

2016 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards

Cuyama Valley: A Corridor to the Past



In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the California Division of Highways (precursor to the California Department of Transportation [Caltrans]) carried out three highway realignment projects along State Route 166 in Cuyama Valley in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. These projects entailed large-scale earth-moving activities, including changes to the Cuyama River channel, which resulted in impacts to seven archaeological sites. Although unusual for the time, salvage archaeological work was conducted at the sites. However, with no available funds to formally analyze and catalogue the materials, the collection sat untouched for 40 years.

Beginning in 2012, with funding from a Caltrans Transportation Enhancement grant, Far Western Anthropological Group and Caltrans gathered together a team of dedicated professionals from the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Foothill Resources, and Tiley Research. The team formally catalogued and analyzed the previously excavated collections (120 boxes), assembled associated paperwork, prepared site maps, and analyzed and synthesized site-specific and regional data. Findings from each site were documented as well as the archaeological, ethnographic/ethnohistoric, and historic aspects of Cuyama Valley; interpretive materials intended for a general audience were also created. All final project materials were submitted to Caltrans in December 2014 as a set of five volumes entitled *Cuyama Valley: A Corridor to the Past*.

Not only does the collected data contribute to the knowledge of Cuyama Valley's prehistory, the Cuyama project also documents the birth of modern Cultural Resources Management practices in California. When the Cuyama Valley sites were initially excavated, archaeological and cultural site concerns were not yet accorded the consideration they receive today.

A truly important component of this project was the community's involvement. Part of the project funding was used to help educate the public about the project, Cuyama Valley prehistory, and the importance of this knowledge to still-present Native Americans. Far Western worked closely with the Northern, Barbareño, and Ventureño Chumash tribes, using the collection data to develop educational materials specific to each tribe and integrating the data into the oral histories that are passed down to each generation.

Learn more about [*Cuyama Valley: A Corridor to the Past.*](#)