WINTER 2012: ISSUE 2

ARCH**notes**

Just east of El Presidio de San Francisco lies MacArthur Meadow, a field that has been empty for decades. Based on historic records, it is thought that this field was an ephemeral wetland when both the Ohlone and Spanish lived at the Presidio. During the U. S. Army occupation, the water was redirected into culverts to create a year-round dry area. The Presidio Trust hopes to restore MacArthur Meadow back to its original wetland state, allowing the water to flow freely on its way to Crissy Field Marsh.

MACARTHUR MEADOW ARCHAEOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION TESTING

This summer the Presidio Archaeology Lab's archaeologists, interns, and a team of volunteers worked on identifying archaeological features and artifacts at MacArthur Meadow in preparation for the eventual wetland restoration. While the primary goal was to identify the presence or absence of any archaeological material, a major part of the research design was to look specifically for the Sanchez Adobe, an adobe house built around the late 1820s and owned by the last Mexican Commandant of El Presidio, Francisco Sanchez. The Sanchez family would have been neighbors with the Miramontes and Briones families who lived in similar adobes at nearby El Polín Spring. Several historic documents, such as maps, paintings, and written records, place the Sanchez Adobe and other historic activities in the MacArthur Meadow area.

To begin the project, the archaeologists used augers, which are handheld drilling devices that remove small cylinders of soil. They carefully documented the soil's color, composition, recovered artifacts, and recorded the location of each auger hole. The artifacts were cleaned in the lab and analyzed. (continued on page 2)

ArtiFACTS

For this edition of ArtiFACTS we're presenting some ecoFACTS. Artifacts are objects that were made by humans, while ecofacts are things that were used by people. Common examples are animal bones and plant remains. These are purslane seeds (*Portulaca oleracea*) from a building at El Presidio. Purslane was combined with other plant materials, clay and dung to make adobe bricks. We find plant remains through a process called flotation, which allows us to recover tiny objects such as fish vertebrae, beads, and of course, seeds. We collected flotation samples in our summer 2012 excavation at MacArthur Meadow – stay tuned for the results of that analysis!

L2012.2

FIELD NOTES

(continued from page 1) Some interesting patterns began to emerge from the locations of the artifacts. For example, terracotta (frequently used for roof and floor tiles by the Spanish and Mexican colonists living at El Presidio) was found more abundantly in some areas. Also, some historic ceramics were unearthed hinting at an occupation between 1800 and 1846, just around the time when Sanchez and his family would have lived in the area.

Volunteer Julie and intern Miriam auguring and screening dirt

One meter by one meter excavation units were opened at those auger locations where a higher density of artifacts was found. Excavation was performed using shovels, pick-axes, and trowels and the soil was screened for artifacts by the archaeologists and volunteers. There were a few promising signs that someone was living nearby in the Mexican era, such as a few Mexican era ceramics, however nothing definitive was discovered in the units. Much of the meadow has been disturbed by landscaping and grading, which has pushed the soil around and mixed soil layers from different time periods together. Spanish colonial terracotta tile was often mixed in with copper wires, plastic and bottle glass. This mixing makes it difficult for archaeologists to determine what time period an artifact was from.

Despite a fairly extensive investigation, adobe foundations were not discovered. Excavation did reveal a cobble channel, which was built around the 1930s to carry water from the spring to the rest of the Presidio. While not as old as an adobe, this cobble channel still represents an important feature in the Presidio's past. Upon completion of the excavation, it was determined that the area we currenlty know as MacArthur meadow was likely a wetland during the Sanchez occupation and that the historic adobe would have likely been constructed on higher ground. In the coming years, the search for the Sanchez Adobe may continue with further research and exploration.

