

RECONSTRUCTING A DECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST: THE CARY RANCH

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The archaeology of Cary Ranch (CA-RIV-36/Terwilliger SBCM 300/C-171) represents a cultural legacy of archaeological, ethnographic, and historic resources: beginning at an unknown time in the prehistoric epoch, marked by European explorations in the late eighteenth century, and bearing the developments of historic elements from homesteading and ranching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Research of existing collections has identified several assemblages recognized as being removed from their contexts with almost no documentation. Efforts to reassemble information surrounding these assemblages are discussed, and methods of examining the potential to reconstruct their provenience are reviewed.

INTRODUCTION

Cary Ranch is a 160-acre private parcel in Terwilliger Valley, at the southwest margin of the Anza Plain, located in Riverside County, California. This acreage straddles the head of Coyote Canyon, one of three natural passageways through the Peninsular mountains separating the southern inland deserts and the California coastal plain. The ranch is currently managed under the governing articles and bylaws of La Puerta Foundation, a California Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation established in 1999. The foundation is committed to the protection and preservation of this significant historic and prehistoric site.

Currently the foundation is engaged in developing a comprehensive understanding of the cultural resources located on and surrounding the Cary Ranch, and documenting the resources and their research values. Recent research at state archives and local museums in southern California, and consultation and dialog with knowledgeable individuals, identified a number of poorly documented artifact assemblages removed from the ranch, and several of these assemblages are the topic of the reconstruction prospects presented here. A short summary of the cultural themes and context of what is now known of the archaeological record of Cary Ranch will be of benefit.

BACKGROUND

The Mountain Cahuilla village of Paukī occupies a portion of the Cary Ranch (Eckhardt 2006). This was a vibrant settlement when Spanish army Captain Juan Bautista de Anza entered Alta California in the San Francisco expeditions of 1774-1776 (Bolton 1930:3:78; University of Oregon 2000). In 1774, Anza christened this mountain pass "Puerto Real de San Carlos," and sometime thereafter it also came to be known as La Puerta (Jaenke 2001:45; Reed 1963:35).

Anza's expedition of discovery in 1774 included 34 people with horses and cattle; they camped overnight on this Cahuilla settlement. One and one-half years later, the colonizing expedition of some 240 people and more sizeable herds arrived to camp at Paukī. For its time, this represented a tremendous impact of direct and immediate proportion: more than half of the colonial population of Alta California crossed this threshold in a single stroke (Mason 1998:18-21, 29). Five years later, Anza's overland route was abandoned following tribal uprisings along the Colorado River in July of 1781, effectively blockading direct land communication between Sonora and California for more than 40 years.

Evidence that the settlement at Paukī continued to play a role in traditional political organization is seen in the Cahuilla participation with the unratified treaties of 1851 and 1852 (Heizer 1972). Among the Cahuilla signatories to the unratified treaty of Temecula, Juan Bautista signed as a village head or alcalde for "Pow-ky" (Paukī) recording his connection with this important Mountain Cahuilla settlement (Strong 1929:150-151).

Government census figures of 1860 list the settlement at Paukī as "La Puerta Indian Village." A Cahuilla man named Cristoval, 40 years old, is recorded as tribal captain. This census recognized 10 households and a settlement population of 49, ranging in age from one to 50 years old (U.S. Census Bureau 1860). From the 1860s until reservations were established (1875) and federal supervision became intensive (1891), the Cahuilla remained on their own lands, making their living through traditional hunting and gathering in combination with agriculture, trade, and wage labor (Bean 1978:584). In January of 1891, this condition was dramatically changed at Paukī, when Fred Clark took possession of the site.

January 6, 1891 marks the transfer of title to lands at La Puerta (Laporto) to F. S. Clark, from an Indian identified as Pissqual. A second title document also exists dated 5 January

1916, wherein Clark's claim to the 160-acre parcel was established and duly consummated in conformity with the Homestead Act of 1862 (U.S. Surveyor General's Office 1919). Members of the modern-day Cahuilla community still chafe over circumstances surrounding this transfer (Eckhardt 2005:2-3).

