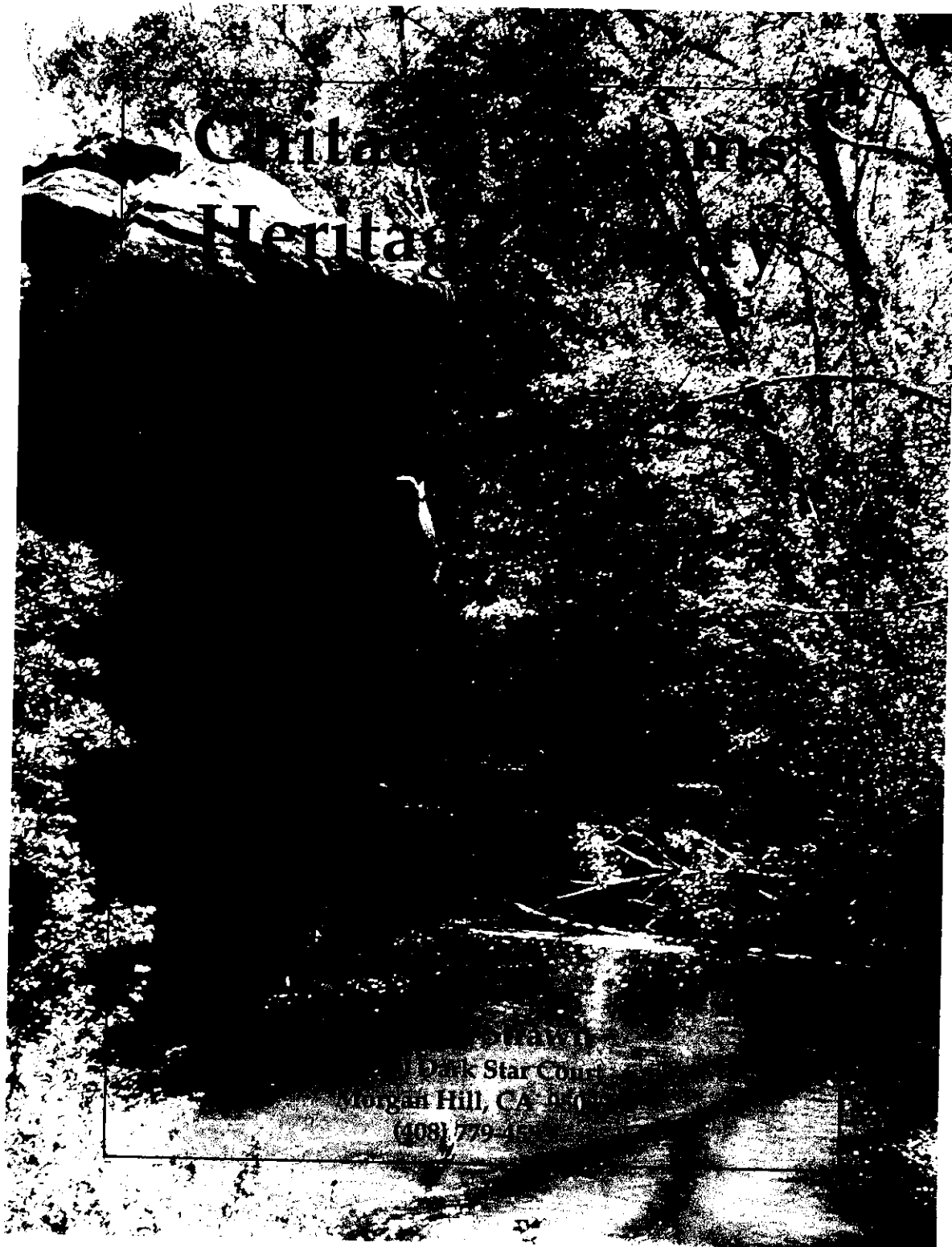




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Preface

When I moved to Morgan Hill two years ago, I looked forward to enjoying the state and county parks located so close to this community. I thought I knew all of them. It was on a Sunday afternoon drive that my family and I discovered Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park. The park was a beautiful place right along side the road. I was even more intrigued while walking the gravel trails to find out that it had been a home to an Ohlone Indian tribe. You occasionally hear stories of Indian remains being discovered in the San Francisco bay area, but to see an actual Indian site in Santa Clara County seemed wonderful to me. There was also the story of the Adams Schoolhouse. Now a “ghost” school, I wondered what it must have been like to go to school with a creek right outside the door. I wanted to know more about this place.

