



REMEMBERING FRANCIS A. RIDDELL

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California foresters lost a true friend with the recent death of Francis A. ("Fritz") Riddell. Fritz was an honored and beloved archaeological field researcher and teacher of nearly mythic proportions. An Olympian figure from the earliest days of California archaeology, Fritz spent almost 70 years working in California, Alaska, and Peru. Riddell leaves behind Caroline, his beloved wife of 41 years, four grown children, thirteen grandchildren, and hundreds of friends and admirers who are most grateful to his family for loaning him to us for so many years.

Francis A. Riddell served as a mentor to the California Department of Forestry from the very beginning of its involvement with archaeological issues. Fritz taught the very first archaeology training classes offered by CDF more than 20 years ago, and, alongside the present CDF archaeologists and archaeological consultants, continued doing so right up to the time of his death. Perhaps more than any other individual, Fritz Riddell is responsible for the form, nature, and many successes of "official" archaeology as practiced in the Golden State over the past half-century. As the very first archaeologist in California to work as a full-time state employee, Fritz created the archaeological program for the California Department of Parks and Recreation that most other governmental programs in California concerning cultural resources, including CDF, are based upon.

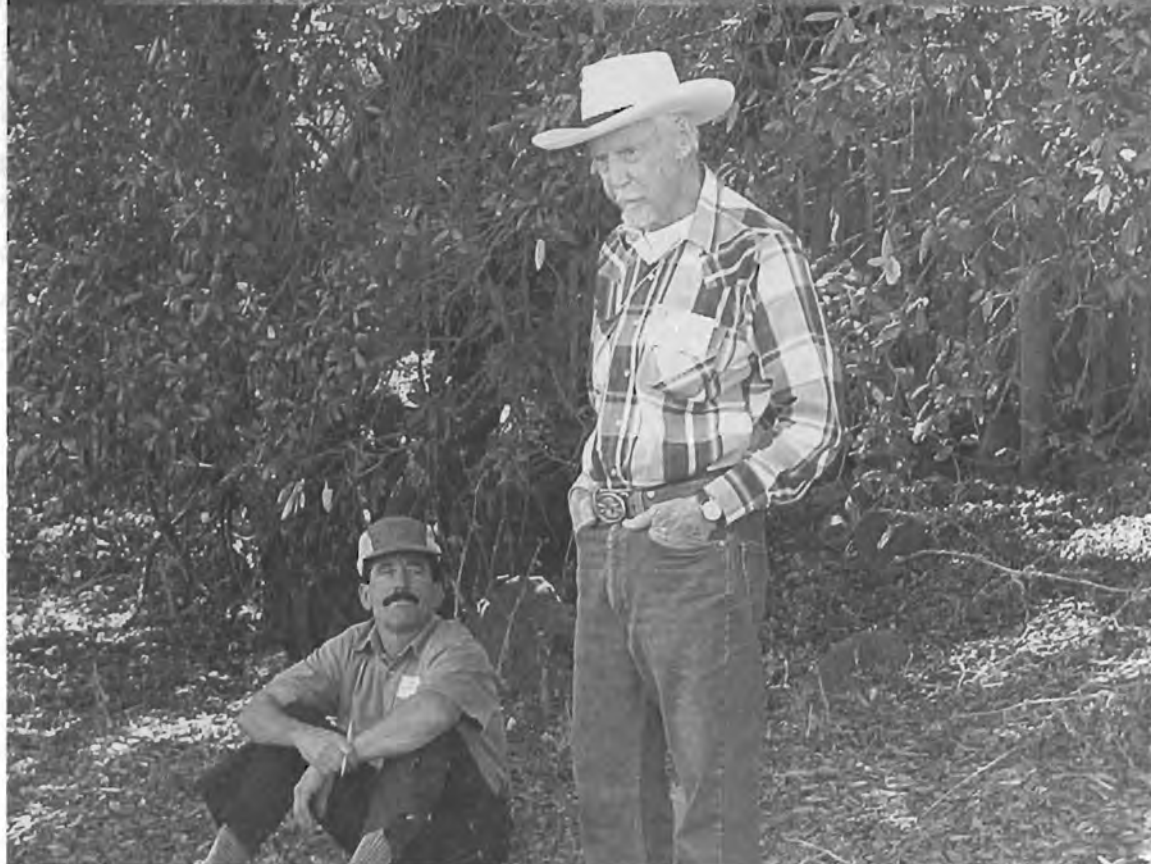
For many years, most California Foresters have accepted the idea that archaeology is an interesting, even an exciting, subject, and that archaeological sites not only have value, but should be preserved. This concept, arrived at not without some resistance, is mainly due to the tireless efforts of inspired teachers like Fritz Riddell. Riddell, through his friendly and humorous approach, turned hundreds of California foresters into avocational archaeologists, convincing them that looking for and caring for

archaeological sites on their Timber Harvest Plans was not only the right thing to do, but a good thing to do as well.

