

## HISTORICAL MAIDU OF THE FEATHER RIVER

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*The Konkow Maidu living along the Feather River remained on the periphery of Western expansion until the Gold Rush. Unprecedented immigration after 1849 completely disrupted the native population, first by hordes of miners competing for resources, and then by settlers claiming land they saw as unused. Archaeology chronicling these historical events is rare and can be very ephemeral. This paper summarizes the potential for the Oroville Facilities Relicensing Project to contribute to these research themes, and highlights investigations of one site that may predate the Gold Rush.*

The indigenous people of the Oroville vicinity, the Konkow Maidu, were situated on the frontier of colonial expansion for decades before their culture came into contact with Western Civilization at the time of the California Gold Rush. Phrasing it this way makes it sound like colonialism had no impact on the Maidu until a specific encounter, and that this “contact” marked the before and after, or from the prehistoric into the historic-period, for the Konkow Maidu. There are implications with describing Maidu history as an event of one insulated culture coming face-to-face with another, and thereby ushering in a new era. Rarely are sites, or the processes that create them, that simple. There is no culture-contact event sandwiched between prehistory and history when prehistoric and historic-period groups commence interacting. And even more problematic for archaeology is that there is no date when “prehistoric” people suddenly stop using “prehistoric” things, as suggested by this false distinction between prehistoric, contact-period, and historical archaeology. Take, for example, the case of Ishi, who continued to use “prehistoric” things into the twentieth century. The lithic debris he left behind in 1900 would most likely be falsely labeled “prehistoric.”

There are a number of criticisms of using the label “culture contact” to describe colonialism, as well as proposed alternatives (see Silliman 2005). For now, I reject looking for culture contact in favor of examining Maidu history. That is, I prefer to examine the culture history of the Konkow Maidu as a continuum instead of looking for the contact-period archaeological sites. For this reason my paper was changed from its original title: Culture Contact on the Feather River.

Often “contact-period” sites are labeled thus because of the presence of non-native material culture: a piece of worked glass, or perhaps a glass embroidery bead, in an otherwise “prehistoric” assemblage consisting of traditional Maidu, locally manufactured material culture. In some cases an assortment of imported, factory-made goods will be found in sufficient context to force this definition. However, these contexts only suggest occupation during the post-contact period, and should therefore be examined within a historic-period context. There also seems to be a mystery threshold of “enough” non-native material that lifts the site out of the contact or proto-historic period and into the historic. That is, at some point the assemblages

diverge enough to label the site multi- or dual-component, regardless of the process that created the site. I concede that in many cases the homestead of such-and-such a person occupies the same space as the village site of somebody else, and that the two components have little or no relationships other than the view to consider. However, this interpretation must be supported through other lines of evidence before the possibility of Native American occupation into the historic period is discarded, and before the “prehistoric” and “historic-era” assemblages are carted away to two separate laboratories for analysis, as so often happens. If a dual-component site appears to straddle the prehistoric and historic divide, that site is better served by developing an appropriate context than by dividing it into two frameworks. Such an appropriate context must focus on the indigenous population in the historic era.

### FORKS OF THE FEATHER RIVER HISTORIC-PERIOD CONTEXT

Unfortunately, the focus in California and the West has been limited to colonial sites such as Spanish, Mexican, Russian, English, and Yankee forts, towns, ranchos, and of course missions. Historical archaeologists zeroing-in on these major nodes of multi-cultural interaction have created, and continue to create, well-developed contexts for interpreting these remains (Lightfoot 2005; Silliman 2004). However, archival records show that beyond these points of direct and sustained relations, there were a variety of outlying interactions that left signatures upon the landscape. In fact, there is every reason to believe that some outlying impacts did not leave easily discernable signatures at all. Outlying populations were not insulated from a variety of affects of colonialism ranging from displacement of other indigenous groups or information about events in far off lands, the introduction of new trade goods, and, of course, the spread of unfamiliar diseases. A suitable context for these site types is lacking, particularly for the Sierra Nevada, and often the prehistoric or historical professionals involved focus on the aspects they know best. These ephemeral sites that likely have no direct archival evidence must be considered in light of a broader historical context emphasizing regional peripheral events within a larger western-frontier arena. Such a context for the Oroville project does not begin with the Gold Rush, but with the era of Spanish and Mexican exploration.