Along Watsonville Road in southern Santa Clara County between Morgan Hill and Gilroy lies the smallest park in the county park system. It is called Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park. This park is made up of well-groomed trails that lead you to prime vantage points to gaze down at Uvas Creek. You can also admire the large boulders and the old swimming hole from beneath the shade of an oak tree or enjoy the wildflowers in all their glory. The park is alive with lizards, squirrels, birds and according to posted park signs maybe even a few snakes. This park has something for everyone and does not require any hiking to enjoy. But the nature aspect is just an added bonus to visiting Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park. Within its four acres lies another treasure. This little spot of wilderness is one that is very rich and full of history. This history begins with the Chitactac Ohlone Indians and ends full circle with an archeological rescue of Indian artifacts and the making of the park. There is also the story of the Spanish and a small country school. Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park is an example of the dreams and struggles of all men.

The Chitactac Ohlone Indians

Long before county parks, schools or missions, much of the San Francisco Bay Area was home to the Ohlone Indians. Ohlone (as the Indian tribes of today refer to themselves) or Coastanoan (as the linguists of today and 18th century Spanish referred to them) Indians settled here over 3,000 years ago. One of these Ohlone tribes lived in a village nestled in the hills next to a year round creek. "Based on archeological evidence

and Spanish military and mission records, this site was possibly the village of the Chitactac." ¹ "Chitac" meaning people of the village and "tac" meaning place. This was the name given to this particular Ohlone tribe either by a Spanish priest or by the Mutsun Ohlone tribe. It was probably not only the name of the village but of a larger group of Indians inhabiting the area.

There is little recorded about the Chitactac Ohlone. It is believed that this Chitactac village was average in size, with a population of approximately 200 people. We also know by the location of the village that they had a good and varied supply of food from the marshlands, the creek, the grasslands, and the forested foothills.



Figure 1 – Bedrock Mortars

Archeologists have used artifacts found at the site to give more light into the lives of the Chitactac. One of the largest artifacts is something similar to a common milling site located on various giant flat slabs of rock around the park. It is at this site that the Chitactac carved bowls into the soft sandstone rock. These bowls, called bedrock mortars, can be seen and even touched today at the county park (figure 1). The Chitactac used smaller hand held rocks, called pestles, along with the bedrock mortars. Nuts, seeds, meats, fish, and medicines, would be put into the bedrock mortars and grounded or mashed with the pestles.

Another artifact that tells us about the Chitactac is the rock art called petroglyphs. The petroglyphs are "markings that are pecked, abraded, grooved or incised onto a rock's surface."² They are found in the park on boulders next to the creek. The easiest one to see looks similar to a bull's eye carved onto a rock. Although there are many theories as to the meaning of the Indian rock art, there is no real answer as to what purpose the petroglyphs served. Other artifacts that have also been found at the site were charcoal, a type of rock called steatite, shells and clamshell beads.

Colonization by the Spanish in the 1700's nearly erased the existence of the Ohlone tribe from the valley and from California. The Ohlone and other tribes suffered greatly from epidemics due to the new diseases introduced by the Spanish. The Indians were terrified of the diseases and with good reason. Death was insured when a disease took hold. Many adults would flee from the missions when an epidemic broke out, even leaving some children as orphans. Some children were taken in by local landowners and married into landowner families. Others became servants to the landowners. Either way, their past and culture became lost to them as they were forced to accept the ways of the Spanish.

The Indians that did not die from the introduction of new diseases were forced into missions where they lived in terrible conditions and were forced to learn new Christian ways. The Chitactac, due to their remoteness, were probably one of the last Indian tribes to be forced into a mission. None of the three local missions were close enough to actively recruit them. It wasn't until the other tribes had been overtaken or

died off that the missions began to show interest in them. The Chitactac tribe was eventually divided up among the Santa Cruz, San Jose, and San Juan Bautista missions. There is evidence of the Chitactac people being brought to the Santa Cruz mission in 1795 and again in 1796. There are also maps with the Chitactac land belonging to the San Jose Mission. The tribes at the missions were forced together and intermarried. Eventually the customs and cultures became mixed and forgotten as they were told that they could only practice the religion of the priests.

Mexico became independent of Spanish rule in 1821 and in 1834 they began to secularize the missions. As part of this secularization, the Ohlone, who had worked the land, were promised half of all the mission land. But, as is so often the case when told of the treatment of Indians, the Ohlone did not receive any property in what is now Santa Clara County. With no land to go back to, the old ways forgotten, and some Indians now of mixed tribes, many Ohlone went to work for the Spanish ranchos as domestic help or ranch hands. The land that was once home to the Chitactac became part of Ranch Solis. It was part of an 8,875-acre ranch granted to Mariano Castro by the Mexican Governor Figueroa in 1834.

