Public Interaction as "Culture Contact"

Lee M. Panich and Tsim D. Schneider

For the past 15 years, research at Fort Ross State Historic Park has contributed to culture contact studies in North America by illuminating the ways in which multi-ethnic identities and colonial landscapes were negotiated at a Russian mercantilist outpost. This research expands the temporal and spatial understanding of culture contact by developing and nurturing collaborative "interactions" between archaeologists and members of the local Kashaya Pomo community. Kashaya Pomo memories and oral traditions provide insight about the past as well as groundwork for contemporary dialogues between the Kashaya Pomo, archaeologists, State Parks employees, and the public.

Over the last two decades, Fort Ross has been the site of much scholarly work on the topic of "culture contact" (Clifford 1997; Dowdall and Parrish 2002; Lightfoot 2003, 2005; Lightfoot, et al. 1991, 2001; Martinez 1998; Parkman 1996-1997; Parrish et al. 2000). Most of this research focuses on an early nineteenth-century Russian mercantile outpost and the multiethnic community that grew up around it. Founded in 1812, what is today called Fort Ross was once part of a larger Russian American Company colony in California, comprised of Russians, Creoles, Native Alaskans, and others. These people settled at Fort Ross, which was located in the homeland of the Kashaya Pomo, a Native American group whose ancestors had lived in the region for over 6,000 years. The Russian occupation of Kashaya territory lasted from 1812 until 1841. During this time, the area around Fort Ross was inhabited by diverse peoples, all of whom contributed to the creation of a pluralistic colonial setting while negotiating the various colonial policies and intercultural interactions.

For the past 16 years, the Fort Ross Archaeological Project has investigated the remains of this colonial outpost and multiethnic community in and around the Fort Ross State Historic Park in Sonoma County, California. This project is a collaboration between the Kashaya Pomo Tribe, archaeologists from the University of California Berkeley, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Beginning in the early 1990s, these parties have been working together to create an interpretive trail at Fort Ross that will present a more pluralistic picture of the area's colonial past to park visitors (Murley 1994; Parkman 1994).

Currently, interpretation at the park is dominated by a reconstructed Russian stockade. This imposing edifice presents an overly Eurocentric and militaristic image of life at Colony Ross. The proposed Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail, however, will encourage visitors to explore outside of the stockade. The interpretive trail will be divided into two segments: an east loop and a west loop. While the east loop will encircle the stockade and highlight the different ethnic neighborhoods that were present at Ross, the west loop will take visitors out onto the coastal terraces where pre-contact archaeological sites will be presented together with Kashaya accounts of traditional and contemporary practices (Gonzalez et al., in press). Visitors will learn about the diverse colonial community of Colony Ross as well as the Native inhabitants of the region through a combination of historical documents, archaeology, and Kashaya oral traditions. Although the interpretive content of the trail will center on the implications of colonialism, the process of creating the trail is itself illustrative of a different kind of culture contact: that which occurs between the myriad stakeholders in any public archaeological project.

The interpretive trail, like the archaeological project, is a collaborative endeavor. Major work on the Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail began in the summer of 2004, as archaeologists and field school students from UC Berkeley worked together with members of the Kashaya Pomo Tribe, trail experts, and interpretative specialists from State Parks, as well as other professionals. Our collaboration with the Kashaya Pomo Tribe is especially meaningful as it is their heritage that will be presented to the public. While not all Native groups would feel the same, the Kashaya believe that it is important to educate the public about Kashaya culture and history. The Fort Ross Archaeological Project and the related Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail are perfect venues for this type of collaborative public interpretation. Research questions are developed with tribal concerns in mind, and archaeological methods are carried out in accordance with Kashaya ceremonial obligations. By working together, archaeologists, tribal members, and State Parks are developing ways to share Kashaya cultural heritage with a general audience in a manner that is agreeable to everyone involved.

With this collaboration comes a willingness to try new things, particularly in terms of access to cultural resources. Few public interpretations of archaeological sites in California reveal to visitors the exact locations of archaeological deposits; yet the Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail Project challenges this trend by focusing on the Kashaya landscape around Fort Ross, including several pre-contact archaeological sites. This trail, then, is in some ways a test case for public archaeology in California, and it is our hope that by allowing visitors to engage more closely with archaeology they will in turn respect the cultural heritage and potential knowledge that archaeological resources represent.

Lee M. Panich and Tsim D. Schneider University of California, Berkeley; tsim@berkeley.edu, panich@uclink.berkeley.edu

Proceedings of the Society for California Archaeology, Volume 19, 2006, pp 27-30

In order to measure the success, or failure, of the trail in this regard, we conducted a pedestrian survey along the proposed trail route as part of a field school. Sites were mapped and followed by systematic surface collections in order to form a baseline from which to measure visitor impact, and to learn more about the pre-contact occupation of the area. All of the archaeological sites on the trail are either small shell middens or low-density lithic scatters that have been significantly disturbed through bioturbation and/or modern landscape alterations. The trail will be routed around the sites, and visitors will view them from a distance, but the interpretation will stress their position within a larger picture of seasonality, resource procurement, and the practices of daily life for local Native people. We hope that by incorporating these archaeological sites into the public interpretation, visitors will gain a deeper appreciation for the past while understanding the importance of the coastal landscape for Kashaya people.