Fred Clark built an adobe and created pastures and corrals for use in what for the time was a sizeable cattle-grazing operation, stretching from Terwilliger Valley, down Coyote Canyon to the desert floor at Clark Lake and Borrego Springs. In 1938, Clark transferred title of La Puerta to Art and Violet Cary. The Carys built their ranch house, barn, and outbuildings in the flat, flanking the streambed, and close against the bouldered hillsides. Art and Violet raised two sons, Dick and Bob, at La Puerta, renaming their holdings as the VA Ranch. Violet and Art continued to live at La Puerta up until the time of their deaths in recent years. Their son Dick remains active in the community, maintains an interest in his family's former homestead, and serves as a board member for La Puerta Foundation.

THE PROBLEM

During the twentieth century, the property known as Cary Ranch has been in private hands. Paukī has been generally closed off to the Cahuilla, and what remains of the prehistoric settlement, evidence of historic contact, and the early historic homestead has been treated as an archaeological site. This has been both a blessing and a curse.

The blessing is that private ownership may have protected the resources from enormous levels of looting and vandalism such as were reported elsewhere throughout Coyote Canyon (Meighan 1959). The curse is that private ownership seems to have engendered cavalier attitudes about cultural features and deposits at the ranch, leading over time to increasing levels of damage to the archaeological record.

Malcolm Rogers recorded the settlement of Paukī as C-171 at the Fred Clark ranch (San Diego Museum of Man, C-171 Terwilliger Valley, undated site record form, notes, and sketches), noting the rock art, and reporting that a local relic collector (Ben Squires) had removed a burial here from a crevice in the bedrock, reporting it was that of a girl and possibly post-historic contact as there were no mortuary offerings. From what is known of Squires, this activity dates from the 1930s, and the burial was most likely removed from the site during Fred Clark's tenure as owner. To date, no documentation regarding the disposition of the human remains has been found, nor any further information identified regarding Ben Squire's activities at the ranch.

It was during Clark's tenure that Herbert Bolton conducted research of the Anza route, and ranch lore has it that Fred supplied the riding stock, camp provisions, and served as guide for Bolton's reconnaissance of Coyote Canyon. In exchange, Clark was gifted with signed copies of Bolton's volumes. In 1924 the State erected a California Landmark on the ranch, commemorating Anza and his campsite at San Carlos Pass.

Existing information suggests that heightened levels of impact occurred following the change of ownership to the Cary family. Some of the Cary family became avid collectors, and a large measure of future research at La Puerta will be the cataloging and analysis of artifacts, photographs, notes, and correspondence generated as a result of the Cary family activities.

In the 1950s and 1960s, growing interest in archaeology found expression at Cary Ranch when history professor Gilbert Becker of the University of Redlands began to investigate the site (Archaeological Survey Foundation of Southern California, loose-leaf notes, photographs, and sketches dated 1951, 1952, 1968, 1969, and 1970). The earliest of these field episodes were site visits and survey collections reported for 1951 and 1952, but apart from dated one-page artifact inventories bearing names of participants, no further 1950s-era documentation has been found. I am cautiously optimistic that further information into the 1950s-era activity will be found once the Cary family holdings are examined.

Becker returned to the site with student excavators over three seasons between 1968 and 1970. Students' field notes, photographs, and writing assignments represent the only primary records of the University of Redlands fieldwork. A single publication authored as a student paper provides a site map, a cultural overview, and extremely brief site description (Thurman 1970:1-38 and Appendix B).

