

FROM RANCHO LABREAN PALEO-GROCERY STORES TO ROCK ART ON THE WEB

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ABSTRACT

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ridgecrest Field Office is the northernmost unit of the California Desert District. It manages land that stretches from the northern Mojave Desert and the Nevada border south and west as far as the San Gabriel Mountains. Topography, flora, fauna, and evidences of the prehistoric and historic past are as varied as the swath it cuts across California. The archaeological history of the area ranges from pioneering work by Emma Lou Davis, Mark Harrington, Lydia Clements, Ruth DeEtte Simpson, Clement Meighan and others to contemporary cultural resources management including site stewardship by the public and rock art on the web.

INTRODUCTION

The first twenty-five years of cultural resource management in the Ridgecrest area, as on other public lands, have mirrored not only changing approaches to cultural resource management but also changing theoretical approaches in archaeology as a whole. The scope and/or focus of both CRM and archaeological theory have shifted over the past twenty-five years and interestingly, the shift seems to have been in opposite directions. Yet both respond to changing social interests and needs. Theoretical interest has moved, for some, from the search for and elucidation of cultural processes of entire groups or even periods in time to the search for the individual or the small group, as in gender and ethnic studies. Cultural resource management has begun a movement from a, perhaps narrow, internal focus on compliance with legal requirements to an outward look at becoming true "public archaeology." While the general public may never know or care about processual/post-processual theoretical debate, it will be affected, influenced, and hopefully, informed by recent shifts in perspective in the cultural resource management arena. I will dwell briefly on where we have been and even more briefly on where we

are, in order to focus on where we should try to be in the near future and twenty-five years from now.

BACKGROUND

The Ridgecrest Field Office is the northernmost management unit of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA). The CDCA is different from every other BLM unit. It was mandated by Congress in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The California Desert was singled out for that status because of its number and variety of rare or unique ecosystems, flora, fauna, landscapes, natural features, and cultural resources and because of the level of public interest in how all these things are cared for and used.

The Ridgecrest Field Office manages lands that stretch from the southeastern flanks of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the California-Nevada border south to the San Gabriel Mountains. The area covered includes all or parts of the southern Sierra, Inyo, Panamint, Argus, Slate, Last Chance, and other mountain ranges. It

includes all or portions of a number of (normally) dry lake beds, remnants of the pluvial past, such as Panamint, Searles, Cuddeback, and Koehn. It contains vast acres of basin and range topography, with opposites of steep, nearly inaccessible mountains to flat, open, sometimes overly accessible valleys. The majority of the area falls within the southwestern Great Basin, territory inhabited prehistorically by western Shoshone, Paiute and Kawaiisu people. The rest of the area falls within the southern California culture area and encompasses portions of the traditional homelands of the Tubatulabal, Kitanemuk, Serrano, and even Gabrielino. Historically it was the scene of several noteworthy early exploration parties, mining booms, and homesteading efforts. All of these people and activities have left their legacies in a complex and rich cultural resource base.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

Prior to the 1970s archaeological investigation was sporadic and much of this early work has never been published and is difficult to access. However, a number of efforts to explore the cultural resources of the area and document them in some fashion were carried out in this early period. The Baldwin expedition into the Saline Valley area in 1931 reported in a summary fashion on a number of sites, most notably a significant complex of prehistoric/early historic materials at the mouth of Hunter Canyon. Ruth Simpson was surveying in Black Rock Canyon by 1952; the Archaeological Survey Association of Southern California continued an interest in the area for many years. The Rose Spring Site, excavated by Lanning in 1963, provided important chronological data in the form of the Rose Spring/Eastgate point series. The Stahl site (on private land near Little Lake), excavated by M. R. Harrington in 1957, exhibited culturally stratified remains dating to the Pinto Period and has been important in elucidating Great Basin chronology. Harrington also excavated house rings at Fossil Falls, a BLM site very near the Stahl site along the bed of the Pleistocene Owens River.

