

ʔitdi'yu (ovens) in the Wa'šiw Sierra

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Recent excavations in Squaw Valley uncovered large and small ovens used by Wa'šiw (Washoe) ancestors. Prehistoric ovens - rare finds in the northern Sierra - are important because they serve as a tangible focus for Wa'šiw remembrance, as well as for archaeological investigation. Wa'šiw elders who visited the Squaw Valley excavation talked about how the ovens were used - offering insight, perspective and a real connection with Squaw Valley prehistory. In addition, as this case illustrates, the difficulty of recognizing rock ovens amidst glacial till, and shows that large area exposures increase the potential for discovery.

ʔitdi'yu.

Two kinds of ʔitdi'yu - rare finds in the Wa'šiw Sierra - were uncovered during the 1999 investigation of CA-PLA-165, at Squaw Valley. This paper, a poster session presented at the 2001 SCA Annual Meetings in Modesto, is a visual representation of the findings.

ʔitdi'yu means "that which is fire", - and is used by Wa'šiw to refer to ovens and hearths.

Wa'šiw is Washoe

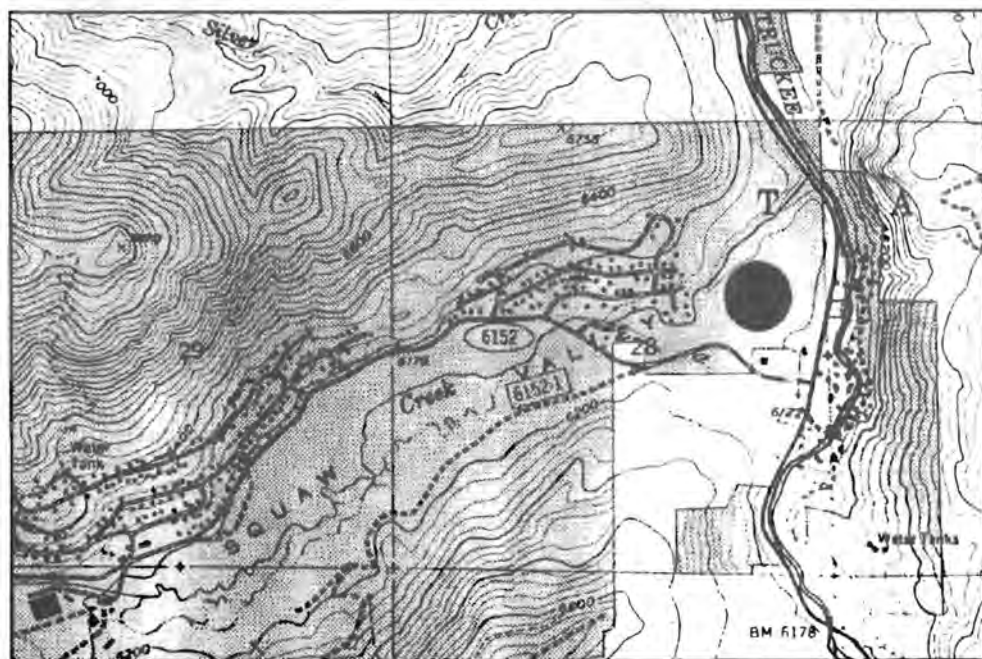


Figure 1. Project location.

Wa'šiw Knowledge

Many Wa'šiw elders, their children and grandchildren, came to view and talk about the ʔitdi'yu. Wa'šiw memory and insight offered knowledge about how ʔitdi'yu were used ... and

conveyed a rich perspective for archaeological interpretation. Laura Fillmore, remembered steaming greens in large *?itdi'yu*.

Large *?itdi'yu*: Ovens

Feature 8 is a large *?itdi'yu* constructed of granite slabs and blocks. A single outer ring defines its form. The ring was laid on glacial till, creating a rock lined bottom. A second half ring, an upper tier, was added to the western arch - increasing the center depth. Charcoal recovered from between the upper and lower tiers returned a C14 date of 2860 B. P. Feature 8 was completely removed, but all its structural rocks were numbered, mapped, and collected for reconstruction.



