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THE FOOTHILLS OF THE SITES QUADRANGLE:
A HISTORY OF SELECTED LAND USES

*a good paper, you chose
a topic that was small enough
and struck well to your hand.*

*Note:
~~omissions~~
other corrections*

*As you noted, it would
be a good idea to add
a map of your own.*

A-

oral reports

Book ✓

MR ✓

Final ✓

by
Glenn Wallace

for
Geography 300
Dr. Trussell

January 5, 1970

Course A

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INTRODUCTION

A Description

The low rolling foothills of the Inner Coast Range, from the Orland area south, face the Sacramento Valley as if they were the children of the mountains behind all lined up for a group portrait. The smaller foothills in front, seated randomly, rounded, like overturned bowls of various sizes, naked, their smooth skin the color of wheat, except for the suddenly appearing and suddenly disappearing green of Winter and Spring. Immediately behind them the larger, taller foothills appear to lie sideways, elongated in shape, but still rounded in feature, naked, except for rare scattered patches of dark green oak, their skin smooth except for the roughness of occasional rock outcroppings. Behind them are the hills also elongated, clothed in dark green oak, and behind the hills, the mountains stand.

Purpose

The foothills though, hold a peculiar fascination because of their sameness of appearance and because of the scarcity of cultural features upon them. This paper results from an investigation of past and future land uses within the foothill area of the Sites Quadrangle which is demarcated on that map, ~~and is~~ enclosed with this paper.

During the past two decades few noticeable changes have occurred within the area. The primary and only continuous economic activities have been sheep grazing during the Winter and Spring and dry grain farming on the more gentle slopes facing the Sacramento Valley. The low intensity of these land uses and the resultant low economic yields, provide further motivation for this study.¹

As an investigation of past and future land uses, this study will attempt to answer the following questions. What other significant land uses has this area supported in the past? What noticeable landscape changes has man wrought as a result of these activities? What future land uses are planned for this area?

¹Interviews with landholder and sheep rancher Lawrence Urrita revealed that natural grazing in this area during Winter and Spring supports from $\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 sheep per acre. Robert Johnson dry farms in the area and receives between forty and sixty-five dollars per acre gross income.

BACKGROUND

Physiography and Geology

Physiographically and geologically this area is typical of the narrow belt of foothills that rim the west side of the Sacramento Valley. The area is drained principally by Stone Corral Creek and Funks Slough both of which are ^{intermittent} streams, ~~which is~~ typical of the foothill region. All of the streams flowing eastward from the Interior Coast Ranges to the Sacramento Valley between Stony Creek in the North and Cache Creek in the South are ^{intermittent}.

The western margin of the area includes the eastern slope of a ridge of hills which strike ^{North-South} and reach to about 1,000 feet elevation within the area. These hills are paralleled to the East by two rows of foothills, the summits of which average about 600 and 400 feet respectively. Further to the East the foothills become somewhat more scattered and ^{lose} their ^{North-South} elongation. The ^{Eastern} margin of the area falls on the gentle slope of the almost inconspicuous terrace that rims the Sacramento Valley.

During Carboniferous time the area was occupied by a sea. Sea invasions also occurred through Triassic and well into Jurassic time. During late Jurassic a period of mountain

making occurred. The foothills are mainly composed of Upper Cretaceous deposits of softly consolidated calcareous sandstone, siltstone and claystone. Cretaceous time was followed by the Laramide Revolution. During this epoch the Inner Coast Ranges were folded, uplifted and eroded. Deposition took place through Pliocene time and into Pleistocene time. The Tertiary deposits consisting chiefly of impure silty consolidated pebble to cobble conglomerate were mildly uplifted and dissected during the Cascadian Revolution, and the alluvial deposits of Pleistocene and late Pliocene age were eroded and redeposited as young alluvium during the late Pleistocene and Recent periods.¹

So this important to regional geology?

