

CHITACTAC-ADAMS HERITAGE COUNTY PARK – A MODEL FOR INTERPRETATION

Donna Gillette and Joyce Johns
Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department
1642 Tiber Court
San Jose, CA 95138

In the last five years, Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park in Santa Clara County has been transformed from a vandalized disgrace into an educational resource for interpreting Ohlone culture and the historic uses of the site. A multi-component program has been developed by the County interpretive staff, working with Native Americans, research specialists, and volunteers. Future plans include a native plant display, native structures, development of the Rancho-period history, and the collection of oral histories of former Adams School students. With the graffiti removed, and interpretive components in place, local school children and the public are now enjoying an outdoor classroom experience.

The village of Chitactac, an ethnographic Ohlone site, is located on the shores of Uvas Creek in Southern Santa Clara County. The earliest radiocarbon dates for nearby sites extend back to 12,000 B.P. Moratto (1984:551) suggests that this area was occupied by Hokan speakers during this earlier period. The village site itself has yielded radiocarbon dates as early as 2690 ± 180 B.P. (Cartier et al. 1995:45). Additional radiometric samples do not indicate whether habitation or use of this site was continual. Unique to the site are nearly a dozen rock-art elements – concentric circles – located on boulders near the creek. Also present are cupule boulders. There are more than 500 bedrock mortars (BRMs) located in the surrounding area (Gurcke 1970), with 75 visible within the boundary of the four-acre Park. The density of BRMs makes this one of the most significant cultural heritage sites in the San Francisco Bay region. The presence of these archaeological components provided the impetus for the creation of a state-of-the-art interpretive park. Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park, dedicated in September of 1998, now provides local school children and the public with an opportunity to learn, in an outdoor classroom, about Ohlone culture and the rock art found at the site. This paper chronicles the site history, reconstruction of the Park, and the

development of educational components, which led to the implementation of an interpretive program. It can now serve as a model for programs at other archaeological sites.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARK

The Chitactac village site is located between the cities of Gilroy and Morgan Hill on the west side of Watsonville County Road (G8), adjacent to Uvas Creek. Ethnographically identified with the Mutsun Ohlones, the native population had been removed from the site and taken to Santa Cruz Mission (Milliken 1995:239-240) and San Juan Bautista Mission (Escamilla 1997:4) by 1800. By 1859, the parcel of land had moved from rancho to private ownership, and was donated by John Hicks Adams (later to become the local sheriff) for the construction of a one-room schoolhouse. The school remained in operation, also serving as a community center, until 1956, when the last of two school buildings burned down (Cartier et al. 1995:6). In 1963 the property was deeded to the County of Santa Clara. Circa 1966 the County Parks Department began operating the site as a roadside rest area known as the Adams Picnic Site.

The area was surveyed and excavated by Cabrillo College in the late 1960's. Rock-art researchers Robert Mark and Evelyn Newman (now Billo) visited the site in the early 1980s and noted the concentric-circle rock art and cupule elements. In 1984, a team of archaeologists and local Ohlone descendants, under the direction of Mark and Newman, met at the site to record three petroglyphs and a cupule boulder (Mark and Newman [Billo] 1993).

While graffiti at the site goes back to the 1960s (and possibly earlier), by 1985 the roadside rest area had become the arena for local gang tagging wars, using spray paint to further vandalize the site. After many requests to the Historic Heritage Commission, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, the County began plans to take action to actively manage and help preserve the petroglyph site.

Erosion, the result of 1987 storms, led to the removal of a petroglyph boulder in danger of being lost in the flooding of the creek (Gillette et al. 2000:48). The boulder was relocated twice to nearby sites at Mt. Madonna and Villa Mira Monte in Morgan Hill, for protection, but has recently been returned to the Interpretive Shelter.

In 1992 Robert Cartier evaluated the Adams School site and recorded additional concentric-circle petroglyphs (Cartier et al. 1992:Figure 1). Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department created several citizen committees to help with the park planning process. These committees included Native Americans, neighbors, environmentalists, commissioners, and archaeologists working closely with the park planners and contractors. Park Planner Lauren Harvey was honored by the Sierra Club with a Special Achievement Award for her work in the early stages of the design phase. When Harvey moved on to a new position, Mark Fredrick picked up the mantle. Construction funding was provided through a federal grant. With the help of volunteers, a mural depicting Ohlone dancers was designed and painted by the Gavilan College Art Department. The

initial program planning documents (Dillingham 1992), an Interim Management Plan, and finally a Master Plan were completed. These provided the guidance to manage and develop the Park by creating an interpretive center and docent program highlighting the prehistoric and historic components of the site. Ramp access was designed throughout most areas of the Park.