Fritz Riddell worked with diverse groups of people frequently at odds with each other over archaeological issues. He always tried to get potential adversaries to find common ground and areas of mutual interest. Riddell could mediate between California Indians, foresters, ranchers, farmers, landowners, university professors and government bureaucrats of every stripe with unusual success; the secrets of his success were his great gifts of charm and persuasiveness.

All California Foresters who have gone through the CDF archaeological training courses over the past dozen years will remember Fritz's incisive wit, his wealth of examples to draw upon when illustrating a point, and his friendly, upbeat and relaxed teaching style. Fritz was a gentle soul with a great capacity for friendship and generosity. He gave unstintingly of himself and of his time to all, without hesitation, especially when archaeology might benefit through his doing so. There was not a mean or selfish bone in his body. With beginners Fritz always had an encouraging word; he was always on the lookout to make new converts to his informal archaeological army. Most of all, Fritz Riddell had a unique and wonderful sense of humor, the kind rarely equaled in the world as a whole and completely unmatched within his chosen profession.

Fritz was a comic genius who could make anybody laugh at the drop of a hat, and who used humor as a teaching and political tool to very great advantage. Humor was one of Riddell's most potent secret weapons; with it, he could persuade recalcitrant landowners, obdurate bureaucrats, and even obnoxious "young Turk" archaeologists to do things they had previously declared they were dead-set against. With it, he could get just about anybody to follow his lead for the greater





archaeological good. Riddell was a past master at verbal repartee, and an expert at the kind of gentle ridicule that could quickly deflate a stuffed shirt, yet not make an implacable enemy of him. Girding up his funnybone in order to engage in a battle of wits with some poor unsuspecting victim, Fritz would stage-whisper to onlookers:

"Just watch, I'll make mincemeat out of him".

And he usually did. Riddell also took great care never to spare himself as the butt of some of his best jokes either. A typical Riddell comic interlude would begin when he would walk up to somebody engaged in a heated discussion, make a slow pedestrian circuit around him in silence, examining the speaker up and down as if inspecting a tree-trunk for bark beetles. By the time all verbal expression inevitably stopped, Fritz would exclaim, with impeccable timing:

"Are those your own legs, or are you breaking them in for a canary?"

With everybody laughing now, acrimony could be set aside, and a consensus reached. The "silent inspection circuit" was also used to great advantage when non-human subjects were the victims of Fritz's wit, such as when friends would pull up in battered old pickup trucks or dusty sedans and hail Riddell from the open window. Fritz would walk over, do his silent circuit of the vehicle, and then ask in a mock-worried tone:

"Was anybody hurt in that wreck? Are there any survivors?"

Francis Allen Riddell was the most patriotic of Northern California boys, and was always proud to call himself a native of Susanville and Lassen County. Fritz's tales of his childhood in Northeastern California were so wild and woolly that many who knew him well assumed that the birth of this quintessential country boy took place in the back of a buckboard bumping towards town through a blizzard, attended by howling wolves. The actual event was much more prosaic; he was born in Redding in a modern hospital. Fritz would always ask his surprised listener if they knew why he was born in Redding (an act of seeming disloyalty to Lassen County) instead of Susanville: we would always fall for it, and ask him why, giving him the opening for one of his many standard jokes:

"I was born in the hospital in Redding so that I could be near my mother".

As a youngster, Riddell was called "Francis" by his mother, while his father called him "Frank." Both were names unfamiliar to generations of California archaeologists, who knew and revered him as "Fritz". The Riddell name is Scots, of obscure origin, and enjoys a number of spelling variants. Fritz always claimed that Frank Riddle, his Modoc Indian wife Toby Riddle or Winema, and their son Jeff Riddle, all of Modoc War fame, were distant relatives. And, lest we think of this definitive event in Northeastern California as "ancient history", it should be remembered that it was as close in time to the year of Fritz Riddell's birth as is the Korean War to the present day.