ARCHival

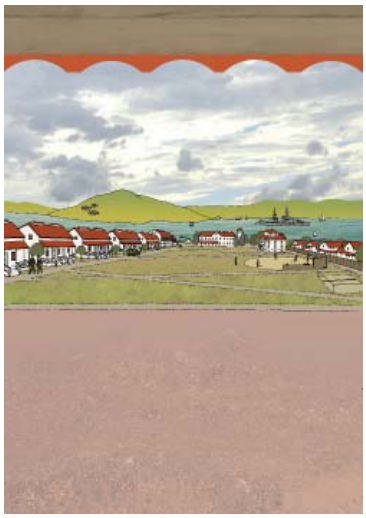
This map was drawn in 1877 but is from a man's memory of the Presidio in 1833. It is called a "memory map" and it is one of the few clues we have about the San Francisco Bay Area landscape in the 1830s. We were especially intrigued by a small marking just outside of the Presidio labeled Fran. Sanchez, possibly indicating the adobe home of Francisco Sanchez. That was just the beginning of a difficult puzzle, though. Can you see any familiar places on the map? The Golden Gate is there, along with the Presidio, El Polín Spring, and Mission Dolores. The puzzle begins when you try to orient the map so that these places line up correctly to north and to each other. If you try it, you will see that it is impossible! You may also notice that the distances are exaggerated in places and compressed in others. Although this map might frustrate a cartographer, archaeologists and historians still consider it a treasure. Archival items like this give us small clues to who was here and what was happening during a time we know little about.

ARCHAEOLOGY INTERN PROJECT REPORTS

Robin Fies

During this summer's internship, all of the interns had to complete an individual project relating to the archaeology at the Presidio. I chose to add to a currently on-going project, the renovation of the Officers' Club on the Main Post. Inside the Officers' Club in the Mesa Room there will eventually be a wonderful exhibit showing how the Officers' Club—one of the oldest buildings in San Francisco—has transitioned through time and through Spanish, Mexican, and American command. In the Mesa Room there are windows that face north out towards the Main Post and San Francisco Bay and my project was to create drafts for artwork that would eventually be installed in the exhibit showing how the view from those windows changed over the years.

El Presidio 1821

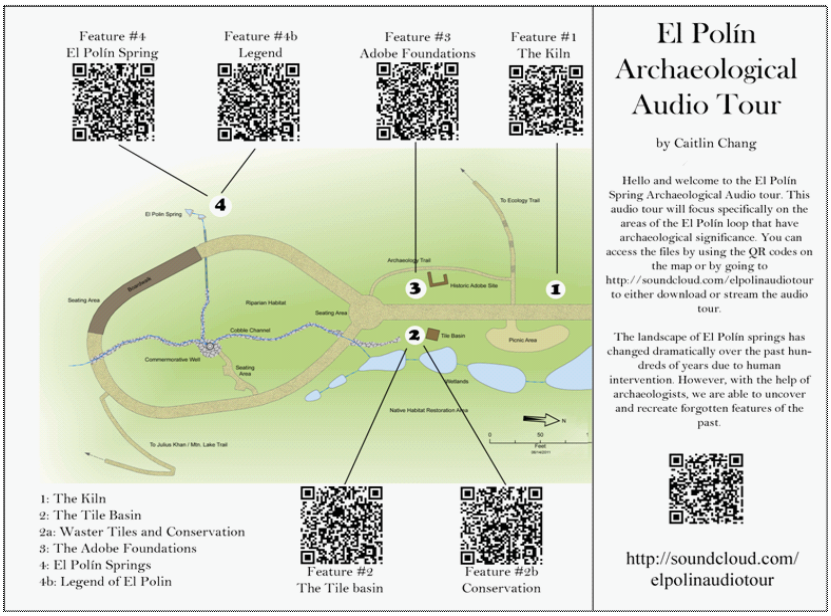


The Presidio 1935

I created four different images representing dates that span the history of El Presidio and each image characterizes a specific period of El Presidio. The first dates to 1790 and shows the fort as it would have stood when it was first founded by the Spanish. The second dates to 1821, representing El Presidio as it would have appeared right after Mexico revolted from colonial Spain. The third image dates to around 1871 and shows the Main Post in the earlier years of its American occupation and after some renovations that were completed during and after the Civil War. Finally, the fourth image shows 1935 and the Main Post as it stood before America began to prepare itself for the trials of World War II.

