

UNDERWATER SURVEY AT REFUGIO STATE BEACH

TRICIA DODDS
CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

Refugio State Beach has a rich past of human occupation. It has been a main location for people in both prehistoric and historic times. Three terrestrial Native American sites have been uncovered and recorded by California State Parks, and four mortars have been previously discovered underwater at Refugio State Beach since the 1970s (California Department of Parks and Recreation 2001). In 2012 and 2013, a fifth mortar and a stone bowl were located underwater. During a subsequent underwater survey by the California State Parks Dive Team, divers observed other objects that might be additional cultural resources, suggesting a more complicated marine landscape than previously expected.

In May 2013, California State Parks (SP) was notified that a recreational diver had found and collected a stone bowl underwater at Refugio State Beach (RSB) (Figure 1) (Dodds 2013). The artifact was a Chumash stone bowl, 25.5 cm in diameter and made of sandstone (Figure 2). Having retrieved the stone bowl from the diver, SP archaeologists now plan to store it at the La Purisima collections facility for further analysis and possible Chumash consultation (Barbara Tejada, personal communication 2014).

Soon after, members of the California SP Dive Team conducted a preliminary underwater survey at RSB to find and record the location where the stone bowl had been found and to search for other artifacts and features at the potential site (Figure 3). They also attempted to re-locate a mortar that the recreational diver observed approximately 50 to 75 ft. from the stone bowl. The divers dove to a maximum depth of 22 ft. and swam in transects side by side to conduct the search (Figure 4). Unfortunately, the Dive Team was forced to end the survey when the visibility decreased and the underwater current became more aggressive, creating a very difficult environment in which to conduct a search (Figure 5) (Dodds 2013).

On the days following the initial dive, SP divers returned to RSB to continue the underwater survey. They were unable to re-locate the reported mortar, which might have been moved by the strong underwater current. However, the divers did observe a possible pestle or ground stone artifact that may have been made of sandstone, two cement cylinders that are possibly historic and measure about 3 ft. in diameter and protrude about 3 ft. from the ocean bottom, and two smooth rocks that appear to be modified (Dion Von Der Lieth, personal communication 2013).

Based on the cultural resources that have already been observed at RSB and the location of three recorded Chumash sites nearby on land, there is a high potential for additional cultural resources to be found underwater (California Department of Parks and Recreation 2001). It is recommended that SP should fully survey and record any cultural resources in the area to have a complete record of the marine landscape, and the SP Dive Team does plan to return soon to RSB to conduct a more in-depth study.

REFERENCES CITED

California Department of Parks and Recreation

2001 Refugio State Beach Underwater Survey. Electronic document, http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=22814, accessed March 17, 2014.

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2013 Original unpublished field notes from Refugio State Beach. Manuscript on file, California State Parks, San Diego.



Figure 1. Refugio State Beach.



Figure 2. Stone bowl discovered off the coast.



Figure 3. Divers conducting the survey.



Figure 4. Diver navigating during the survey.



Figure 5. Poor visibility underwater.