

ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERPRETIVE TRAILS: A CASE STUDY FROM FORT ROSS STATE HISTORIC PARK

KENT G. LIGHTFOOT, OTIS PARRISH, AND ROBERTA A. JEWETT

At last year's annual meeting of the Society for California Archaeology, we introduced a proposed project for creating an interpretive trail in the Fort Ross State Historic Park that would highlight the culture history of the Kashaya Pomo people and their encounters with the Russian mercantile enterprise of Colony Ross (1812-1841). The state park is situated on the Sonoma County coastline about 110 km north of San Francisco. The idea of developing an interpretive trail grew out of previous years of archaeological research and discussions with Kashaya tribal scholars and elders in collaboration with California State Park, Caltrans, and UC Berkeley archaeologists. 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 Russian-American 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 foreign colonists.

The proposed interpretive trail would showcase a diverse range of archaeological sites found within a 3 km radius of the Fort Ross Visitors' Center among some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in California. These include shell middens, lithic scatters, cupule rocks, and village sites that range in age from the oldest (6000-8000 BP) 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, including Russians, Creoles (people of mixed Native and European ancestry), Native Alaskans, Kashaya, Coast Miwok and other Native Californians, as well as later American ranchers.

CHALLENGES IN THE CREATION OF INTERPRETIVE TRAILS

The purpose of this paper is to continue the discussion of two critical challenges raised last year. The first is the development of an interpretive program that promotes interpretation and public access to archaeological sites in a state park and yet also provides for the long-term protection and stewardship of these cultural resources. How can we both interpret and protect cultural remains in a way that allows the public to enjoy and experience the archaeological record without contributing to the destruction or vandalism of archaeological materials? The second challenge is in developing the nuts and bolts of the trail – how will we present interpretations of Kashaya culture history and their encounters with diverse colonists to the public? This is especially pertinent with the dire state budget; how can such an interpretive program be developed and maintained by a state agency strapped for money?

We had originally planned to sponsor a coordinated field school program in the summer of 2003 that would bring together interpretive specialists, archaeologists, and Kashaya Pomo elders to discuss the challenges of developing the interpretive trail. However, our senior staff members—all over 50 years in age—had health problems and we had to postpone the field school. We have subsequently put all of our senior staff into fitness and gym programs and we will offer the field school in the summer of 2004. In any event, during this period of convalescence we have had plenty of time to read and think. Of course, this can be a dangerous thing. In reading about interpretive programs developed

elsewhere in the United States and across the globe, it gave us the opportunity to think “outside the box” with regard to what could be done to develop an archaeological interpretive program at Fort Ross State Historic Park. We also participated in a graduate seminar on interpretive trails in the fall semester of 2003, which was a highly stimulating experience given the energy and innovative thinking of the participants. Many of the papers you are hearing today in this symposium are an outgrowth of that seminar.

Admittedly, we are still grappling with some basic issues about access to and the interpretation of archaeological materials on a public trail. For example, what are the potential benefits and shortcomings of using permanent panels containing texts, maps, and pictures and/or written pamphlets or flyers tied to numbered posts placed strategically on trail stops? Our review of the literature on interpretive programs focusing on archaeological sites as part of trail systems or outdoor museums suggests that we may need to go beyond a basic trail system of signs or a pamphlet associated with numbered stops. Recent studies indicate that the most effective programs involve archaeologists or interpretive specialists working or interacting directly with the public. The presence of archaeologists or interpretive specialists makes a real difference in the experiences of visitors.

EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY AS AN INTERPRETIVE TOOL

In attempting to provide this human touch to interpretive programs of archaeological materials, a number of successful programs in England, France, Denmark, and the United States have introduced school children and the general public to experimental archaeological methods that are tied to specific sites (Borman 1994; Iseminger 1997; Keen 1999; Petrequin 1999; Stone and Planel 1999). There is a long history of research in experimental archaeology in England and the European continent, much of it focusing on traditional technology, replication studies of artifacts, use-wear studies, and the like. Experimental archaeology has provided one avenue for evaluating hypotheses or interpretations about the manufacture and use of material culture unearthed in archaeological sites. What is fairly new is the integration of these material culture studies into interpretive programs.

Some of the most successful programs involve the construction of ancient house structures and other archaeological features using traditional technology and local raw materials that are linked to nearby excavations. These hypothetical constructions are

based on interpretations generated from carefully controlled archaeological investigations. As Stone and Planel (1999:2) stress, there is an intentional distancing of these kinds of experimental studies from the more common museum practice of site reconstruction — where new materials are employed to re-create archaeological features for visitors. In their recent overview of National Park Service (NPS) policies involving site reconstructions, Jameson and Hunt (1999) discuss the long and acrimonious debate about the re-creation of full-scale reproductions on original site locations that are built primarily for tourism. They note that this practice has generally fallen out of favor in the NPS given the potential destruction that can result to in-situ archaeological materials and deposits, as well as the problems of maintaining such reconstructions once they are built. Other European scholars, such as Sommer (1999), and Stone and Planel (1999), are emphatically critical of permanent site reconstructions in open air museums because the reconstructions tend to take on a life of their own. Rather than being recognized as hypothetical scenarios of what the past may have looked like, interpretations that are subject to change over time, these permanent reconstructions often become objectifications of a real past that become institutionalized as part of the built environment.