Caitlin Chang

Part of my time at the Presidio was spent on a personal project where I combined my skills in voice over and audio editing with the archaeology of El Polín in order to make an audio tour. While the El Polín Springs loop has many informative signs, I wanted to reveal the archaeology behind the site. In order to accomplish this, I interviewed several Presidio archaeologists who have worked on El Polín for many years and were there when the original features were excavated.



El Polín Archaeologial Audio Tour

The audio tour explores the archaeology of four features: The kiln, the tile basin, the adobe and the spring itself. Only visitors who listen to the audio tour will learn about the kiln because it is currently buried and unmarked between the bathrooms and the adobe. The audio tour also details the conservation of the tile basin and how the adobe foundations were found. Many visitors also do not realize the history of the tiles surrounding the spring and how they were repurposed by the US military. Many of these archaeological and historic details are not present on signs, so it was my goal to make this knowledge accessible to visitors. If you would like to listen to the tour, please go to http://soundcloud.com/elpolinaudiotour or download a map with QR codes at http://www.mediafire.com/view/?7ghiai5zy6y5i93.

ARCHAEOLOGY INTERN PROJECT REPORTS

Miriam Manda

YMCA Ceramics Camp Summer 2012

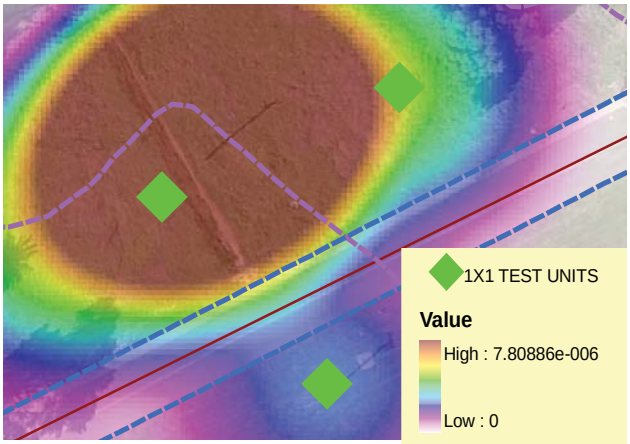
When we were first given the opportunity to decide on the topics of our individual projects, I was instantly drawn to the public aspect of the Heritage Program as I came to this internship with a passion for working towards taking archaeology beyond the academic context in which I was initially introduced to the subject. I began on an exciting project documenting and investigating public outreach at the Presidio. My project worked towards outlining and identifying what the aims and goals of the Heritage Program are, who plays a role in defining them, and how the Heritage Program is achieving these goals. Additionally, I sought to record the public's interests and experiences at the Presidio and use this feedback to suggest ways the Heritage Program could make improvements toward their public outreach efforts.

I conducted individual interviews with the Heritage Program staff, students at the Presidio Archaeology Lab's Ceramics Camp, and summer volunteers. I talked with neighborhood residents, and distributed visitor surveys at the public outreach booth at the MacArthur Meadow excavation site. My project revealed to me the diverse public that the Presidio has, as well as the importance of the staff understanding who their public is, and how this information is important in making decisions about public programming. As defined by the staff, everyone who visits the park is the public! Some of the aims and goals the staff outlined included reaching a broader public, working towards educating and engaging the public, and working towards creating a better understanding of the Presidios history.
My project was very informative and telling of the many way the Presidio is working toward engaging and educating its public.

Nick Triozzi

Following an auger survey by archaeologists in MacArthur Meadow three test units were placed to further investigate cultural deposits. A simple hand-drawn map recorded notes on artifacts in the field and was used to judge the best possible locations for test units for the research goals. This hand dawn map took into account frequency and depth of cultural material as well as the artifacts themselves. After the excavations had begun the data was entered and an electronic map was generated as part of my internship project.

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a tool employed by archaeologists to recognize and interpret spatial patterns. A GIS was used to analyze the auger recovery material as part of a project to justify the placement of 1 meter by 1 meter test units in MacArthur Meadow. For each auger, the density of terra cotta (a typical building material used by Spanish and Mexican colonists) was calculated. The GIS was able to highlight patterns in higher density across the entire meadow. Also mapped were the locations of terracotta, colonial ceramics, and any other useful diagnostic artifacts.