Inherent to the collaborative research designs implemented at Fort Ross over the past decade (including collaborations with Native Alaskan and Russian Orthodox communities) are an increased interest in, awareness of, and, consequently, foot traffic on or near archaeological sites. One role of archaeologists at Fort Ross, then, is to mitigate the impact of disturbance from excavation and other near- and subsurface disturbances, but archaeologists at Fort Ross also hold ourselves accountable to the public—through consultation and by presenting our results to general audiences—and to those communities that we represent. This suggests a second role for archaeologists, namely, mediators between archaeological resources and park visitors. As the SAA Principles of Archaeological Ethics (http://www.saa.org/aboutSAA/ethics.html) make abundantly clear already, we are obligated to ensure the long-term protection and conservation of archaeological resources and to present our research in an accessible format to as wide a range of interested publics as possible. Nevertheless, these two goals often exist in a state of uneasy tension.

From an archaeological perspective, the best way to preserve sites is for them to remain unseen; but from an interpretive perspective, one of the best ways for people to understand the past and, ideally, foster an appreciation for local history, is to engage with archaeological resources. To gauge how we might present archaeology in a meaningful and effective way, while at the same time protecting the integrity of the archaeological record, we administered an informal survey among participants in four guided tours of the preliminary trail route. These feedback forms provide insight on the interpretive content of the trail and the manner in which cultural and archaeological information is presented, as well as practical insight for trail construction such as trail ruggedness, length, feasibility, and our potential audience.

In spite of very strong winds, colder temperatures, cow pasture, and the general rugged terrain that characterize the West Loop, respondents had no complaints about exposure to such elements for the length of time required to complete the walk. On average, trial trail-goers seemed to enjoy walking off the beaten path, an observation that parallels conceptions of the Fort Ross park visitors who brave Highway 1 as a heartier breed. However it is important to account for those who expressed concern for trail inaccessibility. To quote one respondent, "as it is right now [the proposed trail] is not for everyone." Another respondent commented, "to walk even one of the loops will require a serious interest." This reflects our concern that the trail-goers will represent an even smaller, self-selecting group of interested individuals within the already circumscribed pool of visitors who make the trip to Fort Ross.

Despite these concerns, and extending our experience further, the Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail provides a venue to examine long-term "culture contact" at Fort Ross from the early nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. We observed that the Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail offers an otherwise unavailable opportunity for archaeologists to identify and treat stereotypic views held by some park visitors of Native Californian demise during and following European colonization. A commonly held belief in the disappearance of Native Californians coupled with the prevalence of more recent Cold War memories—evidenced by numerous abandoned Nike missile silos on the northern California coast—lends perhaps to the excitement of disbelief regarding the idea of Russians in California versus the idea of Indians in California.

Consequently, Fort Ross has developed a reputation of being only a Russian military outpost and fortress (Parkman 1996-1997). As Breck Parkman (1996-1997:355) argues, "it is probable that defensive aspects of Colony Ross have been over-emphasized in both the priority of reconstruction and interpretation, due in part to the use of term 'fort' instead of 'settlement' in the park's name." In addition to the name itself, cannonades for visiting dignitaries and sundry other defensive attributes of the Fort Ross stockade—its high stockade walls, two blockhouses complete with canonry, and barracks—appear especially appealing to park visitors.

This military nostalgia is hinted at by one of the questions posed to hikers on the proposed interpretive trail: "if you have visited [Fort Ross] before, is this the first time you explored beyond the stockade?" While bearing in mind that 73% of our respondents have visited the park before, 43% of those answered that they had not ventured beyond the stockade into the multiethnic neighborhoods or surrounding landscape. Although only a small portion of Colony Ross was located inside the fort itself, its representation as a "fort" complete with military features reinforces a dominant narrative of Native American hostility towards an enclosed and isolated group of Europeans, in this case, Russian American Company employees. In light of the percentage of people who had not perambulated outside the stockade, we can assume that the majority of visitors are thus left with this one-sided image. This interaction, or "culture contact," between Russians and Native peoples at Fort Ross as it is implicitly revealed to park visitors, presents, as Steve Silliman (2005:57) argues, a "problem in the ways we present our studies of indigenous-European encounters solely as 'contact' episodes to archaeology's various audiences and collaborators."

