



Terminus Reservoir

Geology, Paleontology, Flora & Fauna,
Archeology, History

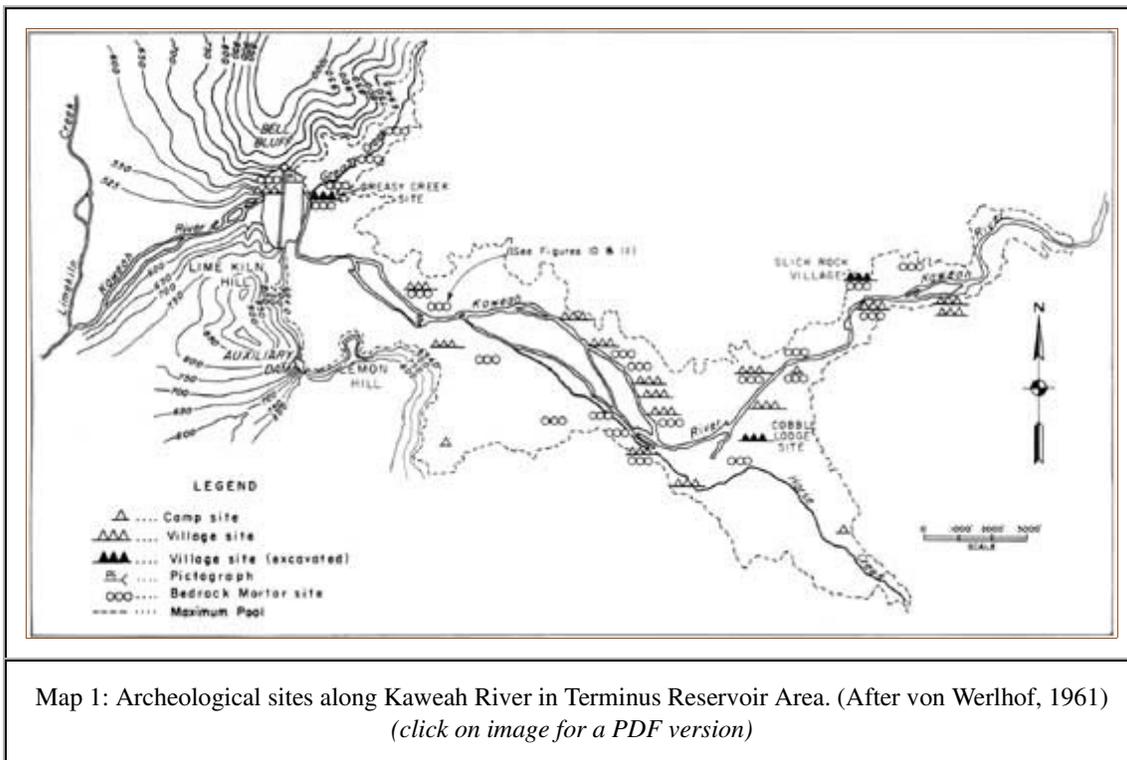


NATIVE OCCUPATION OF THE TERMINUS RESERVOIR REGION

Archeological Investigations

The first formal archeological survey of the area to be flooded behind Terminus Dam was made by F. Fenenga in 1948. That survey found the small reservoir area to be unexpectedly rich in archeological remains and indicated a high concentration of aboriginal population. The archeological remains consisted principally of habitation sites, indicated by low mounds composed of occupational debris. Several of the midden deposits were associated with milling places in outcrops of rock or in large boulders. One site was a pictograph area in which five separate faces of a sheer rock bluff were covered with pictographs made in red, white, and grey-violet paints.

In 1950, the site called Slick Rock Village was excavated and reported upon by Fenenga. In 1957, pictographs on the hill at the north end of the dam were recorded and a full size reproduction made by Sr. Eduardo Contreras, a Mexican archeologist associated with the University of California at that time. A report on the Greasy Creek site was published by D. M. Pendergast and C. W. Meighan in 1959. Finally, studies of Indian trails in the area and excavation of the Horse Creek or Cobble Lodge site were reported upon by J. C. von Werlhof in 1961. The von Werlhof report included information from several other small sites in the immediate vicinity and along the Kaweah River. All the known sites in the reservoir area are shown on Map 1.



In connection with Map. 1, it should be noted that the manner of designating an occupation site is often an arbitrary matter in the field and sometimes depends upon the standards of the observer. Thus, some archeologists have attempted to determine the depth of the midden or living deposit and, for example, if the depth exceeded 6 inches, the site was called a village site. If the depth did not exceed 6 inches, it was called a camp site. In the Terminus Reservoir area, it was often difficult to make the proper estimate because of the sandy soil at some of the sites. There is no question, however, that the three sites excavated were *bona fide* village sites.

Historical Sketch

The foothills of the southern Sierra Nevada, together with the margins of the Central Valley, are shown on maps of estimated aboriginal populations as being an area of marked occupation density, even for California. The paradox of a non-agricultural people having a population density exceeding that of any agriculturists, at least in North America exclusive of Mexico, has often been referred to, and various explanations have been set forth to account for this phenomenon.

However, it is not difficult to visualize the reasons for the relatively dense native populations in these low Sierran foothills, for if any region in California seems well endowed with nature's riches, this one must come to mind as a chief contender. The number of streams that run all year, the attendant opulence of flora and fauna, and the possibilities of moving to a separate tract during particularly favorable seasons all seem to have been well-recognized by the local Indians, and the many living sites along the numerous streams attest to their strong preference for this region over many others in central or southern California.

The Kaweah River does not differ in any respect from other rivers that have their sources in the Sierra Nevada, except that it seems to have been one of the main gateways to the mountains

and to the valleys beyond the crest of the range to the east.

Although this part of California was not directly affected by the Spanish missionaries as were the coastal areas after 1770, the expeditions of Spanish explorers and soldiers did indeed have much to do with the decimation of native populations in the lower foothills. These forays began as early as 1804, when the Indians in the vicinity of present-day Visalia were first seen by white men. Numerous Spanish expeditions visited the region after 1804 and the Indian villages were often attacked or destroyed during these campaigns. Many Indians, especially children, were taken to the coastal missions as Christian neophytes. Cook [4] states that "the whole picture is one of ruinous devastation just prior to 1816." Part of this may be attributed also to fighting among the native villages and to the spread of disease, perhaps originating from native fugitives from the missions who had made their way across the Central Valley. The Spanish explorers visited only briefly. They made some observations on the number and general conditions of the natives, which were included in their official reports or diaries, but they did not remain to settle the country.