The foothills are the remnants of a series of parallel monoclinical ridges which strike ⁿNorth-^sSouth and dip westward toward the anticline which has eroded leaving Antelope Valley. The interrupted nature of the ridges of foothills is due primarily to differential erosion, although some faulting has also taken place. Stone Corral Creek and Funks Slough flow alternately eastward and southward through the area as they cut through the ridges and follow monoclinical valleys respectively. Because of this uniclinal shifting the streams show alternately subsequent and consequent characteristics. The beds of these streams are incised ten to twelve feet into the alluvium through

¹Frank F. Harradine, "Soils of Colusa County California" (Berkeley, California, June 1948), p. 3.

which they meander.¹

Indians of the Area

There are no recorded Indian habitations within the area, however, the Sites area was occupied by Indians belonging to the Penutian family who were of Wintun stock.² Very little has been done on the Indians of this particular area despite the fact that their neighbors in all directions have received considerable attention. The tribe that inhabited the Sites area was known as the Cohelmemseel.³ To the East their territory extended out onto the valley floor about half way to the Sacramento River, or to about where Maxwell and temporary Interstate 5 are now located.⁴ As for their economic activities they were primarily a gathering people. They subsisted on the acorns gathered from the oak trees that grow in profusion throughout the Inner Coast Range. They also gathered seeds from the grasses of the area, grasshoppers and grubworms, "(hence their appellation of 'Diggers' by the early white settlers)." *— who is being quoted here?* Sometimes they would kill an antelope or other kind

¹Robert D. Brown Jr., and Ernest I. Rich, "Geologic Map of the Lodoga Quadrangle Glenn and Colusa Counties, California" Map OM-210, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Geological Survey, 1961).

²A. L. Kroeber, Handbook of the Indians of California (Berkeley: California Book Co., 1953) p. 348.

³Hubert H. Bancroft, The Native Races of the Pacific States (5 vols.; New York, 1874) I, p.

⁴Charles D. McComish and Rebecca T. Lambert, History of Colusa and Glenn Counties (Los Angeles: Historic Book Co., 1918) p. 39.

of game when:

the effort would not prove too exacting on their breath and perspiration Hunger alone compelled them to make some exertion in search of food, but they labored no further than was necessary to secure a supply of anything that would sustain life¹

Early Explorations by White Men

The first recorded visit of a white man to the area occurred during the Summer of 1844. John Bidwell, accompanied by an Indian, camped on a slough some miles west of Colusa. According to Bidwell's account,

The next day we went directly across a large plain. It was a hot terrifically hot day, and we found no water in our march except toward night, and this was so salty that neither ourselves nor our animals could drink it.²

Rodgers states that, "This evidently was the salt lake on Peter Peterson's farm, near the present town of Sites" Bidwell further recounted, "We were seldom or never out of sight of game, --deer, elk, antelope, and grizzly bears,"³

¹Justus H. Rogers, Colusa County Its History and Resources (Orland, California, 1891). pp. 30-31.

²Ibid. p. 49.

³Ibid. p. 45.

CHRONOLOGY OF SELECTED LAND USES

The Stone Corral--Open Range Grazing

Cattlemen began using the area soon after Bidwell's exploration. The Stone Corral was used as early as 1846 by the Mexicans, who used this place for a camping ground. They called it the Stone Corral because of its mountaneous sides.¹ This corral soon took the name of Swift's Stone Corral. Capt. Granville P. Swift settled on Stony Creek near Orland in 1847, and rodeoed his vast cattle herds once a year at three different points, one of which was the Stone Corral where there was, "a spring of living water that lasted the year round." Swift is reputed to have built an adobe house near the corral sometime between 1844 and 1846.²

Cattle grazing soon brought permanent settlement. The first recorded permanent settlements were made in 1853, both in the adjacent Antelope Valley; and at the Stone Corral where Gus and Ben Spear settled with their mother. They sold out shortly to Steele and McChord. Also in 1853, T.J. and James Tolbert located on Funk Slough near the Plains.³ With the

¹ Colusa Sun, Colusa, Calif., Sept. 21, 1908, p. 5.

