

**COEXISTENCE OF MAINTENANCE AND USE OF HISTORIC SITES:
EXAMPLES FROM THE SIERRAVILLE RANGER DISTRICT,
TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST, SIERRA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

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Relations between the public and the Sierraville Ranger District (SVRD) are admirable, especially the simultaneous public use and government maintenance of historic sites supported by the interpretive information made available to the public. The SVRD rents one restored fire lookout and is in the process of restoring a second. Additionally, the District accepts reservations for public use of a brick oven at historic Wheeler Sheep Camp. The integrity of the sites is maintained while the public uses and respects them, demonstrating that maintenance of historic sites and use of these sites by the public can coexist.

One problem facing archaeologists is preserving and maintaining site integrity. Some may argue that if members of the public have knowledge of and access to an archaeological site, then that site will eventually lose its integrity due to vandalism, pilfering of artifacts, or other destructive behavior. However, while the loss of site integrity can (and does) happen, assuming that the relationship between these two variables (public knowledge/access and site integrity) is always negative would be incorrect. There are cases where the outcome is positive and appropriate management choices to preserve and maintain site integrity are made.

Relations between the public and the Sierraville Ranger District (SVRD) of the Tahoe National Forest are admirable, especially the simultaneous public use and government maintenance of historic sites supported by the interpretive information made available to the public. The SVRD rents one restored fire lookout and is in the process of restoring a second. Additionally, the District accepts reservations for public use of a brick oven at historic Wheeler Sheep Camp and provides interpretive information at a site called Kyburz Flat. The integrity of the sites mentioned above is maintained while the public uses and respects the sites, demonstrating that maintenance of historic sites and use of these sites by the public can coexist.

Before discussing the current rental of fire lookouts, a brief history of fire detection and fire lookouts must be provided. In the 1860s, during the Civil War, Wawona Point was used as a fire detection point and scenic vista in the newly created Yosemite Grant, which was later renamed Yosemite National Park. The United States Army cavalry units patrolled Yellowstone National Park in 1872, and these cavalry units were additionally employed in Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks to patrol for general protection, including fire protection and illegal grazing. In 1901, the General Land Office established Division R, the Forestry Division. Surveyors were sent out to survey reserved lands and, as instructed, took appropriate action on spotted fires.

The fire lookouts on forests of today are the result of a 1911 fire plan by Coert DuBois, a United States Forest Service (USFS) forester, who used the Stanislaus National Forest as a model. One element of the DuBois fire plan was to allocate what were considered strategically situated mountaintops as permanent lookout points. A critical and additional element of this plan was the recording of fire statistics. In 1911 the United States Congress passed the Weeks Act, consequently providing matching funds to states that were deemed qualified for forestry fire protection. The State of California entered this program in 1919, and had two State-operated fire lookouts by 1922.

In 1930, the USFS formed an investigative group at what is now the Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station to examine every aspect of fire detection. This group looked at everything from structure design and site designation to the psychological testing of fire lookout operators. Beginning in 1935, the results of the study were implemented for federal, state, and local wildland fire control agencies, resulting in an integrated system of fire lookouts from the Oregon border to Mexico. The Civilian Conservation Corps constructed the lookouts, and the entire plan for the lookout system was implemented by 1938.

While many of these historic buildings are in danger of falling into disrepair, the SVRD has taken the initiative to preserve what it can. Work on two lookouts on the SVRD (Calpine Lookout and Sardine Lookout) follows the Management of Forest Service Administrative Buildings Programmatic Agreement (1990), and both of these lookouts are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Calpine Lookout has already been restored with the help of a Sierra County Resource Advisory Council Grant and is currently part of a fire lookout rental program. For a minimal fee, patrons can rent the lookout for a night and experience history for themselves; there is no running water, no electricity, and no air conditioning at Calpine Lookout. Propane lamps, a gas-powered stove, and a gas heater, however, are in the lookout, along with two twin beds, a kitchen table with chairs, and an authentic fire finder. There is even a picnic area with a fire pit available for use while staying at the lookout. Visitors to and patrons of Calpine Lookout are generally respectful of the historic building, lending support to the idea that members of the public can be allowed access to (and use of) an archaeological site without jeopardizing the integrity of the site.