During this early period, the Western Mono or Monachi Indians of the upper Kaweah River region were not molested, save possibly by epidemics of which we have no records. These people seemed to have carried on trade and otherwise continued contacts with neighboring groups until well into the nineteenth century. Even today there are Indians living in the middle or upper reaches of the river who remember participating in the old seasonal patterns of movement when they were children.



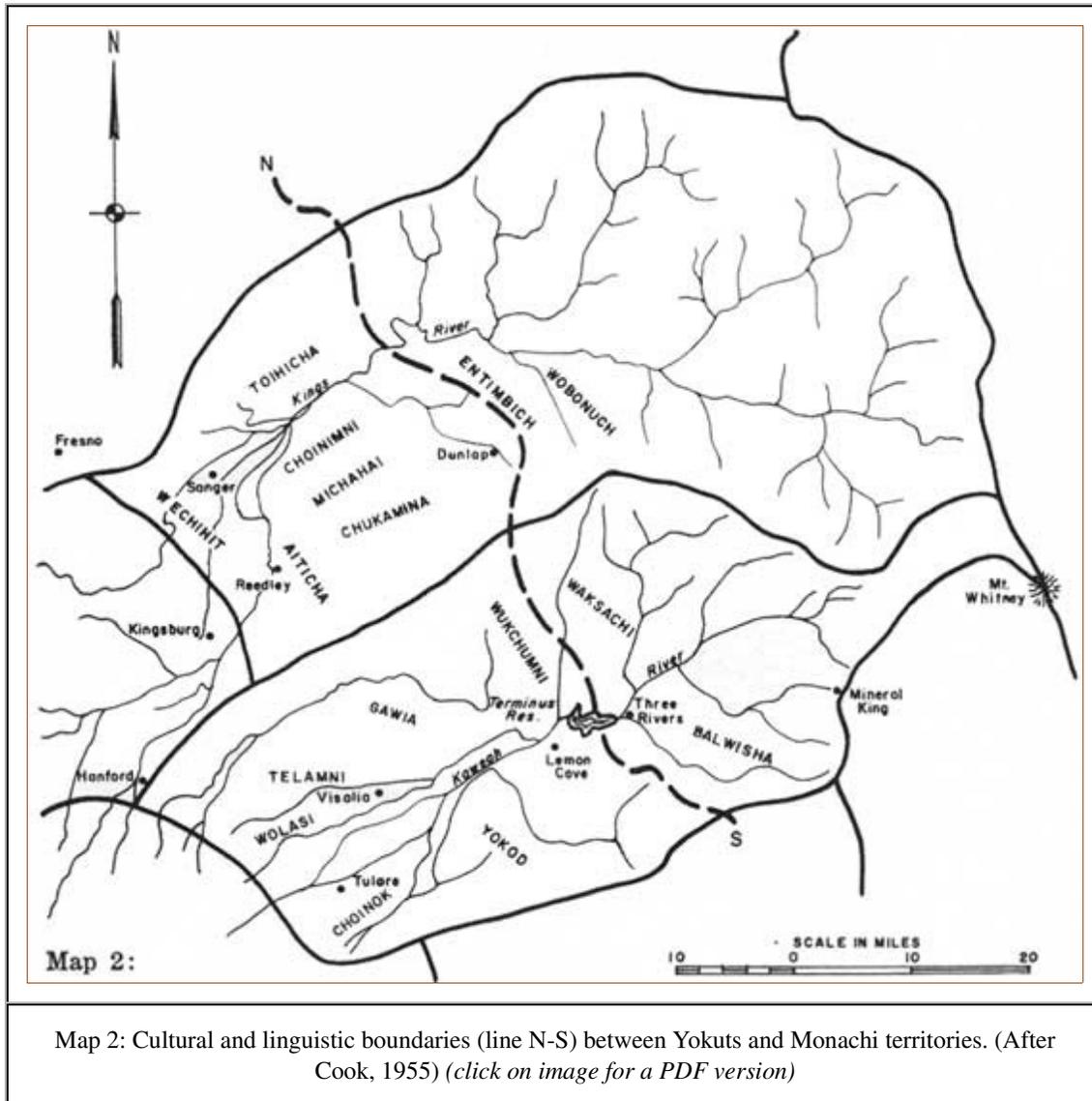
While the Indians of the lower foothills and the valley margins were seriously disorganized before the middle of the nineteenth century, they at least partially escaped the tremendous tide of miners and camp followers that moved into the Sierra Nevada to the north. There were, of course, rumors of gold in the southern Sierra Nevada—in the Kern River country, for example,

and in Tulare County the mining camp known as Tailholt was at one time almost as well-known as Angel's, Columbia, or Sonora. [5] Essentially, the search for gold and such activities as placering the streams did not affect the Kaweah River country as strongly as it did the northern counties. On the other hand, the influx of population focused attention on the ideal agricultural environment of the lower Tulare County region. Accordingly, mid-nineteenth century history of the lower Kaweah River region does not have the colorful quality that the many mining camps gave to the Mother Lode country. In general, the later history of the Kaweah River region is not spectacular. Indian contact with white men was at first violent, sporadic, and catastrophic along the lower Kaweah River, with the Indians farther up the river relatively untouched. In 1925, Kroeber was able to say that the "Mono" Indians, i.e., the Monachi and their close kin, the people of Owens Valley east of the crest of the Sierra Nevada, were the largest body of Indians in California. [6]

Linguistic and Cultural Boundaries

Since the Indians of the lower Kaweah River region disappeared in such a "wholesale" fashion, it is fortunate that so much has been learned about their culture from historical records and from direct work with the few surviving Indians by such persons as A. L. Kroeber (1925), G. W. Stewart (1927), H. E. Driver (1937), A. H. Gayton (1948), and F. F. Latta (1949). In many cases, the kinds of information obtained from living Indians has served as confirmation or clarification of data recovered from archeological excavations in the Terminus Reservoir area proper.

Kroeber's 1925 publication was the earliest detailed statement of linguistic and cultural boundaries which has held up through the years for all of the aboriginal groups of California. His map [7] shows the boundary between the Yokuts, the Penutian-speaking Indians of the Central Valley, and the Monachi, the Shoshonean-speaking mountain-dwelling Indians, [8] as located somewhere between the present towns of Three Rivers and Lemon Cove. An adaptation of the map is shown as Map 2. It shows that Terminus Reservoir is at the extreme eastern end of the territory held by the Yokuts subdivision called Wukchumni. Their land evidently impinged upon that of the Balwisha or Patwisha, a subdivision of the Monachi, who held a large mountainous tract extending up to the crest of the Sierra Nevada.



