

“GOOD CLAMMING” OR “PROTOHISTORIC MIDDEN”: PRESENTING ARCHAEOLOGY TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY AT FORT ROSS AND AT BODEGA BAY, CALIFORNIA

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This paper explores photography as a method for presenting archaeology to visitors to sites in the northern San Francisco Bay area. Photographs of archaeological excavations at Bodega Bay and at Fort Ross are archaeologically telling, ethnographically vital, and a means to present archaeology to often excluded publics. Stories generated by members of descendent communities when viewing photographs reattach cultural meaning to objectively framed archaeological sites. This active engagement with photographs is (1) holistic, (2) enzymic of barriers common between archaeologists and “publics,” and (3) a pedagogic technique to meaningfully present archaeology to the public.

Public accountability is not new to archaeologists. Holistic and inclusive methods of archaeology have been conducted with success in North America by incorporating information, stories, and opinions provided by various ‘publics’ impacted by archaeological research (Dowdall and Parrish 2003; Farris 1988; Ferguson et al. 2000; Lightfoot et al. 2001; McDavid 1997; Parrish et al. 2000; Spector 1993, 2001). Yet despite occasional confrontations that forced interaction between descendents and archaeologists (e.g. Blakey 1997; La Roche and Blakey 1997; Thomas 2000:198-199; Wilkie 2001), archaeology without public outreach often gives little thought to the people whose relatives and important places were being examined (Downer 1997; McGuire 1997; Watkins 2000:3-22).

In addition to the development of outreach and collaboration in recent archaeological practice, more specific issues are concerned with including particular voices in archaeological investigations, how the interests of both archaeologists and stakeholders are addressed, and how to present research to stakeholders and to a broader audience. Interpretive programs, such as the proposed interpretive trail at Fort Ross State Historic Park in California, are developed to make archaeologists accountable to respective publics by presenting research in a sensitive, informative, and inclusive manner. Although the formats of interpretive programs vary considerably, the myriad approaches are valuable to the creative construction of an interpretive program at Fort Ross.

Photographs of archaeological sites at Bodega Bay and at Fort Ross are archaeologically telling, ethnographically vital, and enzymic to barriers present

between archaeological and native Californian interests in site excavation, mitigation, and management. The reminiscences generated when viewing photographs by descendent communities are conducive to multiple perspectives of an archaeological site. This has already been demonstrated in an example centering on CA-SON-299 (the Kili Site) at Bodega Bay (Schneider 2003).

Owners of the land on which the Kili Site is located, permitted looting and excavation, possibly in the interest of removing the mound and to clear the land for farming. By April of 1951, seventy to eighty percent of the mound had been bulldozed and pot-hunted for private collections. Archaeologists did little to prevent destruction of the site, and at times it seemed that a shared interest between the landowners, collectors, and archaeologists promoted further destruction. Archaeologists made numerous “collecting trips” to the Kili Site, and some archaeologists were plainly indifferent to the active interests of pothunters (Fenenga 1951).

A *re-vizw* of the Kili Site and the surrounding landscape articulates stories that are generated by descendents of the Coast Miwok while viewing photographs of the site and vicinity. A photograph of a fishery operated by the Smith Brothers, looking north towards Bodega Head, also reveals the close proximity to the ethnographically documented settlement of Kili (Collier and Thalman 1996). In the background of the photograph are the Bodega Dunes where Kili was located. Suggestive of continued practice of a form of subsistence that utilized resources within a known landscape, one descendent from the Smith Family recalled:

About 50 years or so ago, it was fashionable to go tearing through the shellmounds with bulldozers. A lot of shell midden material was hauled and dumped on dirt roads to pave various driveways in the area. Word reached the family at the Smith Brothers' Wharf, who had gathered for Sunday supper, that men with equipment were digging in one of the mounds and throwing our ancestor's bones all over the place. We (children included) had to rush over there and pick up the bones and other items, place them in burlap fish sacks, and secretly rebury them in the area where we hope they won't be disturbed again. It was a very emotional time [in Cunco 2000:2].

Similarly, another member of Graton Rancheria remembered that on the following morning the hands of the people were stained red from handling bones stained by red ochre (Thomas, personal communication, 24 July 2002). Specific funerary ceremonies practiced to honor those who had passed have been done for thousands of generations and as part of that honoring, burial locations are vehemently protected and held sacred to current and future tribal members (Thomas, personal communication, 2 February 2003). The cultural and emotional violence of the desecration of Coast Miwok cultural sites and the re-burial of Coast Miwok remains imparted in this example suggest that ancestral cultural values have not been forgotten. The story shared by tribal members is instructive in terms of a sense of stewardship for the landscape that descendents of the Coast Miwok continue to defend in order to preserve their cultural heritage.

A photograph, used as an artifact, acts as a touchstone that generates stories and remembrances, and can potentially establish means to generate lines of communication between archaeological and tribal interest groups. Furthermore, Victor Masayesva, a Hopi photographer and filmmaker, commented on a photograph's ability to give testimony to the past and establish affinities to relatives he has never met and to places that are far away (Rony 1995:23). This pedagogic ability of photographs to inform and teach descendent communities and archaeologists is demonstrated at Fort Ross.

A planned interpretive trail, composed of two separate trails, leads hikers outside the Russian stockade and meanders near Kashaya, native Alaskan, Creole, and Russian non-elite archaeological sites, in addition to historic Mexican and Anglo-period sites. Presenting photographs of archaeological sites to visitors reveals narratives often overshadowed by the presence of a dominant Russian stockade (Parkman 1996/1997), and brings forth a crucial awareness of the multi-ethnic histories attached to the Fort Ross landscape.

