

Memorandum

To: George Carollo, Associate Construction Analyst
Department of General Services
Government Operations, West Sacramento

Date: December 3, 2014
Telephone: (530) 224-4749
Website: www.fire.ca.gov

From: Richard Jenkins, Northern Region Archaeologist
Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Northern Region HQ, Redding

Subject: Digger Butte Lookout Parcel
CAL FIRE Tehama-Glenn Unit
T.30N R.2E S.29 MDM
Grave Investigation

Introduction: On March 1, 2013 I conducted an archaeological survey of the 40 acre subject parcel as part of environmental document preparation for an Emergency Notice timber harvest document that would permit the removal of trees burned during the 2012 Ponderosa Fire. During the course of the inspection I relocated the previously known foundation remains of a historic fire lookout and related garage. I also found another feature, an apparent grave, that had not been previously documented. The following feature description is drawn from my March 3, 2013 archaeological survey report:

“This feature measures some 7 feet long by 3 feet wide, is constructed with a single course of local volcanic rock, contains one erect rock at its east end that appears to serve as a head stone, and is oriented in an east-west direction... The grave is located some 65 feet northeast of the northeast corner on the concrete garage foundation.”

Said feature was reported to CAL FIRE Tehama-Glenn Unit (TGU) Forester Adam Wyman that day of the discovery. He queried office staff including the present and two past Unit Chiefs and none reported any knowledge of the feature. During the following weeks and months he and I contacted approximately 20 additional individuals that included retired CAL FIRE Fire Captains that supervised crews that removed brush from the area, two Fire Lookout employees that each spent multiple fire seasons stationed on the parcel, a Forester that prepared a timber harvesting plan there, local ranchers, vineyard owners, historic society members, and a local Native American who is also a historian. The feature was also reported to the Tehama County Sheriff. None of these contacts reported any knowledge of the feature.

Discussion/Analysis: The grave site was flagged for protection during the salvage logging and survived the project unscathed. No effort was expended by the Department to further investigate the grave as the parcel was to be disposed of and it was assumed that the new landowner would conduct any needed study. A member of the Department of General Services (DGS) noticed the grave during an inspection related to the parcel

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disposal process, informed CAL FIRE that a study to determine the contents of the grave would be required to move the disposal process forward, and convinced CAL FIRE Archaeology Program Manager Chris Zimny to authorize CAL FIRE staff archaeologists to excavate the site.

The excavation was performed on May 21-22, 2014 by the author and Associate State Archeologist Gerrit Fenenga, Ph.D., from the Amador-El Dorado Unit office in Camino. Gerrit was chosen to assist as one of his specialties is faunal analysis. In addition to his field gear he brought a reproduction human skeleton and a actual skeleton from a coyote to the site with him for comparative analysis purposes. We were joined the first day of the project by Adam Wyman (CAL FIRE), Mark Van Zuuk (DGS), and George Carollo (DGS). No Native American involvement was thought necessary as the apparent grave was located within the prism of an old logging road or skid trail and thereby thought to date to the past 50 years.

The following discussion is drawn from a Draft unpublished excavation report prepared by Gerrit Fenenga:

Because we were uncertain about what might be buried here and the possibility that it might be related to unlawful activity, we cautiously excavated only a portion of the area covered by the rock cairn using standard archaeological excavation techniques. These included placement of a 1x1 meter test unit over the "feet" end of the possible grave site away from the prominent "head" stone, leaving some stones from the excavated end in place so as to limit disturbance of the original size and configuration of the cairn (see Figure 3). Excavation was conducted in 10cm levels once we were below the surface rock cairn (Figures 4 and 5). Standard notes were taken by excavation level and all cultural materials were collected. All soil was screened through 1/8 " mesh hardware cloth screens. A single animal bone (a short stout femur) was discovered in the 20-30cm level. This bone appears to be unrelated to the animal we found deeper in the unit and has tentatively been identified as a turkey (Pavo sp.).

Excavations encountered more bone at the 50-60cm level, this time consisting of a series of loose carnivore phalanges and eventually a distinct cluster of metatarsal bones representing a single hind foot of a canid. We returned the following day and completed excavations to 70cm below surface and exposed enough of the skeleton to clearly determine its identification as the remains of a large domesticated dog (Canis familiaris). Because we choose to excavate only the lower or "feet" end of the grave cairn, we did not expose the skull or upper portions of the skeleton. Instead we found only the left side of the pelvis and portions of both hind legs. We did not recover or observe any caudal vertebrae, indicating the tail was probably underneath the animal. The inventory of skeletal elements we did identify included the left side innominate, femur, tibia, and fibula and the right side tibia, ankle, and foot bones. It was the right rear foot that was sticking up into the 60cm level that we first encountered. The left foot was below this and was not exposed.

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The skeletal remains discovered at Digger Butte are clearly those of a large dog. This identification was made using a comparative skeleton of another canid—in this case a coyote. Comparison of these individual demonstrated the large size of the dog placed in this grave. No attempt has been made to further identify the variety or breed of domesticated dog found here. Possible breeds include German shepherd, Labrador retriever, or bloodhound. I believe the femur we examined is too small to be from an extremely large dog such as a mastiff or Great Dane. Our conclusion is that this animal was loved and cared for due to the effort placed in burying it so deeply in the rocky ground of Digger Butte and the careful construction of the surface rock cairn grave marker complete with a headstone like a human grave. This was probably someone's close companion, perhaps a hunter who returned to a location that had personal memories and meaning to the both of them.

Following analysis and photography the skeleton was reburied and the rock feature reconstructed to approximate its original configuration. Brush and tree limbs were scattered over disturbed areas to conceal them. It is our thought and hope that the area will be covered with grasses and forbes next spring and appear in its pre-evaluation condition.

Recommendations: It is recommended that DGS share this information with the new landowner upon the transfer of the parcel. Also feel free to provide the authors contact information to the new owner should they wish to learn more about this matter or the historic Digger Butte fire lookout facility that once occupied the parcel.