Pattern of Occupation — Primary Foods

First of all, it should be noted that in a stretch of about six miles along Kaweah River, from above Slick Rock near the eastern end of Terminus Reservoir to the now non-existent Terminus Beach at the western end, there were thirty-seven archeological sites reported. Fourteen of these were milling places, i.e., places where exposures of granite or some other rock (usually metamorphic rock) with mortars ground in their surfaces showed evidence of Indian utilization, but with no apparent living deposit or midden associated. Eight of the sites called occupation or camp spots had milling places closely associated with them. Figures 3 and 4 show a fine exposure with numerous mortar holes present. This series of mortars was obviously connected with the village located near the pictograph site at the western end of the reservoir area. The map of the Slick Rock Site, Map 4, shows the relationship of the milling place to the habitation area proper. With the remaining thirteen sites where some living deposits or midden was present, no milling places were associated, and it is probable that a convenient "community" milling place was used by their occupants.

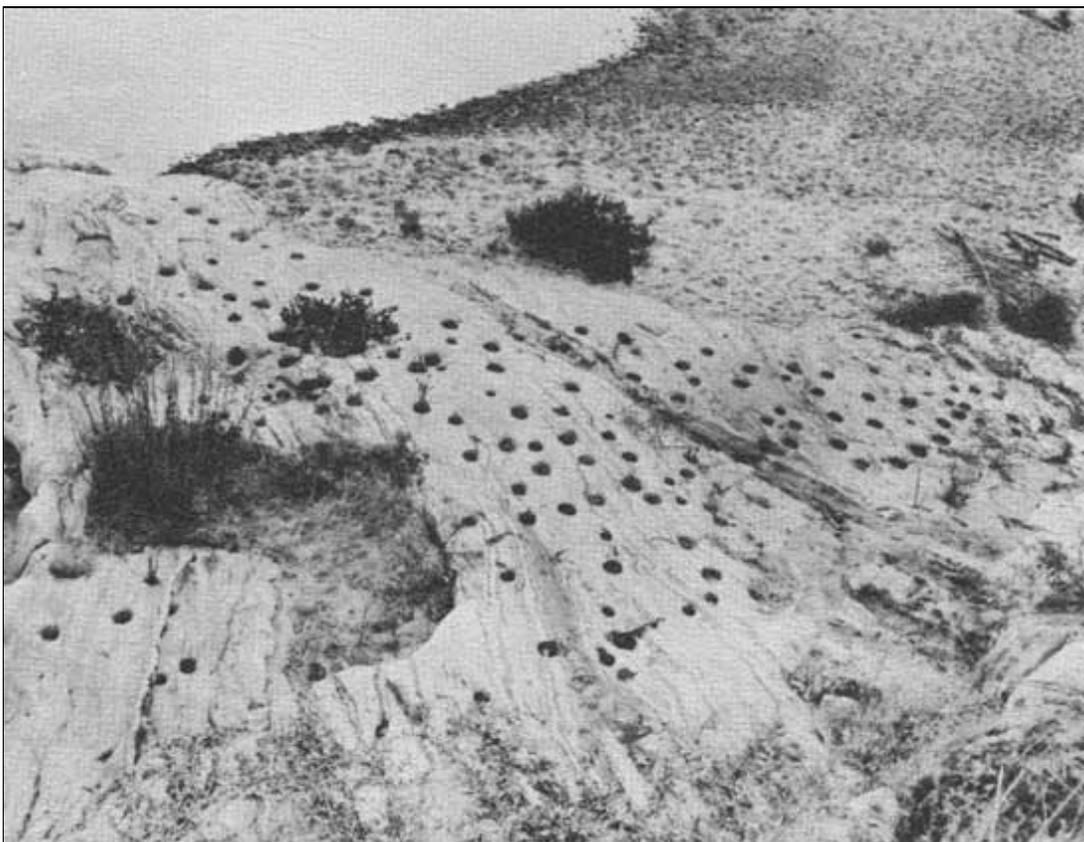


Figure 3 and Figure 4: Two views of a large Indian milling place near the site of Terminus Dam.

The milling places were used mostly for acorns, probably from valley oak and the California black oak, which are abundant today in the region. [9] The black oak grows in the hills and mountains from an elevation of 1,000 to 8,000 feet, and the presence of bedrock mortars along streams like the Kaweah River up to and beyond the maximum altitudinal range of this species attests to the importance of acorns in the native economy. The number of milling places in the short stretch of six miles or so of the Terminus Reservoir suggests that the acorn was by far the most important source of food. Since the man-made holes in the granite bedrock or large flat boulders represent only one part of the procedure involved in preparing the acorn as food, the local importance of the acorn perhaps demands a fuller explanation of the entire course of its processing. From recent observation of living Indians in California it is possible to reconstruct a typical course of events leading to the production of the ready-to-eat meal.

Acorn harvesting took place when the crop had almost all fallen to the ground, the trees being shaken to release more of the nuts. The acorns were gathered in flat bottomed baskets and transferred to conical burden baskets for transportation to the village, where they were placed in a granary. When properly dry, the acorns were brought to the milling spots, where several women at a time might be engaged at the grinding. Removal of the shells was initiated probably by cracking the acorns between a small "anvil" stone and another pebble or cobble. After the shells and the lint-like tomanum were removed, the seeds were placed in the mortar holes and there pounded with a pestle usually made, in the Terminus region, in crude form from some kind of local stone like granite. A brush fashioned from the fiber covering of the soap plant bulb was used to keep the resultant meal confined to the mortar holes.

Most California acorns contain a bitter element, tannic acid, which had to be removed before they could be used for food. Removal was usually brought about by leaching in a leaf-lined depression or basin in sand. These basins were located near streams, and were about two or three feet in diameter. They were deep enough to allow about two or three inches of warm water to be poured over the meal and percolate through it slowly, thus drawing off the tannic acid in solution. The meal was tasted repeatedly and leaching discontinued when it became properly "sweet." After leaching, the meal was covered and left to harden in the leaching basin. When dry and hard, the resultant cake was broken up and eaten without further processing as "acorn bread." After repulverizing in a mortar, the meal could be roasted in little cakes, but the preferred method of cooking seems to have been by boiling it to mush in water-tight baskets. Hot stones were added to a mixture of meal and water and moved around constantly therein so as not to burn holes in the basket. The stones were removed when they had given up their heat and replaced with others until the meal was ready. Although the Wukchumni evidently knew of the existence of pottery in prehistoric times, they seem nevertheless to have continued to use baskets in cooking acorns. The Paiute of Owens Valley, the close linguistic kin of the Wukchumni's neighbors to the east (the Monachi), are known to have boiled acorns in pots.