Francis was the youngest of the three Riddell boys after Jim (1912) and Harry (1920). Young Francis and his brothers grew up amidst the sagebrush and lava flows of Northeastern California, with periodic "time outs" for extended stays up in the high country of the southern Cascades. Their father was an engineer who was involved in the building of major dams and reservoirs such as Eagle Lake in the 1920's, and took his whole family with him for periods of weeks or months to live in tents or rough-planked shacks under the pines while one construction project or another got under way. The almost uninhabited mountains and deserts of California's "empty quarter" were the Riddell boys' playground, and their nearest neighbors were not infrequently Indians, loggers, and hunters. The Riddell kids had a rootin' tootin' childhood unfettered by the constraints of modern urbanism; they threw rocks, climbed trees, shot rabbits and cooked them over mountain mahogany fires, and slept out under the stars from a very early age.

Then, as now, Northeastern California was very rich in archaeological sites and survivals of Indian culture, but very light in terms of overall population. The young Riddell boys would pick up arrowheads while walking around the family place in Susanville, or on the way to school, and thus began their life-long fascination with archaeology and with California Indians. Northeastern California in the 1920's still had many living links to the past. As youngsters, Fritz and Harry Riddell were fascinated with Indians and went out of their way to meet and speak with

local Maidu and Paiute people living in and around Susanville in the 1920's. Local Indian cultures were strong and vibrant, and the white man had only been present there for, at most, three generations. At this time there were still a few very old Indians, septuagenarians or octogenarians, who could remember the arrival of the very first white people in Northeastern California, the very last part of the state to be explored and colonized by non-Indians.

All three Riddell boys were close, but Fritz and his brother Harry were inseparable, best friends who did everything together almost from birth right up until World War II, when international events forced them to go their separate ways for almost the first time. In the mid to late 1920's the two youngest Riddell boys would ride to school bareback, one behind the other, on the wise old family horse. The horse would be turned loose to graze outside the small Susanville schoolhouse alongside the other kid's horses while the children attended to the three Rs inside. The animal was many times older than the combined ages of both Riddell boys, and, as Fritz used to say when in a humorous mood, smarter too. In any case, the long-suffering animal was patient and withstood much imaginative abuse, extending even to shooting it in the rump with a .22 rifle through the schoolroom window one day when both the teacher and the horse were not looking. This prank was not repeated, as the Riddell boys were hoisted on their own petard, finding that after shooting your own horse, it will A; refuse to be caught, and B: refuse to be ridden.

By the mid-1930's, the now teenaged Fritz and Harry Riddell had outgrown their horse, having pooled their resources and bought a second-hand 1927 Ford Model T Roadster Pickup Truck. This rig was used in their archaeological explorations of Lassen County and beyond. The vehicle would be loaded with cooking gear, extra cans of gas, their tent, shovels, and recording gear, and they would set off with extra tires lashed to the rear wheels for additional traction (an early form of "duellies"), the 20 hp engine straining all the way. The Riddell boys scrimped and saved in order to buy gasoline for their expeditions; gas only cost 10 cents a gallon then, but as Fritz used to say, so did a loaf of bread, and they had to eat before they could go play Howard Carter off on the Madeleine Plains. By the time they were teenagers, Fritz and Harry had become self-taught

archaeologists, self-motivated and completely self-sufficient in ways that cannot even be conceived of by modern-day field workers. They were responsible for finding and recording hundreds of the very first archaeological sites ever put on the map in Northeastern California and adjacent Western Nevada.

By the late 1930's the Riddell family had moved to the bright lights of Sacramento, and both younger boys had decided to become professional archaeologists. Eventually the old Model T was sold to a friend, a newer used car was bought, and Fritz and Harry Riddell, now Sacramento college boys, became dazzling urbanites. How the decidedly non-German Francis Allen Riddell got his Teutonic nick-name of "Fritz" is a story involving another founding father of California Archaeology, and a firm friend of Riddell's: Franklin Fenenga. When Francis A. Riddell and his brother Harry enrolled at Sacramento Junior College in the late 1930's, they were drawn to a very small group of like-minded fellows, all of them budding archaeologists, led by the University President, Jeremiah B. Lillard. The archaeology students at Sacramento J.C. included Franklin Fenenga. Since "Frank" had already been claimed by Fenenga, and the younger of the two Riddell brothers didn't care to be called "Francis" outside his family, Fenenga bestowed the nickname "Fritz" more as a joke than anything else. The archaeological *nom de guerre* stuck, but to his family, however, "Fritz" would remain Francis all his life.