### Era of Spanish and Mexican Exploration, 1770-1830

Certainly events associated with the period 1770 to about 1830 had some impact on the people of the Forks of the Feather River, albeit likely unnoticeable in the archaeological record. Spanish, and for that matter, Russian, settlements along the coast explored the interior as early as 1808, with a major expedition that reportedly reached the mouth of the Feather River in 1821. Captain Luis Arguello led an expedition of 75 men, 235 animals, and a canon that visited a string of villages. Their descriptions of the villagers suggest retention of traditional lifestyles. Arguello wrote from a River Patwin village on the Sacramento River in the vicinity of Woodland, "I came upon a village situated on the banks of the river Jesus Maria named *Goroy* inhabited by a large number of people who received me with sufficient tranquility and some gifts of their making which they gave me with a show of rejoicing and peace. From these natives I began to receive news of the unknown establishment of foreigners of which I had already been told and which the object of the expedition is to discover" (Arguello 1992:23). Not all interactions were peaceful. The very next day was spent battling another village to the north, killing five and wounding an unknown number. The distance between that battle and Oroville is about 60 miles. Additionally, the River Patwin share an ethnographic border with the KonKow Maidu, and both speak Penutian-stock languages. I would not be surprised if word of what that canon did during the battle reached the study area.

### Era of Fur-trapping Expeditions, 1830-1840

This phase of periodic incursions into the interior ended with Jedediah Smith's traversing the Central Valley and foothills in 1827. His trip passed much closer to the Oroville area, probably into ethnographic KonKow Maidu territory. His descriptions opened the door to French- and English-speaking fur trappers entering the valley from the northeast. Far more disease entered the valley literally on the backs of this increased interaction. John Work led a trapping party in 1832 and 1833 into the region. His 100-person party spent extended periods on the Feather River and was not simply a party of hunters, it was more a nomadic pluralistic village with men, women, and children of diverse backgrounds and task-specific specialization. Work also kept a detailed journal. On February 24th, 1833, from a camp near Oroville, he wrote: "the Indians are very numerous here, in about one and one half hours march after we started this morning we passed four villages with 40 to 50 houses in each, and there is another large village a little way ahead of us. The country must be rich in resources for food or so many people could not subsist, the only provisions which we have mostly found among them during the winter is acorns of which they have large stock laid up" (Work 1945:32). There are numerous entries about giving food and trifles, probably beads, and in some cases trading them for food such as salmon. Again, however, not all interactions were positive. When traps or horses went missing, the trappers took revenge.

### Era of Rancho Expansion, 1840-1848

Around the time of Work's expedition was the secularization of the coastal missions, sparking an increase in land grants. Rancho

expansion into the interior began within a few years, with John Sutter, in 1839. More non-Hispanic settlers soon followed, with multiple claims in Butte County by 1844, including John Bidwell. During this decade interactions between indigenous people and encroaching settlers became sustained. The Fernandez Rancho was granted in 1846 to a pair of *Californios* from Monterey: Maximo and Dionisio Zenon Fernandez. The 17,000-acre patent extended from the Feather River west, encompassing much of what is now the Oroville Wildlife Area. This is the same region that had been so heavily populated when John Work's party trapped beaver and otter about 13 years before. Although Mexican Land Grants required improvements, I still do not know what the brothers did there. A detailed map was not created until 1856, and by then numerous immigrants and settlers arriving with the Gold Rush had changed the landscape considerably. Local histories are ever so brief concerning operations of this particular rancho, having Bidwell's enterprise in Chico to focus on instead. If the brothers had any ranching going on at all between 1846 and 1849, it would not have been unusual to have Maidu laborers. A confirmation plat map dating to 1857 indeed depicts a "Large Indian Rancheria" along the bank of the river. For this village to survive until 1857 suggests that it not only was a historic-era Maidu village, but that it was a principle village within the Rancho Fernandez boundary. It falls just outside the study area where a mobile home park has developed. What I mean by survive is that by 1857 this stretch of river had been gold panned and squatted on for almost a decade. In fact, areas both up and down river from the village were mined as early as 1848. Bidwell hit the lower bend in the river in the spring of 1848 on the way back to his rancho in Chico after visiting Sutter's Mill first-hand. The Fernandez Rancho that he was crossing had been granted only two years before. Bidwell returned to a spot up-river, away from the rancho, within a few months, with provisions and Maidu labor from his Rancho Chico.