Another feature of the local acorn complex still may be seen today in use in scattered parts of the western Sierra Nevada in the territory of the Monachi. This is their characteristic granary, a large, often beehive-shaped thatched container perhaps four feet high and three feet in diameter at the base, raised from the ground on a rock or set upon posts or tree branches. It was designed to keep the acorns dry and free from hungry animals during the winter and spring months when acorns could not be gathered from the trees. This type of granary probably was used in the Terminus Reservoir region. It is the clearest known example of efforts made by the local

Indians to preserve any kind of food for relatively long periods of time and certainly reflects the great regard in which this staple food was held.

Large game animals, probably the California mule deer, were represented among the faunal remains recovered at the excavations, and we can assume that these animals were an important source of protein for the Kaweah Indians. Coyote and fox were not eaten but wildcat and raccoon were considered very good as were squirrels, woodrats, quail, doves, and pigeons. Numerous varieties of fish were available and those commonly used included trout, suckers, and catfish. Larvae were also eaten. Vegetal foods also included manzanita berries, Mariposa lily bulbs, arrowhead root, soap plant bulbs, and various seeds. Pinpoint clover seeds were parched and then ground to meal for cooking.

The Pictographs

It has been postulated that the pictographs (Figures 5 and 6), since they were associated with a widespread trail system in the Sierra Nevada, may have something to do with hunting magic, i.e., may contribute either to the increase of the animal species or the luck of the person engaged in hunting them. Heizer and Baumhoff [10] demonstrated as conclusively as possible that this correlation between game trails and petroglyphs is valid for the Great Basin, i.e., the region to the east of the crest of the Sierra Nevada, and therefore that petroglyphs must have been an important element in the food quest. So far, however, the pictographs of the Terminus Reservoir area have not been positively associated with the idea of hunting magic. Although the pictographs were near Indian trails, these were not necessarily game trails, and it seems unlikely that the pictographs were connected with hunting luck, especially in view of the evident importance of the acorn in the domestic economy. Furthermore, it is clear that the aboriginal occupants of the lower Kaweah River had little difficulty in obtaining an adequate supply of food. On the contrary, the Great Basin peoples had to spend almost every waking moment in the search for food and probably felt constrained to use every resource at their command, including painting or engraving on rocks, to keep from starving to death.



Figure 5 and Figure 6: Two views of the pictographs on Bell Bluff.

As further evidence that the pictographs near the spot where the dam now stands were not specifically connected with hunting luck or wishes for animal increase, it was found that they were known to the historic Yokuts, and that they were apparently associated with their shamanism. Gayton [11] shows a Wukchumni village site there called "gutsnú mi" near which, her informants said, was a big hill known as Bell Bluff or "coisí syu" meaning "dog place" (also given as "coí su"). The latter site was said to be on the Kaweah River directly opposite Terminus Beach. Gayton probably received a garbled account from the Indians for it seems that "gutsnú mi" itself must be the proper name of the pictograph site, while "dog place" refers to the Greasy Creek site slightly farther up the river but in a way "opposite Terminus Beach."

Although Gayton [12] states that her Indian guides to the site [children of an informant] became frightened and ran home before they showed her the exact spot, the following about the site was recorded:

It was believed that most shamans had private caches where they kept not only their sacred outfits of talismans, but their wealth, and even the stuffed skins of dead women adorned with beads and other valuable ornaments. The cache would be in a cliff or rock pile; cracks indicated the door, which opened at the owner's command. The rocks were usually painted; in fact, any rock with pictographs was thought to be a [shaman's] cache ...

[One informant] said that there were several inner chambers "each as big as the house" and that they were filled with native treasures (baskets, beads, feather ornaments, etc.) and female effigies [made] of stuffed skins. When one walked over the hill one could hear it was hollow, "your footsteps sound different." [The informant] expressed apprehension lest the hill might some day be dynamited, for if so, "all kinds of bad diseases would fly over the country."

[One Indian informant actually] had a frightening experience there ... The rocks of the bluff are painted with pictographs, she said, but she would not accompany me there.

Long ago her uncle warned her not to look at them as she would get sore eyes. Moreover there was a beautiful weird dog there which came out of the rocks to attack investigators. However, she and her cousin went down there one evening just at dusk. A ghost came out after them. They jumped to one side of the trail and "it went right by and down the hill looking like fire." [The informant] believed that the cross she was wearing at the time saved her. When the girls reached home the uncle chided them for going down there. He said that in that hill were the skins of beautiful boys and girls stuffed with tulle, and each one had a basket of money. The shamans had eaten their flesh and liver. The dog which guarded the cache had a snake's body and human hands for feet. A white man once saw it, shot at it, and died the next morning.

The belief in these guardian dogs explains the common term for shamans' caches, wherever located, [i.e.] dog place....

Apart from the possible contradictions as to site locations inherent in the foregoing

descriptions, it also appears that many of the elements described, e.g., the presence of the "stuffed skins of dead women" and the different sound of footsteps when one walked over the putative cavern, are gross exaggerations, while the fantasies of the snake-bodied dog and the like are such as could easily be associated with the power of shamans. The significant point is that any description in such relatively concrete terms of the meaning of a pictograph in ethnographic California is quite rare. The usual reply from Indian informants about rock paintings is negative and vague.

Summary of Excavations

Greasy Creek Site

Of the three excavations carried out in the Terminus Reservoir area, only one revealed any considerable time-depth and showed a fairly definite layering of artifacts. This was the Greasy Creek site, so-called because of its proximity to the confluence of Greasy Creek and the Kaweah River. The site consisted of a concentration of sandy midden deposit measuring about sixty to eighty yards. It capped an old alluvial fan, and gave the appearance of a bench above the Kaweah River (see Figure 7 and Map 3). The midden deposit was six feet deep in places and there was evidence of some cultural change from its lower level to that representing the final occupation, probably in late prehistoric or early historic times. The upper levels of the Greasy Creek site may correspond to the Wukchumni occupation although, as noted in the previous section, there is some confusion as to the proper name or designation of the site.

