Title: Osteological Analysis of an Historic Burial at Fort Ross, California

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OSTEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF AN HISTORIC BURIAL
AT FORT ROSS, CALIFORNIA

Peter D. Schulz

On April 21, 1972 an archaeological crew under the direction of William Pritchard discovered evidence of human skeletal remains near the bottom of what had been thought to be a privy pit or root cellar at Fort Ross. After exposing part of the skull and two loose molars which were assumed to derive from the interment, excavation was discontinued until representatives of the Russian community in San Francisco had been contacted. In the following week an agreement was reached whereby the burial would be exposed by the archaeologists at the site and then be removed for reburial in accordance with Russian Orthodox rites. The author was requested by the State Parks Archeologist to go to Fort Ross to aid in the exposure and retrieve any osteological information possible from the burial. The actual exposure occupied eight hours on April 28, and two hours the morning of April 29. The remains were removed about noon of the latter date.

Materials

The condition of the bones, as anticipated, was extremely poor. The only traces of bone in fact were portions of the cranium, mandible, left and right femur, and left tibia. These bones in turn were so badly decayed that no morphological...
features whatever remained other than gross outline. The two
teeth excavated on April 21 were assigned by the author to the
genus *Sus*, and they may represent the same individual as a suid
jaw found nearer the surface in the same unit.

In addition to these bones, ten tooth crowns or major frag-
ments were exposed several centimeters caudal to the cranium.
These were in association with what appeared to the excavator as
faint traces of the mandible, but they were not in anatomical
position. Only the enamel of the teeth was preserved, and this
was chalky and quite fragile. These teeth which had experienced
dentine exposure exhibited thin-edged circular holes on the occl-
usal surface where the dentine had once been. Since the teeth
were not in position and had lost all trace of roots, it was
not readily evident if they were maxillary or mandibular. The
symmetry of the corresponding pairs argues heavily for derivation
from a single arch.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tooth</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incisors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>This fragment of about half a tooth shows clear and complete absence of shovel-shaping. There is some wear, but no dentine exposure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canines</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Neither exhibits shoveling; both have experienced dentine exposure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premolars</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Both show dentine exposure; one is apparently P1, the other P2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molars 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>All show isolated patches of dentine exposure. All appear to be four-cusped, without accessory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cusplets.

Molar 3 2 Both are tricuspid, appear fully developed and probably fully erupted, but show no wear.

Although the provenience of the teeth may suggest that they are maxillary, the canine morphology struck me impressionistically as being maxillary—a suspicion which is confirmed by the tricuspid nature of the third molars.

Burial Position

The body lay extended, the head almost due magnetic east. The upper surface of the femur shafts, as the burial lay exposed, were somewhat rounded and exhibited no hint of lines asperae. Hence the body rested on its back.

Age

On the basis of third molar eruption, suggested age is ca. 21, with a range of about 17 to 25.

Race

Assuming the recovered dentition was maxillary, the single incisor fragment was from a lateral incisor. This shows absolutely no sign of shoveling. Since Aleuts show shovel-shape frequencies of 100% (Moorhies 1957: 25), and aboriginal Californian frequencies approach this very closely (e.g., Newman 1957: 54), the individual buried at Fort Ross was almost certainly not
a Native American but rather a European.

Sex

It was impossible from the remains recovered to even tentatively suggest a sexual diagnosis on osteological grounds.

Bibliography

Moorhies, C. F. A.


Newman, R. W.


May 12, 1972

cc: F. A. Riddell
    W. E. Pritchard
New Excavations

Findings Show Russ Were in California Before 1812

By William K. Lyon

Highway engineers often come to dig with archaeologists, but in California they can unearth some amazing facts. In fact, some highway builders who a few years ago did not have an interest from a hunk of rock can now spot one at 100 years.

Archaeologists have found that highway builders can help save the past.

The basic idea is simple. Division of Highways excavation plans are sent to advance the Society of California Archaeology at 11 major educational institutions in the state. Just ahead of the excavations, the archaeologists can do their digging while the bulldozers work around them.

Fort Ross Digs

An example is the recent work on the site of more than 160 years of California history by the prehistoric Russian settlement at Fort Ross.

Twelve miles north of Jenner on the Russian River, the site was occupied by Russian colonists for 18 years, from 1812 to 1826. The fort was occupied by Russians as a trade post in 1812 and the remaining buildings were never damaged, including the Russian Orthodox Church, the cemetery, workshops, quarters and the stockade.

In 1812, when Capt. John A. Foss led the first Russian expedition to the Pacifie coast, explorers were hunting sea otters along the California coast. They remained there until 1826, when Capt. John B. Foss returned.

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Russian History In California Advanced Through

Historic Find At

Ft. Ross

SACRAMENTO — A chapter of early California history dating back 130 years was uncovered last week as a result of an archeological survey conducted by the Department of Public Works at Fort Ross State Historic Park in Sonoma County.

Thanks to the state's policy of making exploratory surveys in advance of highway alignments and other public works construction, a grave site and evidence of an early Russian settlement were found by State Park archeologists that pre-dates by at least 20 years the original Russian cemetery located a mile away.

The survey was made using the new right of way for State Highway 1, unexpectedly meeting the historic site and its being recorded.

State Park archeologist William E. Pritchard, project supervisor of the survey team, called the find "an extremely significant discovery. The archeologists proved there were more buildings and burial grounds outside of the stockade than have ever been recorded before."

He added that in the area were the remains of the Russian Blewett Indian village, whose lands were purchased by the Russians from the Russian Indian before the Fort was acquired by California.

Fort Ross, site of a settlement founded in 1812 by the Russians to adjust California's eastern waters for sea otters, remained here until 1849, only 10 years before California joined the Union. When Captain John A. Sutter purchased the supplies and equipment for $400.

Over the next few years, Sutter and the town grew around the building of the stockade and removal of the walls, equipment, and supplies that the Russians left. After 1849, the fort became the center of a large trading area.

The fort was acquired by California in 1869, and the remaining buildings were reduced, including the Orlovka (Slovak), the commandant's quarters, and the surrounding stockade under repair.

The fort was eventually turned over to the California Department of Highway policy of cooperation in archeological survey projects. Information is immediately disseminated by the Department of California Archaeology to other major educational institutions throughout the State. Funding is provided for actual excavation and recovery of worthwhile historical and archeological objects.

The relocation of Ross and the Fort Ross State Historic Park is planned for the summer and will take place in the neighborhood of 600,000. It will provide a new scenic highway which will bypass the Fort and will include a park entrance and parking lot.

Metropolitan Archbishop Peter Kudriavtsev, official of the Russian Orthodox Church, presided over the dedication of the St. John the Baptist College. They will return with the Russian Orthodox Church on June 1 for burial of the remains.