

EARLY MILESTONES IN CALIFORNIA STATE PARK ARCHAEOLOGY

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“Often, we are what we were,” claims Harvard psychologist Jerome Kagan in talking about early childhood development. The same may be said of state park archaeology. It operates today on the foundations laid decades before. Archaeology and history were a strong part of the early park movement in California. Motivations for this early historic preservation included patriotism and the advantages of an educated citizenry. The Olmsted blueprint for a California State Park system included preserving important touchstones of California’s past. This was seen as a vital role of government in providing for a Jeffersonian democracy. State park archaeology in California began slowly but documented a wide variety of heritage values on the parklands of an emerging system. The rich and varied environments of state parks contained a cultural mosaic stretching back to ancient times. At the end of its first century, demands of the state water project and highway system in the 1960s necessitated a robust effort to salvage archaeological information. Key projects and events are recounted to illustrate the development of parks archaeology in formative decades.

BEGINNINGS

California State Parks is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. This article looks at the genesis of archaeology and history within the organization and mentions some events and milestones witnessed during its first century. It concludes with a look at the salvage archaeology done for the State Water Project in the 1960s and a remarkable feature excavated at San Luis Reservoir.

It was in 1864, in the midst of a terrible Civil War, that President Abraham Lincoln signed the legislation conferring some 20,000 acres of federal land in Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove to the State of California. Previous federal grants had been made to states and corporations for development purposes, but this one was unique – the first of its kind. It called for the preservation of natural conditions and scenery, “upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation, and shall be inalienable for all time” (Engbeck 1980:17).

Thus, the American park movement began in California with a state park. The legislation carried the indelible imprint and language of the most ardent champion of conservation in the U.S.: Frederick Law Olmsted (Figure 1). Trained as a landscape architect, he designed and oversaw construction of New York’s Central Park and served as its Superintendent. Upon seeing the grandeur of the high Sierra, he proclaimed Yosemite to be the “greatest glory of nature” (Engbeck 1980:21).

But Olmsted’s call for preservation was not based simply on the ethereal nature of wilderness. He saw the protection of places like Yosemite as a duty of government so as to provide the “means of protection for all its citizens in the pursuit of happiness against the obstacles, otherwise insurmountable, which the selfishness of individuals or combinations of individuals is liable to interpose to that pursuit” (Engbeck 1980:20). The enjoyment of nature was necessary for humans to achieve the health and vigor of their intellect, and it was the government’s obligation to make those opportunities available lest a monopoly of rich citizens deny them by private purchase and restriction.

Historic preservation efforts began to emerge at about the same time. Driven primarily by efforts to preserve California’s missions and establish monuments to pioneer achievement, sites began to be set aside and restored. An impressive number of individual societies across the state raised funds, purchased properties, and began restoration. These included Marshall Gold Discovery (1886), Sutter’s Fort (1891),