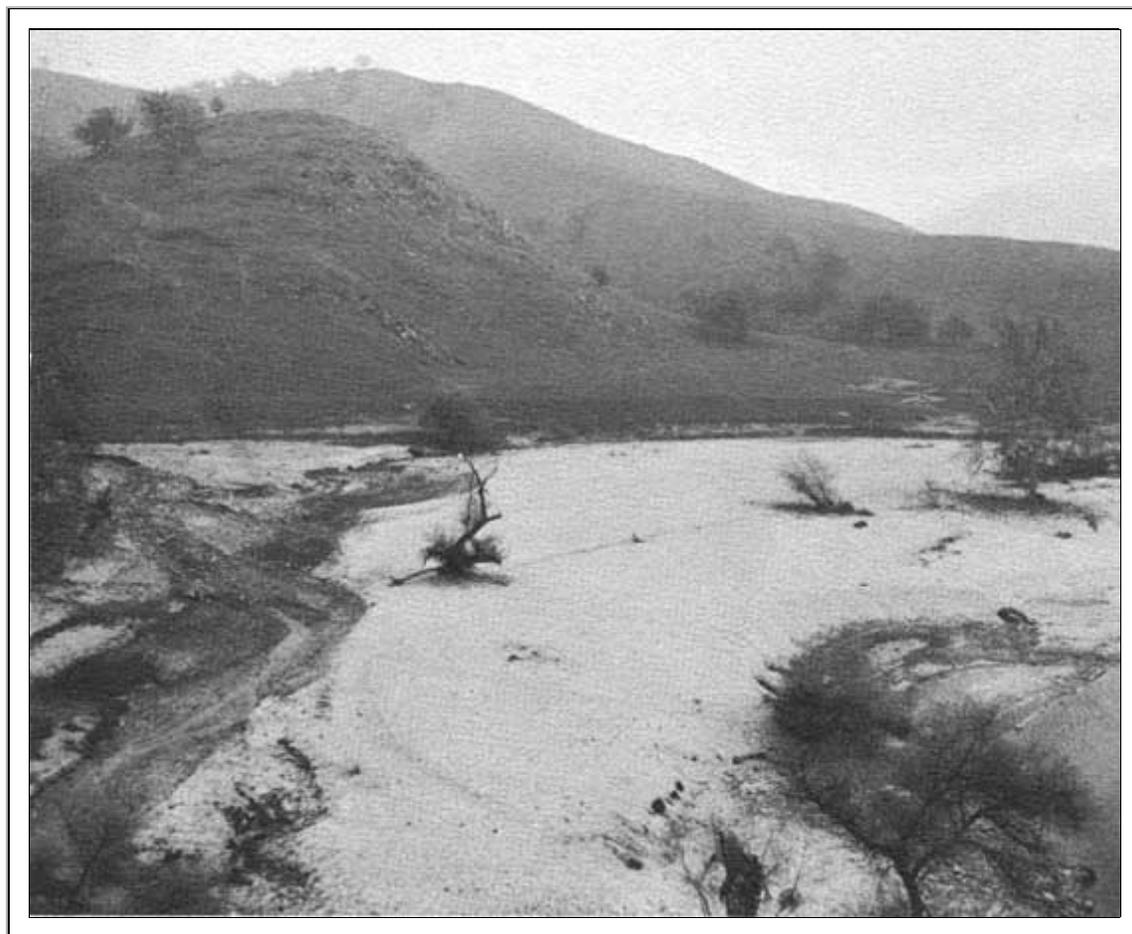
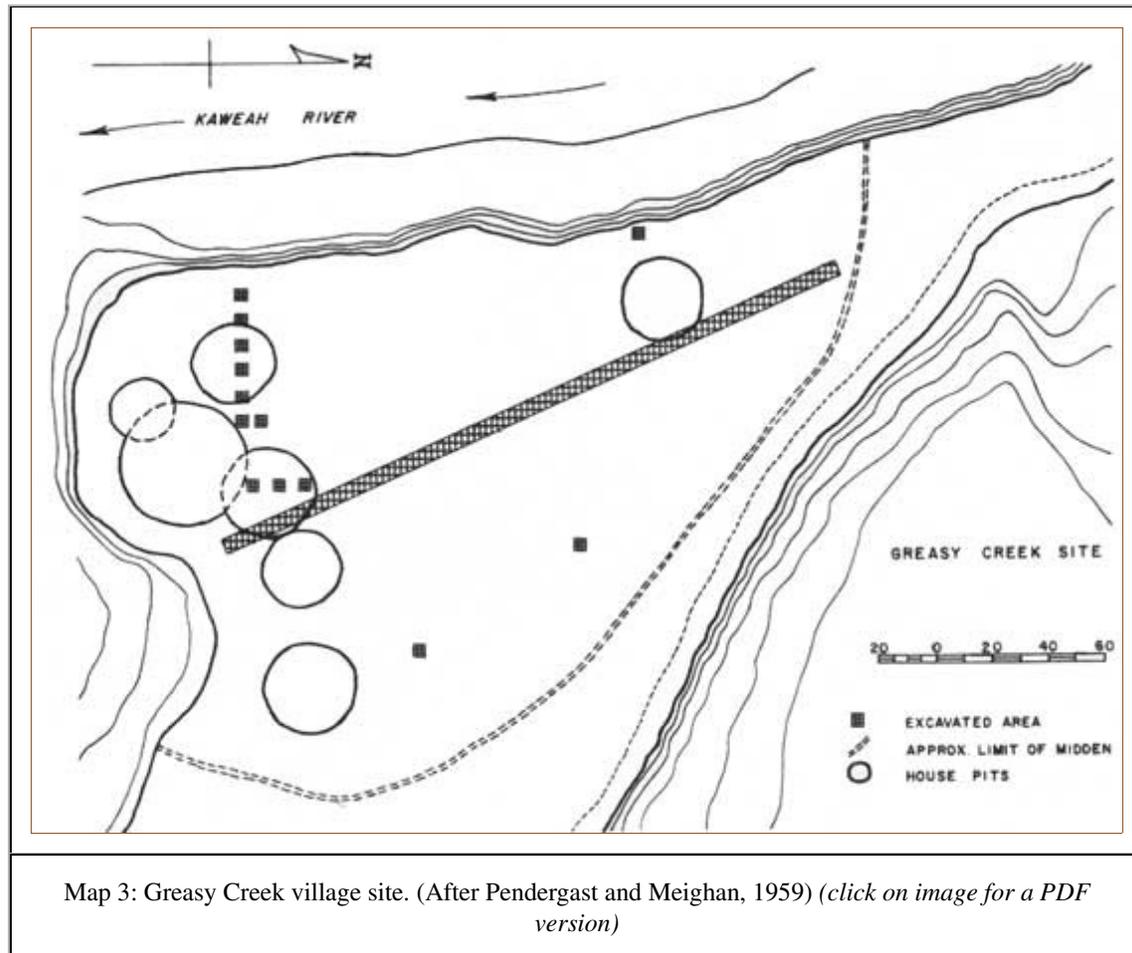
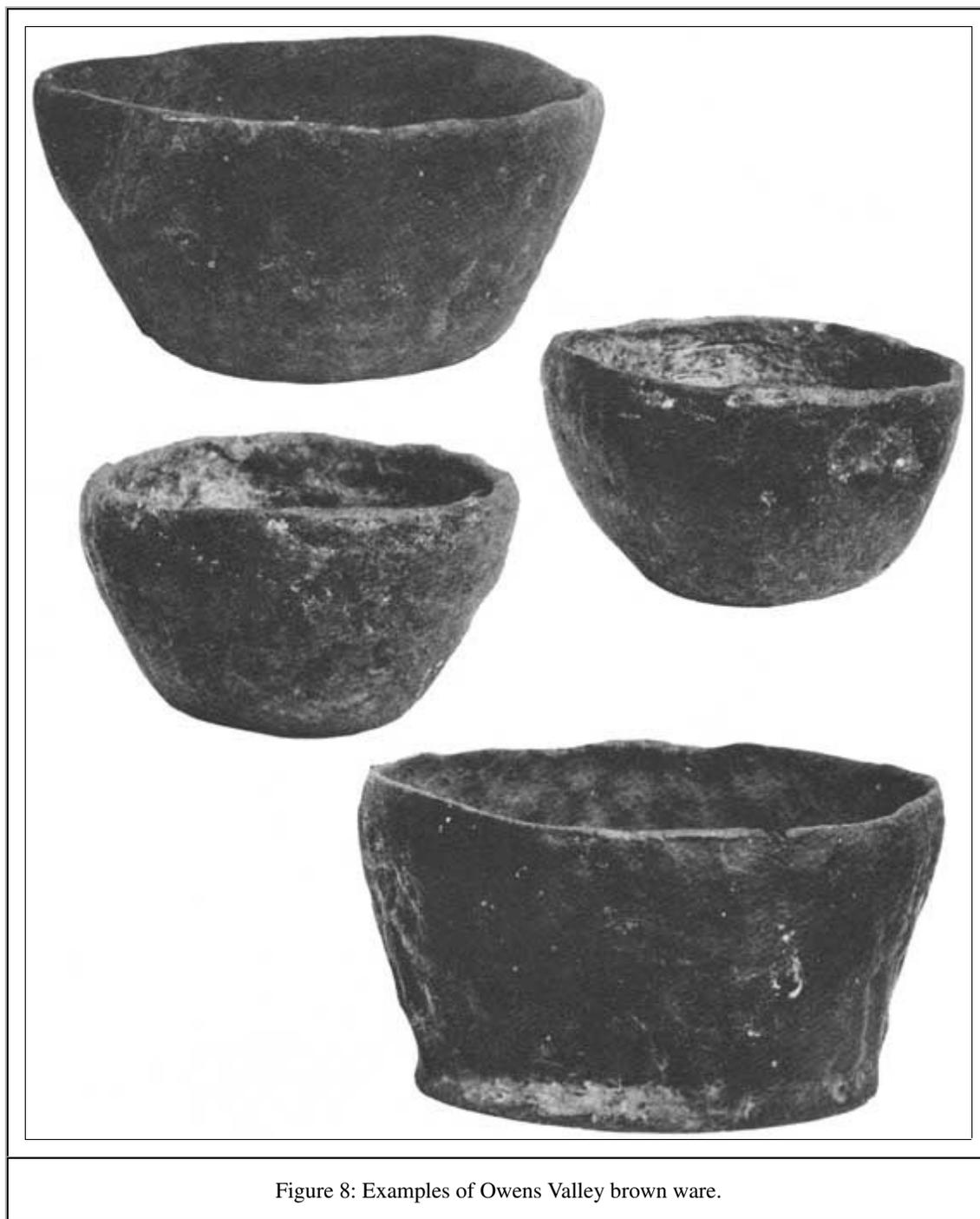


