

## SCHOLARS OR SQUIRRELS<sup>1</sup>: CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRUST IN CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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*One of the challenges facing land managing agencies responsible for cultural resources on lands they manage has been chronically under-funded and under-staffed programs. Often, keeping up with the project-related workload is such a struggle that proactive efforts are minimal. Some cultural resources staff have begun to look to the interested public for assistance, as volunteers. Others harbor deep concerns about the amount of cultural resources information to which volunteers may have access and struggle with confidentiality issues. One may ask if having little or no proactive site management for lack of staff or funding is better than having site management that requires sharing information with volunteers and trusting them to do the right thing. These issues are examined here in the context of the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP).*

Federal agencies never seem to have enough archaeologists around. With workloads that include daily project related Section 106 compliance requirements, consultation and coordination with tribal groups, National Register nominations, recently added requirements to accomplish significant amounts of Section 110 inventory (inventory done not because of project requirements but to understand cultural resources on managed lands to improve their management), program administration, budgeting, advising other staff of cultural resource issues, maintaining the data base of site records, site atlas, project reports, photos, slides, and other related materials, and working with student archaeologists who are or have plans to do Master's thesis research on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, simple regular monitoring of archaeological and historic sites becomes extremely difficult to squeeze in. Often, it isn't squeezed in. The result is that significant sites and districts that do not happen to fall in front of planned projects may go for years without being inspected for damage, changing use patterns, and other activities that could affect them. Our understanding of the current condition of sites and districts, and processes that may be impacting them, becomes unsystematic and anecdotal.

At the same time that agency archaeologists are struggling with workloads and feelings of unease over things that may be happening out there that they have not yet discovered, there is a large and growing segment of the population that has a deep interest in cultural resources and in seeing that they remain safe on public lands. Many of them spend a great deal of time exploring public lands and know how to recognize most archaeological sites without having access to any data base or being told by an archaeologist what it is.

Most of them learn in time how many archaeological phenomena are distributed on the landscape and know where to look if they want to see some archaeology. In other words, in many respects discussion about whether or not we'll let go of information from our data base is moot. They don't need it to know where the stuff is. These people are a resource waiting to be tapped.

### THE CALIFORNIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

In 1996 the BLM State Office in Sacramento began working on a project to provide to the public information on rock art and rock art sites that the public can visit. Rock art is probably the most fascinating aspect of archaeology to the public in general. BLM field archaeologists are regularly contacted by people who want to know where rock art sites are so that they may visit them. We don't usually divulge site locations, so I usually mention a couple of sites that have been subject to installation of protective barriers and interpretive signs and that are already publicly known. Usually the response is that they've already been there and want to know where others are. The local museum regularly receives the same kind of query. The incredible level of public interest required a response. Twentyfive sites on BLM managed lands from the Mexican border to the Oregon border were carefully selected for public visitation. These sites were selected because they were already known at least to local people, had already been subject to any protective measures that could be taken, and were on roads that provided easy access not requiring four wheel drive. Some had campgrounds located adjacent to or near them. The intent was to

provide a way for members of the public to tour the entire state and visit rock art all along the way. Since revealing the locations of 25 sites was already breaking with a long held tradition, it was decided that we may as well attempt to reach as wide a public as possible. Not only would a brochure be produced, but a BLM rock art web site would be constructed. A specialist in rock art studies was contracted to prepare information that would go into the brochure and on the web site, including maps of their locations, directions to the sites, photographs of the sites, and a brief description and discussion of each site. Also included would be some general information on rock art and a preservation message that includes discussion of appropriate behavior when visiting such sites. Both the State Office of Historic Preservation and the Native American Heritage Commission endorsed the project. The American Rock Art Research Association (ARARA) requested that a system of monitoring the on-the-ground effects of encouraging public visitation at the sites be established. This was an absolutely reasonable request and ultimately led to the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP).