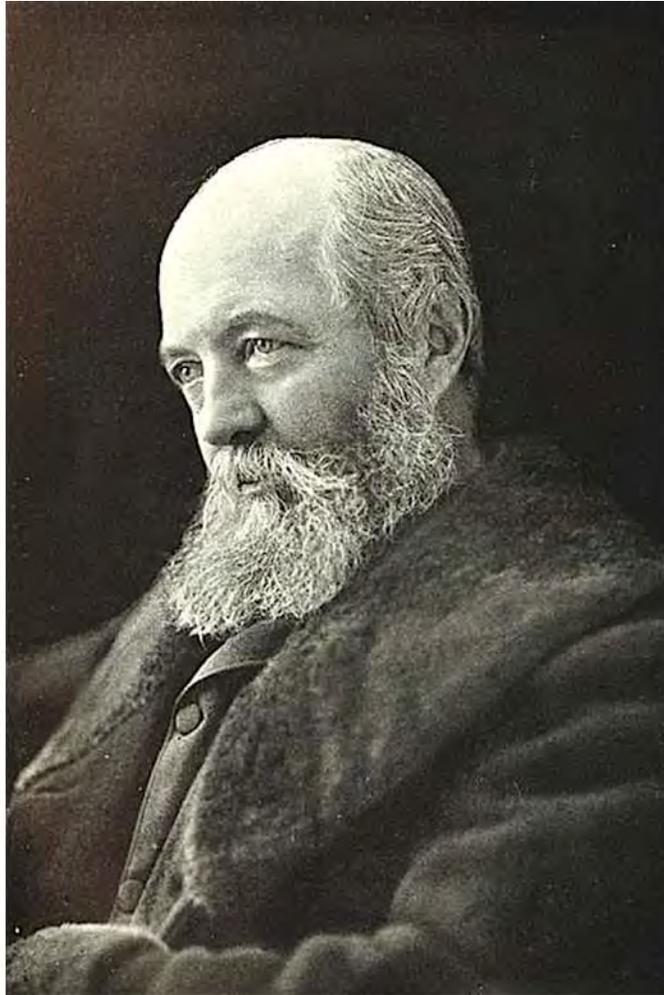


Figure 1. Frederick Law Olmsted was a transformational leader in land conservation in the U.S. He was very influential in the legislative establishment of Yosemite as the first park, conferred to the state of California in 1864 by President Abraham Lincoln. Trained in landscape architecture, Olmsted was comfortable combining natural elements and the works of humans in preserved park lands.

Monterey Custom House (1900), Mission San Francisco Solano (1903), Fort Ross (1906), La Purisima (1908), and Pio Pico's Adobe (1909) (Engbeck 1980; Hata 1992).

At the time the first formal State Park was designated at Big Basin in 1902, there was a rising interest in the value of preserving historical sites as a patriotic duty. By the beginning of the twentieth century, historical societies were formed across the state with the rationale:

No country or community advances except through the patriotism of its people. Patriotism is the love of country, and intelligent patriotism is only possible when the patriot knows of the lives, deeds and characters of the citizens of his country [Engbeck 1980:36].

The value in setting aside, preserving, and studying history was expressed as a practical one. As one of the movement's leaders, William R. Bacon, pointed out, history

can tabulate the mistakes, point out the pitfalls to be avoided, fully appraise the advantages gained and mark a course for future pursuit which will preserve to us the best and discard the valueless.... The collection, preservation, and display of historical



Figure 2. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was commissioned by the State of California to conduct a survey of potential properties for the establishment of a state park system. His report was submitted to the legislature in 1928 and is considered the blueprint for its system of preserved park lands. Dr. A. L. Kroeber was an advisor to Olmsted and urged inclusion of significant heritage sites related to Native California history.

artifacts of local relevance could engage the interest of many who would otherwise remain unaware of historical matters and therefore be unable to learn from the historical record [Engbeck 1980:36].

Clearly, the State of California needed to provide some coordination to these efforts, and it turned to a familiar name to provide it. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was commissioned in 1928 to carry out a survey of potential state park properties in California and deliver recommendations to the legislature for a statewide park plan (Figure 2). This would be the first such survey ever carried out in the U.S. Historic parks and cultural resources were to be a part of that plan, and when the first State Park Commission was appointed, two members included archaeological expertise in their résumés (Hata 1992). Olmsted enlisted a network of volunteer experts to help investigate potential park acquisitions. The overall focus was clearly scenic and recreational properties and thus identified redwood groves, shorelines, desert landscapes, and mountain peaks as potential acquisitions. Olmsted insisted that recreational values be considered – how the public would be able to access the park – as well as the degree of endangerment it faced. Of primary interest were places where the state could educate people how to enjoy scenic and recreational values and “to curb and limit the activities of exploiters who would destroy the birthright of their successors” (Hata 1992:13).

Olmsted drew ideas in his survey from a wide group of historic preservation advocates, including university professors, the Native Sons (and Daughters) of the Golden West, the California Historical Society, and the Society of California Pioneers. A great many civic organizations sought the opportunity

to preserve sites and buildings across the state. For Indian history, Olmsted turned to a prominent expert. Dr. A. L. Kroeber provided valuable advice on the need to protect key sites of Native California history and culture, including restoring one of the more complete Indian villages. Kroeber also emphasized the rampant destruction of Indian heritage sites taking place across the state and urged Olmsted to save key sites.

A key planning milestone in the early park movement was the preparation of Aubrey Drury's "Survey of Historic Sites and Landmarks in California," compiled for the 1928 park bond campaign. This report emphasized the missions for their unique interest, but also included among the potential acquisition targets forts, monuments, ship landings and shipwrecks, buildings, mining towns, literary sites, and landmarks such as Death Valley and Point Concepcion. Individual archaeological and ethnographic sites were not listed, but the categories of interest included "Indian villages, pictographs, shell mounds, and caves" (Hata 1992:261). By any measure, this is a very comprehensive vision of a cultural component to an emerging state park system.