One whose work bridges the gap between this early period and the beginning of a full-fledged cultural resource management program by BLM is Dr. Emma Lou Davis. Dr. Davis began

investigations into the paleo-archaeology of the Mojave Desert in the 1950s, lured to the area by Sylvia Winslow, a local resident with a life-long interest in the archaeology of the area. By the 1960s "Davey" was working in Panamint Valley, China Lake, and other locations in the northern Mojave Desert. She became the most well-known "geoarchaeologist" of the California Desert and a tireless advocate of interdisciplinary research, coining the term "paleo-grocery store." Dr. Davis not only pursued her own research under the aegis of a private foundation but worked under contract to the BLM. For archaeologists who were with BLM in the California Desert in the 70s Davey was as much a part of the desert as the geoglyphs she studied.

In 1976 the California Desert Conservation Area came into existence and BLM began preparation of the California Desert Plan, the first large land-planning effort undertaken by any federal agency. As part of the plan, a series of cultural resource overviews were written that detailed the state of existing knowledge, archaeological, ethnographic, and historic (Bean *et al* 1981; Davis *et al* 1980; Hall and Barker 1975; King and Casebier 1976; Lyneis *et al* 1980; Norris and Carrico 1978; Norwood *et al* 1980; Stickel and Weinman-Roberts 1980; Warren and Roske 1981; Warren *et al* 1980; Warren *et al* 1981; Weide *et al* 1974). The desert was divided into planning units and each planning unit was subjected to sample inventory, some under contract with consulting firms or academic institutions and some by BLM archaeologists. The results of the contracted surveys were written and published by BLM (Brooks *et al* 1981; Cook and Fulmer 1981; Coombs 1979a, 1979b; Gallegos *et al* 1980; Weide 1973); results of planning unit surveys done in-house were never formally published. The data is still on file at BLM and still available for use, and some of it was disseminated in the form of papers presented at various meetings by the archaeologists who had done the field work. There was a lot of criticism at the time about the low level of inventory; it was something like 2% or less. But the CDCA consisted of 12 million acres. Two percent of 12 million acres is still a lot of inventory and an enormous body of data was collected. The California Desert Plan was signed in 1980 and contained direction for establishing and managing cultural resource Areas of Critical

Environmental Concern, evaluating and nominating sites to the National Register of Historic Places, and other pro-active management strategies for cultural resources. During the 1980s many, if not most, of the management plans for the cultural resource Areas of Critical Environmental Concern were written, mostly by the archaeologists working in the field offices. As part of implementing these plans, a number of sites were listed in the National Register, and subject to fence construction, road closures, signing, and other measures to protect them from inadvertent and deliberate damage by desert users. Many of these plans also called for some form of regular monitoring to determine trends in site condition. After this flurry of plan writing and implementation, workloads increased and budgets decreased and the small archaeological staff left with BLM in the California Desert found itself fairly well mired in keeping everyone else's projects, both BLM staff and the public, in some level of compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. Things have pretty much stayed that way since.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

Ridgecrest Field Office staff have gotten pretty good at doing Section 106 compliance and preventing unnecessary disturbance of cultural resources by project impacts. This effort has left little time for pro-active management, interpretation, or research. One recent project took a step outside the Section 106 arena, cleaned up a site that was being "junked" to death by visitors who chose to leave their picnic remains and other debris at the site when they left, and altered access to the site to leave it easily visitable but not so easy to carry in coolers, lawn chairs, and cases of beer. Ayers Rock has been a well-known rock art site to locals for years. The open area around the rock was littered with debris and it was possible to drive right up to the rock with a pick-up load of more stuff to leave at the site. The access road ran through a small mining operation. As "off-site" mitigation the mining claimant was persuaded to alter the route of the access road to avoid his operations (a boon for him) and to route it to a parking area approximately one-half mile from Ayers Rock. BLM and a group of volunteers constructed a trail from the parking area to the