Figure 7: The Greasy Creek village site shown as a level bench at the foot of the hill in the upper left part of the photograph.



A bedrock mortar exposure on the edge of the site was thought by Pendergast and Meighan to have been used by the later occupants because the cobble pestles of the kind used with these mortars were not found in significant number in the lower levels of the midden deposit. The suggested early type of milling stone or metate, together with characteristic hand-stones or manos, was found in the lower levels but not in sufficient quantity to allow a definite conclusion about the sequence of use.

Sherds of a crude sort of pottery (see Figure 8) known as Owens Valley brown ware (from its abundance at sites in Owens Valley on the east side of the Sierra Nevada) were recovered, but only in the top twelve inches of deposit. Along with the pottery, small projectile points of obsidian and chalcedony were recovered. It was assumed that the dearth of these projectile points below the top foot of deposit must indicate the use of perishable wooden-pointed arrows since the bow was almost certainly used at the site before the advent of pottery and of the small stone points.



Human burials at the Greasy Creek site were uncommon, only two having been recovered. One of these was possibly a secondary inhumation since no articulation was noted, and the other was probably a cremation found at a depth of 65 inches. Both the relatively great depth of the latter grave and the fact that the practice of cremation has not been reported ethnographically for the Wukchumni, at least as a general practice, [13] suggest the introduction at some point in the prehistoric period of either a new custom or a new migrant people who had the custom of simple inhumation of the dead. However, this one example is not sufficient to make such an inference of much value.

On the surface of the site were noted seven shallow, roughly circular pits, probably house pits, ranging in diameter from 27 to 48 feet with an average diameter of 31 feet. These pits were

larger than those observed at the Slick Rock Village site up the river, and are much larger (up to eleven times greater in diameter) than the shallow pits used in connection with the houses of the historic Wukchumni. Dimensions of any circular house pits occurring below the present surface of the site could not be determined, hence it could not be proved that any changes occurred in size of pits during the early or middle ranges of occupation of the site. It is evident that if these large pits are indeed house pits, then "a significant shift in late prehistoric or protohistoric times from larger groups to single family dwelling [Wukchumni type] is indicated." [14] Whatever size of house was employed, the fairly widespread evidence of burnt clay fragments with impressions of grass and twigs seems to indicate the use of clay-plastered brush or grass thatched houses both in historic and prehistoric times.

Although it was not possible to date the beginning of occupation at the Greasy Creek site, the presence of such artifacts as core choppers and scrapers, hammerstones, large obsidian projectile points or knives, and tubular bone beads, in addition to some of those types of artifacts already discussed, may be meaningful. These traits all suggest comparatively early occupation and serve to relate the Greasy Creek site to other sites in the central and southern Sierra Nevada. This is a frank appeal to the concept that, the older traits are also those with the widest distribution.