It was when the United States took over the land now known as California in 1848 that the Ohlone were no longer used as cowboys and domestic help. The gold driven Americans took to killing the Native Americans. The Ohlone that survived the Easterners were left with a new people that did not want them on “their” land. The only land that

was now available as a home to the Indians had been severely damaged by sheep and cattle ranching. It was impossible to live off of it. The Chitactac's old lifestyle was gone.

It was also at this time that Mr. Castro was having some legal problems. The ownership of his land was called into question. It is believed that Mariano Castro sold part of the acreage he owned in order to pay a lawyer that was proving his land grant was valid. Many Spanish were doing this at the time and it is very likely this was the case with Mr. Castro. There is no proof of this except for the change of ownership of some of Mr. Castro's acreage. The property was sold to a veteran military man and sheriff, Captain John Hicks Adams, in August of 1853.

The Adams School

In 1856, Captain John Adams donated part of his land north of his home in order to build a school. This was the same property that was once was part of the home of the Chitactac. In 1859, the Solis school district was split creating the Adams School District and the Adams School.

The first Adams school was a simple one-room frame building (figure 2). "Those were the real wild west days, to be sure, when upon



Figure 2 - First Adams School

arriving at the schoolhouse in the morning, bear and lion tracks were to be found in front of the door and around the building."³ The school was surrounded by grassy fields with huge oak trees and had wonderful rocks by the creek for the children to climb and slide on. It was a wonderful natural playground but the school was much more than that. Many of the ranches in Southern Santa Clara County relied on the school to be the center of the community for their area. Morgan Hill and Gilroy were places you went to maybe once a month. The school was where all the social events as well as voting, church school, and any community gatherings would occur.

Teachers at the small school came and went. It was a difficult job. The setting was different from that of San Jose or San Francisco and sometimes the salary was not very good. The teacher would have to work around the harvest and the student population would range from just 20 to as many as 93 children depending on the time of year. Children were active in the harvest and some were the children of migrant workers. It seems the teachers migrated a lot too. Some stayed at Adams school a month and some stayed for years. Their salaries ranged anywhere from \$45 to \$90 a month. The first teacher, Mr. Kirley, made \$75 a month. In 1866, according to board minutes, a Mr. Scherer was hired for \$65 a month plus room and board and a pasture for his horse.

The Adams school district was not always the quiet, small farming school one might expect. In 1861 the schools trustees, O.M. Day, A. Chappel, and Captain Adams decided the one room school was too small and needed too many repairs.

Democratically, an election was held to see if a proposed tax could be levied in order to

help build a new school. The trustees lost their election by a vote of 14 to 48 and the children continued going to school in the little one room building. In 1875 the school began having financial difficulties. At this time the teacher was making \$90 a month (\$75 if he required a teacher's helper). The salary was then dropped down to \$70. In 1884, the Adams school district was not able to pay its teacher. After a discussion with a lawyer and a bank the school district paid \$60 in back pay. Somehow they managed to pull their finances together and the school continued. The next crises came in the 1890's. A neighbor filed a lawsuit claiming the school was legally on his land. Fortunately for the Adams School, the courts ruled in their favor and another disaster was averted. Eventually in 1914 or 1915, the old school was either moved or burnt down and a new school was built (figure 3). In the 1950's, they even had a bus (figure 4).



Figure 3 - Second Adams School



Figure 4 - School Bus

It was in 1956 that the Adams school met its match. Mysteriously in the night, the school was burned down by "suspicious circumstances". It was believed to be arson. That was the end. The land was turned over to the Gilroy school district, which chose not to rebuild the school. After 97 years the Adams school and Adams School district were no more.

The Beginning of a Park

The next 30 years were ones of deterioration on the small acreage of land. This led to a mission started by two people to save a small piece of history. The decline of the area started in 1963 when the Gilroy school district deeded the land to Santa Clara County. The deed had the stipulation that part of the land would be used to widen the existing Watsonville Road and the remainder used as a roadside rest area. The school district also added that if the property was not developed by Santa Clara County in two to three years, the property would revert back to them. The road needed widening, so a small roadside rest was built where the school once stood.

The rest area was not the most well managed one. The informal swimming hole, commonly referred to as “La Posa”, was used often but there was no janitorial care of the area and only occasional trash pick up. Broken glass, dirty diapers shoved into rock crevasses, and trash was everywhere. When tagging became popular with local gangs the park also suffered heavy vandalism. The rocks were sprayed and carved with graffiti. The petroglyphs were defaced and some were stolen. The bedrock mortars where the Ohlone spent so many hours preparing food were damaged, painted and misused. It seemed a tragic end to what once was the center of community for the Ohlone people as well as those in the Adams School District.