rock. Students from a local school made signs to point people from the parking area to the rock. Both trail and signs are designed to be unobtrusive on the landscape. An interpretive sign has been completed by the students and is awaiting installation at the parking area. Recent visits to the site were encouraging. Observed vehicles have all been in the parking area, along with the coolers and lawn chairs. No debris has been observed at the site. A visit to Ayers Rock is now far more pleasant than when one had to step around or over the camping debris. With the improved access, short and pleasant hike from the parking area to the rock, and far more attractive location, this site may be included in a forthcoming brochure of rock art sites being managed in part for public visitation. I see this project as an example of a creative solution to a problem, creative use of "off-site mitigation," a productive partnership between BLM, volunteers, and a local school, and acceptance of the reality that archaeology is sometimes a public commodity and should be managed that way.

As an example of making archaeological resources a public commodity, BLM in California is advertising a series of rock art sites on the biggest advertising page in the world, the Internet. A rock art web page, still under construction but accessible by the public, will contain when completed information, photos, and interpretations of twenty plus rock art sites on BLM lands from the Mexican border to the Oregon border. The web site will also contain information on proper behavior at rock art and other archaeological sites and a strong preservation message. And it will contain maps and directions so that the public can visit the sites in reality as well as on the web. Rock art is perhaps the single most popular archaeological site type with the public; the public craves it. There is no keeping the public away from all rock art sites. Can we guide the public to the sites we prefer to bear the brunt of visitor impact and perhaps reduce use at other sites? Can we educate the public so that their visitation at rock art sites (and hopefully other sites in the future) is not a threat to those sites? What will happen to sites advertised for visitation on the Internet? To help us answer these and other questions, as a companion program to rock art on the web we will be instituting a site stewardship program. Site stewards, volunteers from the

public, will be trained in site stewardship goals, public contact, site ethics, and in recording day-to-day information relating to public use and activity at archaeological sites. They will sign agreements specifying a minimum amount of time to be spent at sites which they agree to steward. Theoretically, the presence of other people will deter vandals and artifact thieves. While initially the site stewardship program will focus on those sites accessible on the Internet, it is hoped that the program will expand to sites not so advertised but still subject to public visitation.

WHERE WE NEED TO GO

The Ridgecrest Field Office manages a truly magnificent archaeological resource, both prehistoric and historic. The opportunities for research, interpretation, partnerships with other entities, public support, creative management, and just plain fun with archaeology are limitless. The same can be said for many other areas we manage. So what do we need to do?

1. **We need to modernize.** We need to move quickly from site atlases that are big books of maps and file cabinets full of reports and site records to computerized data bases, GIS, GPS, computerized photo and slide files, and any other electronic system that will make the job of keeping track of our data and using it simpler, more accurate and less time consuming. We're all moving in this direction at some pace but it can't happen fast enough. The amount of data we have to keep track of is enormous and growing. If we don't find a way to finance this conversion we'll be left behind by other agencies that are moving at a faster pace. We'll have difficulty attracting well-qualified archaeologists to work for BLM if we're still using old-fashioned data systems and they can go to another agency or a private firm and play with electronic data systems. Electronic data systems will allow us to actually respond with reasonable data to those sudden requests for information that are somehow tied to funding and whether you get it or not. Use of electronic data systems should leave us with more time for other, more interesting, aspects of the job. We need to be really creative in finding ways to fund the
- change to electronic data systems. There may even be times when improving an electronic data system could be acceptable off-site mitigation.
2. **We need to encourage more research, lots more research.** We need to find ways to advertise the opportunities for research that exist on our management units. We need to decide what research we need or that would best increase our understanding of the resources and the past and search for ways to get it done. We need to establish relationships with colleges and universities that may be looking for places to do research or convince them that they should be looking if they aren't. We need to do more than sit and wait for people to come to us and ask for permission to do the research they want to do. Two sites managed by the Ridgecrest Field Office have been instrumental in elucidating cultural chronologies for the Great Basin - Rose Spring and Fossil Falls. The Stahl Site, while not on BLM managed land, is immediately adjacent to the Fossil Falls site. The data potential of the Fossil Falls area that Harrington excavated at in 1957 has in no way been exhausted. There are hundreds of such opportunities in the Ridgecrest area. Multiplied by all the units in BLM and the National Forests in California, the research potential is phenomenal.
3. **We need to really get over the "squirrel" syndrome.** We need to stop collecting data just for the sake of collecting data or because we think it must be required to meet Section 106 compliance and think about what we are doing. We need to stop "squirreling" everything away, too. We need to open up to the public and share with them the historic and prehistoric past of which we are the caretakers. The public pays for it and the public loves it. We've been afraid to tell anyone anything for fear that the information would be used to damage sites. So we've kept it all secret and sites have been vandalized right and left or damaged unknowingly by people driving around on them or camping on them or doing a hundred other things. Yes, there are people out there who will deliberately damage sites if they know