Calpine Lookout, which is also accessible during the winter season, has even been featured in the *New York Times*; in fact, on June 12, 2009, Bonnie Tsui's article on the historic fire lookout was published. The next morning, the SVRD was flooded with phone calls and questions about Calpine Lookout, and while Tsui's article created a greater public awareness of and interest in the lookout, the increased popularity of the building has not resulted in damage to the site. Additionally, there are members of the public who help maintain Calpine Lookout. A man named Douglas Jensen occasionally goes up to the lookout to paint the interior of the cabin for the SVRD, and his efforts contribute to the idea that the public can be involved in the maintenance of a site without damaging the site's integrity.

Sardine Lookout is another fire lookout on the SVRD. As can be seen on a map of Sardine Peak, the current structure is actually the second lookout that was built on the peak. The first lookout was built about 1915, but not much is known about the original structure (other than that it was demolished in 1934) and there are only two photographs of it in existence. The current fire lookout on Sardine Peak was staffed as a true fire lookout until late in the 1970s and has since been used for its original purpose only during lightning storms. Unlike Calpine Lookout, Sardine Lookout is not currently available for rental to the public; however, the SVRD is in the process of making rental possible. In 1992, the first restoration efforts on the fire lookout were made possible through the receipt of an America's Great Outdoors Grant. During this restoration, lead paint on the exterior of the building was removed and encapsulated, and a new pit toilet was installed on the flat just below the lookout. The year 2001 saw the next restoration effort, which was taken on by a Boy Scout named Chris Hanely. For his Eagle Scout project, Hanely rebuilt the lower stairs of the lookout, stabilized the upper stairs and the catwalk, and rebuilt the doors on the second story.

And yet, after all of these restoration efforts, Sardine Lookout was still not fully restored. However, in 2008, the SVRD received another Sierra County Resource Advisory Council grant. Since then, additional work has been done on the lookout, and members of the public are so keen to see the rental of Sardine Lookout become a reality that various groups have volunteered to help with the restoration of the building. A number of Jeep owners, called the Diablo 4WD Group of Concord, California, have organized a group, and one of their group outings in the recent past has included coming to the SVRD and volunteering to help with the restoration of the lookout on Sardine Peak. This demonstrates the public's awareness of the importance of the site, and an eagerness to help in its

renovation. The SVRD is continuing the process of restoring the building and hopes to have Sardine Lookout available for rental to the public by the end of summer 2010.

Kyburz Flat Interpretive Area, another part of the SVRD, has three components. There is a rock containing petroglyphs (more specifically, cupules), remains of an historic stage stop, and Wheeler Sheep Camp. The existence of these three sites provided the SVRD with the opportunity to interpret aspects of Washoe, western frontier, and Basque heritage to the public. The Kyburz petroglyph is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was interpreted because of its location—20 ft. from a county road and in one of the few shaded parking areas available in the vicinity. Camping was also occurring on the site, so the SVRD District Archaeologist, Michael Baldrica, consulted with Washoe tribal members, who believed that the only viable option was to interpret the site for the public. Attempting to hide the boulder was not feasible, so large rocks were placed to prevent parking and camping while still allowing for a dispersed campsite away from the rock and its petroglyphs. Finally, an interpretive sign was put in place to explain what is being protected and why it is important to protect it. This mitigated not only the issue of intentional vandalism, but also the issue of potential inadvertent damage by people not knowing that what they were looking at (or parking on) was an important piece of Washoe heritage.

While interpreting the Kyburz petroglyph, the historic stage stop, and Wheeler Sheep Camp, the SVRD identified some objectives, based on learning, behavior, and emotion (Baldrica 1995); these objectives remain in place today. Stated by Baldrica (1995), the behavioral and emotional objectives of the SVRD include that “the majority of the visitors will appreciate the tangible remains of history and heritage and will not vandalize these remains” and that these visitors will “feel that vandalism takes away from their enjoyment, and their children’s enjoyment, of cultural resources and that vandalism is a disgusting act” (Baldrica 1995:6, 7). It appears that these objectives have been met, as the SVRD continues to maintain interpretive signs at these three sites in Kyburz Flat. Present-day visitors to the ranger district can be seen examining these signs and learning about the history of the area. In addition to visitors to the site, groups have volunteered to help maintain the integrity of the site. A Girl Scout troop from nearby Truckee, California, has come to Kyburz Flat in the past to help stain the boardwalk and keep up its appearance for visitors. Another part of Kyburz Flat, Wheeler Sheep Camp, is still used today, and a general history of these types of camps is important to understanding public appreciation of what remains of this site.

