A family outing led to the discovery of an unusual archaeological site at Bodega Head. The site was marked by numerous projectile points, shell beads, and teeth from humans and animals. Initially, the site was thought to be of Coast Miwok origin, but analysis of the site constituents indicated that it was contemporary in nature and created by one or more individuals practicing an amalgamation of arcane forms of witchcraft, spanning from Wicca to Palo Mayombe. Contemporary archaeological sites like this necessitate a discussion of how to manage places of worship on public lands.

Rituals to celebrate religion and culture are evident in early archaeological records. Locations which are foci of sacred practices and beliefs can be highly varied and culture-specific. The place in which humans have practiced deep sacred beliefs has worn many faces. What does it look like to facilitate a conversation about modern non-traditional places of worship?

In June 2008, 60 miles north of San Francisco, a family outing resulted in the unexpected discovery of an unusual archaeological site characterized by numerous shell beads, stone projectile points, human and animal teeth, and other items scattered about a rock outcropping marking the highest point of Bodega Head, on the Sonoma Coast (Parkman 2013) (Figure 1). The site was given the temporary designation SCSP-08-1 by the junior author. Initially, the site was thought to be of Coast Miwok origin. However, it was quickly determined that this was not the case, as discussed in this report.

We believe that the Bodega Head site is a contemporary archaeological feature created by one or more practitioners belonging to one or an amalgamation of an unknown form of witchcraft spanning from Wicca to Palo Mayombe. Some of these practices require human bones to cast spells, and with these traditions becoming increasingly diasporic, the necessity for tools such as human bones and other antiquities has increased. With the increase of populations interested in spirituality and non-traditional spiritual practices on the rise, sites like Bodega Head will be more prevalent and it is necessary to start a conversation on how to manage such modern and spiritual sites when they are encountered in the future.

After the Bodega Head site was found, it was immediately reported to the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. That same day, Senior State Archaeologist Breck Parkman was forwarded the e-mail detailing the site finds and a date was set to survey the site. After multiple visits and surveys, several artifacts were collected. A total of 24 stone projectile points and bifaces were found, 17 of which were obsidian and subjected to XRF analysis (Figure 2). The XRF analysis ruled out obsidian sources from the following regions: California, the Great Basin, Alaska, and British Columbia (Hughes 2008a, 2008b, 2009). This evidence further suggests that these projectile points are not associated with Coast Miwok or Native Alaskan cultures. The XRF analysis was conducted by Dr. Richard E. Hughes, who stated, “none of the 17 specimens analyzed from SCSP-08-1 match the trace element composition of any of the well-known obsidians that dominate local archaeological assemblages” (Hughes 2008b).

Over 200 shell beads with a range of 5,000 years were collected, most of which were *Olivella*, except for a single *Dentalium* bead (Fitzgerald and Riordan 2009). *Dentalium* is exceptionally rare in the area, although trade routes suggest the possibility of these beads finding their way into a local archaeological deposit. A single quartz crystal was recovered from a large concentration of these shell beads.

Several stone beads were recovered from the site, as well as a stone pendant with dark polish at the top of a manufactured hole, indicating wear. Two American coins, dated 1981 and 2007, were found among...
Figure 1. Looking west toward the Bodega Head site, 2008. Pin flags mark the location of offerings.

Figure 2. Projectile points found at the Bodega Head site. Scale in cm.
a collection of projectile points and shell beads. A single modern glass red bead and a small clear rhinestone were also recovered.

After the shell beads and quartz crystal were removed, a partially smoked cigar was found a few days later, in the exact same location of the quartz crystal. This could be interpreted as a cleansing of the site, as cigars and cigar smoke show up in various traditions.

Ten teeth were recovered from the site, of which eight were human, while the other two belonged to canids. Dr. Sabrina Agarwal of the University of California, Berkeley, conducted the analysis of the teeth (Agarwal 2008). According to Dr. Agarwal’s analysis, the human teeth were archaeological and came from at least two people, a sub-adult and adult.

Breck Parkman had visited the site multiple times between July 25, 2008, and June 27, 2009. He observed that these artifacts were continually being placed on the surface; even after all visible artifacts were previously collected by him on previous visits. On a couple of occasions, artifacts were arranged in such a manner that suggested a ritual of some sort had or was being conducted by a practitioner of magic.

On August 8, 2008, Breck was at the site and found that someone had sharpened an 8-foot-long alder branch, broken it evenly into eight pieces, and arranged it in an east to west alignment. On August 15, the same sticks found on August 8 had been situated into a runes-like pattern (Figure 3). A few weeks later, an almost 2-m long piece of kelp had been brought to the site and arranged in a “snake” pattern near the site’s “altar” stone. Breck interpreted this as a sort of warning because during several of his site visits he had been observed removing artifacts by at least one suspicious person.

The nature in which these artifacts were found, and continued to show up, along with the analysis showing that the obsidian was not local and that the teeth were archaeological, indicates that the Bodega Head site is active. The creation of other sites such as this one at Bodega Head has occurred since at least 2008 in the general area. For example, about a mile south of the Bodega Head site, a human femur was found atop an island of ice plant. The bone was archaeological in nature but did not originate there. In addition to the femur, a human skull was found in a Sebastopol parking lot behind a hotel in a paper bag. It was observed by Breck that the teeth of the skull had been forcibly removed with pliers. Whereas the FBI and local law enforcement officials were initially suspicious of the fact that the teeth were missing (sometimes removed by criminals to hide the identity of murder victims), their concerns were dispelled when two forensic anthropologists independently concluded that the skull had most likely belonged to an indigenous person from the precontact era. Breck speculated that the skull might have come from an osteological lab collection and he attributed the removal of the teeth to someone later securing their use for spell casting. We note that all these human remains, as well as the artifacts from Bodega Head, were reburyed in Coast Miwok territory by representatives of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, in a ceremony that Breck participated in.