### Era of the Gold Rush, 1848-1852

Then came the miners. Within one year the Fernandez Rancho and the entire Feather River drainage were overrun. The impact that came during the Gold Rush is obvious. Multiple camps hosting hundreds of miners from all over the world sprang up along the rivers every five to ten miles within one year, and every sand bar in every drainage had been sifted through a pan within only a couple of years. By the end of the first decade entire creek banks were getting washed for gold. Several of the large placer-mining sites in the study area appear to have ripped through "prehistoric" sites that may have been inhabited in the historic period. Additionally, there are many recorded house-pit village sites within earshot of many of the gold-mining camps. On December 22, 1849, a miner at Long's Bar, a primary camp that was in the study area, wrote in his diary "we see Indians almost every day traveling up and down the river who frequently call at our place. They appear to be very friendly and peaceable [sic]. Some of them are employed in the mines by whites, but they are not to be depended on for laborers being unused to and too lazy to work and will leave it whenever they take fancy to do so... one came into our cabin a few days ago dressed in a red flannel shirt and tarpaulin hat under the brim of which some Yankee had stuck the pictured part of a pack of cards with which he appeared to be highly pleased" (Batchelder 1849: December 22, 1849).

### Era of Forced Relocations, 1853-1863

By 1852 the rush had largely subsided, but the region had permanently become a state of the Union, ultimately realizing the ideology behind Manifest Destiny. The Maidu now had to deal with multitudes who decided to stay and even settle on lands the emigrants believed open and unused. In 1853 and again in 1863 the State of California forcibly relocated Maidu and other native people to distant reservations: First to Nome Lackee and then to Round Valley. Although some Maidu returned to their homeland along the Feather River, others stayed. The details of these drives are obscure, but the implications for a Maidu historical context are obvious (Castillo 1978:110-111; Helen McCarthy, personal communication 2004).

### Post 1864 Era

Maidu history remains in the shadows between 1863 and 1900, appearing only sporadically in some documents. Not until 1900 did the US government formally enumerate Native Americans in the population census. The native population in California plunged from about 150,000 to 16,500 in the last half of the nineteenth century. In 1917 the California Supreme Court declared the survivors citizens, and the nation followed suit in 1924, giving them the right to vote.

## HISTORICAL MAIDU ARCHAEOLOGY

A sufficient understanding of how the Maidu living on the Forks of the Feather River navigated through this historical context is lacking. The large volume of historic sites identified as part of the Oroville Relicensing Project inventory provides an opportunity to explore the issue. I reviewed the results of the inventory to identify archaeological sites that could address issues of Maidu history. Beginning with the 75 so-called multi- or dual-component sites out of the over 800 newly recorded or updated resources, and reviewing the records for the 83 inundated sites, I culled the sites that can contribute to these research themes. Nine sites were identified, all of them located upriver from the Oroville Dam. This is not, of course, an exhaustive analysis, but a place to begin. I am confident that upon further, site-specific research, more will be identified.

CA-BUT-151 is a site that could not be re-visited during the inventory, because it is located in the lowest reaches of the operational fluctuation zone at the 650-foot contour. Water levels rarely reach that low, although in 1977 they did dip to 645. The site was recorded in 1962 as consisting of eight house pits and bedrock milling features. One of the pits was partially excavated by American River Junior College in 1964, and Chartkoff recorded the site as the village of *Shushum lammi* in 1965. Gebhardt (1964:24) described in his field notes that "square nails, glass trade beads, and a glass bottle have been recovered, clearly pointing to a post-contact occupation of the site." Incidentally, this village is only a couple hundred feet upslope and just over one-half-mile from Bidwell Bar, established in 1848 and, based on the 1879 General Land Office (GLO) plat, the site was apparently just across a trail and uphill from Mrs. Fitzgerald. Her family ran a hotel by 1860 along the Beckwourth trail, a popular overland route during the 1850s.

