HEIZER AND TREGANZA’S HEMATITE 9: CONSOLIDATING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD’S RECORDS

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In California, archaeological records and reports are housed and maintained at the Information Centers (ICs) of the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS), a series of nine repositories located across the state. The ICs allow researchers to access their inventories, and, in turn, researchers are required to submit their reports/records back to the ICs (CHRIS Information Access and Use Agreement Section 6[E] 2016). While researchers are generally required to provide their professional qualifications prior to accessing the ICs, there are no such requirements when submitting reports/records to the ICs.

For the six ICs that make this information available on their websites, there is a total of almost 190,000 records for prehistoric and/or historic-era archaeological resources in the state (Office of Historic Preservation 2018). This number would surely be higher, perhaps 250,000, if all the ICs reported the most recent statistics. It also does not include the records maintained by the various federal agencies that manage more than 45% of California’s land (Vincent et al. 2017). To think that, when combined, the total number of archaeological resource records in California between the ICs and federal agencies is around a half of a million, and that this number is still increasing, is not a wild assumption.

While submissions to the ICs do require some pertinent information (see CHRIS IC Rules of Operation Manual 2016), the ICs do not have the time, resources, or mandate to check them for accuracy. Therefore, it seems inevitable that a percentage of the quarter million records the ICs manage are erroneous in some way. In this paper, I explore the task of improving, correcting, and consolidating the archaeological record’s records through a case study involving a California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) project near Heizer and Treganza’s Hematite 9 site (CA-ALA-9).

SETTING

My research involving ALA-9 began with a Caltrans safety lighting project along State Route (SR) 13 in the City of Oakland, Alameda County (Figure 1). SR 13 is a northwest-southeast trending highway that runs along the base of the East Bay Hills, and the project called for installing several overhead lights and upgrading guard rail near the Redwood Road overcrossing. Three sites were located around the Area of Potential Effects (APE): ALA-9, P-01-003689, and P-01-010790 (Figure 2).

CA-ALA-9

This site, also known as Heizer and Treganza’s Hematite 9, was first recorded in the 1940s, but the accounts provide few details (Heizer and Treganza 1944; Wallace 1947a, 1947b). Heizer and Treganza (1971:310) wrote that a hematite outcrop located at the “NE [northeast] junction of Redwood Road and Mountain Boulevard, Oakland Hills… shows signs of having been worked by Indians, and mortar holes in the rocks nearby with pigment adhering to the walls indicate hematite chunks were crushed into powder here on the spot.” Wallace’s (1947a) record of the site is only one page long and does not have a corresponding map. The record offers a little insight: the site is an aboriginal hematite quarry with bedrock mortars (BRMs) measuring 30 feet by 20 feet within a eucalyptus grove. He notes a “Mission chapel” on the record, and that the former property owner was George E. McCrea, who reportedly found both Native and Spanish-era artifacts on the property (Wallace 1947a). Wallace (1947b) also published about the site, with some more detailed information about features at the quarry, although the article does not provide a better locational description of the site.
Schwartz (2006a) recorded this site, which he named the “Hematite Quarry at Holy Names College”; it is also worth noting that Schwartz is an avocational archaeologist. He describes the site as consisting of about 25 hematite-bearing boulders containing various mortars, cupules, slicks, and pecked curvilinear nucleated features; he also mentions the presence of shell. The record is more detailed than those for ALA-9 (it contains an actual location map), but it still lacks a sketch map. As the name implies, the site is located on the Holy Names University campus.

This site was also recorded by Schwartz (2006b), this time named the “George McCrea Ranch Indian Site.” The record begins with this sentence: “I ‘found’ this site searching old newspapers…” (Schwartz 2006b). Schwartz was searching past editions of the *Oakland Tribune* when he came across a 1943 article entitled “Historic Site Now City Park: Ancient Indian Camp Given to Oakland by Rob McCrea.” Here is an abbreviated excerpt from the article:

One of Oakland’s little-known historical spots, a hilltop section where Indians camped and where Spanish padres took their messages to the aborigines, has been presented to the city as a park. The property, between four and five acres off Redwood Road near Mountain Boulevard, has been given to Oakland by Robin D. McCrea, San Francisco engineer, and will serve as a memorial to his father, the late George E. McCrea, well-known Bay area architect. McCrea Sr., who died last May, bought the property, then 20 acres, in 1908. Previously it had belonged to two different owners, each of whom lived there a quarter-of-a-century, and before that had been part of the Rancho de San Antonio of the Peraltas. The acreage, cut with paths which had their origin in the water trails of the Indians, includes a camp—a rock-bound circle—where the Indians had their council fires and cookers. The rocks, blackened by smoke and pitted with mortar
Figure 2. Project APE Map with Nearby Sites.
wells where the acorn flour was ground, will be left as they are for a historical exhibit. A chapel, where padres from Mission San Jose held services for the Indians and under which a priest is said to be buried, also will be included in the park. The chapel was converted into a dining room when McCrea added on to the building after he bought the property, but will be removed from the house and restored to its original form, according to E. M. Sanborn, forester in charge of field operations for the Oakland Park Department. When his father took the property, he found relics of the Indian and of the padre, McCrea said. A two-room cabin which antedated the chapel, and a house which had been used by a branch of the old Peralta family also were still standing. The deed to the property lists it as part of the Peralta grant.