Construction of the Park improvements involved Ohlone descendants Irene Zwierlein of the Amah Mutsun and Rosemary Cambra of the Muwekma tribelets. They consulted during the excavation process, during which time several burials were recovered. A reburial ceremony was later conducted under the direction of Irene Zwierlein.

Shortly before the completion of the construction, the Bay Area Rock Art Research Association (BARARA), donated funds from their non-profit foundation account to bring rock-art conservator Johannie Loubser to the site. Loubser trained and supervised volunteers in the correct techniques for removal of graffiti from an archaeological site. Over the next seven weekends, 15 trained volunteers spent 422 hours removing and camouflaging the graffiti.

The group included two young men who were working off their community-service hours to fulfill court obligations. Two members of the Ohlone tribelet were also part of the trained graffiti removal team.

The Park features a self-guided interpretive walk with stops at several interpretive panels, including photos and original art created by Marcus Lui, local Rumsen Ohlone descendent Linda Yamane, and American Rock Art Research Association (ARARA) member John Betts. The bilingual panels in English and Spanish describe the natural history of Uvas Creek, and Ohlone Village life, buildings, food processing, petroglyphs, and culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Also included is information on Spanish California and the Adams School.

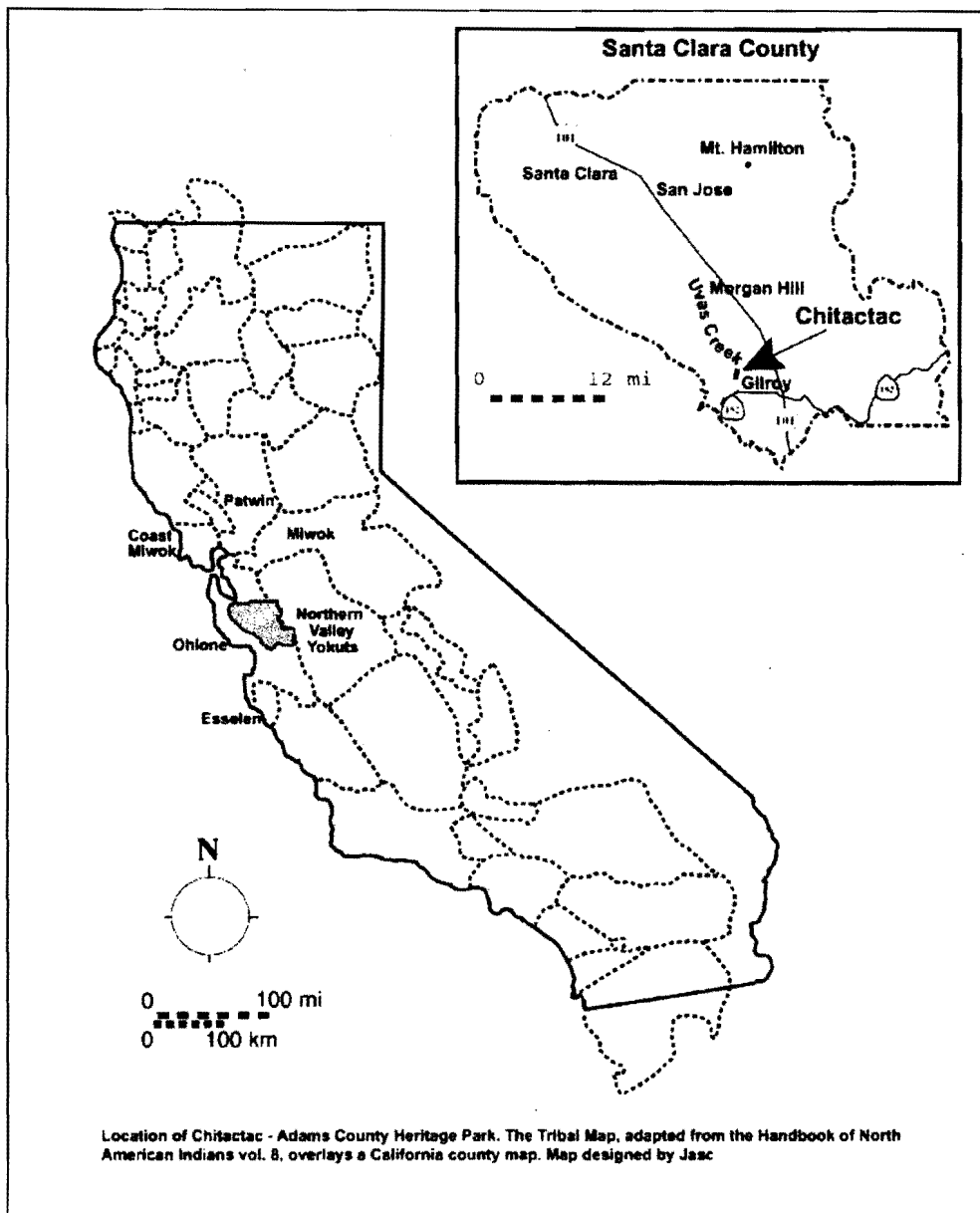


Figure 1. Location of Chitactac - Adams County Heritage Park. The Tribal Map, adapted from the Handbook of North American Indians vol. 8, overlays a California county map. Map designed by Jason Coleman, Merritt College.

The interpretive shelter features additional information about Ohlone culture, which includes language, maps, trade items, social structure, plant uses, other food resources, post-contact Ohlone culture, and the petroglyphs and their preservation. In this display, school children are taught why touching the real petroglyphs is not allowed, but they are encouraged to touch a reproduction of two concentric-circle

glyphs. One appears to be freshly carved, while the other represents how a glyph might look after years of weathering. This reproduction was created and donated by Native American artist and ARARA member John Palacio.

The completed Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park was dedicated on September 12, 1998. One of those in attendance at the

event was Ohlone Elder Maria Antonia Ketchum, who had also attended Adams School as a child.

ONGOING MANAGEMENT OF THE CULTURAL RESOURCES