The Olmsted survey was submitted to the new State Parks Commission on December 31, 1928. From an initial list of 330 proposals, 125 were recommended for state acquisition, but only 10 of those were historic sites: Columbia, Shasta, Fort Ross, Santa Barbara County missions (La Purisima), Marshall Park extension, Pioneer Memorial and Donner Lake parks, Mark Twain's home, Camulos Ranch in Ventura County, De La Guerra ranch in Santa Barbara, and the Vallejo home. Five archaeological sites made the cut: Painted Rocks in San Luis Obispo County, Chumash Painted Cave, Fish Traps in Riverside County, Shell Middens in Tulare County, and the Petrified Forest in Sonoma County (Hata 1992:262).

Olmsted felt the state should encourage private ownership and protection of places of historic interest by purchasing conservation easements or deed restrictions. This seems contrary to his recognizing the state's role in educating the public about its history, but his overwhelming concern seems to have been the cost of maintaining historic sites. He noted:

there are some cases where the only practicable course is for the State to take title to the land, to repair and protect the object, give it a suitable setting, and permanently safeguard it, all of which involves a considerable annual expense without much possibility of securing any corresponding revenue in any dignified and legitimate way. Much may be said of certain objects of archeological interest, remains of Indian culture now neglected, and seriously subject to thoughtless destruction, and to various isolated objects of special scientific interest, geological, botanical, zoologic and otherwise [Olmsted 1928:51].

He clearly recognized the need for preservation and the threats faced by historic and cultural sites across California. The idea that historic properties had intrinsic values like their scenic and recreational counterparts -- apart from commercial tourist potential -- is not expressed, but, to be fair, Olmsted pushed for historic landmarks to be added to the expanding park system. And this was done. By 1939, there were 70 parks in the system: 20 park reserves, 36 recreational units, and 14 historic parks representing "chief episodes in the state's romantic past" (Hata 1992:15). Historic and cultural values were firmly established as being part of the park movement and worthy of acquisition, protection, and interpretation.

EARLY ARCHAEOLOGY ON STATE PARKLANDS, 1920-1965

Finding archaeological milestones for the early decades in what was becoming a system of California State Parks is a bit like searching for gold nuggets. Once in a while, an important discovery is made, but these may be interspaced by long dry periods. Keeping in mind that State Parks had no archaeologist to guide or encourage research, park managers and university or museum archaeologists found a way to collaborate.

Notable early studies on state park lands include Malcolm Rogers' archaeological explorations in southern California. He conducted surveys and excavations at properties now designated as park lands at Anza-Borrego, Cuyamaca, and Torrey Pines, and focused on building a chronology for early occupation

and settlement of the desert and coastal regions. Rogers (1929, 1941) also noted rock art values and cultural ties with the greater Southwest.

The WPA and CCC programs in California during the Great Depression provided some archaeological excavations worthy of mention. At La Purisima, the National Park Service directed archaeology to enable an accurate reconstruction of the mission complex. Further studies by Harrington (1939) identified the Indian barracks and by Deetz (1963) provided details of the blacksmith shop. Over 40 years of excavations at La Purisima have provided “one of the clearest archaeological pictures of Franciscan influence on California native peoples” (Schuyler 1978:72).

Adan Treganza’s excavations at Topanga and Fort Ross were important milestones, as they set the stage for further studies in each area (Treganza 1954; Treganza and Bierman 1958). The Topanga complex and ultimately the Millingstone horizon were defined by the clear stratigraphic placement of a village site with heavy lithic tools, cogged stones, abundant milling stones, and few projectile points. At Fort Ross, Treganza’s excavations provided a great deal of information necessary for reconstruction of Russian-period buildings as well as the frontier cultural landscape of this unique site. He noted five sizeable village sites within 0.5 mi. of the stockade (Schuyler 1978:75).

William Wallace’s excavations at VEN-1 (Little Sycamore, now within Point Mugu State Park) was an important milestone, as it isolated the stratigraphic separation between an upper shell midden deposit with late prehistoric Chumash artifacts and the lower Millingstone components including abundant manos, metates, and hammers (Moratto 1984:129; Wallace 1954). The time separation between these deposits seemed to argue against the Millingstone peoples being ancestral to the Chumash.

Important nuggets were added to California’s history and prehistory with Richard Beardsley’s (1946) excavations to locate the flagpole site at the Monterey custom house, and Franklin Fenenga’s (1947) excavations at the site of Sutter’s sawmill. These efforts demonstrated the usefulness of archaeological techniques in producing insight and artifacts from important historical sites.