When the war came Fritz volunteered for the Marines, and was attached to Marine Aviation as ground crew (ordnance) for the close aviation support that came to characterize the Marine amphibious way of waging war in the Pacific. Fritz ended up in the 3rd Marines, rising through the ranks to finish the war as a Tech Sergeant. He served in three different campaigns, the longest and most difficult being the protracted struggle for Okinawa late in the war. Fritz survived at least one suicide charge by fanatical holdouts on Okinawa, and could claim the unusual distinction of being one of the few ordnance men to have blown up his own airplane through an incompletely secured bomb dropping prematurely. Fritz was a proud ex-Marine for the rest of his life, and, like many, felt and believed "Once a Marine, always a Marine." He was even prouder still that one of his own daughters joined

the Corps, became an officer, and married a Marine so competent he is presently in line to become Sergeant Major of the entire Corps.

After mustering out, Fritz returned to college, this time the University of California at Berkeley, where he rejoined his old friend and fellow ex-Marine Frank Fenenga. Fritz worked all over California as an undergraduate and graduate student. At Berkeley Riddell began to enjoy the novel experience of doing archaeology and getting paid for it; he began a life-long commitment to public archaeology there, working through the then-new California Archaeological Survey. His archaeological horizons expanded greatly when he got the chance to go to Peru to do fieldwork. He also began publishing papers and monographs on archaeology, California Indian ethnology, and other subjects, beginning his long career as a scientific writer. Fritz somehow found the time to work in Nevada and Alaska while a Berkeley student, and returned to Peru several times before leaving Berkeley with a Master's Degree in 1956.

There are many entertaining stories about Fritz's field exploits during his Berkeley days, from those which feature him as an ace chicken thief, stealing live poultry at night so as to keep the UC Berkeley field crew fed, to those in which the fearless ex-Marine stood up to a charging young bull, defending his fellow Berkeley archaeologists, who, burdened with field equipment, had ill-advisedly taken a short-cut through a cow pasture. According to eyewitnesses, Fritz stopped the bull dead in its tracks with a thrown rock, hitting him right between the eyes in a spectacular feat of marksmanship. Unfortunately, however, the lithic missile also killed the animal just as its angry owner showed up to demand payment from the intrepid, impoverished, archaeologists.

Fritz became the head of the California State Indian Museum in 1956. The Museum was a showpiece for California Indian culture, located within Sutter's Fort in Sacramento. Here many thousands of California school children got their first exposure to the Indians of their state and to archaeology through field trips to Fritz's museum. In addition to ethnographic exhibits and outreach programs by California Indians, the Museum incorporated outstanding prehistoric and historic archaeological displays showing off the richness

and diversity of the Golden State. In the late 1950's, while turning the dusty old museum into one of Sacramento's star attractions, Riddell also became the man to see when archaeological questions arose within the halls of state government.

Postwar California was expanding in population by leaps and bounds, and one result was that archaeological sites were suffering as never before. Until 1960, any attempts at archaeological protection were *ad hoc* at best. There were no laws on the books protecting sites and no professional archaeologists on any state payroll outside the University system empowered to even find and record such sites, much less with the authority to protect them. Fritz Riddell changed all that, by becoming the very first public archaeologist in California, or, for that matter, in the entire Western United States. In 1960 he became the head (also the only) archaeologist for the California Department of Beaches and Parks, later known as the Department of Parks and Recreation. Fritz was stretched so thin, as the saying went, that you could read a magazine right through him. He built up his program, however, fought seemingly endless budget battles, and hired a gradually increasing staff to at least try to show the archaeological flag in all parts of California. The early and mid-1960's were the greatest period of major freeway, aqueduct, and reservoir building in California, and Fritz Riddell was the most important point man in the race to see that at least some archaeological sites could be either preserved or studied before they were lost forever, bulldozed away for a new interstate or submerged beneath yet another dam built for this thirsty land.

Throughout the 1960's, '70's and early '80's, Fritz Riddell worked at breakneck pace from the Oregon line to the Mexican border, putting out archaeological fires whenever possible, commissioning scientific studies of sites that would be lost to one construction project or another, and occasionally, much less often than he would hope, succeeding in turning some important California Indian prehistoric site or California Historical landmark into California's newest state park, with the probability that for once, something would be saved relatively intact. Despite the killing pace, and the mind-numbing exposure to brainless bureaucrats on a daily basis, Fritz never lost his intellectual curiosity, nor his

enthusiasm for archaeology. His energy and optimism were infectious throughout his professional career, and generations of people who caught the archaeology "bug" caught it from Fritz Riddell.