The tubular clay pipe, steatite disc beads and vessels, *Olivella* disc beads, and perhaps bone awls all were recovered, as expected, in the later strata of the site. (See Figure 9.)

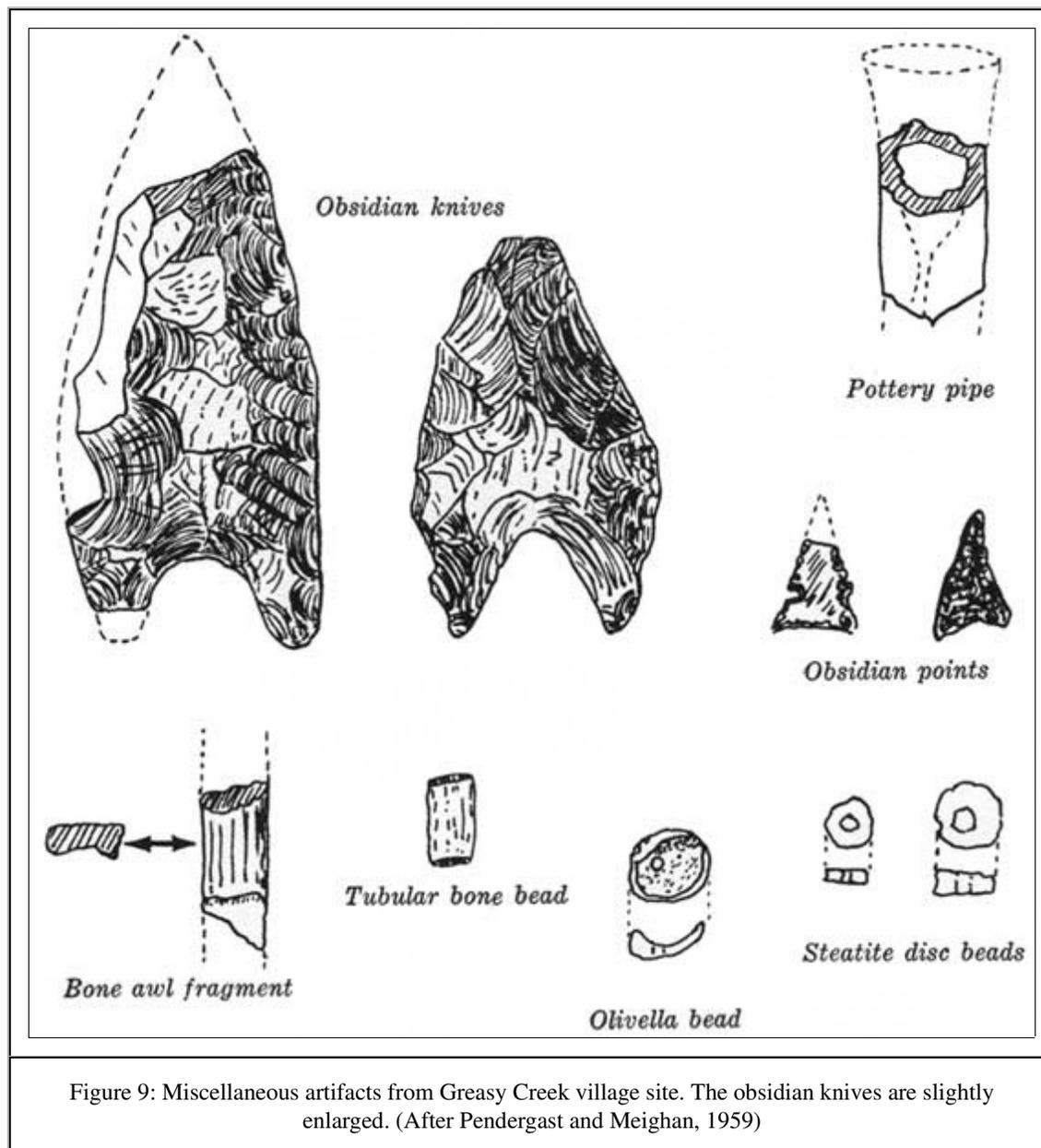
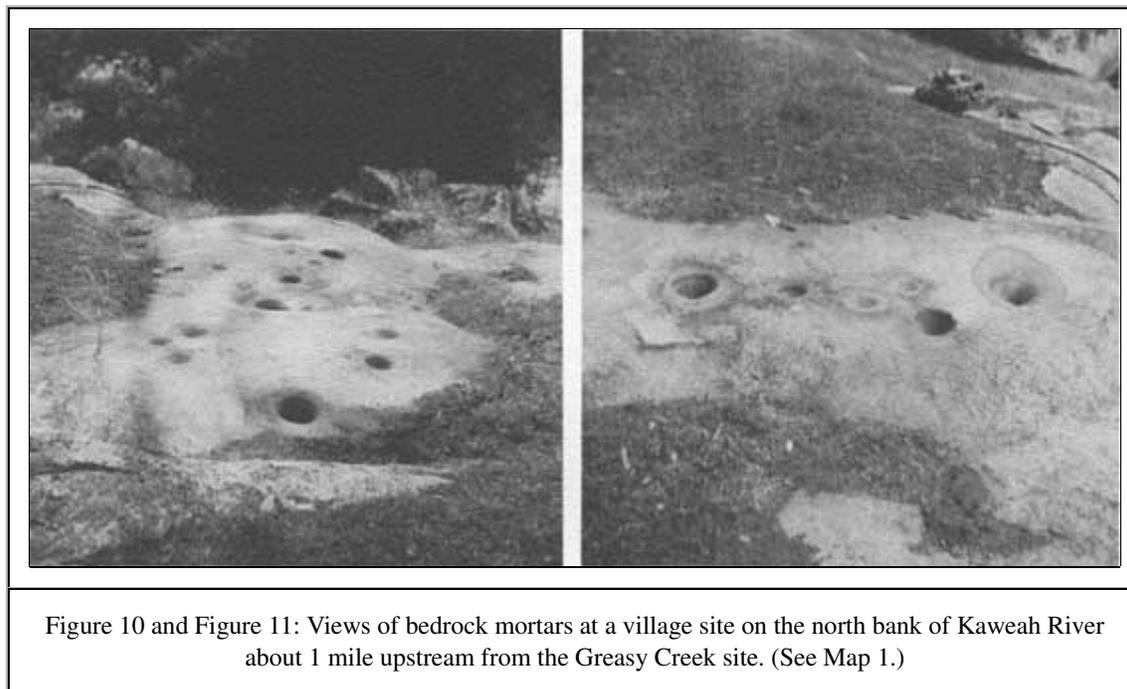


Figure 9: Miscellaneous artifacts from Greasy Creek village site. The obsidian knives are slightly enlarged. (After Pendergast and Meighan, 1959)

Pendergast and Meighan do not suggest a beginning date for the site, but only comment that the introduction of pottery (represented in the top 12 inches of deposit) probably occurred since 1300 A.D. [15] Elsasser, [16] while observing that the deep midden deposit at Hospital Rock (located on the Kaweah River above the Ash Mountain headquarters of Sequoia National Park) also contained a number of "earlier" appearing artifacts, could likewise not offer a firm date for this postulated early occupation. Carbon 14 datings are needed from deep levels of several sites in the region.



