

**A Brief Inspection of the Archie Brown Artifact Collection  
Near the Community of Vina, Tehama County, California**

by:

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During the summer of 2003, CDF Archaeologists were corresponding with Bob Colby, a Historian who serves on the Board of Directors for the Paradise Historical Society. Bob had agreed to contribute information to be used in a history of the CDF Archaeology Program, and in the course of these communications, Bob provided CDF with an original copy of the June 2003 issue of *Tales of Paradise Ridge*, a fine little publication produced by the Paradise Historical Society. We were startled by an amazing photograph that appeared on the inside of the front cover of that issue. It depicted a man identified as the late Larry Richardson standing in front of an impressive collection of Indian artifacts including several dozen complete stone bowl mortars and metates displayed along a hillslope within a landscaped yard area. The caption for the photo read "Larry Richardson at Archie Brown's home in 1972." We asked Bob Colby to find out more about the artifact collection visible in this photograph, and if possible, to arrange for a brief inspection. Bob did this for us. Through his friend Gene Serr, Past President of the Tehama County Genealogical and Historical Society, Bob made arrangements with Mrs. Romaine Brown for us to meet her and examine the artifact collection on September 8, 2003.



Vina cattleman Archie Brown pointing to the single specimen in his collection with incised decorations.  
Photo circa 1970 by Ken Kitcher, Red Bluff Daily News

It was a pleasure to meet Mrs. Brown. She is a delightful woman who provided us with terrific information about this collection and about her late husband Archie who collected it. Archie Brown was cattleman who ran cattle on a family-owned ranch of almost 1000 acres near Vina in Tehama County. He became interested in Indian artifacts early in life and first began amassing the collection when he was 12 years old. Mrs. Brown believes that almost every item in the collection came from a 15 mile radius from their ranch. Archie would be notified by the local farmers whenever they were going to plow their fields, and he would walk behind the equipment during the plowing activities to inspect and collect Indian artifacts that were unearthed. Mrs. Brown thought that most of the heavy ground stone items were collected this way, although they also occasionally ventured up Deer and Mill Creeks and some of the other local stream canyons to search for additional Indian artifacts.

Archie was born in 1918 and died of cancer in 1975 at the age of 57. He gave many presentations on California Indians to local groups, ranchers, and school children; a public outreach effort that Mrs. Brown continues today. Most of the children from the nearby communities have come on school field trips to view this marvelous collection. Mrs. Brown also explained to us that Archie was a *cattleman*, not a *cowboy*. When asked to explain the difference, she indicated that a cattleman stays home with his wife, while a cowboy goes to rodeos.

It is widely known that Ishi was from the Deer Creek area, which was the same area that Archie had collected so many of his artifacts. Mrs. Brown has intimate knowledge about Ishi and the anthropologists who worked in the area. The Brown family has been ranching near Vina for several generations and they had family members and neighbors who had met Ishi and Alfred Kroeber. Mrs. Brown told us that when Theodora Kroeber wrote her book *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America*, the Browns were asked to edit the book to make sure that the geographical descriptions were correct.

This paper will make no attempt at a complete documentation of this collection. To do so would take much more time than what we had available, although Mrs. Brown indicated she might give permission for such documentation should we be able to recruit the interest of an ambitious graduate student that might be willing to do some of this work.

We took an approximate count of the number of individual ground stone artifacts visible throughout the yard. This rough count is as follows:

447	stone bowls/ bowl mortars
133	pestles
141	shallow (hoppered) mortars
10	metates
26	manos
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757	ground stone artifacts

We also saw a slab of bedrock with seven mortars, an unusual three sided mortar, a fragment of an incised stone bowl, and other items such as net weights and a large rock with a groove around it.

This is a tremendous collection of groundstone artifacts including bowl mortars and stone bowls. Most of these are made from vesicular basalt, sandstone, andesite, and other rocks of local origin.