The web site, still under construction, was unveiled at the ARARA annual conference in Ridgecrest in May 1998. A computer was set up at Maturango Museum, host of the ARARA meetings, and logged into the web site during an evening event at the museum. BLM State Office Archaeologist Russ Kaldenberg, who originated the idea for the web site, spent the entire evening at the computer talking with conference attendees and asking those interested in becoming stewards for the sites on the web to leave their contact information on signup sheets, which were left at the registration desk during the conference. Maturango Museum, interested in a site monitoring program from the beginning, kept signup sheets at their front counter for most of the following year and publicized the program in the museum newsletter. The museum was an excellent public contact point not only for local residents but for visitors from out of the local area. BLM staff took every opportunity to publicize the program and solicit volunteers.

During that same year a committee was established to flesh out the details of a site monitoring system. The committee consisted of BLM archaeologists, representatives of local museums and other interested entities, a representative of the Society for California Archaeology, and Discovery Works, Inc., a private consulting firm that had been contracted to carry out administrative functions of the program, to produce training and other materials once the program was designed and ready for

implementation, and to plan and carry out training workshops. The committee studied several existing site monitoring programs, including the Arizona Site Steward Program, the Partners in Preservation Program of Los Padres National Forest, and several local monitoring programs. The result was a design that can serve as an umbrella program for local monitoring efforts statewide. It provides consistency between local programs, and a way of ensuring quality control. It does not replace programs that were in existence prior to inception of CASSP, but they may become local chapters of CASSP if they desire. The Society for California Archaeology agreed to formally sponsor CASSP and to allow its not-for-profit status to be used as a vehicle for seeking grant funding for CASSP activities. A Memorandum of Understanding was written and has been signed by BLM, the State Office of Historic Preservation, the Native American Heritage Commission, the Society for California Archaeology, Discovery Works, and Maturango Museum and Imperial Valley College Desert Museum, the first two local entities to sign on as partners in the program. In the course of putting together the site stewardship program it went far beyond the initial goal of monitoring sites on the rock art web site. The committee formulated the following program definition and goals:

The California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP) is a network of concerned people committed to protecting California's rich cultural heritage. The program uses professional archaeologists and trained volunteers as stewards to monitor sites throughout the state. Stewards promote protection through monitoring, education, research, and public awareness. Their presence on site enhances the preservation of California's cultural resources for all.

Our program goals are as follows:

1. To protect and to preserve in perpetuity prehistoric and historic archaeological resources for the purposes of conservation, scientific study, interpretation, and public enjoyment.
2. To increase public knowledge and awareness of the significance and value of cultural resources.
3. To support the understanding of national, state, and local preservation laws.

4. To support the recordation and to provide the ongoing physical record of the site to assist with permanent site management.

Our motto is "Caring, Sharing, and Protecting."

## THE FIRST CASSP EFFORT

The first site stewardship workshop was held in May 1999 in Ridgecrest. Ridgecrest was chosen for the first workshop for a variety of reasons: the local museum, Maturango Museum, was a supportive partner in the endeavor; the local community is strongly identified with the well known Coso-style rock art; there is a high level of interest in rock art and archaeology in general on the part of the local community; and the archaeological resource that BLM manages there is particularly rich in rock art as well as other prehistoric and historic resources. It was also necessary to have a local agency archaeologist who would work with volunteers in a way that required sharing site information with them. As the Ridgecrest Field Office archaeologist, I had been part of the committee that designed CASSP. I had also had some important previous experience at working with the public and have come to believe that it may be the only way archaeology will survive into the next century.

We hoped for 20 participants in that first day long workshop; 21 attended. Nineteen of them signed on as active volunteers. Two more Ridgecrest volunteers attended the second workshop in El Centro and are among our busiest workers. Another new Ridgecrest volunteer attended a recent workshop in Bishop. Topics covered included a summary of the local prehistory, history, and natural resources; archaeology and the law; safety and meeting the public; and ethics, including issues of data confidentiality. Finally there was discussion of sites that had been selected as the first targets for site stewardship, and the workshop participants selected the sites or National Register districts in which they were interested. Each volunteer signed an agreement of confidentiality in which they acknowledged having read and understood the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Code of Ethical Responsibilities of the SCA bylaws (pertinent portions of all of these were discussed during the workshop), and they agreed to abide by them. We also began scheduling the second portion of their training, a day in the field with me, at their sites.