It was a rock art researcher's curiosity that brought Evelyn Newman Billo and Dr. Robert Mark to the roadside rest. They had heard about a petroglyph on a boulder at a rest stop on Watsonville road north of Gilroy from the late Professor Hector at San Jose State University. Dr. Mark and Ms. Billo are both members of the American Rock Art Research Association and were interested in what they would find. The only information they could find on the site was that it was once the location of a tribe of Ohlone. There was no listing of it having any petroglyphs. What the researchers found surprised them. Not only did they find the petroglyph Dr. Hector mentioned, but there were others too. They also found one of the largest bedrock mortar concentrations in the San Francisco bay area. There were 75 bedrock mortars and at least 3 petroglyphs. It was an amazing find. Unfortunately, the effect humans were having on this area was very disturbing. Dr. Marks and Ms. Billo decided that they would study the petroglyphs and monitor the rest area to see exactly how people were affecting these artifacts. It was then that a two-



Figure 5 – Rock with Petroglyph

decade project to save the site and artifacts began.

The petroglyph find was of great importance (figure 5). Petroglyphs are rare in the San Francisco bay area. What made this find even more exciting was that there were two types found in

the park, cupules (small rock indications) and cup and ring forms (the bulls eye shape mentioned earlier). The findings encouraged archaeological studies of the area. The chances were good that there could be even more petroglyphs in other areas and on other boulders. These studies were performed in 1970, 1973, and again in 1992. Since the Ohlone also lived outside the four acres of the park, an archaeological easement across Uvas Creek to the west side on to agricultural lands was obtained by the county in 1981.

The site was also brought to the attention of the Santa Clara County Historical Heritage Commission (HCC) and added to the Santa Clara County Heritage Resource Inventory in 1979. The little roadside rest was becoming more than just an unkempt picnic area. With the attention of the HHC, who reports to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, there was hope that the park would be able to get the some of the funds and attention needed to save the historical artifacts and establish eligibility for the National Registrar of Historic Places. This registration would guarantee the safety of the artifacts from even the local government, in particular the Road and Transportation Agency, who still held claim to some of the land for possible road widening.

It was good that the park received some much needed attention, but there was no real action being done to preserve the artifacts. In 1987 there was a flood along Uvas Creek and in August Dr. Marks and Ms. Billo once again brought the site to the attention of the HHC. The area showed more deteration due to vandalism but the biggest concern was that one of the boulders containing some petroglyphs had fallen into the creek. The boulder is made out of sandstone and easily broken. If another storm caused the creek to

flood, there was real concern that the boulder would move further down the stream and become damaged even further. They petitioned the HHC for funds to have a consultant hired and to remove it from the creek.

It was one year later that the petroglyph boulder was moved. In 1988, it was flown out of the creek by helicopter and taken to Mt. Madonna County Park. There it rested on a wooden base outside park headquarters for the public to enjoy. Unfortunately even here, right next to the park headquarters, it was not safe from vandalism. In response to someone's initials being carved into it, the rangers placed the petroglyph boulder under a tarp until a new, safer location could be found. At first the Gilroy Museum seemed like the ideal location to move it to. The park was in the Gilroy area and the museum would still offer the public a chance to view the petroglyphs. In the end it was found that it would be much easier getting it to Morgan Hill. The boulder was placed on a flatbed truck and moved to the historic Morgan Hill house in April of 1989.

The next step made by Santa Clara County Park management was to assign park planner, Lauren Harvey, to evaluate the growing problems at the site. Harvey was ready for the challenge. Her first job was to begin to gather the funds need to hire consultants to aid her in developing some sort of plan. She went before the HHC and presented the issues regarding preservation of site. They granted her \$30,000. With this money she gathered a team of 19 people including a rock art conservationist, Ohlone descendants, neighbors, trail advocates, archeologists, and others to help in deciding exactly what the

park needed to make it something that would preserve the site as well as offer a learning opportunity and provide enjoyment to the public.

In September 1992, based on the findings of Ms. Harvey and the consultants, interim management at the park began. The petroglyphs were fenced off with a rope to try to prevent further vandalism. A gated parking lot that was only open during park hours was added. The picnic benches were removed from the bank of the creek and added to a location close to the parking lot. Money was also spent to have permanent bathrooms installed.