The challenge of interpreting archaeological sites for park visitors can be met through the integration of photography and oral traditions that are attributed to certain places along the trail and are meaningful to the Kashaya Pomo. One site—CA-SON-1889—and the narratives, stories, and insights related to it will be presented as an example of this interpretive method. Just as photographs can be used in layered museum exhibits (Davis 1997:93), photographs, site maps, and oral traditions supply patrons on the interpretive trail with alternative levels of abstraction from archaeological data.

This proposed interpretive trail plan could be implemented either through a web-based format already in development or through the use of signs placed at critical locations along the trail. The signs or web site would present one or more photographs of the landscape or archaeological site in that location, together with the oral traditions and archaeological interpretations of that specific place.

CA-SON-1889 (near Clam Beach) is associated with the western interpretive trail (Figure 1). An archaeological description might read:

CA-SON-1889 is a shell midden bordered on the north by a large rock outcrop, and located within a coastal landscape littered with sandstone, limestone, and metamorphic rocks. The site was first recorded and surveyed in 1989. Artifacts recovered from the midden include sandstone, chert, and obsidian flakes, one mortar, and one pestle. When considered with the large amount of shellfish remains recovered from excavations, and when considered in terms of the site's proximity to the coast, CA-SON-1889 is believed to be a food-processing site and/or a temporary settlement. The site dates to approximately A.D. 1500 through 1812 and gives insight into social and cultural habits prior to Russian colonization.

Kashaya Pomo (Otis Parrish, personal communication, 2 March 2004) and Kashaya oral traditions from the *Kashaya Texts* (Oswalt 1966) offer another perspective.

Herman James's rendition of "Rock Man and the Sharp-Shinned Hawk Boys" (in Oswalt 1966:71) focuses on the geomorphology of the Fort Ross landscape, highlighting the interconnectivity of the Kashaya Pomo, as physical beings, and Kashaya Pomo oral traditions, as ephemerally embodied pieces of the landscape (Figure 2). In the story's ending, the two sons redeem their father's death by destroying Rock Man, whose rock remains now litter the landscape. "These rocks everywhere, the mountains of rock that we see on the earth and the stones lying on the gravel beaches, are for all kinds of things: for mussels to grow on and abalones to grow on and for Indians to make pestles and mortar stones for pounding acorns. It was for those

purposes that Rock [Man] exploded” (in Oswalt 1966:71). “Preserving Shellfish,” as told by Essie Parrish (in Oswalt 1966:301), offers further insight to how the Kashaya Pomo collected and processed local resources. Otis Parrish (personal communication, 2 March 2004) also elaborates on the impact of the landscape—its rocks, animals, and plants—on Kashaya identity and history.

Born and raised in the traditional homeland of the Kashaya Pomo, Otis Parrish spoke of an eternal connection to the landscape. With a member of his family identified in the 1820-21 census of Fort Ross (Istomin 1992), Parrish traces familial ties to the Fort Ross vicinity prior to colonization in 1812 and following the expulsion of the Kashaya Pomo from the Fort Ross vicinity in 1872. In spite of difficult times, Parrish always returns to visit Fort Ross. This is a philosophy manifest in an eternal connection to the landscape passed through generations and fused to Kashaya oral traditions.

Reluctance to use oral tradition is partly attributable to the history of archaeology as a discipline. Emphasis on cultural universals among some archaeologists (Ferguson 1996:65) and *a priori* assumptions on the untranslatable nature of oral traditions (Whiteley 2002) are opposed by multiscale approaches that mediate between separate lines of evidence to account for the inchoate nature of oral history and archaeological interpretation. We are reminded that oral traditions (and archaeology) are palimpsests of history in that they exist in the present and contain information about a past several times removed (Anyon et al. 1996). Furthermore, the temporal flexibility of oral tradition suggests an axiomatic or self-evident characteristic whereby multiple understandings of the past operate at several levels of meaning (Anyon et al. 1996). Used with archaeology, oral traditions offer perspective on archaeological layers of meaning. And, when generated through active engagement with site photographs, oral traditions provide meaningful insight into a specific place by teasing-out avenues of communication between stakeholders, which enable a reading and re-reading of a landscape (Geertz 1973:450).

A photograph, as an artifact, is a proven and principle means to understand a landscape archaeologically (Prince 1988). As a touchstone, a photograph can generate stories and remembrances, and can potentially establish lines of communication between archaeological and tribal interest groups. Photographs also empower those who view them, conjuring investigative lines to the past and



Figure 1: Looking north towards Clam Beach (Photograph by author).



Figure 2: Pieces of “Rock Man” near Fort Ross (Photograph by author).

engendering emotive and active engagement among visitors to archaeological landscapes. As Roland Barthes (1981:5) suggested, photographs are never distinguished from their referent (from what is represented), and any attempt to perceive photographic significance requires a necessary action of knowledge or reflection. Thus, the paradox, and indeed strength, of photographs rests in their specific intention and, when unframed, photographs have the ability to beget a profusion of meanings. Susan Sontag (1973:4, emphasis added) remarked, “photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that *anyone* can make or acquire,” or interpret, or reflect upon.

The proposed Fort Ross interpretive trail offers archaeologists a timely opportunity to investigate and apply new approaches to public outreach. As Peter Stone (1997:27, emphasis added) argued, “archaeologists need to know, and equally important,

must be able to *explain why* such tangible evidence is vital." This paper stresses an interpretive form of public outreach that uses photographs, oral traditions, and archaeology in concert to understand native Alaskan, native Californian, Creole, Russian, and Anglo archaeological sites at Fort Ross State Historic Park. Photographs reattach lived experiences to a traditionally objectified space and illuminate stories wedded to the cultural and archaeological landscape. Photographs and oral traditions provide a poignant interpretation of archaeological sites, and archaeology in general, whereby sites traditionally viewed by non-archaeologists as uninteresting become engaging and emotionally evocative.

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