The general consensus among interpretive specialists is to conserve and preserve archaeological remains in situ, and that any reconstruction should be done off-site. The 1990 guidelines of the ICOMOS *Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage* emphasize that “reconstructions should not be built immediately on the archaeological remains.” (Stone and Planel 1999:3). Currently, two kinds of off-site constructions are being experimented with. One involves rapid advances in digital techniques; a new generation of virtual reality applications are being used to develop three dimensional constructions of ancient places and sites (Addison 2000; Addison and Gaiani 2000; Pletinckx et al. 2000). Several papers in today’s symposium address new developments in digital technology and website applications in archaeological interpretations.

The other is the incorporation of experimental archaeology in which archaeologists and interpretive specialists participate with the public to construct structures and replicate and use newly created artifacts. For example, Petrequin (1999) and Keen (1999) describe successful interpretive programs involving the constructions of lake dwelling structures in France and Iron Age round houses in England, respectively. These hands-on programs are not only popular with school children and adults alike, but they allow archaeologists

to continue to evaluate and test hypotheses about site interpretations derived from nearby excavations. The critical component of the program is not the finished structures per se, but rather the process of producing them. It is the incremental construction of the structures over several months by archaeologists and visitors alike that provides the educational value. As Petrequin (1999: 225) emphasizes, finished structures without archaeologists become lifeless and static and their interpretive value diminishes considerably.

A SCENARIO FOR FORT ROSS STATE HISTORIC PARK

In thinking about the interpretive trail program at the Fort Ross State Historic Park, we may want to experiment with the following scenario. This scenario would involve the continued collaboration of California State Parks, Caltrans, the Kashaya Pomo tribe and local universities. The focus of the interpretive trail would be initially on a few select sites for a one or two year-period.

Ongoing archaeological investigations could take place on scheduled days during the late spring, summer and early fall months that could be staffed by faculty and students taking field courses and seminars from local universities such as UC Berkeley, and perhaps a coalition of others. At the same time, Kashaya Pomo interpreters and other interpretive specialists would develop a coordinated program of traditional technology and experimental archaeology at nearby off-site locations. These off-site locations would serve as places where ongoing interpretations could take place involving the construction of house structures, cooking features, and other activity areas, along with the production and use of artifacts tied to the specific sites. Site visitors would not only be able to participate in a program of experimental archaeology, but could also view nearby ongoing archaeological investigations that are linked to the hypothetical constructions. The program would serve as a living traditional technology laboratory where both research and teaching could take place.

The idea would be to keep the program small scale and relatively inexpensive. Funding is a major issue. It could be run as a series of linked field courses and seminars involving faculty, undergraduate and graduate students. The program would also be linked to the already successful Environmental Living History program at Fort Ross, which involves the immersion of school children in the living history of the Russian colony during overnight stays in the state park. I think some funding could be obtained from granting agencies

that commonly fund museum projects for a finite time – that is, a one or two year funding cycle. The funding would be critical for supporting Kashaya Pomo interpreters and for supporting the archaeological research. For example, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the California Council for the Humanities have awarded grants for the field program planned for the summer of 2004. A positive component of such a program is that the active participation of archaeologists, Kashaya Pomo, interpretive specialists and students would provide the people power to monitor and protect archaeological sites on the trail. The idea is to make the project finite in scope. After the funding cycle ends, any of the constructed structures and activity areas would be dismantled, and the state would not be involved in their maintenance. The ultimate purpose of the project would be to try to develop a relatively seamless interpretive program that would allow local school children and adults to view archaeological sites and to consider some of the different interpretations that may be generated from the archaeological work and native oral traditions.

.....

REFERENCE CITED

- Addison, A. C.
2000 Emerging Trends in Virtual Heritage. *IEEE Multimedia* 7(2):22-25.
- Addison, A.C. and M. Gaiani
2000 Virtualized Architectural Heritage: New Tools and Techniques. *IEEE Multimedia* 7(2):26-31.
- Borman, R.
1994 'The Fascinating World of Stonehenge': An Exhibition and its Aftermath. In *The Presented Past: Heritage, Museums, and Education*, edited by P. G. Stone and B. L. Molyneaux, pp. 179-189. Routledge, London.
- Iseminger, W.R.
1997 Public Archaeology at Cahokia. In *Presenting Archaeology to the Public: Digging for Truths*, edited by J. H. Jameson, pp. 147-155. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek.
- Jameson, J.H., and W.J. Hunt
1999 Reconstruction Versus Preservation-In-Place in the US National Park Service. In *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education, and the Public*, edited by P. G. Stone and P. G. Planel, pp. 35-62. Routledge, London.

Keen, J.

1999 The Ancient Technology Centre, Cranborne, UK: A Reconstruction Site Built for Education. In *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education and the Public*, edited by P. G. Stone and P. G. Planel, pp. 229-244. One World Archaeology. Routledge, London.

Petrequin, P.

1999 Lake Dwellings: Archaeological Interpretation and Social Perception, a Case Study from France. In *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education, and the Public*, edited by P. G. Stone and P. G. Planel, pp. 217-228. Routledge, London.

Pletinckx, D., D. Callebaut, A.E. Killebrew, N.A. Silberman

2000 Virtual-Reality Heritage Presentation at Ename *IEEE Multimedia* 7(2): 45-48.

Sommer, U.

1999 Slavonic Archaeology: Grob Raden, an Open Air Museum in a Unified Germany. In *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education, and the Public*, edited by P. G. Stone and P. G. Planel, pp. 157-170. Routledge, London.

Stone, P.G. and P.G. Planel

1999 Introduction. In *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education, and the Public*, edited by P. G. Stone and P. G. Planel, pp. 1-14. Routledge, London.