This was not just another County Parks project. Many of the neighbors and the general public wanted to help create this new park.

A public workshop was held to clean up the park and graffiti. The students at Gavilan College in Gilroy painted a beautiful mural on the outside restroom wall (figure 6) and the Boy Scout



Figure 6 – Mural

volunteers built steps and rerouted trails. A lot of work was completed to try to slow down the damage being done. It was now time to have a master plan made that would offer more than just limited protection to the area. Ms. Harvey went before the HHC again. She was granted another \$70,000 to prepare a master plan for the park.

On November 24, 1992 the master plan for the park was approved. Now all the park needed was the money to put the plan into action. Once again the search for money was on. Ms. Harvey began to write grant proposals for funding from both the federal government and HHC to make the park plan a reality. In August 1993 Federal funding was awarded in the amount of \$721,357. This was added to a grant of \$98,367 that Santa Clara County was going to provide. The park had over \$900,000! It was time to take the master plan for Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park and make it a reality.

In 1994 Lauren Harvey left the County Parks Department to return to graduate school. The implementation of the master plan was handed over to Mark Frederick. His job was to follow the goal of the master plan. This purpose was to “find a strategy to protect its (Chitactac’s) invaluable cultural resources from further abuse. The desire of the county is to integrate the recreational aspects of the park and interpretation of the sites resources.”⁴ Ms. Harvey had gotten the money together but there was still much work to do. There was the complex job of cleaning up more graffiti without harming the artifacts. The park needed a better barrier to be built between the public and the petroglyphs (which were still being vandalized). The area by the creek, which had been more or less turned into a beach, also needed revegetation. After this repair, a way to display the information on Ohlone culture and the history of the site needed to be found. It was just the beginning of the making of a park. On September 5, 1997, construction began.

Frederick, as park planner, faced many difficulties as he watched the park begin to take shape. Some problems, like that with the transportation agency were expected. The

transportation agency did not want to let go of all the land that was allotted to them to widen the road. The plans called for the building of a tupen-tak or roundhouse to be built close to the parking lot (figure7). This ceremonial building was going to hold cultural information on the Ohlone. The transportation agency felt it was too close to where a new road might be built. After much discussion the plan was altered and the building was pushed back further into the park.



Figure 7 - Roundhouse

Some problems that arose with the construction of the park were unexpected. While making the parking lot, construction crews unearthed Indian remains. They had discovered the remains of two complete bodies as well as other bones. It was believed from the way the remains lay that they had not been originally in this location. The bones were probably moved here with the mounds of dirt during construction of the road. The law was that Mark Frederick had to go to the Ohlone people to decide exactly what to do with the remains. The Ohlone people were offered three choices concerning the remains. The first was to remove the remains from the location and take them somewhere else to be reburied. The second was to rebury the remains in a different part of the park. The last was to leave the remains and work over them. It was difficult to get all the Ohlone to agree completely on one option. This was a very emotional issue to many of them. Eventually Mr. Frederick took the vote of the majority. There were some that were disappointed and others angered by the decision but ten months after the park was open,

the Ohlone buried the remains in a private ceremony and in an unmarked location in the park.

Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park

The park was now almost ready to open. There was only one more item needed to complete it. It was time to return the petroglyph boulder. In August of 1989 a flatbed truck carried the rock back to the park and a crane set it in place. Everything was in order. The dreams of Dr. Marks and Evelyn Billo were finally going to become reality. On September 12, 1998 the Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park officially opened to the public. It was a grand affair for such a little park. There was an elaborate dedication ceremony with speeches and demonstrations of various skills, such as basket weaving, used by the Ohlone. The park was a success due to the efforts of a very long list of people, both hired and volunteers.



Figure 8 - Park Today

The Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park has weathered very well over its opening two years ago (figure 8). The park is well maintained and signs of earlier vandalism have all but disappeared. There is a self-guided interpretive walk with eight historical stations, a

roundhouse with interesting information on the Ohlone, and excellent views of Uvas creek. A volunteer “host” lives in a RV on the site and watches over the park as well as answers any questions you may have. There is even a spot where you can stand and view a petroglyph on one of the best-traveled boulders in south Santa Clara County.

¹ L17.1.2 Interpretive Text Draft 4

² <http://claraweb.co.santa-clara.ca.us/parks/prkpages/chitacch.htm>

³ Sawyer 1055

⁴ Billo 2

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Photos

Historical Adams School District photos can be found in the Gilroy Historical Museum or from files at the County of Santa Clara Parks and Recreation Department

Photos of Chitactac Adams County Park as it appears today are from the personal collection of Valerie Strawn.