² Jessie Sturroch Shoopman, "The Stone Corral," Wagon Wheels I, No. 3, (November 1951) p. 4.

³ Will S. Green, History of Colusa County California (San Francisco: Elliot and Moore, 1880) Reprinted 1950 by Sacramento Lithograph Co. pp. 39-40

exception of ^{settles} along the Sacramento River, settlement in Colusa County occurred first in the foothills where water was available for stock rather than on the plains.¹ Between 1847 and 1852 the cattle that grazed in the area were chiefly of the long horned Spanish scrub stock. These began to be supplanted by American breeds of cattle and by sheep after 1852.² At the Stone Corral beneath a large oak tree a cabin was built purportedly from timber shipped around Cape Horn.³ In the election of 1853, to determine the site of the county seat, the Stone Corral was among the five locations receiving votes.⁴ Permanent settlement, however, brought fencing of land and the Stone Corral's usefulness declined. In 1908 the Native Sons of the Golden West rebuilt and straightened the stone fence and erected pillars on both sides of the gate, upon which they placed the inscription, "Erected by John Steele 1885 and reconstructed by the Colusa Parlor N.S.G.W., 1908." It is unfortunate that the inscription is inaccurate and doesn't indicate the true historical significance of the Stone Corral.

The appearance of the white man and a change of grazing were apparently coincided with the rapid decline of the original human inhabitants. No record was made of the abandonment of

¹ Ibid. pp. 51-52.

² Rogers, Resources. p. 72.

³ "Pictures From the Past," Colusa Sun-Herald. November 1, 1962. p. 4.

⁴ Green, Colusa County, p. 44.

the Cohelmemseel village and the dispersal of its inhabitants. It is possible that this occurred in 1844, because John Bidwell reported that, "We observed many Indian villages, which had been abandoned because the springs had dried up. The Summer of 1844 was an exceptionally dry one."¹ The disappearance of the Indians was accompanied by the disappearance of the larger game animals that were originally so plentiful.

As early as 1853 the Elk were pretty much all cleared out. (The antelope) . . . were more numerous than any other of the larger animals . . . they disappeared suddenly from the Plains about 1853 or 1854 with occasional bands of a half a dozen appearing as late,--perhaps, as 1865.²

*check a dictionary
 to see where word
 can be right.*

The Stone Quarries

As the foothill area became fenced, grazing, which had persisted, and dry grain farming became the dominant economic activities of the area. However, in 1886 it appeared that the area was about to experience a boom. The Colusa and Lake Railroad was formed and construction of the narrow gauge railroad between Colusa Junction and Sites was begun.³ This railroad opened the way for the sandstone quarries, the first of which was opened in November of 1891 by O'Neil and Abbott, at what is now called the upper quarry. Shortly thereafter, S.C. Sisk and R. S. Burgett began quarrying at the lower quarry. W. L. Watts, a field assistant for the State Mining Bureau, also

¹ Rogers, Resources. p. 48.

² Green, Colusa County. p. 62.

³ Rogers, Resources. p. 222.

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reported that,

. . . developments have shown the stone to be of uniformly good quality and easily worked Owing to the exceptional advantages of position and transportation sandstone can be delivered in San Francisco from this quarry at sixty cents per cubic foot.¹

The advent of the railroad and the quarries brought a boom to the area. In the flat area between the quarries a town sprang up called Quarryville. By 1896 the Colusa Daily Sun reported that,

Our little burg (Quarryville) has taken on quite a lively appearance. Several new houses are under construction for the use of workmen One hundred or more men will be at work in the near future.²

This initial activity centered primarily around the upper quarry managed by David O'Neil, who in 1897, sold out to the Pacific Bridge Company.³