And, Fritz continued to work closely with the California Indian people he had loved and respected since his early childhood, recording old lifeways which were fast-disappearing, interviewing Indians so as to find out how his agency might be more responsive to them and in some cases helping preserve Indian traditions that might have vanished otherwise. One of his proudest accomplishments was helping the Honey Lake Maidu revive their annual Bear Dance in Janesville in the late 1970's. Fritz had been present at several Bear dances decades earlier, and had witnessed and extensively photographed one of the last ones performed in traditional fashion in the early 1950's. He worked closely with the younger Maidu who wanted to hold the Bear Dance for the first time in almost 30 years, and saw the project through to its completion.

Fritz was so pleased and proud that this dangerously moribund tradition was alive again, that he invited California Governor Jerry Brown to visit the first "new" performance of this ancient California Indian ritual, and to everybody's delight, the governor accepted. Unfortunately, the governor's motorcade was delayed, and the dancers, after waiting around for the big cheese hour after hour, decided to start the dance without him. Even worse, when the governor finally arrived, instead of moving over to the Bear Dance, he stayed by his car, hobnobbing with his aides, all of whom were pressing one form or other of urgent business upon him that needed immediate attention. When Fritz Riddell saw what was happening, he grabbed a spoonful of acorn mush, waded through the gubernatorial toadies, parting them like Moses at the Red Sea, and shoved the acorn mush into the governor's open mouth. This had the twin benefits of simultaneously getting the governor's attention and also shutting him up. Fritz then dragged Jerry Brown over to the circle of dancers, handed him a willow wand, telling him:

"The bear is ready to dance, and he doesn't wait for ANYBODY."

After a decent interval, the governor fled back to Sacramento, convinced that he had barely escaped with his life from that State Parks and Recreation madman Riddell and his Indian allies.

After more than two decades as the preeminent state archaeologist, the pace began to catch up with Fritz, and by the beginning of the 1980's he began to confront the first of a long series of health problems that would have made a lesser man give up. Diagnosed with cancer in his salivary glands, Riddell kept his ailment quiet and even while undergoing radiation treatments, went to work every day, enduring the excruciating pain in order to continue on with his mission of saving archaeological sites and to ensure that his Department was in good hands archaeologically speaking. Riddell retired from the State Parks and Recreation Department in 1983 and, characteristically, immediately began to work twice as hard, not on just one New World continent, but now on two.

After his retirement, Fritz resumed his commitment to Andean archaeology. He created the Institute for Peruvian Studies and raised funds to promote archaeological field research in South America. By the 1990's, Fritz was leading an annual field expedition to Peru, working closely with Peruvian archaeologists, some of them the children of friends he originally made in the 1950's while a Berkeley student, and offering dozens of North American archaeologists and volunteers their first taste of Latin American archaeology. Admired and beloved just as much by his Peruvian colleagues, students and fellow-field workers as he was by his North American colleagues, Fritz was awarded an honorary Doctorate by the Catholic University of Santa Maria in Arequipa in 1998.

During the final two decades of his existence, Fritz's life was a paradox. He now had the time and the financial security to do the kind of archaeology he wanted to do, instead of the endless bureaucratic wranglings that characterized the worst part of his longtime job as Chief Archaeologist of the State of California. Unfortunately, just as limitless archaeological opportunities seemed to beckon, fate dealt him a series of very cruel hands. From the early 1980's until his final hours Fritz was in discomfort every day, often suffering excruciating pain of the kind that would have felled an ox. He suffered through

innumerable operations, incisions, excisions, bone grafts, and so forth and so on, fighting four different kinds of cancer in succession, beating each one, never giving an inch. You always hesitated to ask him how he was doing, for fear that the answer would be just what you dreaded, but Fritz always turned his response into a joke:

"How do I feel? I feel like I have one foot in the grave, and the other on a banana peel!"