As the renovation neared completion, Santa Clara County Parks began searching for a camp host. The camp host program has been in successful operation at several of our local county parks. Chitactac has been especially fortunate in having a dedicated and reliable couple, Jim and Marcia Chadsey, filling this position. Their sincere interest in Native American culture (he was raised on reservations in the West, as his father was with the Bureau of Indian Affairs) has led to their additional participation as docents for the interpretive school program. This involvement is beyond the hosts' commitment to provide presence and to serve as caretakers of the Park. As they are monitoring the site, they are always eager to stop and share their knowledge and insight with visitors. Jim is regularly monitoring for new graffiti, and if found, it is immediately reported to the park rangers for photo-documentation. If needed, the trained graffiti removal volunteers are contacted, and a clean up takes place. Santa

Clara County Park rangers assigned to the district in which Chitactac is located patrol the site several times a day and provide additional presence.

With the full-time caretaker program in place and regular monitoring by rangers, vandalism became nearly non-existent. The site was now ready to become the Interpretive Center that was envisioned years ago by many dedicated individuals.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

School Programs

As Santa Clara County Parks began their plans for interpretation of the site, a park interpreter was hired to begin the process of developing a program to be offered to local school children and the public. Park Interpretive Program Coordinator Robin Schaut and Park Interpreter Chris Carson began working with anthropologist Doug Petersen and Linda Yamane, a Rumsien Ohlone and specialist in Ohlone culture, to produce an educators' guide on the Ohlone people of central California.



Figure 2. Interpretive Shelter and first sign on the interpretive trail.



Figure 3. School children playing Native American stick game during a class fieldtrip.

This 55-page guide includes accurate background information on local native people, and provides teachers with lesson plans and resources, which serve to enhance site visits by their classes. Teachers are also provided with a list of suggested reference materials. It includes posters, videos, related web sites, lists of native plants and herbs, and a list of Native American museums and gatherings.

A limited number of site tours were offered by the park interpretive staff during the 1999-2000 school year. An outreach program began with Interpreter Chris Carson visiting local classrooms. Her presentation includes a hands-on kit full of artifact replicas, baskets, examples of food resources, tools, animal skins, and related Ohlone cultural materials. The kit also includes lesson plans, books, and other resources. Three of these kits are now available for teachers to check out and share with their classes.

In the summer of 2000, the first teacher workshops were conducted at Chitactac Park. The two workshops were day-long

events, and were filled to capacity with enthusiastic local teachers. The teachers were introduced to the park with a guided tour, and received a brief introduction to the programs that would be offered to the visiting classes. After a picnic lunch, they had an opportunity to participate in various hands-on activities. At the end of the workshop they were given a packet of materials to prepare their classes for visits to Chitactac. Included in this packet is the educators' guide mentioned above.