Finally, in the Anza-Borrego desert, surveys and excavations were carried out by Meighan (1959) for the northern half and Wallace, Taylor, and Kritzman (1962) for the southern half of this huge new park. At Indian Hill Rockshelter, excavations revealed a series of heavy dart points overlain by a pottery-bearing deposit, marking the first documented transition from pre-pottery to ceramic traditions. Cottonwood triangular points in the upper component replaced stemmed dart tips. This site stands as the Rosetta stone for the Anza-Borrego desert, enabling surface artifacts to be assigned a relative chronological placement. Further work by Wilke, McDonald, and Payen (1986) at Indian Hill has confirmed and added detail to this cultural transition, while documenting the use of stone storage cysts before their replacement by ceramics about A.D. 1000. Indian Hill Rockshelter produced a radiocarbon date of 4070 ±100 B.P. on the stone cysts feature (McDonald 1992).

What emerged from these early studies was that California state park properties, regardless of classification, often contained prime heritage sites and features. Park lands in almost every region of the state could be expected to include the imprint of human endeavor going back millennia. The missions, historic towns, and monuments were important touchstones and worthy of preservation, but many archaeological deposits held the key to understanding the 95 percent of human experience that occurred prior to European contact. In California, it would be crucial to preserve and manage a wide range of heritage sites encompassed in this system of preserved park lands.

GETTING IN FRONT OF THE STATE BULLDOZERS

In 1960, Fritz Riddell was hired by State Parks in the first archaeology position outside of an academic setting. At the same time, the State Division of Beaches and Parks was given legal authority to provide archaeological services to Highways and Water Resources for their unprecedented development of state infrastructure. Fritz was directed to respond to this immediate need, but included in the enabling

legislation was the proviso that archaeological studies could not delay state construction. With opportunity came great challenge.

For the Highway Salvage Program, Riddell devised a regional system of response in which qualified institutions could be given contracts to carry out salvage efforts. A serious impediment to this approach was Highways' refusal to fund initial surveys or report preparation. Money was only available for actual excavation costs (Riddell 1965:2, 1973:61). This resulted in many sites being discovered by bulldozers and needlessly destroyed. The Water Resources program was more realistic and funded all phases of archaeology in its projects. As a result, its achievements were far greater. Archaeological studies done for the San Luis Reservoir and State Water Project provided significant early milestones in State Park archaeology.

For about a decade beginning in 1960, State Parks teams conducted surveys and excavations at San Luis, Los Banos, and Little Panoche reservoirs for the State Water Project. This was an immense undertaking for State Parks. No archaeology on this scale had ever been attempted before, and the logistics, administrative support, and project time constraints added to the degree of difficulty. The northwestern San Joaquin Valley region was considered by Kroeber to have been lightly inhabited and outside the mainstream of central valley prehistory (Kroeber 1925:478), so the findings of this public archaeology were astonishing.

Reservoir excavations revealed a series of well-established villages and camps along the reaches of San Luis and Los Banos creeks. Some were single-component; other sites saw reoccupation over many centuries. The occupants of this area were oriented to an acorn gathering and hunting economy, and maintained trade relationships with others to the north as well as to the coast. An extensive seriation of shell bead types provided chronological control and affinity relationships in some cases with Delta sites. Based on the work at MER-14, MER-130, MER-119, and MER-S-94, along with FRE-128 and FRE-129, four cultural complexes were described (Moratto 1984:191-193; Olsen and Payen 1968, 1969, 1983; Pritchard 1983):

- *Positas Complex* (ca. 3300-2600 B.C.) is distinguished by small shaped mortars, short cylindrical pestles, milling stones, perforated flat cobbles, and spire-lopped *Olivella* beads. This was identified from the basal cultural deposit at MER-S-94.
- *Pacheco Complex* (ca. 2600 B.C.-A.D. 300) is separated into two phases, with 1600 B.C. being the dividing point. The earlier phase is marked by foliate bifaces, rectangular *Haliotis* ornaments, and thick rectangular *Olivella* beads. The later phase features distinctive *Olivella* beads, *Haliotis* disk beads and ornaments, perforated canine teeth, and large stemmed and side-notched points. Pacheco is seen as coeval with Middle Horizon in the Delta region.
- *Gonzaga Complex* (ca. A.D. 300-1000) is represented at MER-3, MER-14, MER-S-94, and other sites. It is recognized by bowl mortars, shaped pestles, bone awls and grass saws, and squared or tapered-stem projectile points. On the basis of bead type, the complex is assigned affinity with Delta "Late Horizon," Phase I sites.
- *Panoche Complex* (ca. A.D. 1500-1850) features large circular and oval structures, few milling stones, varied mortars and pestles, bone awls, saws, whistles, and tubes as well as small, side-notched arrow points and clamshell disk beads. These characteristics seem to be related to the "Late Horizon," Phase 2 in the Delta.