CDF Archaeologist Rich Jenkins tells us that the sandstone only occurs on the west side of the valley. Most of this group, which contains the deepest bowls, is carefully displayed on a gentle hillslope in the front yard, and protected from theft by field fencing. Curiously, Mrs. Brown referred to ones stacked and cemented along the edge of the driveway as "lesser" which she considered to be poorer specimens because the depth of the bowls ground into the rock surface was much shallower. She thought these "lesser" were bowls just in the beginning stages of manufacture or use. Upon closer inspection, we believe that this group represents another type of artifact entirely. Many of the small, thin stones with a shallow pit were certainly hopped mortars that were used with a bottomless basket. A hopped mortar is an ingenious tool commonly used by California Indians (Heizer 1951: Figure 2D, Kroeber 1925: Plate 24a, Holmes 1900: Plate 22B). It provides the same functional value as a 150-pound stone bowl mortar but is much more lightweight so it can be easily transported. About 10 of these items along the driveway weren't mortars at all. They were slab metates, and could very well be the oldest artifacts in the collection.

The Brown collection also includes a collection of projectile points, arrowshaft straighteners, charmstones, small paint mortars, stone and shell beads, a bone awl, and a collection of historical artifacts such as old ox shoes, rifles, spades, bear traps, a lock, pistols, two large Chinese stoneware jars, etc.

Private archaeological collections, such as the impressive one acquired by Archie Brown, have played a long and important role in scientific studies of California prehistory. The earliest comparative studies were compiled with the aid of large private archaeological collections (Holmes 1900), as were some of the first regional syntheses (Gifford and Schenck 1926; Schenck and Dawson 1929). The analysis of private collections also was critical to the development of the Central California Taxonomic System, which has become the theoretical framework for central California Prehistory (Lilliard, Heizer, and Fenenga 1939; Beardsley 1948, 1954; Bennyhoff and Frederickson 1994).

Purists might argue that archaeological collections gathered by non-professionals in an unscientific manner have little or no worth since the context of their discovery has been lost. However, there are many factors that go into scientific research, and certain aspects of collections like those of Archie Brown make these more suitable for some kinds of studies than artifacts collected by scientific methods. For example, archaeological excavations rarely produce statistically reliable samples of finished stone tools that are large enough for comparative analyses. Typically, an excavated site will produce a few artifacts of the sort in the Archie Brown collection, not hundreds.

Mrs. Brown asserts that most of Archie's collection was gathered locally, although from a number of different sites. We noticed a variety of different lithic raw materials were present in the groundstone tool collection, although the preponderance were of either basalt or sandstone. One particularly interesting study that could be made of this collection would be to investigate the nature of the materials represented and their likely sources of their origin. Nomlaki ethnography (Goldschmidt 1951) describes a pestle manufacturing locality and implies these were made for trade. This evidence, together with other data, suggests a pattern of incipient craft specialization existed in northern California in prehistoric times. The Brown Collection might be very useful for investigating a research subject of this sort, especially since we today have advanced methods for geological sourcing.

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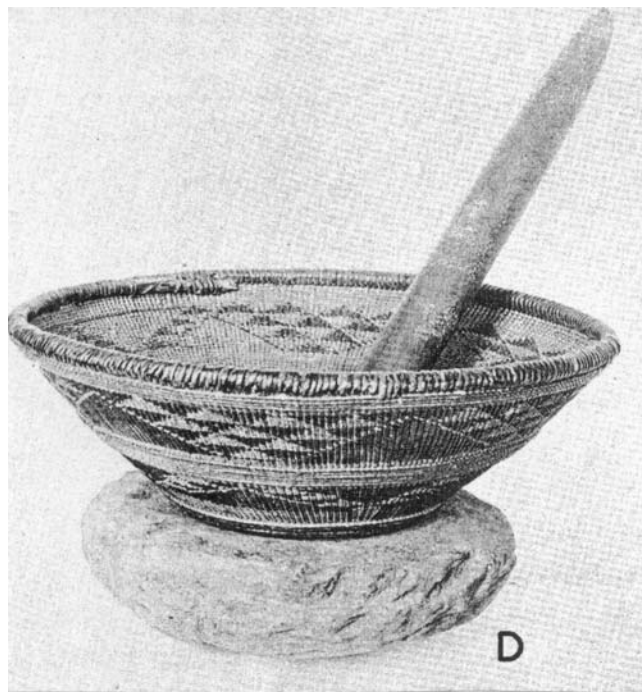
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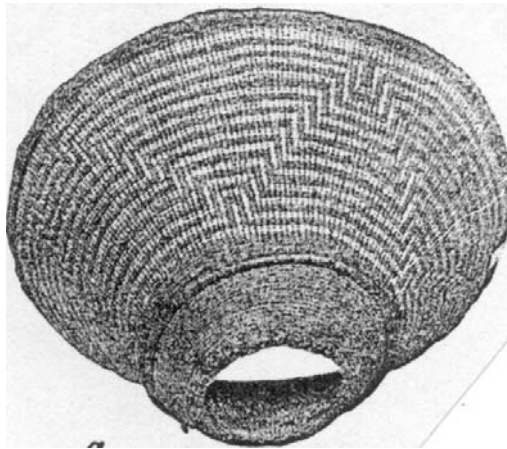
Illustrations and Photographs:



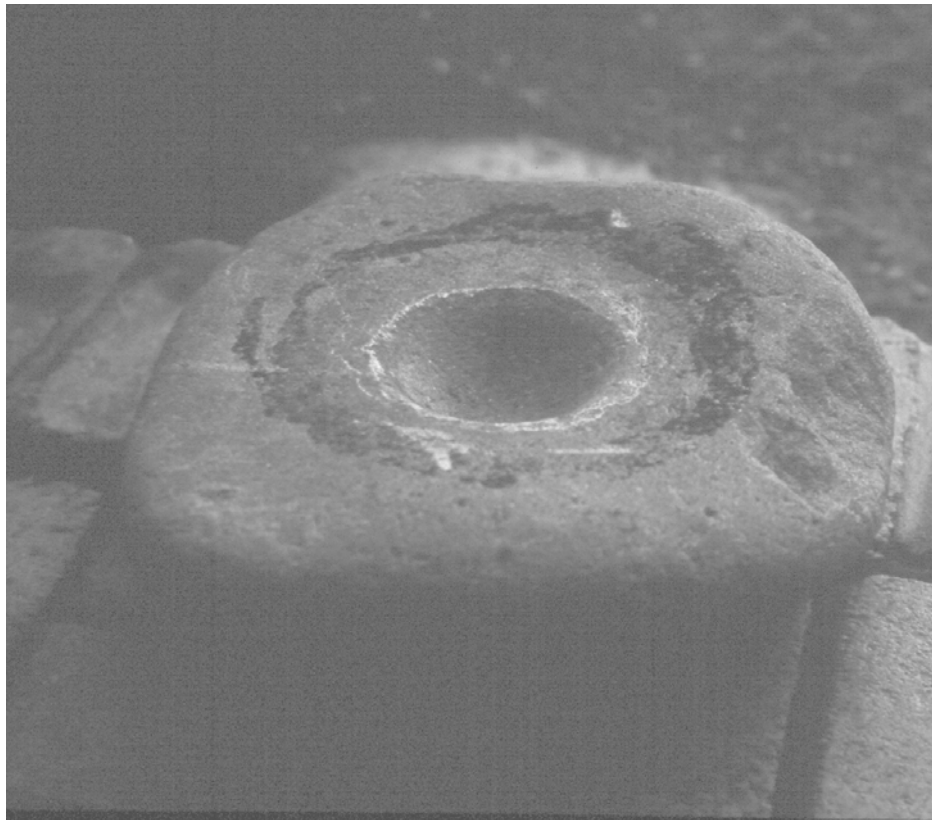
Illustration showing a Pomo woman pounding acorns in a shallow mortar equipped with a basket hopper (from Holmes 1900:Plate 22B)



Example of a Pomo mortar and pestle with a twined basketry hopper (from Heizer 1951, Fig 2D)



Lassik basketry mortar hopper (from Kroeber 1925, Plate 24)



Hopper mortar with asphaltum still on the mortar. Photo by Richard Jenkins.



Bob Colby, Romaine Brown, Dan Foster and Gene Serr looking through the window at some of the smaller artifacts. Some of the bowl mortars and stone bowls are visible in the yard. Photo by Gerrit Fenenga.



Artifacts housed in display cases but visible to the outside. Photo by Dan Foster.





Hopper mortars and mortars and slab metates line the driveway. Photo by Gerrit Fenenga.



Gerrit Fenenga in front of the slab of bedrock mortars along with a mortar and several pestles.  
Photo by Dan Foster.





Linda Sandelin inventorying artifacts. Gene Serr and Romayne Brown standing in front of some of the collection. Photo by Dan Foster.



Romayne Brown and Linda Sandelin discussing the history of the Vina area. The mortar at the corner of the house is three sided, with two sides visible in the photo. Photo by Dan Foster.