Figure 2. William Bloomer recording.

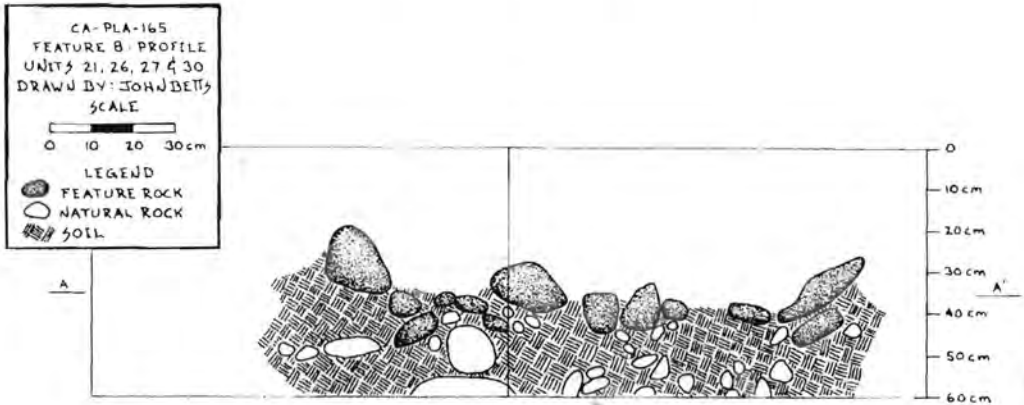


Figure 3. Feature 8 Cross-section.