where they are. And there aren't enough archaeologists or rangers to patrol all of them and to be there when the bad folks are there. So we may as well let the good folks help us out. We don't have to spill everything we know; discretion will always be necessary. But I think we'll find that the public loves the resource we deal with enough to want to help protect it if we make them a real partner with us. Public programs, partnerships, interpretive sites and events, school programs, and site stewardship programs will help people to feel a personal ownership in the resource and they'll help us watch over it and care for it.

4. **We need to learn to be grant proposal writers and go for funding for special projects that are unlikely to be funded through agency budgets.** We need to search for strong partners to work with us on grants. We have millions of acres with research or other opportunities to offer; we ought to have folks beating down our doors to partner with us on grants.

5. **We need to be open to new approaches.** Not too long ago, at the request of the State Historic Preservation Officer, a task force of archaeologists and other interested persons spent some time looking at the concept of mitigation banking and some related topics. The State Historic Resources Commission has accepted the report of that task force and the SHPO supports the concepts developed by the task force. We have all the support we need to try new approaches, do things differently, try pilot programs to test new approaches, and get out of the old Section 106 rut. We need to use the freedom that's been handed to us with this tool to augment existing resources for managing cultural resources and to focus our time and efforts where they will most benefit the archaeological and historic resources of the state. We need to use this tool as a means of focusing on those cultural resources that are truly significant or of most interest to the public or most in need of care so that we can pick the resources we work with rather than have them always picked for us by where projects happen.

6. **We need to be open to new approaches to achieving compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act.** We need to leap into implementation of the new protocol between BLM and SHPO whole-heartedly as another tool to free us from unending by-rote archaeology so that we can be more productive and creative, and use the opportunity to do better science rather than better legal compliance. We need to use the new procedures as a way of taking better care of the resources and not just doing better Section 106 work. I believe that honest whole-hearted implementation of the new protocol, which gives us greater flexibility and encourages us to step out of the same worn path, will also require that we be better scientists than we've had to be to do step-by-step legal compliance. For some that may be a burden; for others it will feel more like being freed from shackles.

CONCLUSION

Strong compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act doesn't prevent vandalism to sites, doesn't realize the research potential of most sites since avoidance is usually the chosen (cheaper) alternative, doesn't teach us much that's new about the past, doesn't recognize the public interest in archaeology, and doesn't often offer interesting experiences to the public. It's time for cultural resource staff to turn around, if you will, to stop looking internally at legal processes and to look outward toward the public and the opportunities to really use the resource base for education, for fun, and for preservation into the near and distant future. We are at a juncture right now that encourages us to move in new directions. We have new tools in the form of the State Task Force report and the new protocol. We have the support of the State Historic Preservation Officer and our own management to try new things. The time may never be better to set off in new exciting directions and to close the perceived gap between cultural resource management and academia. I see a future in which, if we take advantage of opportunity, the next 25 years of cultural resource management can be both productive of new research and

exciting and fun for us and for the public. In an article published in the *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* Robert Elston once called for archaeologists in cultural resource management to always do the best science we

can do and never be satisfied with "just" CRM. And well before that, in 1981, Tom King talked about archeology for scholars or squirrels. We've been very good squirrels over the past 25 years. It's time to be scholars.

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