Prior to the use of vehicles for relocating sheep from lower elevations to sheep camps during the summer, the movement of sheep was accomplished by herding, an event that took place sometime between late spring and early summer. After arriving at the sheep camp, the animals were divided into bands of 1,000, with each band having an assigned herder who stayed with the sheep all day, every day. After the summer ended, the bands were herded back to the sheep camp and the ewes were separated from the lambs. The lambs were sold and consequently shipped away, while the ewes were herded back down to the main ranch headquarters in the lower elevations and put in winter pasture ranges (Baldrica and Smith 2008).

Wheeler Sheep Camp was one of four sheep camps located on the Tahoe National Forest. The history of this particular camp involves a Dan C. Wheeler, who entered the sheep business in 1867 after bringing a herd of sheep from Oregon to Truckee Meadows in California. The original Wheeler Sheep Camp was located at Kyburz Flat and consisted of a three-room cabin, an outdoor brick oven, an outdoor wood stove, a developed spring, a bathhouse, a chicken coop, a horse barn and corral, five tent platforms, sheep corrals, chutes, and livestock scales.

Unfortunately, all that remains for the interpretation of the historic Wheeler Sheep Camp today is the brick oven (which was built around 1927). While it was still used by the sheep camp, the brick oven was used to bake breads and cook stews. Freshly baked bread was delivered to shepherders every five days, and was considered to be one of the two essential items delivered by the camp tender each week (the other essential being red wine). The Forest Service, in accordance with policy, tore down the camp buildings of Wheeler Sheep Camp in 1968; however, the brick oven was left standing because it was

considered to have cultural significance (Baldrica and Smith 2008). The original oven lasted until the early 1980s, when the shed that was built to protect the oven collapsed. This exposed the oven to the natural elements, which eventually resulted in the oven also collapsing.

However, during the summer of 1992, Dr. Jose Mallea of the Basque Studies Program at University of Nevada, Reno, volunteered his time and coordinated the reconstruction of the oven. The project was done in coordination with personnel from the SVRD, and enlisted the help of various members of the community. The shed that had been built to protect the oven from the elements was also rebuilt by Tahoe National Forest recreation personnel. The site, which has been deemed not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, is now interpreted as part of the SVRD's Kyburz Flat Interpretive Area. The previously mentioned Girl Scout troop from Truckee that aided with the preservation of Kyburz Flat Interpretive Area has also made trips to Wheeler Sheep Camp in order to volunteer and help patch cracks in the brick oven.

Large and small groups use the brick oven during the summer months, and the entire site is open to day use recreation. Some Girl Scout troops even visit the site to bake pizzas in the oven. One example of a recent recreational usage of Wheeler Sheep Camp is an event hosted by Cheryl Koehler, who is associated with *Edible East Bay* and loosely associated with the slow food movement. This annual event, affectionately called "Burning Lamb," again took place during summer 2009. During this gathering, the oven was once again used for baking fresh bread and cooking stew (using authentic recipes, of course), and through this event, Basque heritage was celebrated. The oven was used safely and appropriately, and the site was clean when the event was over.

Through the prior discussions of Calpine Lookout, Sardine Lookout, Kyburz Flat Interpretive Area, and Wheeler Sheep Camp, it can be understood that the public has been allowed access to these four historic sites on the SVRD and the results have all been positive. The public is given the opportunity to enjoy a tangible aspect of the area's history, and, because people have been educated about the importance of these sites, the integrity of each place remains intact. The SVRD has done an impressive job restoring, interpreting, and maintaining these sites, and the results from these efforts should be viewed as proof that the coexistence of preservation and use of historic sites is entirely possible.

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