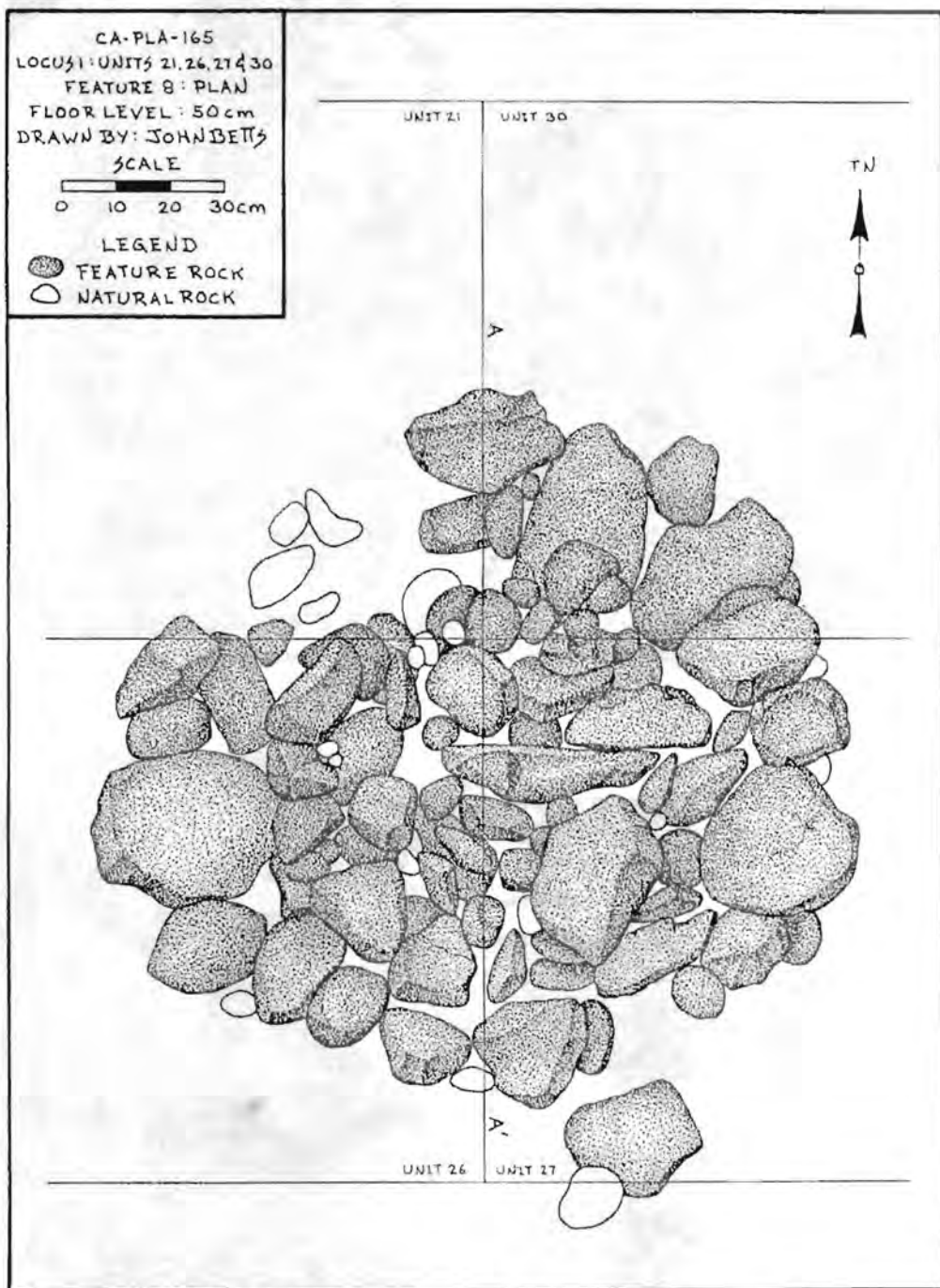


Figure 4. Feature 8 Plan View.



Figure 5. Glacial cobbles provided a natural rock lined bottom for the large ʔitdi'yu.

Small ʔitdi'yu : Hot Plates

Features 9 and 10 are small ʔitdi'yu constructed with a single ring of granite blocks set on a granite slab base. These ʔitdi'yu were possibly swept clean after heating, with food cooked directly on the hot slabs like "hot plates".



Figure 6. Steven James suggests the small ʔitdi'yu might have been used for sun drying.



Figure 7. Feature 9. Charcoal recovered from Feature 9 sediments returned a C14 date of 2320 B. P.



Figure 8. Feature 10. Charcoal recovered from Feature 10 sediments returned a C14 date of 2000 B. P.

Finding *ʔitdi'yu* on a Glacial Moraine

Large area exposures are necessary to recognize *ʔitdi'yu* in cobble rich Sierran sediments. With large exposures, the granite slabs and blocks used for building *ʔitdi'yu* sit in contrast to the rounded glacial cobbles.



*Figure 9. Feature 1 at CA-PLA-163 is a remnant *ʔitdi'yu*, recognized by the association of granite slabs and millings stones amidst dense glacial till. Two C14 samples date this near surface *ʔitdi'yu* between 910 B. P. and 440 B. P.*