CA-BUT-198/H is a site composed of all indigenous artifact classes made from locally available material except for a single, imported Western glass bead. The site is located in the fluctuation zone along an unnamed tributary of the North Fork Feather River, about five miles north of Bidwell Bar and less than two miles east of the Gold Rush town of Oregon City. On the other side of the drainage is the ethnographic village site of *Shumum heno*, and at least one gold miner settled farther up the drainage before 1867. A house is shown on the GLO of that year, but not the Maidu villages. The lack of a substantial component of Western imported material may indicate that BUT-198/H was abandoned by the 1850s.

CA-BUT-20/H and CA-BUT-23/H are both located above pool on the banks of Oregon Creek Gulch, in what is now the Craig Saddle Recreation Area. I would like to point out that the ethnographic team of the Oroville Facilities Relicensing Project has compiled a wealth of data for this area. Other sites here likely will be linked directly with Maidu history, with more research. These two sites are both Maidu cemeteries, and the inventory avoided them for this reason. The 1961 recording by Riddell lists glass beads at BUT-20/H, the Spencer/Sweetman Cemetery. Locus L of BUT-23/H appears to contain indigenous and imported Western material in association, adjacent to the Martin Cemetery. Oregon Creek Gulch experienced extensive placer mining that has carved into many prehistoric sites. Some of them are now nothing more than a small lithic scatter on a remnant hill that did not get washed away by miners.

CA-BUT-2397/H is less than 2,000 feet south of Oregon Creek Gulch, toward the South Fork Feather River. It is situated along an old roadbed in the fluctuation zone and was discovered during the relicensing inventory. It has both indigenous and imported Western artifact types in close association clustered between several bedrock milling features. A colorless-glass flaked tool and another possibly worked piece of glass suggest Maidu occupation of the site into the historic period. Downhill along the banks of the river, less than two miles away, the 1849 community of Stringtown flourished.

CA-BUT-2529/H, also discovered during the relicensing inventory, is located in the fluctuation zone about a mile up-river from BUT-2397/H, on the other side of the town of Enterprise, named for the Union Enterprise fluming operations established there in 1852. The area between this site and BUT-2397/H, discussed above, contains a high density of resources that, as at Oregon Creek Gulch, will likely be linked to historic-period Maidu occupation, given more research. The Enterprise Rancheria occupied the area prior to development of the reservoir. The site has both indigenous and imported Western artifact types, including a blue, hexagonal glass bead thought to be a trade bead, and several bedrock milling features. The sparseness and type of imported Western items, and the location along a small tributary, suggest the site is associated with early placer gold mining.

CA-BUT-86/H is located on the bank of Foreman Creek above the fluctuation zone. It was first recorded in 1960 by Riddell, and then again in 1965 by Ritter as six to eight house pits, midden soil, and bedrock milling features. Although a fence was reported, no historic-period artifacts were noted on either record. When it was re-recorded as

part of this project, six house pits were confirmed tucked into the corner of a fence line, along with an adjacent dirt road, and flaked glass among the observed indigenous artifact classes. Other imported Western material, including bottle glass fragments, a button, and cut nails, was also found in association with the house pits. BUT-86/H is located on the edge of the historic Clinton Ranch, with the two bedrock milling features in Foreman Creek. Not far away is the approximate alignment of the 1851 Beckworth Trail that came across the Sierra Nevada to Bidwell Bar, a couple of miles down the road. Charles Clinton began ranching at this location in the 1850s, along with a string of pioneers that grabbed prime land along this well-traversed wagon road. The 1880s census lists in addition to Charles, his wife, two daughters, and son, five Indian laborers: 30-year-old Mathus Roy, 30-year-old Nancy Roy, 26-year-old John Brown, 17-year-old Willie Brown, and 16-year-old Peter Brown. The oldest, Mathus and Nancy Roy, were apparently born during the Gold Rush. A relationship between the occupants of the house-pit site and the Clinton Ranch, located about 450 yards southeast, is a possible explanation for the historic-era character of the site.

CA-BUT-2560/H is located in the reservoir fluctuation zone at the confluence of the West Branch and North Fork Feather River, and was discovered during the relicensing inventory. The site is situated on a small ridge and consists entirely of indigenous artifact classes made from locally available material except for a single, imported Western red-glass faceted bead. The rest of the assemblage includes flaked and ground stone and three bedrock milling features. This site is adjacent to and downslope from CA-BUT-1890/H, which is the last site that will be discussed.