By now I have spent quite a bit of time in the field with most of the site stewards. Many of them were

already familiar with the sites or areas they are monitoring. Some of them showed me sites I had never been to before. They have been working as site stewards for almost a year now and are impatient to do more. Archaeologists who work with volunteers are finding that a dedicated group of volunteers is hard to keep up with. Personal interests and abilities are cropping up that affect how they carry out their site stewardship duties. I have a growing body of information on a number of important sites and districts, most of which had not ever been subject to regular attention. Since most of these are districts and not individual sites, the number of sites under surveillance is close to 200. Not every site is visited each month; in the larger areas site stewards may take a general look at the whole area or a more detailed look at a portion of the area on each trip.

## RESULTS OF SITE STEWARDSHIP

1. Most of the site stewards were involved in outdoor activities before site stewardship came along. Almost all of them had prior experience of some sort with archaeology, history, rock art, or closely related subjects. Several were museum docents; a couple were already certified rock art tour guides who led tours to Little Petroglyph Canyon on China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station. One is working on a degree in history, one has a Master's Degree in history, and two have degrees in anthropology with emphasis on archaeology. One is president of the Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert and was recently appointed to the Kern County Historical Resources Commission. One had worked in a similar volunteer program on the Los Padres National Forest and now volunteers in a local state park. One is the curator at Maturango Museum. Many of them are members of archaeological or anthropological societies. Taken together they were an almost unbelievable local resource just waiting for something like site stewardship to come along. Personal bents have made for some interesting approaches, also. One steward is a retired engineer. After monitoring his National Register rock art district for two or three months, he contacted me and wanted to know exactly what were the appropriate techniques for making an exact record panel by panel and element by element. I expect that by the time he's finished this will be the most meticulously documented rock art site in the state. Another of the stewards, a real estate appraiser, seemed to be concerned at first that she had no prior experience with archaeology and no training except our workshop, and didn't know how good she would be. She decided she wanted to work at the Fossil Falls National Register District, which encompasses several

square miles. I spent some time in the field with her and then she took the maps I gave her and set out to locate all the sites in the district for monitoring. The next time I went out with her she knew where everything was, had explored some outlying areas, and had found a couple of sites that had been missed during formal inventory. I was impressed at how quickly she had learned her way around just by following a map. When I asked about the kind of real estate she prefers to handle she said "raw land," which of course requires being able to read a map, find the property, and walk over it to do an appraisal.

2. I have a running record of what is going on, or not going on, at 100 to 200 significant sites. The site stewards have reported back on road closures that have been forced open by offroad vehicle users and that need to be reconstructed; missing or vandalized signs that need replacing; routes of travel that cross sites and that need rerouting, capping, or other measures; a few instances of recent graffiti; and numbers of people and vehicles that are in the vicinity of sites when they do their monitoring. They have assisted in identifying additional recording that's needed and have located unrecorded sites.

3. Site stewards have produced valuable new information on the archaeology of the area. As an example, one couple became site stewards with their "patrol area" already picked out and it wasn't any of the areas I had selected. In fact, it was a location I had never been to. They had been surveying and monitoring the area on their own for years. They had relocated a couple of sites that had been recorded many years ago and had located several previously unknown sites. At some point they had talked with a former archaeologist in the Ridgecrest office about recording the sites in the area, and he had suggested they start by making a map. He suggested that they establish a datum and map features by taking a compass bearing and distance from the datum to features they found. The first time I went out with them they showed me a meticulous map of features carefully measured from the datum and mapped along compass bearings. We'll start working on site records on the next trip out. In a relatively small area they had found rock art, two large middens containing lithics and groundstone and probably other materials subsurface, isolated milling features, and a fairly sizeable cave which I haven't explored yet. The area is very near Highway 395 and gets enough activity that these sites certainly need attention.

4. Site stewardship shares responsibility for managing resources on public lands with the public, who are, after all, the owners of public lands. The

greater the level of interest in and responsibility for resources on the part of the public, the better will be the management of those resources. Public land managers are busy people; if they aren't hearing from the public regarding a particular resource or program, they assume all is fine and turn their attention to other issues. Cultural resources has not been a highly visible program to many managers.

5. The site stewards are continually learning more about the archaeology and history of the area and about cultural resources management and the job BLM has to do. They have come to understand better some of the decisions the agency has to make. They are becoming a public support group for cultural resources and their management, a thing that barely existed in the past. They are passing this information on to other members of the community and helping to increase the general level of understanding and appreciation for local cultural resources.