The pluralistic and flexible characteristics of intercultural interactions at Colony Ross have already been demonstrated by Lightfoot and others (Lightfoot et al. 1997, 1998). A "colonial" understanding of these interactions however identifies processes of interactions, not framed events; shared histories, not isolated trajectories; and shared identities, not models of acculturation and assimilation (Silliman

2005). Our inheritance of a unilinear, frontier history, Silliman (2005) warns, enables us to present contact events as severed, fleeting moments in world history. The idea that those who were "contacted" fell victim to this singular trajectory is solidified in California, the terminus of a Manifest Destiny. Yet by redefining kinship ties, maintaining an essential sense of place, and by continuing traditional subsistence pursuits while integrating new practices and ideas, some Native Californians were able to accommodate and resist colonialism. Furthermore, by participating in archaeological projects at Fort Ross, the Kashaya Pomo continue to navigate colonialism by affirming their ties to the landscape and by shaping the perceptions of park visitors who, to this day, come into contact with them.

In developing the interpretive trail, we deal with "culture contact" in the past, as well as treating the "contact" between ourselves, the Kashaya Pomo, park visitors, and the materials we represent. It is helpful to understand the events and histories that unfold at Fort Ross as part of a longer historical trajectory that discusses contact—as it occurred in the past and as it occurs in the present—as well as the long-term developments of a colonial model. While stereotypic views historically informed perceptions of Native Californians and daily life at Colony Ross, we take stock in a renewed public interest in the Kashaya Pomo, the native plants viewable on the trail, Kashaya use of the plants and animals that are part of the Fort Ross landscape, as well as interest in the trail itself. In response to a question regarding the most likeable aspects of the proposed trail, one respondent stated that "[I liked] seeing the places where people actually lived and worked! Nature is great, but the places where human beings have interacted with and used what nature offers are much more interesting."

It is this nascent interest in the Native Californian experience at Colony Ross that we hope to foster with the Kashaya Pomo Interpretive Trail. This task, however, is not easy. As the respondents to our survey affirmed, archaeology provides a powerful connection to the past. Yet how to balance accessibility to this connection with the simultaneous protection of the integrity of the archaeological record and the physical heritage of our collaborators, is a difficult question. At Fort Ross, we have attempted to chart a middle course. We propose to interpret certain archaeological remains in situ, in their broader context within the Kashaya landscape. It is our hope that by encouraging the public to look beyond the reconstructed stockade walls at Fort Ross they will begin to appreciate the diverse colonial experiences that took place at Fort Ross and to see this small Russian colony in its context within the Native Californian landscape. In this way, we believe that new modes of "culture contact" have the potential to challenge old, colonial histories.

References Cited

Clifford, James
1997 *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Dowdall, Katherine M., and Otis O. Parrish
2002 A Meaningful Disturbance of the Earth. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3:99-133.

Gonzalez, S., D. Modzelewski, L. Panich, and T. Schneider
2006 Archaeology for the Seventh Generation. American Indian Quarterly 30 (3).

Lightfoot, Kent G.
2003 Russian Colonization: The Implications of Mercantile Colonial Practices in the North Atlantic. *Historical Archaeology* 37(4):14-28.

2005 *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers.* University of California Press, Berkeley.

Lightfoot, Kent G., Antoinette Martinez, and Ann M. Schiff
1998 Daily Practice and Material Culture in Pluralistic Social Settings: An Archaeological Study of Culture Change and Persistence from Fort Ross, California. *American Antiquity* 63:199-222.

Lightfoot, Kent G., Otis Parrish, Roberta A. Jewett, E. Breck Parkman and Daniel F. Murley
2001 The Metini Village Project: Collaborative Research in the Fort Ross State Historic Park. *Society for California Archaeology Newsletter* 35(2):1, 23-26.

Lightfoot, Kent G., Ann M. Schiff, and Thomas A. Wake (editors)
1997 *The Native Alaskan Neighborhood: A Multi-Ethnic Community at Fort Ross.* The Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Fort Ross, California, Vol. 2. Contributions of the University of California Archaeological Research Facility No. 55. Berkeley.

Lightfoot, Kent G., Thomas A. Wake, and Ann M. Schiff
1991 *The Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Fort Ross, California.* Vol. 1. Contributions of the University of California Archaeological Research Facility No. 49. Berkeley.

Martinez, Antoinette
1998 An Archaeological Study of Change and Continuity in the Material Remains, Practices and Cultural Identities of Native Californian Women in Nineteenth Century Pluralistic Context. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

Murley, Daniel F.
1994 Peopling Ross' Past. *Proceedings of the Society for California Archaeology* 7:61-65.

Parkman, E. Breck
1994 Preserving the Fort Ross Archaeological Record. *Proceedings of the Society for California Archaeology* 7:47-59.

1996/1997 Fort and Settlement: Interpreting the Past at Fort Ross State Historic Park. *California History* 75:354-369.

Parrish, Otis, Dan Murley, Roberta Jewett, and Kent Lightfoot
2000 The Science of Archaeology and the Response from within Native California: The Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Metini Village in the Fort Ross State Historic Park. *Proceedings of the Society for California Archaeology* 13:84-87.

Silliman, S.W.
2005 Culture Contact or Colonialism? Challenges in the Archaeology of North America. *American Antiquity* 70:55-74.

. . . . . .