The activities noted above could be congruent with illegal exhumations of skeletal remains, recently occurring throughout the U.S. For instance, there are documented cases of grave looting by practitioners of Palo Mayombe. There are similar places along the Sonoma Coast that share a common thread with the Bodega Head site, that being a place of worship and ritual. Shortly off Highway 1, one will encounter, on close inspection, a labyrinth constructed ca. 1996, apparently as a 50th birthday present for a local resident (Figure 4). Residents from across the Bay Area walk this labyrinth and leave behind handwritten letters, little toys, pictures, and other offerings (Figure 5). State Parks planned to remove the feature but Breck convinced them not to as it was now an integral part of the community. Kaitlin Carlberg has walked this path and left offerings here.

In a similar light to the Shell Beach Labyrinth is the dance circle and fire pit at Metini, otherwise known as Fort Ross. Fort Ross was built on traditional Kashia Pomo land, a place called Metini, and the Kashia were forced off nearly 150 years ago. In 2012, they requested to build a dance circle. The State agreed but requested that the land be restored after the ceremony. After some concerted convincing, a successful argument was made, and the State allowed the dance circle and fire pit to stay (Figure 6). The Kashia have used the dance circle ever since.

These sites were illustrated to demonstrate how susceptible a person’s offering is to be deemed as trash or litter and vice versa. Both the labyrinth and the Kashia dance circle were considered a blot on the landscape.
Figure 3. Sticks arranged as probable runes at the Bodega Head site, 2008.

Figure 4. Shell Beach Labyrinth, looking northwest, ca. 1999.

Figure 5. Central shrine with offerings at Shell Beach Labyrinth, 2013.
and had it not been for any intervention, would have quickly been removed without consideration of how these sites operate within the community. That brings us to the question of, when on public land, what can stay and what must go?

It is challenging to manage public-owned land as if they are truly “wild lands,” when so many people live adjacent to them. Is it possible to allow people to worship on public land without impacting the ecology and aesthetics of the land? The dance circle at Metini was considered an exception to the rule given its cultural value to the Kashia. Park management allowed its construction and yearly maintenance. The labyrinth, however, is merely endured by park management, and every so often cleared of the offerings to avoid it becoming an eyesore. That said, what is allowed quickly becomes precarious as no candles are supposed to be brought to the labyrinth, yet some do show up and this could prove to be disastrous in the dry season. Would then sites like the one at Bodega Head be encouraged or merely tolerated?

When we first started working together on the Bodega Head site, the senior author wanted to get a better feel for it so she visited the site by herself on several occasions. On one visit, she observed what appeared like a lid of a Gatorade bottle sticking out of the dirt underneath a ledge of rocks. Upon closer inspection, it was instead a small jar that was immediately placed back (Figure 7). Upon consulting with Parkman, we decided to open it on the next visit. Upon Carlberg’s return to the site, the partially exposed jar was very carefully unearthed and inside it was a quartz crystal along with an amethyst crystal resting inside of a home-sewn leather pouch with two rainbow triquetras on it (Figure 8).

On a later visit, among all the granodiorite and very near the small jar, a large, waterworn, red, Franciscan chert rock was observed. It stuck out among all the specked black and grey rocks, and this could be a sign that the site is still being actively used with someone leaving a rock, especially a rock that is a color that often holds great significance. Note that we use the term “practitioner” in lieu of “witch.” Witch as a descriptor can prove to be burdensome. Firstly, the terms “Wicca,” “witch,” and “witchcraft” are often confused as being synonymous with one another. Today, Wicca is recognized as an official religion and falls under the greater umbrella of paganism. That said, not all pagans are Wiccans. This same general rule applies to those who claim to be a witch or practice witchcraft. Wicca and witch or witchcraft are often used interchangeably, and while many Wiccans do self-subscribe as witches as well as practice witchcraft, not all Wiccans consider themselves to be as such.

As it stands, Wicca is a religion and witchcraft is a practice. The previous statements are not accepted across the board and opinions do vary. This site at Bodega Head is dichotomous in nature. There are the darker nuances, in reference to the teeth that were presumably exhumed as well as the non-local antiquities.
Figure 7. Glass bottle found at the Bodega Head site, 2017.

Figure 8. Contents of glass bottle found at the Bodega Head site, 2017.
and then the lighter, such as the most recently discovered jar. Considering the Bodega Head site, and others briefly mentioned, the question remains: What should and should not be allowed? So far, we allow human cremains on public lands following an approved permit. What about when human remains are used by a practitioner of magic? Should we allow items of antiquity to be deposited when they are intended as tools for spell-casting? It is evident that there is an increasing need for well thought out and clear regulations in consideration to Bodega Head and future sites like it. We believe that the managers of our public lands need to address such issues in the future. Further research of non-traditional practices would facilitate a sturdier ground on which to base new regulations and eventual contingencies.

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