

Archeologists Can't Dunk But Can Dig

Did You Hear the One About...

...how many bureaucrats it takes to screw in a light bulb? No, not that one – the one about how many BOR officials it takes to dig a one-foot diameter hole only four feet deep? Witnesses at Steele Park Resort say it was four – and it took six hours! The hole was for a PG&E pole. They would dig six inches down, then sift the dirt for Native American artifacts.

As silly as this may seem to some, there is often a good reason (and some legal requirements) to exercise care when excavating in areas that may potentially contain Native American cultural artifacts. But from a scientific point of view, the areas inside the resort boundaries, and even areas outside them, are not of significant cultural value. This excessive bureaucratic oversight is not justified based on previous archeological studies done above the 440 foot lake level.

Any delays in resort redevelopment such as requiring hours to dig a hole are just nonsensical academic exercises for the Reclamation participants. Especially considering Reclamation approved the "grind it to the ground" approach originally.

Which makes one of the excuses the BOR used for not allowing cattle grazing on the East Shore even sillier. (See previous story.) The BOR prohibited grazing because Native Americans may have once lived in the area. The Bureau felt that grazing animals over potential archeological sites would be disgraceful, even though ranching, as well as farming, had been a means of livelihood in the area since the Berryessa family lived there more than a century ago. Also, two archeological studies did not support the proposition that Native Americans lived that far up from the main Putah Creek.

Two archeological studies were done 1975 and 1985: Milling Stone Cultures in Northern California: Berryessa I and Archaeological Investigations at Lake Berryessa, California: Berryessa II.

https://www.lakeberryessanews.com/resources/References-PDFs/Berryessa-Archeology-Reports-1979_1985.pdf.

The authors state:

"The recent two-year drought (1975-77) provided an opportunity to find out just how such material might be brought to light. During the drought, Lake Berryessa on Putah Creek lowered its level about 40 feet leaving surfaces exposed that were considerably altered from their pre-1956 (year of inundation) condition. During the winter of 1975-76, an archaeological survey was made over a small parcel of land on Lake Berryessa's shore as part of a proposed campground.

Although the study area (Oak Shores Park) is contiguous to Lake Berryessa and appears (at the present time) to be a favorable place for human occupancy, prior to the construction of Monticello Dam it was a considerable distance from the principal stream draining the area (Putah Creek), and would not usually be considered a very likely place to search for or find substantial evidence of prehistoric occupation. Thus, when the Bureau of Reclamation requested the Oak Shores survey, it appeared that it would be yet another public archaeology project in which the primary value would be the exercise gained by the surveyors."

And later:

"In spite of this rather intensive effort, not a single site was located within the survey area. Even after checking some areas more than once not a single flake, bedrock feature, or other bit of evidence of prehistoric occupancy was noted. Given the terrain and general environmental considerations and the fact that several sites of

consequence were situated in the valley a relatively short distance away, this complete lack of cultural remains was an enigma.

A consideration of the circumstances that might account for such a dearth of archaeological remains suggested at least four viable possibilities: (1) there was no significant utilization of this kind of terrain by the prehistoric occupants of the North Coast Range province in general; (2) terrain such as this was normally or usually exploited or utilized, but for some special reason the Oak Shores area was not; (3) the area had actually been utilized but under circumstances where no tangible remains were left behind; or (4) the survey area had been utilized and artifacts or other evidence of this utilization were simply not apparent."