CA-BUT-1890/H is a large, complex site consisting of six loci and outlying features collectively known as the Goat Ranch Site, named for the goat-cheese operation that existed there prior to construction of the reservoir. All of BUT-1890/H is located in the fluctuation zone above the confluence of the West Branch and North Fork Feather River, and was discovered during the relicensing inventory; since then it was found to be CA-BUT-448. Francis Riddell originally recorded BUT-448 in 1962 as a small camp with shallow bedrock milling features and sparse artifacts located directly around the goat-cheese manufacturing buildings and home of the ranch owner. The site was misplotted closer to the confluence by the Northeast Information Center and so considered inundated and unreachable during the inventory. It was after the inventory that BUT-448 was determined to represent the prehistoric component in Locus A of BUT-1890/H; the historic-period element of this locus is related to the twentieth-century goat-ranching and cheese-production operations. A historic-era road alignment designated CA-BUT-1891H crosses the site, passing through Loci A, C, and D.

Loci B and C of BUT-1890/H have particular significance for an understanding of Maidu history. In addition to dense, overlapping assemblages at these loci of indigenous artifacts made from locally available material and imported Western items, nine white-glass embroidery beads were collected from the surface during inventory, as well as an 1877 US mint quarter in Locus C. The number of similar beads in two distinct concentrations about 350 feet apart led to the selection of this site for evaluation studies related to the Oroville

Facilities Relicensing Project. Another ten glass beads were discovered on the surface two years later, again all located within two distinct concentrations in loci B and C. Apparently, ongoing erosion related to cyclical inundation is exposing and relocating material annually, exposing new beads that were not visible on the ground surface during the inventory. Karlis Karklins analyzed the beads collected during the evaluation phase. In addition, evaluation studies discovered a piece of worked, colorless glass in Locus B and an 1808 Spanish silver two-*real* coin in Locus C very near where the 1877 quarter was found. Another noticeable difference between the two loci is the significant number of Chinese ceramics—both porcelain serving-vessel fragments and utilitarian brown-glazed storage vessels—discovered in Locus B; Locus C did not share this characteristic. At some point an orchard crop was planted across Locus B.

All of the beads are drawn, circular, short barrel compound or flashed white variant embroidery beads ranging in diameter from 3.3 to 6.7 mm, except for a single, fragmented, wound cylindrical compound scarlet-on-light gold embroidery bead with a 11.3 mm diameter. The white seed beads have been found at various West Coast colonial sites dating to between 1830 and 1860, such as Settlement Ross and Fort Vancouver, as well as in Old Sacramento and in Gold Rush-era San Francisco, with date ranges from 1833 to 1884. The larger, wound scarlet-on-light gold *white heart* bead is more unique and may be older, particularly given its off-white center. This rare type has been found on colonial and Indian sites dating from 1803 to about 1875 and, given that it is fragmented and unburned, probably broke off whatever it was decorating, likely a garment or basket. The knapped glass was discovered not far from the wound bead.

A goal of evaluation was, of course, to determine the nature and integrity of significant deposits. The tight clustering of beads at the two loci suggests they are not far from their depositional context. Distribution within the boundaries of indigenous and imported Western artifact classes further suggests that the two sources of the beads, coins, and knapped glass are associated with both components. Indeed, these items appear situated in pivotal locations at the centers of both the traditional Maidu and imported historic-period artifact distributions. The areas containing glass beads in loci B and C are about 5,400 and 9,600 square feet, respectively. Not small areas.

Assuming that erosion is pulling the downslope sides of each locus lower, the likely source of the proto-historic material is located closer to the higher sides. Analysis of bead elevations suggests the probable primary context is restricted to a relatively level flat measuring about 1,650 square feet at the edge of a ridge in Locus B, and an artifact-rich area of about 1,200 square feet along the old wagon road at the center of Locus C. These locations appear to have the best probability for containing intact deposits that can address early Maidu history along the Feather River.