Schwartz (2006b) found the closest extant city park (the Redwood Heights Recreation Center) to the location described in the article (Redwood Road and Mountain Boulevard) and recorded several features: a stone circle, mortars, relics, a small chapel with a priest burial, a cabin, and shell fragments. However, he then goes on to state that these features, besides the shell fragments, “are not existent on site” (Schwartz 2006b). It seems that Schwartz simply copied the features mentioned in the article into the site record without having observed any of them in the field, and recorded the site boundary as the park boundary, a somewhat unorthodox method.

FIELDWORK

I found three surface shell fragments in the APE along SR 13, and given the nearby prehistoric sites, I followed up with extended phase I (XPI) subsurface testing. The results of the XPI were negative, and I concluded that the few shell fragments were highly disturbed and qualified as an isolated prehistoric find. At this point, the Section 106 process was complete: no cultural resources were present in the APE. However, out of pure archaeological curiosity, I decided to become a rogue archaeologist and re-locate these sites.

CA-ALA-9

Site ALA-9 was mapped by IC staff at the northeast intersection of Mountain Boulevard and Redwood Road (see Figure 2), as described by Heizer and Treganza (1941, 1944) and Wallace (1947a, 1947b). Unfortunately, there were no boulders or bedrock on the moderately steep hillside. I continued my survey into a large eucalyptus grove to the north, as Wallace (1947a) indicated the site was in a eucalyptus grove. I found a considerable number of hematite-bearing boulders, but after spending some time clearing them off, I determined that none of them contained any cultural features.

P-01-003689

Schwartz (2006a) gave a clear description of what building the site was closest to on the Holy Names University campus, so relocating this site was not difficult. It currently sits on the backside of a day school for special needs children; a playground is situated adjacent to the site, and some of the smaller boulders seemed to be oriented as a part of the landscaping (Figure 3). But a few of the larger boulders were culturally modified. One such boulder, exhibiting a vibrant red hue, had dozens of multi-sized pecks along its face (Figure 4). Another boulder had several deep, well-defined conical mortars with smooth bottoms (Figures 5 and 6). Other boulders contained a combination of pecks, incipient mortars, and slicks. No shell was seen, contrary to Schwartz’s observations.

P-01-010790

The Redwood Heights Recreation Center is a public park managed by the City of Oakland. Schwartz (2006b) claimed to have seen an abundance of shell, but none of the other features he mentions in the record did he witness. I found one shell fragment during my survey of the 5-acre park, and no indication of any of the other features. Without any other observable evidence, P-01-010790 did not appear to qualify as a prehistoric site.
Figure 3. Overview of P-01-003689 (CA-ALA-9), view to the northeast.

Figure 4. Detail of Quarried Hematite-bearing Boulder, view to the southwest.
Figure 5. Detail of Boulder with Several Mortars, view to the west.

Figure 6. Detail of Conical Mortar.
ANALYSIS

To summarize efforts thus far, I re-located P-01-003689, but I did not find evidence of ALA-9 or P-01-010790 in the locations in which they were mapped. I was prepared to submit updated site records detailing my findings, but I felt as though there was a definitive answer to this mystery lying just beyond my grasp. I continued with some archival research, and it was not long before I encountered another Oakland Tribune article, dating to January 18, 1962, and entitled “Leona Park Trout Pond New George E McCrea Memorial.” The 1962 article reports that the Oakland Park Commission and Robin McCrea, son of George McCrea, agreed to transfer the name from the original McCrea Park (referred to in the formerly mentioned 1943 article) to this park, since the first park had been isolated by the construction of the Warren Freeway (SR 13) and had by that time become a part of Holy Names University. The current McCrea Memorial Park is located south of the APE (Figure 7). Holy Names University was originally constructed on the shores of Lake Merritt, but the property was sold to Kaiser; in 1956, the University purchased the 60-acre property on Mountain Boulevard, including the original McCrea Park and ALA-9 (Holy Names University 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this 1962 article seems to prove that the Native American site referred to in the 1943 article is indeed located on the Holy Names University campus, which had been the original McCrea Park prior to the construction of SR 13. Furthermore, the site referred to in the 1943 article appears to be ALA-9, given the similarity between the description in the Tribune article and Wallace’s (1947a, 1947b) records, and the absence of other bedrock mortars in the vicinity. Schwartz’s (2006a) P-01-003689 is ALA-9, and P-01-010790 (Schwartz 2006b) was recorded erroneously, as the 1943 article used to locate the site was referring to a completely different city park.

As mentioned in the introduction, there is likely at least a quarter of a million archaeological site records housed within the ICs, not to mention hundreds of thousands of corresponding reports and studies, and these numbers are growing as development continues across the state. Our system that allows avocational archaeologists to submit data to the ICs has several benefits, including encouraging public interest in archaeology; however, there is essentially no quality control for these amateur submissions. As demonstrated in this case study, at least some of these records need to be revisited, as they are old, inaccurate, and occasionally just outright incorrect. Often, and for a variety of reasons, we do not directly address these issues through updates; rather, we turn a blind eye, and the questionable records persist until the next archaeologist is presented with the same dilemma. This is not a sustainable practice: as more data are being sent to the ICs, they face pressure to consolidate their inventories, while we are stuck sifting through more pages of research, spending more time than necessary on record searches, and having to determine which sources are reliable and which are merely background noise.

We professional archaeologists are the stewards of the archaeological record’s records, and the responsibility of improving, correcting, and consolidating these documents falls on us. While this task may require more time and energy in the short term, it will improve the viability of our ICs and provide for more efficient and precise research in the long term.
Figure 7. George E. McCrea Memorial Park Sign, view to the south.

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