Quarryville consists of ten or 12 new houses built by the company for the workmen, a hotel and saloon besides the large machinery sheds A large channeling machine is arranged on a track along the hillside Its capacity is sixty square feet per day The cranes are capable of lifting 15 tons. The gang saws are the largest used in any quarry in the world (T)he outlay so far for machinery and buildings has cost . . . something over \$42,000.⁴

In 1900, the McGilvray Stone Company began operations at the lower quarry.⁵ This company was apparently more aggressive

¹W. L. Watts, "Report on Colusa County Mineral Resources" Colusa Daily Sun. Feb., 15, 1893.

²Colusa Daily Sun. Nov. 12, 1896.

³Ibid. March 20, 1897. ⁴Ibid. Jan. 12, 1897

⁵Ibid. Feb. 12, 1900.

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than its competitor across the creek. In 1902, the upper quarry was sold to the Colusa Sandstone Company.¹ The two quarries produced 118,054 yards of sandstone valued at \$289,454 during 1905.² The following year they received an unexpected boost as a result of the earthquake and fire in San Francisco. Buildings constructed of their stone, such as the Ferry Building, Flood Building and the Shreve Building survived with little damage.³ Despite its resulting good reputation as a building material, the use of sandstone declined as less expensive reinforced concrete gained popularity. In 1915 the Colusa and Lake Railroad was forced to abandon service to Sites as they were averaging only fifty dollars per month freight revenue from the quarries.⁴ Using trucks to haul the stone, the McGilvray Quarry remained in operation briefly, but in 1917 the quarries were divested of their equipment and Quarryville disappeared almost as quickly as it ^{had} appeared.⁵ The McGilvray quarry reopened in 1925, but operations were short lived.⁶ Today there is no trace of Quarryville itself, and only the faces of the quarries remain.

¹Colusa Sandstone Co., "Articles of Incorporation" filed Sept. 15, 1902, Colusa County Recorder's Office, Colusa Calif.

²Colusa Tri-Weekly Sun. March 30, 1905.

³Ibid. May 3, 1906

⁴California, Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission, VI, Application No. 1550, Decision No. 2324, April 23, 1915.

⁵Colusa Daily Sun. Oct. 20, 1916.

⁶Wagon Wheels. I, No. 3, p. 3.

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*Orchard was planted
 since should be planted
 4 miles - ground -*

Mill's Orchard

With the demise of the quarries a new land use developed in the area. "In 1912 James Mills, bought the Houx Ranch . . . and proceeded to plant a lemon orchard said to be the largest in the world. . . . 724 acres of lemons, 40 acres of oranges, 240 acres of almonds and 20 acres of pomeloes,"¹ were planted on the foothills to the east and north of the Stone Corral. In addition, olives apricots, and peaches were planted. The orchards were irrigated by means of concrete pipes laid to the tops of the hills with contour ditches conveying the water to the trees. Rows of eucalyptus trees were planted along the pipelines leading to the hill tops. The two large foothills upon which the orchards were planted were called Big and Little Whiskey. Mill's Orchard quickly took on the appearance of a small town. In addition to the large packing and storage sheds, six dwellings were built and a station on the Colusa and Lake Railroad was established.²

Like the quarries, the orchards were short lived. Despite heavy smudging, freezes during the 1930's, particularly in 1937, destroyed the trees and they were removed. In 1947 the Mill's Orchard was sold to Parrot Investment Company for use as a

¹Charles D. McComish and Rebecca T. Lambert, History of Colusa and Glenn Counties (Los Angeles: Historic Record Co., 1918). p. 119.

²Robert McMahon, ex-employee of Mill's Orchard, interviewed at Maxwell, Calif., Nov. 1, 1969.

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sheep ranch.¹ Today only two of the dwellings remain along with a few small sheds, the workshop and one of the large packing sheds, the other having been moved to the Stone Corral for use as a lambing shed. On the hills, two rusty water tanks and parts of the concrete pipelines remain. The contour ditches have since disappeared aided by gradation and grazing sheep.

