO KAHNI SHP

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*On June 9, 2001, the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP) launched a new site stewardship program at Tomo Kahni State Historic Park near Tehachapi in Kern County. As one of the first groups formed in partnership with California State Parks, the program has experienced its share of growing pains, but nonetheless has already experienced great success in protecting the sites within Park boundaries. A small group of dedicated volunteers maintains vigilant watch over the precious resources tucked away in the Sand Canyon area, bound on all sides by private property. Recent organization changes based on the unique situation at Tomo Kahni SHP will further enhance the success of the site steward program.*

On June 9, 2001, the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (otherwise known as CASSP) in cooperation with the California Department of Parks and Recreation, launched a new site stewardship program at Tomo Kahni State Historic Park. It was the second such group to be formed within State Parks and the fifth CASSP workshop offered statewide.

Tomo Kahni is located on 240 acres in the archaeologically-rich area of Sand Canyon near Tehachapi in southeastern Kern County. The park encompasses all or portions of eleven formally recorded archaeological sites which include everything from bedrock mortars, to lithic scatters, to rockshelters, to house rings, and rock art. These sites likely represent an important cultural or ethnographic landscape attributed to the Kawaiisu people and could be considered a district under the National Register of Historic Places.

Prior to about 1993, the land now encompassed by Tomo Kahni was privately owned and was a well-known "recreation spot" for locals. The property changed hands a number of times, with at least one attempt at occupation by an old trailer home. At least one current volunteer remembers seeing real estate advertisements for the property that contained such special features as "Indian grinding holes and pictographs". Despite over ten years of ownership by the State now, complete with fencing and signage to indicate so, trespassers have continued to get into the park boundaries to re-inhabit favorite hunting

grounds, ride the old dirt roads on their All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and bring friends to see the pictograph-lined cave.

In keeping with the wishes of the late Kawaiisu elder Andy Greene, State Parks has maintained a policy of non-development of the Tomo Kahni property. That also means, however, that there is no regular staff presence at the site during "working hours" in the form of a visitor center, ranger station, kiosk or maintenance shop. Combining that with public tours being offered only on weekends in spring and fall, it leaves a lot of time in the year when Tomo Kahni is vulnerable to trespass and vandalism. The only saving factor is the park's rather secluded location known only to locals, old-timers and to visitors who have previously taken the guided tours.

In that respect, it can be a challenge to introduce people to a site with sensitive cultural resources. Our mission is to educate the public and we can only hope that our tours inform and inspire the visitors to respect our state's cultural heritage. This is the case 99 percent of the time, but there always looms the potential for that 1 percent of a "bad seed" element. Over the years, artifacts have been known to disappear from familiar points along the tour route, and a couple of years ago someone attempted to move a large stone engraved with a rare Southern Sierra petroglyph panel.

Fortunately, Herb Dallas at the Southern Service Center in San Diego recognized that Tomo Kahni's unique situation would make it an ideal candidate for

instituting an archaeological site monitoring program like that being offered by CASSP to other agencies around the state, such as the BLM.

The site steward training that fine weekend in June was a smashing success. Some thirty plus people attended including twenty volunteers and about a dozen archaeologists and representatives from other state parks who were looking into starting versions of the program at their own parks. A one-day classroom training was followed by a day in the field where the many corners of Tomo Kahni were assigned to eager volunteers. In the field, volunteers filled out Archaeological Site Condition Assessment Records (or ASCAR for short) to document a “baseline” state for monitoring signs of vandalism and natural deterioration.

A site steward coordinator position was subsequently assigned to the very active Tomo Kahni Board of Volunteers. Funding from State Parks became available for the purchase of supplies for the program and the volunteer coordinator put together a site monitor backpack with items such as a GPS unit, digital camera, clipboard, forms and various writing utensils. Over the next few months, a couple of site monitors headed out into the field and submitted reports on their sites.

Unfortunately, the coordinating ranger later transferred to another park. Since the program was so new, the volunteer coordinator began to feel that he did not have enough guidance to lead the program and decided to resign from the position. Meanwhile, many from the original group of trained volunteers still weren't quite sure what they were supposed to do.

Despite many of these “growing pains”, the site steward program at Tomo Kahni was already beginning to experience success. One particularly dedicated site steward, Robert Hoffman, continued to make monthly trips out to his assigned site, CA-KER-4445, taking photographs, writing reports and calling the sector office when he noted anything out of the ordinary.

On a couple of occasions, ATV tracks were noticed on dirt roads within park boundaries. Quick notification of State Park staff resulted in a ranger-led reconnaissance of the fence line, where a break was discovered on the backside of the park. A neighbor saw the rangers that day and suggested that a new area resident may be the culprit, and may not have realized that this was State Park property. The fence was repaired, additional signs were posted and the ATV tracks have not been seen since.

On another one of Robert's outings, he noticed some people hiking on the property. Fortunately they were friendly and it turned out to be an off-duty ranger from Red Rock State Park showing the Tomo Kahni sites to his visiting parents during the tour off-season. On a separate occasion, Robert had documented substantial foot traffic at the park along the tour route. This turned out to have been the results of a special tour that was given to a large group from the Native American community the preceding weekend. Although no damage was incurred to sites in either one of these cases, it did outline the need for better coordination about special visits or tours between Parks staff, the sector office and site monitors.

Unfortunately, “after-hours” activities at Tomo Kahni are not always so benign, underscoring the great need for the site steward program. During subsequent site monitoring visits, Robert has documented shell casing scatters and a bullet hole in a State Parks sign, and most recently, what appears to be looting activity in midden soils at his site near the southwest gate. Careful observation of two different sets of footprints was made indicating that this was not a solo operation. CA-KER-4445 is located at the “back” of the park and well away from the main tour route, so without the monitoring program, this damage may have gone unnoticed for months or even years.

In just short of a two-year time period, and under a newly-established system in a constant state of flux, Tomo Kahni's site steward program has already been able to begin documenting the amount of activity going on inside the park boundaries, outside of the regular tour season. By recording incidents of vandalism within a timeframe of one month or less, based on routine monthly site visits, State Parks is better equipped to address important resource management concerns.

So what's in store for the future of this already successful program? The empty volunteer coordinator position on the Volunteer Board has now been filled by docent Jeff Mattern and he has been moving ahead with the organization of the program under the assistance of State Park liaison Mark Faull<sup>1</sup>. Jeff plans to begin work on putting together a digital map of the park property, labeling landmarks for greater readability. When incidents are reported, they will be marked on the map and keyed according to type and severity. That way, we are able to distinguish any patterns in the location of incidents and can then use that information to protect against future trespass more effectively.

Jeff is currently working on a spreadsheet file to keep track of the monitoring frequency of each of the eleven archaeological sites on the property. Ideally, each site will be visited once a month on random days, so as not to establish a predictable pattern. In mid-April of this year, all site stewards from that original June 2001 training who are still interested in participating in the program, will attend a refresher course out in the field. At this course, stewards will learn how to use the handheld GPS unit, the digital camera and will go over filling out the site monitoring forms in detail.

It looks to be an exciting year for Tomo Kahni State Historic Park. Additional land acquisitions are in the works, a new office space is on the horizon and increased publicity has caused tour waiting lists to quickly fill. Now, more than ever, the archaeological site steward program plays an integral role in the preservation of the cultural resources that we work so hard to share with and interpret to the public.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Due to employment considerations, Jeff Mattern is no longer coordinating the site steward program although he is still involved as an individual steward. Robert Hoffman has now taken the coordinator position and his incredible sense of dedication will serve the program well.