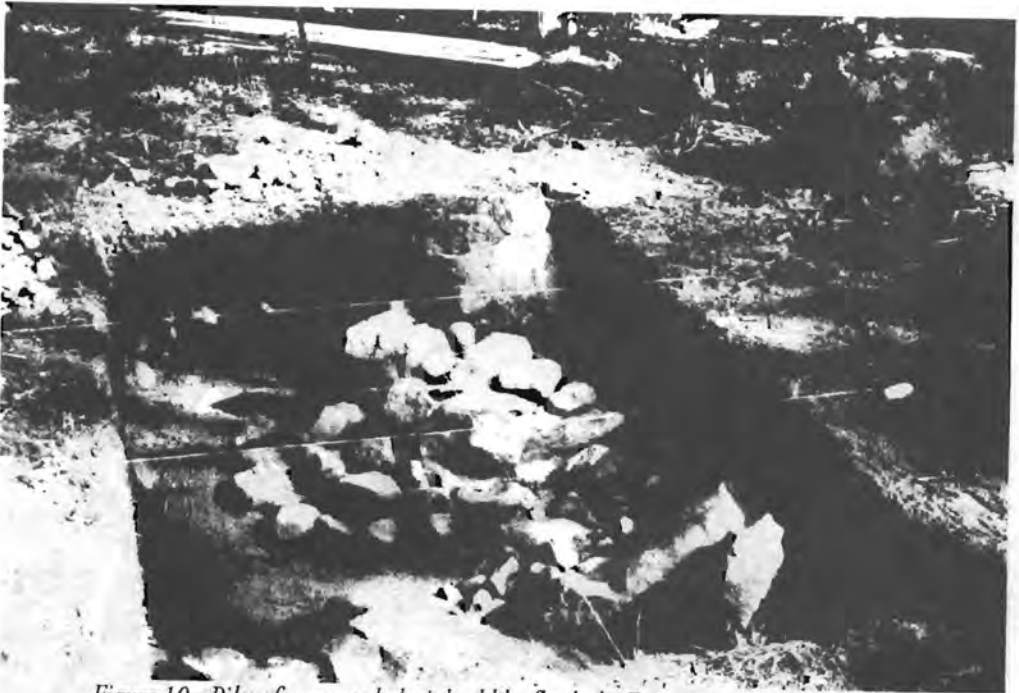


Figure 10. Piles of excavated glacial cobbles flank the Feature 8 exposure.

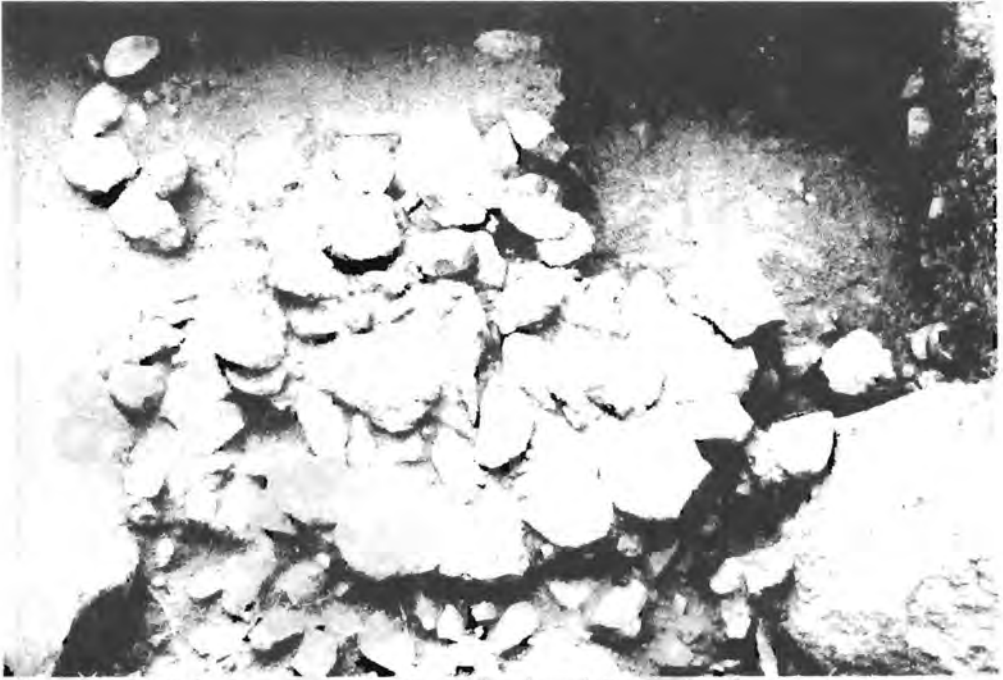


Figure 11. This 1x1 meter excavation unit was dug through Feature 8 without recognition.