Or, when feeling a little more chipper:

"Last week I found myself talking to St. Peter, but I flunked the entrance exam and he sent me back. Seems like he is doing the "catch and release" bit like all these California trout fishermen when the game warden shows up"

Fritz Riddell was the bravest man most of us ever knew. During his 20-year struggle with cancer he never slowed down, and never lost his wonderful sense of humor. Sympathetic and understanding with those younger than him who suffered from much less grievous ailments, Fritz showed all of us how to deal with medical adversity through his own shining example. We all marveled at his ability to simply ignore excruciating pain and embarrassing medical inconveniences and get on with the job at hand. The final two decades of his life were one of the most productive periods of his career as an archaeologist. Fritz did California archaeological fieldwork without letup, lectured for CDF and other state agencies sometimes as frequently as nine times in a single year, and the big archaeological event of each year remained the annual research trip to Peru. Despite his recurring trips to the hospital, Fritz never lost his optimistic outlook on life, nor his perspective. When onlookers would remark upon his nonchalance in the face of pain and discomfort, which included constantly changing dressings on unhealed wounds, downing a pharmacopoeia of pills every day, and his inability to eat any but the most insipid and easily chewed and digested foods, Fritz would always say:

"Yes, it's a bother, but when you consider the alternative..."

Francis A. Riddell looked cancer right in the eye every day for more than 20 years, and every day he kicked cancer right in the teeth. He died

still victorious over the many kinds of cancers that he had battled for so long, for it was a heart attack that finally killed him.

Anyone who was ever privileged to do fieldwork with Fritz Riddell quickly came to the realization that not only was he completely at home in any kind of natural environment, but that he was the best field man most of us would ever know. Fritz had an uncanny ability to "read" terrain, be it sun-blasted desert, rocky, conifer-covered uplands, windswept coastal bluffs, or even flat valley lands covered in waist-high grass. Fritz could look at the ground and tell you what had happened right there, five hundred or a thousand years before. He usually knew intuitively where the archaeological sites were long before anybody else accompanying him did, having mentally cataloged the possible patterns back when Herbert Hoover was still president, and then simply applied the local situation to his vast mental array of comparative examples. Fritz could find elusive archaeological features such as shallow housepits or faded petroglyphs on shadowed rocks that most other archaeologists would walk right past.

Because of his close study of local Indians as a boy, and his continued friendship with traditional Indians in California, Peru, and other parts of the New World, Fritz had an amazing ability to understand vanished technologies and figure out elusive elements in archaeological sites lost through the accidents of preservation. In a very real sense, Fritz was archaeology on the hoof. One brief example serves to illustrate his amazing range of knowledge about Indian technology. At one point while on a field survey, a younger archaeologist found an unusual artifact and brought it to Fritz for a quick I.D.: Fritz pronounced it a "gopher hook," which resulted in blank stares all around. He then proceeded to explain how various groups of California Indians went "fishing" for ground squirrels by sliding thin poles with such dry-land "hooks" attached to their ends down rodent burrows so as to snag their dinner.

Through a complete fluke, in the mid-1990's, Fritz encountered the old friend he had sold his Model T pickup truck to before the war. He found that his old buddy not only still had it (Frontispiece), but also was willing to sell it back to him for the original purchase price, \$7.00. So, Fritz embarked upon yet another historical

restoration project, this time, of his own first-ever car, six years younger than himself. And, he managed to work this wonderful story into his teaching act, most recently though CDF as late as October 2001.

One of the most common questions CDF archaeologists have been asked by foresters over the past decade goes something like this:

“You know, when I took your archaeology class, there was this great old guy with a handlebar moustache and a twinkle in his eye who made the whole thing enjoyable... is he still teaching?”

To which, we would happily reply, “Yep, he still is, and we don’t know how he does it.” Then we would note what a treat it was teaching with Fritz Riddell and just being around him. The exchange would usually end with a Fritz joke; either one about him, or one he had told remembered. Sadly, we must now answer this question, still being asked, with a completely different and very depressing response.

All who knew him cannot believe that Fritz has left us, and we think of him, and miss him, every day. The world is a much poorer place without him; a little less exciting, a little less fun, a little less entertaining. A measure of his popularity was signaled by the number of friends who turned out for his memorial service, held with very little advance notice almost immediately after his unexpected death. Around two hundred people dropped what they were doing and came to Sacramento, many driving down from Redding, Susanville, and points north, or up from as far away as Los Angeles.

During his long life Fritz Riddell not only changed California archaeology for the better, but he also made California a much better place for all of us. Fritz may now be gone, but he is not really dead, for he lives on within all of us. He left his mark on everyone who worked with him or was taught by him, and we are all richer for having known him.

Fritz was our leader and our friend.