In 2005, Archaeological Survey Foundation recognized a portion of these records and a banker's box of poorly classified and improperly cataloged artifacts from the University of Redlands within the files and collections of the Archaeological Survey Association, Inc. Initially a number of artifacts attributed to "Terwilliger" or "Cary Ranch" were identified. The artifacts were examined in comparison with the records, and an approximate association was recognized. The artifacts are certainly from the ranch, but the records at hand did not adequately reveal from where. In January 2007, additional field records, half again as many artifacts, and a set of catalog cards surfaced. Examination of the collective assemblage and records shows a strong accordance between the field notes and drawings, catalog cards, and artifact labeling.

THE PROSPECTS

For the purpose of managing the resources at Cary Ranch, the University of Redlands collections are a good starting point for reconstructing—or at least improving our understanding of—the damaged archaeological record. Many arguments can be made either way regarding treatment of poor-provenience collections: deal them in; deal them out, or simply don't deal with them. For La Puerta Foundation, the only argument that makes sense is to deal them in. Among the reasons for this is our status as a public benefit corporation, and our purpose to protect and conserve the cultural legacy at Cary Ranch. For management reasons, we want to know how and where excavations have occurred, and to what extent buried deposits have been impacted.

Another compelling reason to start the reconstruction of the archaeological record with these materials has to do with continuing consultation with members of the Cahuilla community. The assemblage from the University of Redlands appears to be principally indigenous material, attributable to Cahuilla culture in the late prehistoric and ethnohistoric periods. Cahuilla elders have asked what we have done to find, examine, and/or analyze materials removed from deposits at Cary Ranch before La Puerta Foundation's arrival. Developing a positive response to these questions and sharing our findings with interested community members can be expected to strengthen the foundation's relationship with the Cahuilla.

Efforts have begun to bring this information and these collections into stronger relationship with the site. Geographic information system (GIS) software is being used to manage a relational database comprised of multiple media of variable accuracy. Field notes, photographs, and drawings are being reviewed and examined to identify field work location information, to track project participants, to chart the chronology and types of field activities conducted, and to search for provenience information (e.g., unit locations, surface collection areas, particular dates of discovery) that may be used to identify the provenience of the artifacts in this assemblage. Some success has been recognized, with the discovery of several sketch maps delineating work areas for portions of the surveys and excavations conducted here over the course of three seasons of fieldwork. Three of these have been successfully georeferenced for use in the GIS project files. It remains to be seen whether concordance can be achieved in matching the incomplete catalog cards and the highly variable labels on individual artifacts, artifact bags, and paper mounts that characterize the previous curation treatment of these collections.

The artifact collections will be cataloged. Steps will be taken to remove projectile points, beads, and shell and ceramic pendants from their glued positions on construction paper. The collections will be reclassified, measured,

weighed, and photographed. Existing record information from bag labels or the backsides of construction paper mounts will be tethered to the appropriate elements in the new catalog, sustaining those artifacts' links to whatever evidence had originally been documented. If or where provenience can be reconstructed, this will be added to the catalog. Even without success in reconstructing provenience, this rehabilitated collection will prove useful.

The assemblage includes many recognized tool forms and types that have not been adequately described or subjected to any comparative analyses with other collections of similar character. Painted pottery, projectile points, trade beads, shell beads, and milling stone tools are present in the assemblage and await more detailed analyses. Organic materials (wood, charcoal, and bone) are included in the collection. If sufficient provenience is reestablished, samples of the wood and charcoal might provide radiocarbon dates. The bone fraction, however, will first be examined for human content in satisfaction of federal requirements (e.g., NAGPRA). Thereafter, depending on reconstructed provenience, analysis of non-human bone may be useful in refining our understanding of site structure, diet, or social activities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Treatment of existing collections of information and material culture derived from Cary Ranch is only beginning. These efforts will allow us to better understand the integrity of resources within the ranch, gain a truer sense of the wealth of material cultures represented here, and assist with the long-term management and preservation of this important cultural resource area.

Is it worth it? Perhaps the answer to that question is resolved to the extent that treatment of these existing collections satisfies the cultural concerns of the Cahuilla, strengthens understanding of the material cultures represented within this acreage, and aids in the protection, preservation, and management of historic properties.

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