The dark brown color indicates a high density of terra cotta, justifying why test units were placed in that area.

The density seems to overlap with locations of some significant cultural material. Terracotta is a fairly reliable artifact for dating a site. This is why this GIS considers terra cotta densities exclusively. Since it is an architectural component it may suggest possible locations of a structure. The GIS made it easy to suggest future locations of test units because it synthesized the data into an easily interpretable format. Technology such as this is very useful in allowing archaeologists to better understand history.

VOLUNTEER VOICE
Ella Middleton

Volunteering with the Presidio Archaeology Lab has been a tremendous learning experience for me. When I first arrived—a music major between my freshman and sophomore years at Vassar College—I had a hazy notion of archaeology as a cool science that involved digging in the ground to learn about history. To be honest, I didn't even know that archaeologists didn't study dinosaur fossils. I certainly didn't know what an auger was, how to take a soil sample, or tell the difference between brick and terra cotta. Now I do.

Ella cleaning artifacts in the lab

In my short time working here, I have been given the opportunity to try out many of the facets of what archaeologists here do. I've helped little kids make adobe bricks with Jules; I've augered and screened dirt in MacArthur meadow with Kari, Starla, and the interns; I've worked in the lab and the field with Liz and fabulous adult volunteers; and I've even helped build a stone foundation with Nabil, the visiting Egyptian stonemason. It is not often that a volunteer with as little experience as I gets to work side by side with amazingly knowledgeable—and amazingly down-to-earth—professionals. Not only have I learned a whole lot about a fascinating science, I have felt like part of the community here at the Lab.

As I go back to school this fall, I may forget the difference between coal and slag, but I will definitely remember the incredible experience of working with such fun, inspiring people and plunging into something completely new. I have a much greater interest in and appreciation for archaeology now. And if nothing else, one thing will always stick with me: Archaeologists don't dig dinosaurs!

EDU.CURIOUS

Q: Do you always dig up broken bits or are some of the artifacts whole?

—Ceci from Spring Valley Elementary

A: Yes, we do find whole objects. Artifacts made with materials that are very strong, like stone and metal, are less likely to break and be in pieces. Much of what archaeologists find is made of more breakable material though, like pottery and animal bones. We are able to use the small pieces to reconstruct the whole object. So, even the smallest fragment can give us the information we use to understand what people were doing in the past. While whole objects are great, we love the broken bits too!

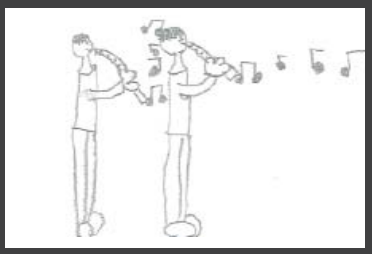
—Kari Jones, Archaeologist

EDU.CATALOG

Artifact: Flute
Color: Dark brown
Size: Long!

People still use flutes today to make music!

—Lucia, Grade 1
St. Brigid Elementary



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

WINTER EVENTS

December 12, 7p.m.-9p.m. - 103 Montgomery Street (Montgomery St. Barracks)
Join us for this special program with James Delgado, international shipwreck expert and maritime archaeologist. Come learn about the variety of shipwrecks hidden deep beneath the bay as Dr. Delgado speaks of sunken treasures in the Golden Gate Strait. Dr. Delgado will be introduced by co-author and National Park Service historian Stephen Haller. No RSVP required.

January 30-March 31, Wednesdays-Sundays 11a.m.-5p.m. - 103 Montgomery St.
The Heritage Program Workshop will be a public exhibition of the design, content, and program planning for the Heritage Program opening in the Officer's Club in 2014.

All programs are free

Find out more about these and other events at the Presidio on our web site, http://www.presidio.gov/calendar.

PRESIDIO ARCHAEOLOGY LAB

Address
49 Moraga Avenue
Post Office Box 29052
San Francisco CA, 94129-0052

Phone
(415) 561-ARCH (2724)

Email us or sign up for the newsletter
archaeology@presidiotrust.gov

Presidio Archaeology Lab
P.O. Box 29052
San Francisco, CA 94129-0052