On-site programs are arranged through a phone call to the park interpreter, who schedules a visit, with a back-up rain date during the rainy season. Teachers are given a choice of one of four interest-area programs: tools, games, foods, or rock art. Two of these programs may be selected for a longer-day experience. Upon arrival at the park, the class is divided into two groups, and while one group takes part in a docent-led tour, the remaining students participate in their selected program and activity. The groups trade places to complete their fieldtrip experience. Many classes bring their lunches to enjoy at the picnic tables.

This school year (2000-2001) the Park has hosted 58 class fieldtrips, which have included more than 2,300 students. Group size is limited to 40-60 students. The program is geared to third through fifth graders, who study native cultures as part of their mandated state curriculum framework. This fulfills the requirement to expose the students to the field of archaeology. The camp host and other volunteer docents assist the interpreters with these programs. Recently, Linda Will joined the interpretive staff. Vests and nametags have been ordered to identify volunteers. Teachers who are unable to bring students to the site may schedule a classroom Outreach Program. During this year 24 classes and approximately 480 students have learned about the Ohlone culture without leaving their classrooms. There is no fee for any of these programs. They are provided by the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department. Teachers are asked to provide supplies for craft experiences.

One of the first tours of the Park was scheduled by Baldwin Elementary School teacher Mike Boulland. His longtime passion for local archaeology and history had made the local Ohlone culture an important component of his fourth-grade curriculum. The trip to Chitactac lit a spark in one of his students, Matthew Nash. Matt asked his mom to return to the park that afternoon to show her what he had experienced, and to help him take digital photographs of the signs and the petroglyphs. Matt then created a program on his computer about Chitactac, using Hyper Studio© software. With encouragement from his teacher, and educator Joyce Johns, he presented his project during an Education Session at the 1999 SCA meeting in Sacramento. SCA President Mike Sampson was so impressed with Matt's creation that he spent a good part of the afternoon with Matt at the computer. Matt was asked by Donna Gillette (and her co-authors Mark and Evelyn [Newman] Billo), to enhance his presentation with his own words, and it became part of a presentation in the Education Symposium at the International

Rock Art Congress (IRAC) meeting in Ripon, Wisconsin in 1999 (Gillette et al. 2000). This paper highlighted the development of the Park Interpretive Center, and how visits to the Park can serve as a springboard to further student interest in archaeology and culture, and to provide project material. At the end of the week-long congress, Mark and Billo were honored with the Conservation Award presented by ARARA, for their years of effort in being the moving force behind the creation of Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park.

Teacher Mike Boulland also included oral history as part of his classroom studies. After his class trip to Chitactac, he discovered that someone at the school was acquainted with Areda Stadler, 87 years old at the time, and a former student at Adams School. Stadler was invited to visit the class and became the subject of a living-history experience, sharing her memories of the years she spent as a child attending the school.

Public Program

In the summer of 1999, the first public programs were held at Chitactac. They were presented once a month in June, July, and August, and consisted of presentations by Native Americans and specialists. Topics included the following:

- *Use of Native Plants* by Linda Yamane
- *Native Food* by Doug Petersen
- *An evening of Ohlone Storytelling* by Linda Yamane

The programs were advertised in the local newspaper. Several families took part, and several neighbors stopped by to see what was happening. From this group, and the earlier volunteers who helped with graffiti clean-up, a list was compiled to begin a "Friends of Chitactac." This support group, from which docents and other volunteers are drawn, is comprised of many interested individuals and families. Service hours are recorded and kept on file with the Santa Clara County Parks Volunteer Coordinator.



Figure 4. Park Interpreter conducting tour during teacher training session.

When the Park appears to be in need of a little extra cleaning (in addition to the regular maintenance by the Park Service), a workday is scheduled for the Friends of Chitactac. Volunteers of all ages answer the call and join in. Cleaning and maintenance supplies are provided by the County, as is lunch.

The first cleanup day was held in preparation for a celebration of the return of the petroglyph boulder from Morgan Hill to the shelter at Chitactac. A public event, a "Welcome Home the Rock" party, was held, with a special program involving a former Adams School student, those who had worked on the Park in the planning process, and a short talk by Irene Zwierlan, representing the Ohlone families. One of the highlights of the day was the discovery of former Adams student Norma Haslam, who had traveled 150 miles to take part in the festivities. The sign depicting the site as a school highlighted a photo that included Norma and her sister as young students. The "Welcome Home the Rock" party also

served to heighten community visibility of the Park and its programs.

The second summer of public programs consisted of three presentations by Chris Carson, Park Interpreter on Ohlone foods, tools, and games. The participants were given an opportunity to pound acorns, participate in craft activities, and enjoy other hands-on experiences. This spring and summer (2001), five programs are planned for the public. Subject matter will include tools, animals, storytelling, rock art, and a history of Adams School. The programs will be presented by the interpretive staff and specialists in various subjects.

