

INTERPRETING THE SABRE SPRINGS SITE: HOW EVERYBODY WON

Ruth C. Alter
Affinis
847 Jamacha Road
El Cajon, CA 92019

ABSTRACT

In addition to sharing data with the archaeological community, cultural resource management (CRM) projects should make an effort to inform and educate the public whenever possible. This paper describes efforts to disperse information about the Sabre Springs site in San Diego County, and archaeology in general, through a developer funded interpretive project at Morning Creek Elementary School in Poway. This well-received project combined displays of specially selected artifacts, basic information geared for students ages 5-11, and instructional background information to enable teachers to continue further study as desired.

INTRODUCTION

In his foreword to Those Who Came Before, Emil Haury eloquently states:

I have long contended that unless professional archaeologists are willing to share the excitement of their findings popularly, they are not fulfilling their potential as discoverers of new truths...The increase in knowledge is one thing, and its diffusion another; but the latter is the real measure of the usefulness of the former. [Lister and Lister 1983:9]

While few of us would debate Haury's point, real world constraints of budgets and time don't always allow the luxury of practicing one's convictions. In truth, as many professional archaeologists working within the structure of cultural resource management are aware, simply getting out requisite information to our peers can be a difficult enough process without adding the onus of public enlightenment. On occasion, however, the opportunity to share our findings with the world at large does present itself, and this paper is the description of one such occurrence.

BACKGROUND

The community of Sabre Springs exists today as a mix of single- and multi-family homes and commercial development in Poway, located in the northern part of the city of San Diego. It is much like many other developments of its kind in Southern California with two exceptions: first, much earlier people lived in the same location, and second, the modern day developer of the property, Pardee Construction Company, was sensitive to that fact.

In 1982, archaeological surveys conducted in the initial planning stages of the Sabre Springs community development project confirmed the presence of a site first recorded at the San Diego Museum of Man as W-230 by Malcolm Rogers in the 1920s. The surveys, however, revealed that the site was considerably larger than Rogers had indicated, and the "revised" site was recorded with the South Coastal Information Center as CA-SDI-6669 (Gross and Robbins-Wade 1992). In 1983, test excavations affirmed the area as a significant archaeological resource and that impacts from the impending development would require mitigation. At this point, project planners redesigned the development to avoid a large and important

portion of the site, and also added a permanent, dedicated open space easement, which met the provisions of Appendix K to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Gross and Robbins-Wade 1992).

While dedication of the open space easement satisfied CEQA mitigation requirements, members of upper management at Pardee, genuinely interested in the archaeological resources of the property and understanding the potential community relations benefits, proposed funding further research, including extensive excavation of areas outside the easement, and future interpretative projects.

In early 1984, excavation of CA-SDI-6669 began, and included a program of backhoe trenching and hand excavation of 112 units. Monitoring of grading activities produced additional artifacts and information. In all, over 85,000 artifacts were collected from the site. A cremation was encountered during the excavation and provided an initial application of California's Native American Burial Act. The cremation and associated grave goods were reburied according to the directions of representatives of the local Native American community.

In 1990, Pardee contracted with Affinis to prepare the site excavation report, based on the collections and the catalog, lab notes, correspondence, and initial studies conducted by the original contractor (RBR and Associates). Additional analyses were performed by Affinis staff and by independent contractors. The site report of CA-SDI-6669, authored by G. Timothy Gross and Mary Robbins-Wade, was published in 1992.

Essentially, research revealed CA-SDI-6669 as a multicomponent site with nine loci, including habitation areas and bedrock milling stations. The earliest occupation of the site most likely dates to about 1000 B.C., and the latest occurred during the Late Prehistoric, sometime between A.D. 1120 and 1750. Use of the site falling between these time periods is suggested by some radiocarbon dates, but the evidence is not conclusive.

The most extensive use of the site oc-

curred during the Late Prehistoric period, as documented by ceramics, diagnostic projectile points, bedrock milling, and the presence of cremations. The earlier occupation(s) are chronicled by radiocarbon dating and a few large points (Pinto, Elko, and Gypsum Cave) and some knives.

In Late Prehistoric times, the Sabre Springs site was situated near the ethnographic boundary of the Yuman-speaking Tipai/Ipai (Kumeyaay/Diegueno) and the Shoshonean-speaking Luiseno. Because these people shared a similar material culture, a specific archaeologically-based cultural assignment for the site was not possible. However, when procedures for dealing with the cremation were required, the Native American Heritage Commission assigned Ron Christman, a Kumeyaay/Diegueno, as the local Native American representative.