Future Land Uses

The future holds promise of additional new land uses for the area. In conjunction with the Tehama-Colusa Canal, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has made plans to flood Antelope Valley by building dams at the Golden Gate on Funks Slough and on Stone Corral Creek just west of the upper quarry. In addition, afterbays are planned on both streams. The Sites Reservoir is planned to inundate a maximum of 12,150 acres. Although its water level is to fluctuate 130 feet with water demands in the Sacramento Valley and Delta,² it will still, undoubtedly be used for recreational purposes.³ The two afterbays will be small, 243 acres on Funks Slough and 300 acres at the Stone Corral. Although water levels will be kept stable, these afterbays will be shallow, averaging only about ten feet in depth.

¹ Ibid.

² U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "Sites Reservoir Pump Storage Complex Modification" undated, unnumbered supplement to, ("Tehama-Colusa Canal and West Sacramento Canal Unit", Sacramento, 1964) pp. 5-6.

³ John Merlino, Project Engineer, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, interviewed at Willows, Calif., Nov. 13, 1969.

The water surface level of both will be at 206 feet elevation.¹
No recreational plans are being made for the afterbays.²

The Tehama-Colusa Canal which will traverse the entire area from North to South, the two dams for the Sites Reservoir and the two dikes for the afterbays will involve considerable earth moving. The concrete-lined canal will have a capacity of 2,100 cubic-feet per second,³ and will roughly follow the 206 foot contour. It will require numerous "cuts" and "fills".⁴ The dikes necessary for the afterbays will be 49 feet high,⁵ and in excess of 800 and 1600 feet long on Stone Corral Creek and Funks Slough respectively.

The establishment of the proposed afterbays and the flooding of most of the area contiguous to the west, will probably result in much of the foothill area being used for recreation, requiring roads, buildings, picnic grounds and possibly private homes. Recreation will probably replace grazing on natural vegetation as the dominant land use. In addition, some of the remaining level areas not flooded by the afterbays will probably be planted to irrigable crops since irrigation water will be readily available from the Colusa-Tehama Canal. The Stone Corral Afterbay will flood the site of the Stone

¹USBR, "Modification". pp. 7,9.

²Merlino, interview Nov. 13, 1969.

³USBR, "Modification". p. 3.

⁴Merlino, interview Nov. 13, 1969.

⁵USBR, "Modification". pp. 7,9.

Corral, but not the quarries. The Tehama-Colusa Canal will transit part of the orchard sites. Construction dates have not been set as of yet, but construction is expected during the 1970's.¹

¹Merlino, interview Nov. 13, 1969.

CONCLUSION

The three past land uses, open range grazing, sandstone quarrying, and orchards were each relatively short lived. Each had its period of significance within the area and then disappeared, and each resulted in some lasting changes to the landscape. The changes that occurred during the period of open range grazing, the disappearance of the Indians and large game animals, are only indirectly related to the land use. The faces of the quarries and the remnants of the orchards are readily visible evidence of those past land uses.

When land uses change because of economic reasons, apparently little thought, time or effort is expended in either the preservation or burial of the old land use. The only remaining remnant of white man's first activity and settlement in this area, the Stone Corral, is about to be inundated. No one has written a detailed account of the quarries or Quarryville, meanwhile the pit left at the upper quarry has developed into a garbage pit and watery grave for the animals that fall into it. The old smudge pots that were left half buried on the hillside at Mill's Orchard still catch fire occasionally during hot Summer days.

The landscape changes wrought by these past land uses may be described as minimal, when compared to the changes that

are inherent in the projected land uses. The canal, dams, dikes, and afterbays represent and will result in landscape changes of massive proportion. What will be the fate of the landscape changes resulting from these land uses when, and if, they become no longer practicable?

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