NATIVE USE OF THE SITE

Since word of the Park renovation has spread, Native American groups have also returned or come to Chitactac for events. One of the local Ohlone groups held an event that was included last year on the itinerary of a Native American run, from Alaska to Mexico. They stopped at the Park and held a ceremony down by the creek.



Figure 5. One of several concentric circle elements occurring at the site.

FUTURE PLANS FOR THE PARK

The Park staff and Friends of Chitactac, with involvement of the local Ohlone descendants, have many plans to enhance the site and the programs that are offered. Regular meetings are held with representatives of the Friends group and Park staff to discuss and work on current projects and to plan for future needs. The following list provides a summary of these.

- The Ohlone community plans at a future date to construct a typical living shelter, similar to one that may have been on the site before the Mission Period. They plan to build a sweat lodge, which would also be available for their own ceremonial use.
- A ramada will be constructed in the near future to provide shelter for interpretive programs.
- Plans are now underway to re-introduce native flora to the site, with signs to inform visitors of the native uses, and to plant species to provide Native basket makers with needed materials. Native American input will also be an important part of this project.
- A research library on Ohlone culture and history is being assembled, and will be available in the shelter. Research is in process to learn more about the use of the land during the Rancho Period.
- A Bulletin Board is now located near the entrance to the shelter, where up-coming programs are announced and visitors are given etiquette guidelines for visiting archaeological sites.
- A new registration box is being constructed for the site, asking for contact information from those who have had personal involvement or interest in the site, either as Native Americans, rancho-family descendants, or former Adams School students.

From this information and other sources, an oral history project is planned to further document the story of the Park. To date, several people have stopped by and talked to the camp hosts, including the great-grandson of John Hick Adams who happened to be visiting the area from Minnesota. He has considerable family information he is willing to share.

- The Spring of 2001, Archaeology Month was celebrated at RAFT,

Resource Area For Teachers. Chitactac docents and interpreters will be displaying the teaching materials, demonstrating the activities, and promoting the park to hundreds of teachers who visit RAFT daily to buy supplies and materials donated by local industries.

Ideas to further enhance the Park and its programs are added regularly.



CONCLUSION

The ethnographic village known at contact as Chitactac was for many centuries the home to Ohlone people. Evidence is still visible of how they lived, how they processed their food, and where their children played. Carvings were left on the rocks that tell of their ritual life. This same location, where young Native children once learned the old ways, is now an outdoor classroom for the children of today. Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park, the site of Adams School for nearly 100 years, is now a place where school children and adult visitors alike can learn about the past and experience the beauty and the serenity that attracted the first Native Americans to this peaceful site along the banks of Uvas Creek, so long ago.

REFERENCES CITED

Cartier, Robert (Principal)

1992 *Cultural Resource Evaluation of the Adams School Site Project in the County of Santa Clara*. Archaeological Resource Management, San Jose. Report on file, Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, Los Gatos, CA.

1995 *Phase II Archaeological Testing Report and a Request for Determination of Eligibility: Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park Improvement*. Archaeological Resource Management, San Jose, CA. Report on file, Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, Los Gatos, CA.

Dillingham, Reed (Principal)

1992 *Adams School Site Master Plan Program Document*. Prepared for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department. Dillingham and Associates, San Jose, CA. Report on file, Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, Los Gatos, CA.

Escamilla, Patricia. B.

1997 *A Short History of Gilroy*. Gilroy Historical Society Museum, Gilroy, CA.

Gillette, Donna, Evelyn [Newman] Billo, and Robert Mark

2000 From Gang Hangout To Educational Resource – Reclaiming A Cultural Treasure. In *International Rock Art Congress Proceedings*, edited by Peggy Whitehead and Lawrence Loendorf, 1:47-52. American Rock Art Research Association, Tucson, AZ.

Gurcke, Karl

1970 *A Yokut Indian Site in the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains*. Manuscript on file, Northwest Information Center, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA.

Mark, Robert, and Evelyn Newman [Billo]

1993 Computer Graphics Assisted Recording Uvas Creek Petroglyph Site. In *American Indian Rock Art*, edited by Ken Hedges, 3:191-200. Museum of Man, San Diego, CA.

Milliken, Randall

1995 *A Time of Little Choice*. Ballena Press, Menlo Park, CA.

Moratto, Michael J.

1984 *California Archaeology*. Academic Press, Orlando, FL.