

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SLICK ROCK VILLAGE, TULARE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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SLICK ROCK VILLAGE (4Tul 10) was excavated by a Smithsonian Institution River Basin Surveys field party* under the direction of the writer between June 20 and July 30, 1950. It is one of nine very similar sites which will be covered by the reservoir pool to be created by the construction of the Terminus Dam on the Kaweah River. This particular site was chosen for excavation because it showed less evidence of modification by recent cultural activity than any other of the threatened sites. Intensive excavation at a single site (rather than test excavation at several) was chosen as the preferable approach to the archaeology of the Terminus Reservoir area because we had hoped that concentrated excavation at a single site would yield an integrated account of at least one ancient community in this region. Such an account would be particularly interesting in the light of the extraordinarily full ethnographic literature on this area (Gayton, A. H., 1948 a, b; Latta, F. F., 1949).

I am not able to identify Slick Rock village with any specific historic village. A Wukchumni Yokuts hamlet named Sanukwa'o was situated directly across the stream from it and the westernmost Patwisha Mono hamlet was at Three Rivers, three miles upstream from Slick Rock. In other words, the site lies approximately on the border line between the territory of the Wukchumni and that of the Patwisha and slightly closer to known Wukchumni hamlets.

Two archaeological features offer slight preference for identifying the village as Wukchumni: Grass thatch was used as house covering at the site and by the Wukchumni,

the Patwisha generally used bark. Burial in the flesh predominates over cremation at the site; the Wukchumni bury whereas the Patwisha cremate their dead. Hence the totality of the evidence favors identifying the site as the remains of a Wukchumni settlement.

Our first concern at the site was the preparation of a topographic map of the area of archaeological interest. Surface features (house pits and bedrock milling places) were carefully cleared of dead vegetation and their locations and dimensions were plotted on the topographic map. The product of this initial effort is a plat which shows the village plan for a small hamlet consisting of 13 houses and 3 separate milling places situated on a well drained knoll adjacent to the river (see Fig. 103).

For a quarter of a mile above the village the river consists of a shallow, steeply graded, riffle flowing over a cobble and gravel bed which ends at a low falls caused by the granite outcrop on which the site is located. Below the falls the river is turned sharply to the south as it flows past Slick Rock and this segment is a wide, deep eddy with a sand bottom. (Slick Rock Eddy is an important spot in Wukchumni mythology, the home of a monster who drowns swimmers [Latta, 1949, p. 10]. Contemporary residents have an analogous superstition, believing, incorrectly, that the river undercuts the rock, thereby trapping swimmers.) The river banks are lined with willows and sycamores; the surrounding hills are bare rock with open parkland with valley oak, live oak, digger pine, and manzanita the most obtrusive trees in the order named.

We began excavation at the northern edge of the site; 5660 cubic feet of soil were removed from an area 3980 square feet in extent (Johnson, F., 1951, p. 35). The soil of which the site is composed is a compact, ashy, gray-colored midden entirely different from surrounding soils which are sandy red clays. It is apparently an artificial accumulation produced largely by the decay of organic materials discarded at the site. It is deeper and more widely distributed on the northern and eastern margins of the area occupied by house pits (the extent of the midden is represented by

* The members of the field party were all then students in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California. They included: Rod Ash, Richard Bachenheimer, David A. Fredrickson, Arthur Freed, Warren Fischer, Kenneth Kennedy, and Robert Tellefsen. Dr. and Mrs. William J. Wallace of the University of California Archaeological Survey and Donald McGeein offered us welcome voluntary assistance for a portion of the work. I wish to express my indebtedness to Arthur Freed who performed a number of extra tasks including the identification of the faunal remains recovered at the site.

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There are five specimens identifiable as tubular pipes made of pottery. Four of these are sufficiently complete to permit description. All of them are made of a paste which appears to be identical to that used in the manufacture of pottery. Three have the form of elongated cones, modeled around a straw which was burned or pulled out to form the stem perforation. The bowls are thimble-sized depressions made in the large end of the cone, apparently with the finger tip. The single complete specimen of this form is 104 mm. in length, 26 mm. in diameter at the bowl end, and 11 mm. in diameter at the stem end. The bowls of these three specimens contain a charcoal "cake." The fourth piece is complete and might be described as trumpet shaped. It has a cylindrical stem which is 44 mm. in length and 9 mm. in diameter. The bowl flares abruptly to a diameter of 16 mm. The total length of the specimen is 54 mm. Clay pipes, similar to those found at the Slick Rock village, were made by the Wobonuch Mono of the ethnographic period (Gayton, 1929, p. 246), and, by inference, also by other Western Mono and Foothill Yokuts groups.

Artifacts derived from industrial cultures were rare at Slick Rock village, but the presence of such pieces is important in that it permits us to arrive at an approximate date for the occupation of the site. The site was abandoned before such contact introduced any important changes in the native material culture and the social significance of such contact was probably similar to that represented by aboriginal trade for such non-local materials as olivella shell beads and obsidian projectile points.

Three glass beads were found. Two of these are short hexagonal tubes with irregular ends. They are translucent, and are bright blue in color. They belong to Meighan's type 156.¹ Their known distribution includes the following sites: Sha20, Hum169, Fre27, SJo26. None of these sites came directly under Spanish-

¹The type collection to which this refers is in the University of California Museum of Anthropology. I am indebted to Clement W. Meighan of the University of California Archaeological Survey, who organized the type collection, for these comments on the distribution and dating of our specimens.

Mexican influence and this bead type is probably to be attributed to American or possibly to Hudson's Bay Company origin at a point in time post-dating 1830. The third glass bead is a unique specimen, not represented in Meighan's typology. It is deep green in color, oblate spheroid in form, 19 mm. in diameter, 17 mm. long, and has a perforation which is 3 mm. in diameter. Meighan suggests that beads of similar size and shape are late (post 1840) in California.

Two slender (4 mm. in diameter), cylindrical, iron rods were found together on the floor of feature 14. They approximate identity in form but there is a slight difference in their lengths (220 and 226 mm.). The specimens taper to a long conical point at one end and are square at the other. Both of them are beveled off from one face at the squared end. I have seen Wobonuch Mono spearing suckers in the Kings River using identical points (in that instance made from two tines of a pitch fork) mounted on a long shaft in such fashion that they diverged toward the tip. The fish were impaled by the points and held secure by the wedging effect of the divergence of the tips. The beveled bases of our specimens would facilitate similar mounting and their paired occurrence is consistent with the fish-spear interpretation. No specific date can be suggested for these pieces, but they more closely resemble the items which Indians secured by trade with the Americans than those which they secured from the Spaniards. This, in turn, would imply a mid-nineteenth century dating.

There is one fragment of a glazed stoneware vessel. The glaze is orange in color, the paste gray. The small fragment does not permit fuller description and the piece is not datable.

Slick Rock village was a small community of not more than 13 households occupied in part during the first half of the nineteenth

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