Preservation conditions in the hot, dry San Joaquin Valley margins were excellent, and perhaps most remarkable were the many late prehistoric houses excavated. Their living floors were well preserved, and post molds allowed architectural designs to be recovered. The best-preserved examples came from MER-119. For these west-side valley peoples, houses were large, ranging from 11 to 13 m (36-43 ft.) in diameter. They were constructed with a ring of small posts around the rim and six to eight posts spaced halfway between the rim and the center. Central posts were optional, and a fire pit was centrally located. Pritchard (1983:89) ascribed these to the Kahwatchwa Yokuts (Latta 1977:146; Moratto 1984:193).

It was decided that State Parks was to operate San Luis Reservoir as a park unit, so the excavations at MER-119, to be preserved along the reservoir's forebay, were designed to reconstruct or interpret these Yokuts houses. The pie-shaped units were employed to leave most of the house area preserved for park purposes – a contrast to the salvage orientation for most of the State Water Project sites. They are still preserved today.

Excavations at the Menjoulet site (MER-3) exposed the most remarkable feature in the many sites sacrificed to reservoir construction (Figure 3). Designated Housepit #2, it was a deep semi-subterranean structure with a large rim of collapsed earth. Its interior dimension measured 69 by 67 ft., but across the outside rim it spanned 93 ft. north/south by 84 ft. east/west (Pritchard 1970:33). This makes it possibly the largest structure ever documented in Native California. Parks archaeologists excavated 175 5-x-5-ft. units within the structure, as well as cross trenches exposing an area of 1,650 ft.². A plastered mud wall averaging about 2 ft. in height completely encased the structure's perimeter. Forty-three posthole impressions were exposed in the floor. They included a ring of small posts about 4 ft. from the wall and spaced at 7 ft. intervals. They averaged 16 in. in diameter. Larger posts were irregularly spaced across the interior, with an average diameter of 18 in. and a depth of 30 in. (Pritchard 1970:34). The west wall presented evidence of a covered tunnel or crawlway.

The function of this massive building remains problematic. Whether it was used exclusively as a ceremonial structure or housed multiple family units could not be determined from the archaeological remains. Pritchard ascribed the presence of human cremations in, above, and below the plastered floor as evidence that it served as an important ceremonial center in late prehistoric and protohistoric times (Pritchard 1970:45).

The labor cost and engineering knowledge required to design and construct such a structure make it a remarkable achievement. For example, the largest Great Kiva in the southwest is at Casa Rinconada in Chaco Canyon (Vivian and Hilpert 2002). It measures 64 ft. in diameter. The protohistoric Yokuts built a larger structure without stone, to serve a similar function.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The genesis of archaeology and history within California's state park movement has been briefly summarized in this article. A review of its early milestones shows concern for preserving heritage sites as an integral part of efforts to preserve iconic landscapes. Historic preservation interests were as widespread as those advocating redwood forest, coastline, or wilderness protection. Patriotic fervor and educational opportunity were seen as benefits from preserving and interpreting history. It must be admitted, however that the early visionaries saw a different role for historic towns and monuments. Park leaders envisioned Columbia, for example, more as a "Williamsburg of the West," a living community frozen in time with period costumes, crafts, and activities. This was, according to common reasoning, the only way such a park could be sustained. On the other hand, historical monuments at Donner and Marshall's gold discovery site were quickly expanded with 1928 park bond acquisition funds so as to preserve their setting – an early recognition of the cultural landscape needs of such historic park units. Indian history was not well understood at the time by park advocates. The connection between California's rich environmental setting and the resultant antiquity, diversity, and complexity of human experience remains a challenge for park managers to this day.

It took almost a century for State Parks to hire its first archaeologist (Figure 4). By that time, the archaeological potential of emerging state park properties was beginning to be understood. The excavations done for the State Water Project were solid efforts, successful in building a chronology for this unknown region and highlighting some of its important archaeological features. What is arguably the largest known structure in Native California was carefully examined. In its conservation approach to the house pit features of MER-119, a glimpse of an emerging preservation ethic can be seen.