Although the full assemblage of imported Western debris in Locus B covers nearly the entire locus, the highest density corresponds to the likely source of the beads. Locus C is more complex and has multiple locations with almost equally dense pockets of historic-period debris. By examining only the clusters of nails in Locus C it is apparent that the

source of the beads and coins corresponds to one of as many as eight buildings that appear to have burned in place. The beads seem to be coming from either under or within the building, which appears to be one of four along the west side of the wagon road. The largest cluster of non-architectural historic-period debris appears to be behind the buildings, on the opposite side and downslope from the road. This patterning suggests that loci C and B retain a high level of integrity, and that the beads were in a structure and not in the trash heap in Locus B. Both loci appear contemporaneous and seem to represent a small community that existed for several decades or more; likely a Konkow Maidu village that survived up until about 1880, and that became smaller but more pluralistic with time.

As it turns out, the earliest place name we have for BUT-1890/H is the ethnographic village name *Wita kasi* (Helen McCarthy, personal communication 2004). It became known by 1880 as Hubbard Flat. Dwight Hubbard, born in 1811 in Massachusetts, mined at the confluence of the West Branch and North Fork Feather River at least by 1856. The last claim found bearing his name was filed jointly with Ah Sing in 1879 for fluming waters near the mouth of Dark Canyon, not far from Hubbard Flat. Ah Sing and company, composed of as many as nine other Chinese miners, were working the same vicinity from about 1877 until at least 1882, according to mining and water claims on file. Hubbard seems to have disappeared in the 1880s, replaced by Thomas Harper Jeffries and Emma Florence, who were paying the taxes on the place during that decade. Besides being in the area between Hubbard and Jeffries, there seems to be another link between Ah Sing and Jeffries in the form of some reciprocal land deals in Oroville in the year 1875. Jeffries, a single carpenter born in 1830 in Virginia, lived in Oroville in 1880 with Anna Thompson, a 32-year-old, California-born Native American cook, and Nellie Reading, a 27-year-old Chilean seamstress. Both he and Florence, of whom not much is known, lost the property by defaulting on the property taxes in the mid-1890s. It was not long after that when Nick Patronis acquired the parcel and, apparently, established residence downhill in Locus A, marking the end of cultural deposition in loci B and C.

Archaeological and archival research suggest that a community of Konkow Maidu occupied, perhaps seasonally, the mid-slope terraces that overlook the confluence of the West Branch and North Fork Feather River, into the 1850s. By the later part of that decade Dwight Hubbard and perhaps others squatted on the flat, and possibly employed as gold miners some of the Maidu living there, as is suggested by the likely contemporaneity of the two populations, high density of trade beads, and lack of any partners with Anglo names on the Hubbard and Company mining claim of 1856. It is possible that the trade beads, 1808 Spanish coin, and knapped glass actually predate the arrival of Hubbard and other gold miners, perhaps pointing to interactions between inhabitants of *Wita kasi* and fur trappers or nearby rancheros in the period 1830-1848. Regardless, it looks like the village continued to be inhabited after 1848. If Hubbard and the Maidu did live and work together, for how long did this go on? Did they work together for Hubbard's entire 25-year tenure? Did Ah Sing and his company of miners also take up residence at Locus B between 1877 and 1882, as is suggested by the assemblage of Chinese ceramics there and the mining and water claims? Did Hubbard and company, Ah Sing and company,

and Konkow Maidu all occupy BUT-1890/H at the same time? What was the relationship between the Konkow Maidu, Dwight Hubbard, Ah Sing, and Thomas Jeffries? Was Emma Florence of Konkow Maidu descent, explaining her near-total absence from most archival documents? Do the archaeological remains in Locus B predate the orchard, or do they indicate a contemporaneous labor source? Archaeological excavation and further historical research can address these specific questions, and more.

## CONCLUSION

Further study of BUT-1890/H can contribute a good deal of new information to piece together the historical particulars of how the Maidu from this village negotiated their way through the Gold Rush and beyond, and interacted with miners like Hubbard. The full story of the site cannot be extracted, however, unless the investigation addresses all of the relationships of its material culture. That is, a site that straddles the prehistoric and historic-period divide does not have two separate histories; it has one.

At the onset of this paper I said I was going to examine Maidu culture within an appropriate historical context. I have to further that concept by adding that to fully grapple with indigenous populations in the historic period, one must employ prehistoric, ethnographic, and historical techniques and data. Any study of the sites discussed here requires the type of integrated approach that Kent Lightfoot proposed a decade ago (1995), an approach that transcends traditional prehistoric and historical divisions. The alternative is to suggest that they have more than one history.

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