The Big Picture

Eventually, a large area exposure revealed three piles of granite slabs, blocks, and milling fragments surrounding Feature 8. These piles, Features 11, 12 and 13, are ʔitdiʔyu rock, likely stacked for eventual use in ʔitdiʔyu construction. Their proximity to Feature 8 constitutes a complex of ʔitdiʔyu related features.



Figure 12. Lynda Shoshone, Rema John, Lyman Joe, Dinah Pete and her granddaughter view the Big Picture.

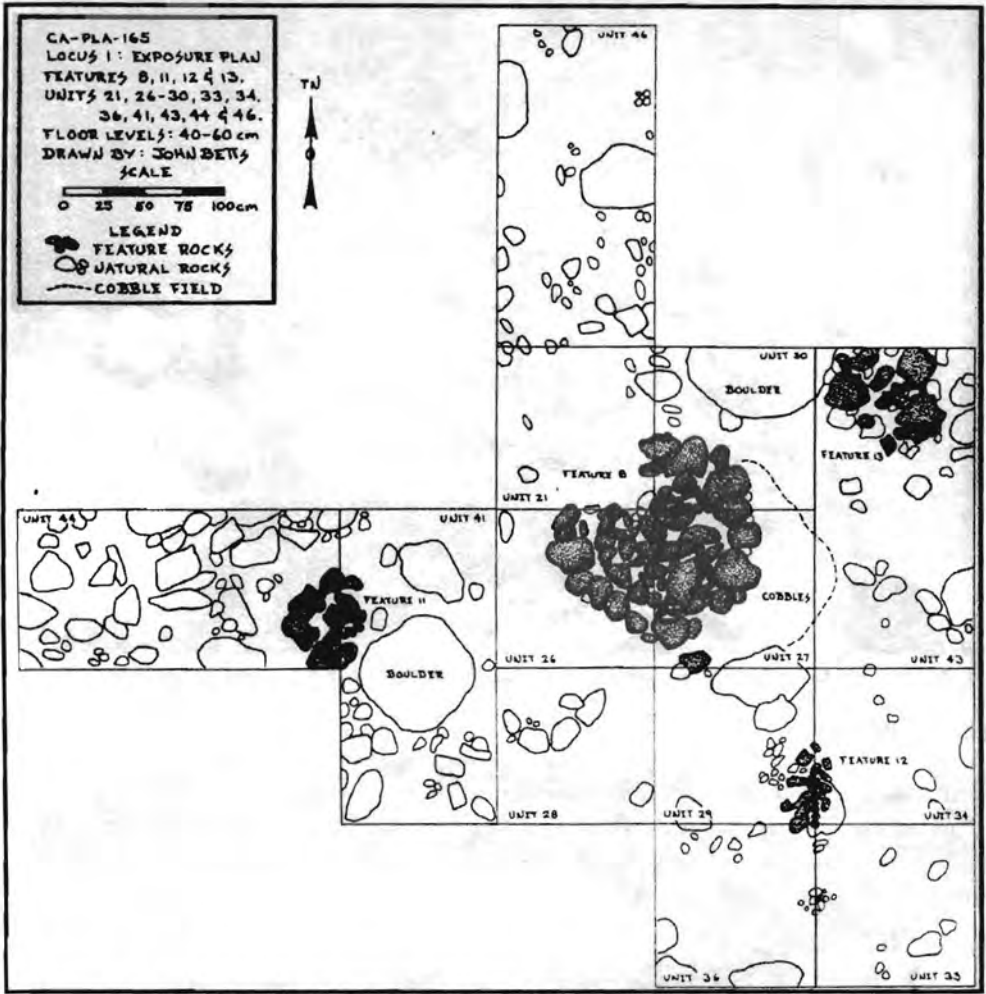


Figure 13. The Big Picture. Sketch map of Features 8, 10, 11, and 12