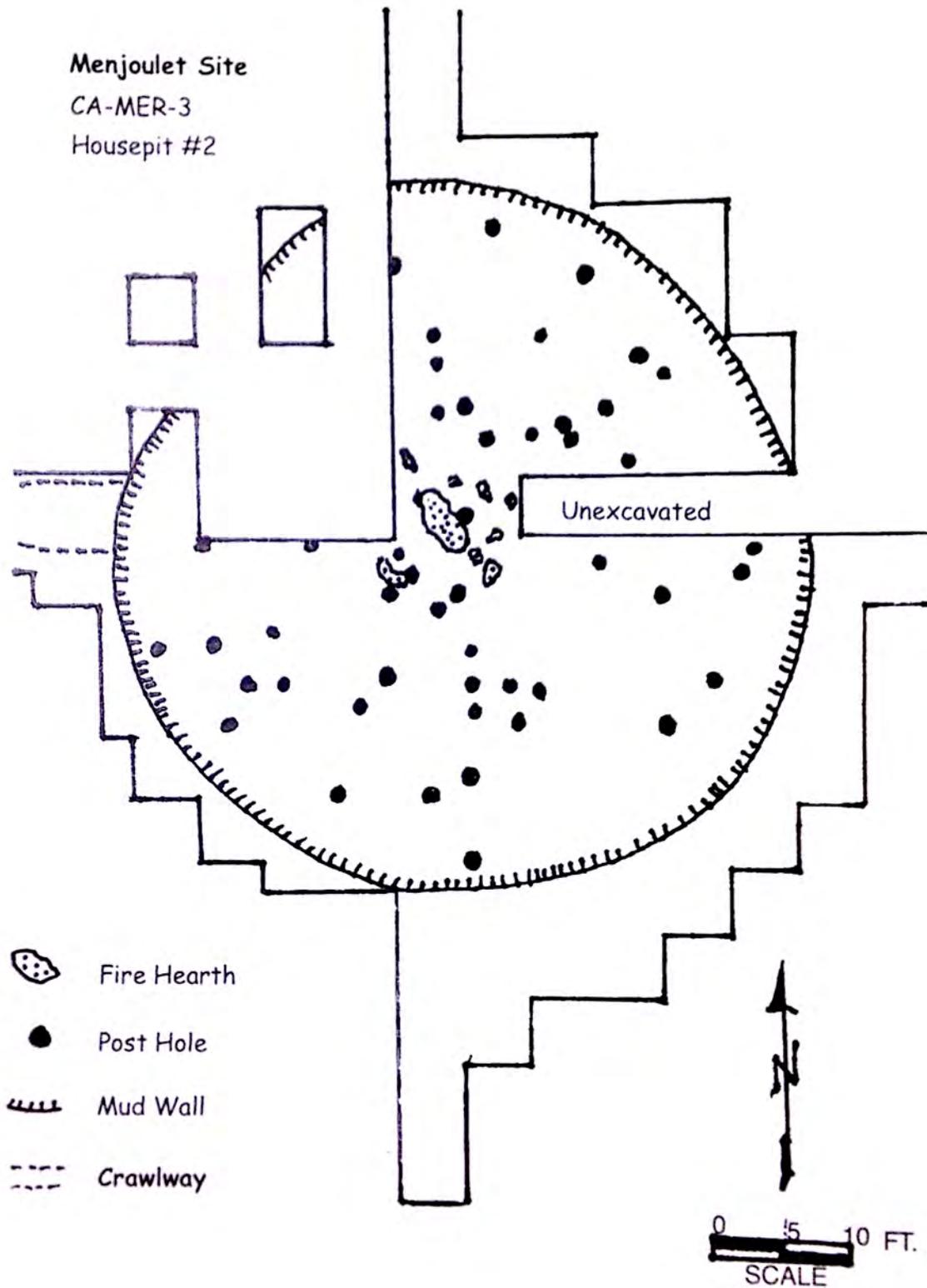


Figure 3. Plan view of Housepit #2 at the Menjoulet Site, CA-MER-3. This semi-subterranean structure was one of the largest known from Native California. Redrawn from Pritchard 1970:Figure 5.



Figure 4. Discussing the planned excavations at Indian Hill Rockshelter, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. From left: John Foster, William Wallace, Fritz Riddell, Edith Taylor Wallace, and Ranger Mark Jorgenson. Photo by the author, 1978.

Activities and programs to preserve sites, structures, landscapes, artifacts, and archives related to California's past would take on even greater prominence in the second century of state park history. At least...that's how I hope my successors will see it.

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