6. The site stewards are doing more than their immediate stewardship responsibilities. Most of them have assisted with other work. A number of them have volunteered to assist with inventory of areas in which we had little or no inventory but felt that there were probably important sites of which we should be aware. They have been instrumental in helping BLM archaeologists survey over 2,000 acres in areas in which we badly needed some cultural resources data. As a result of this inventory, a significant archaeological complex has been identified and is being recorded and targeted for research. Important sites have been identified in a second area that was previously unknown archaeologically. A number of volunteers assisted with excavation of a historic site that is the subject of research for a Master's thesis.

7. One of the benefits of the program that I did not foresee was a raised awareness of the public interest in cultural resources on the part of other BLM staff, especially the supervisor who got to sign all the volunteer agreement forms. After he had signed a few he started to ask about what was going on. With the stewards coming and going on business with me, the formerly one-person cultural resources program has more visibility, not only on the ground but inside BLM as well.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY VERSUS SHARING: SOME MANAGEMENT VERSUS NO MANAGEMENT

After 25 years of cultural resource management for two of the three largest landholding federal agencies, it is clear that there are never going to be enough

archaeologists to watch over all the cultural resources on federal lands. There will never be enough rangers, law enforcement officers, and archaeologists to be wherever sites may be endangered; never enough to identify every site that needs site stabilization before it erodes away; never enough even to identify where all the sites are. While we spend most of our time doing compliance on sites within planned projects and a modicum of time on some proactive care of cultural resources that are not within planned projects, nominate a few to the National Register, put in a fence here and there, do an interpretive project now and then, there are thousands of archaeological sites that we will not get to for a very long time, if at all. There are also thousands of people who are getting to many of those sites every day. Some of them are there out of interest and do no harm, some do harm without intending to because they don't realize they are doing it, and some are there to do a great deal of harm through intentional vandalism and theft of artifacts. It has also become clear to me that under most circumstances the idea that site data confidentiality will in some way protect cultural resources or reduce impacts to them is a myth. Almost anyone can read a little archaeology, explore a little, and figure out how to locate archaeological sites. They may not recognize the finer points of lithic reduction technology and may identify as cultural items that are not, but on the whole they know a prehistoric site when they see one. Historic sites are even easier for those interested in old bottles or mining equipment. The difficulty in maintaining site confidentiality has been compounded in the past few years by the increasing popularity of guide books to sites and by the fact that there does not appear to be any legal steps an agency can take to stop people from publishing books on how to get to interesting historic and prehistoric sites. The newest challenge is, of course, the internet. Almost anything can show up on the web. The recent appearance on two web sites of a historic site that is in an unusually excellent state of preservation and at which we have been carrying out historic research has been a disconcerting and eye opening experience. Once a site is on the web we have lost all control of information on that site. And anyone who visits a site can put it on the web. Even if there were a legal way to require or request that some information be taken off the web site, nothing will change the fact that some unknown number of people who were unaware of this site a short time ago know about it now.

In the face of easy access to cultural resources and to data that are outside our control, there seems to be no choice but to reduce the level of concern over hoarding data and find some new ways of dealing with the increasing level of use that cultural resources are

receiving and will continue to receive, regardless of access to data. Implementation of successful site stewardship programs such as the one in Arizona or Partners in Preservation on the Los Padres National Forest, both of which have been in existence for some time, has resulted in better management of the resources and improvement in their condition. In neither case has sharing information with site stewards resulted in damage to or destruction of resources. Site stewards take their responsibilities seriously. They want to share the burden. It may behoove us to open up to the public a little more and share that burden in carefully considered ways. Cultural resources need outspoken and knowledgeable public support. Site stewards are a clear indication of public concern with cultural resources. Rather than automatic knee jerk reaction over data confidentiality, it may be time to make this another area for well thought out professional and scholarly decisions about cultural resources; time to think less like squirrels and more like scholars.

#### Note

1. The title for this paper was borrowed from a paper written by Tom King in 1972, *Archaeology: For Scholars or Squirrels*. Typically, Tom was a little ahead of the rest of us.