

## ARTIFACTS AND FEATURES SITE RECORDING

The Museum's Coso petroglyph tours are world famous, but you may not be aware that we are active in many other areas related to archaeology. This article is one of an occasional series describing some of the archaeological things we do.

Today we discuss recording (or "recording") of archaeological sites, as applied to Federal lands and State lands. An archaeological "site" is a locality where past human habitation has occurred. Its presence is usually identified by artifacts, features, or landforms visible on the surface. (Sometimes sites are also discovered based on geophysical testing or remote sensing, but that will be the topic of a future article). Recordation is the formal term for documenting the existence of a site. Maturango Museum archaeologists and volunteers are active in site recordation, mostly in the upper Mojave Desert area.

In the archaeological sense, a "site record" and a "site report" are two distinct things, and, since the world of rock art studies uses the terms differently, the distinction is important. In archaeological terms, a site record is a document which records site location and describes the access route, the nature of the local environment, and descriptive information about the site; it is prepared on forms approved by the State Historic Preservation Office, or SHPO. A site report, by contrast, describes the results of more extensive investigations at a site and is not on SHPO forms. Most site records are very brief, although some are fairly large, while site reports tend to be quite voluminous.

Site records, when completed, are submitted to an Archaeological Information Center (AIC) approved by the SHPO. For Kern County, for example, the AIC is at California State University, Bakersfield, while the AIC for San Bernardino County is at the San Bernardino County Museum. Site records (and also site reports) are cataloged and archived at the AIC, and made available for reference by scholars and by contract archaeology firms. Due to the need to protect archaeological sites from damage, the records and reports are not available to the general public.

Why record sites? First, recordation is the first step in ensuring that sites are protected. Recorded sites are entered into a state-wide data base by the AIC, and both State and Federal law requires that the data base must be consulted whenever a land use (such as a road) is planned which might damage sites. Exactly how this is done is a complex process, with both archaeological and legal aspects, but the bottom line is that sites cannot be indiscriminately destroyed.

Second, recordation creates a valuable data base for studies of ancient population distribution, and, when combined with chronology, hydrology, and plant and animal distributions, gives insights into ancient lifeways. Fran and I will be presenting a paper at the Great Basin Anthropological Conference in October which draws on such data, for example.

Thus, recordation is important to preserving and, in conjunction with ethnography and Native American oral traditions, to understanding the ancient cultures of the people who lived here before us. The Maturango Museum is proud of its contributions to the field.