INTERPRETATIVE PROGRAM

As provided by Pardee, funding for an interpretative program was made available to Affinis in late 1991. Morning Creek Elementary School, within the Sabre Springs community, was designated as the recipient of this program. The school consists of students from kindergarten through grade 6.

The project began with consultation with school faculty members, who indicated a preference for a display case-based program targeted at grades 3 through 6 (age 8-12), complementing an existing multi-cultural studies curriculum. The school faculty, as well as the Affinis staff, wanted the students to feel a specific connection with those people who had preceded them in their own neighborhoods. They wanted the children to understand that many approaches to daily living are possible, and to come away with a basic understanding and respect for the past.

To accomplish this, two bi-level glass cases measuring 13" by 40" each were purchased and set up in the multi-use room, which also houses the school's library. Affinis staff prepared a rough "story line" to be illustrated in the cases with artifacts from

the Sabre Springs excavation. This "story line" focused on two themes: life as it had existed at Sabre Springs in the past, particularly during the Late Prehistoric period, and how the science of archaeology extracts information about the past from sites. These themes were explored from a young person's point of reference, examining those aspects most likely to be of interest. Primary, secondary, and tertiary information categories were established and space in a display case was allotted to each theme. Artifacts from the Sabre Springs collection were selected to illustrate the label information and also to stand on their own as examples of the creative abilities of the former Sabre Springs inhabitants. These artifacts came from the site's trench monitoring activities, and were unprovenanced. In one instance, a masterful cast, made by Ginger Ridgeway, of a unique and research-significant biface, was substituted for the original. The project was completed and installed at the school in early December 1991; a series of in-depth handouts was prepared for the teachers' use, as was a list of suggested reading material. Formal presentation of the cases to Morning Creek School was made by David Poole, Vice President of Pardee Construction Company, later in the month.

The "Life at Sabre Springs" case explores Kumeyaay lifeways and includes labels with information about basic subsistence patterns, division of labor, food and food-preparation, housing, tools and tool-making, ceramics, clothing, ceremonial life, and recreational activities. Case materials include pottery sherds, projectile points, a pounder, manos, hammerstones, shell, rodent and deer bones, and acorns. Photographs of a Kumeyaay woman grinding acorns, of Kumeyaay pottery, and of Kumeyaay acorn granaries are included in this display case. A portable metate with a mano is stationed outside the case so students can practice grinding first hand.

The "Archaeology" case presents information about how archaeological investigations are conducted, and specifically recounts the study of Sabre Springs. This case contains a wide assortment of archaeological instruments including a trowel, plastic bags, a line level, a computer disk, a tape meas-

ure, a wooden stake, pin flags, pages of field notes, photo canisters, and a dental pick. The case also contains information labels about prehistoric tool manufacture along with representative cores, flakes, scrapers, chopper, and hammers. A photo-box shows various views of the Sabre Springs site prior to excavation.

The cases are intended to be a permanent feature of the school, and while they have only been available for the past five months, indications suggest they have been and will be well-used. Some classes have already conducted supplemental studies focusing on the prehistoric environment of the neighborhood, and their maps and related handiwork are on display next to the cases. The school itself funded a videotape showing an archaeological excavation in progress. Both Pardee and Affinis have received many compliments and expressions of gratitude from teachers, students, and parents.

CONCLUSIONS

In retrospect, the Sabre Springs Interpretative Project achieved several positive things: it allowed a developer to receive recognition for a civic good deed; it enabled teachers, students, and other members of the community to have use of a special resource not ordinarily available to them; and it allowed a group of archaeologists to bring an archaeological project full circle by providing information to members of the public normally excluded from the archaeological data sharing process.

As a final thought, I would like to make an observation and pose a question to those who concur with Haury's contention that those who do not share findings with the public have not fulfilled the potential of discovery. Obviously the key to the success of the Sabre Springs interpretative program was the funding made possible because of the sincere archaeological interest of a few businessmen, people who are usually outside that charmed circle of those privileged to receive such information. As a pragmatist my question is: how many others do we exclude because of such eligibility restrictions,

and, more importantly, do we ultimately do ourselves and our discipline a disservice by assuming, as is commonplace in cultural resource management, that all developers are only paying the bills because "they have to"? Or perhaps, by taking time to uncover such interest and then nurturing it, would we find many others who share our wonder and excitement in discoveries of the past, and in so doing, provide further opportunities for everybody to win?

REFERENCES CITED

Gross, G. Timothy, and Mary Robbins-Wade
1992 Investigations at Sabre Springs (CA-SDI-6669, SDM-W-230): A Multicomponent Site Located near Poway, San Diego County, California. Affinis, El Cajon.

Lister, Robert, and Florence Lister
1983 Those who Came Before. Southwestern Monuments Association, Tucson.