Slick Rock Village Site

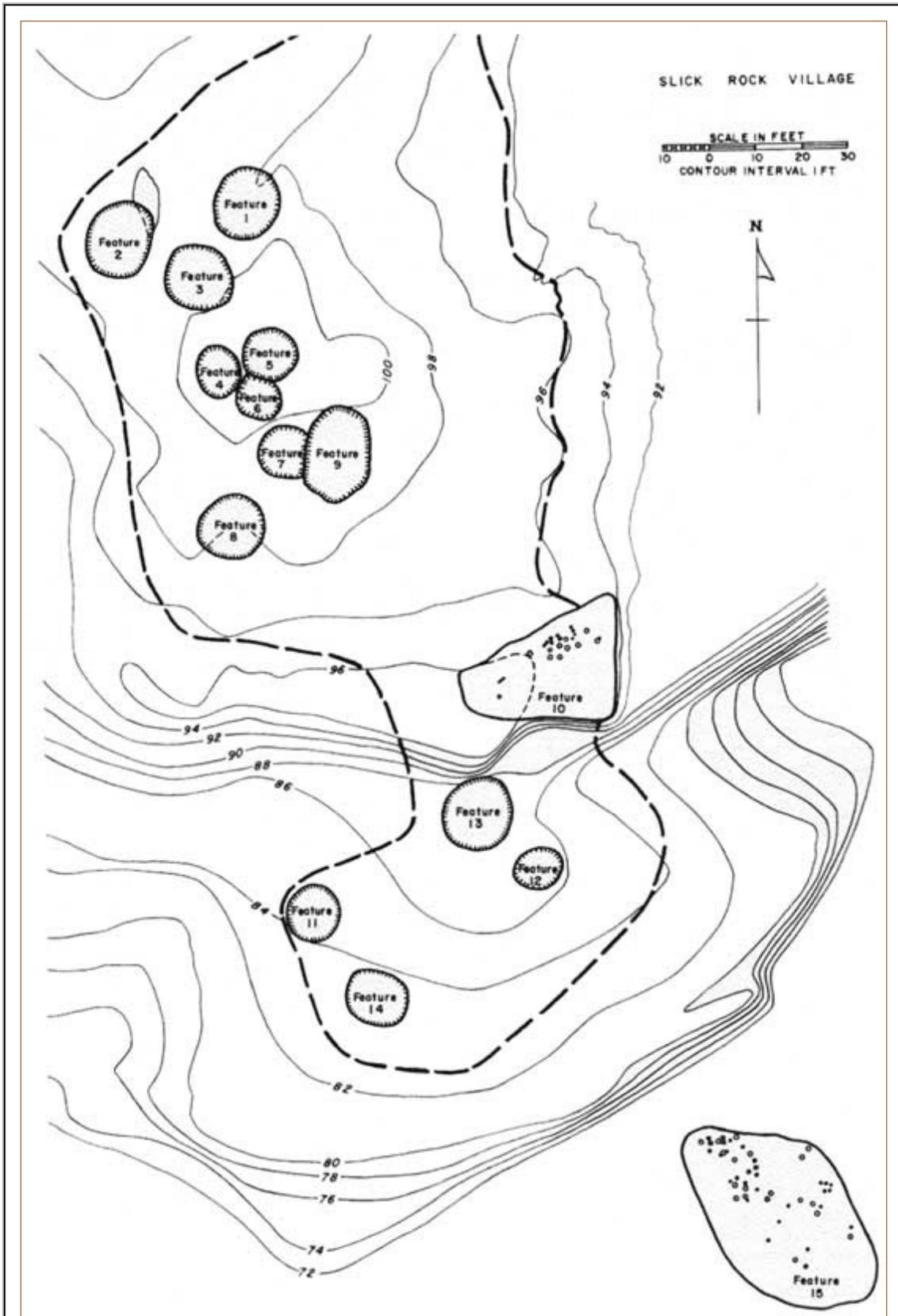
The excavation of Slick Rock Village in 1950 by a group led by F. Fenenga disclosed evidence of a late prehistoric occupation site. A few token specimens such as European type glass trade beads were found in the upper levels of the site deposit and suggested a nineteenth century contact with white men. Nevertheless, Fenenga could not identify the site by name with any historic Yokuts village, although there was a named Wukchumni village directly across the Kaweah River from the Slick Rock site. In addition, Slick Rock itself was known as "Pahdin" to the Wukchumni. According to Latta, [17] "it was thought that an evil spirit dwelt under Pahdin and pulled swimmers into the water hole and drowned them. Pahdin was the extreme upstream limits of the Wukchumni."

The Slick Rock site showed an irregular distribution of soil deposit that had a maximum depth of 52 inches. Artifacts from the entire site tended to correspond with those taken from the upper levels only at the Greasy Creek site, thus placing it in what appears to be ancestral Wukchumni territory. Fenenga placed the historic boundary between the Monachi group, the Balwisha or Patwisha, at three miles up the Kaweah River (near the present town of Three Rivers), while von Werlhof [18] is more specific, indicating a village called hotnú nyu about one mile west of Three Rivers as the Wukchumni outpost. Several lines of evidence from the Slick Rock site bear out the claim that ancestral Wukchumni must have occupied this village. It is known that the Wukchumni utilized grass thatch to cover their houses, while the Patwisha primarily used bark. During the Slick Rock Village excavation, numerous pieces of burnt clay similar to those described as occurring at the Greasy Creek site were found. These clay fragments are thought to have been used as a crude plaster material for house walls. Since they bear impressions of grass stems, it is assumed that the plaster was applied over the grass thatch used in Wukchumni houses.

The other apparent support for the idea of Wukchumni ancestry is that eight of the ten interments observed at Slick Rock Village were primary inhumations, and only two were

secondary cremations. These remains were presumably deposited in the spots where they were found after they had been burnt elsewhere. The eight inhumations all lay on bedrock in tightly flexed positions, and in all of the graves there was an abundance of rock fill. This type of burial is the kind practiced most frequently by the historic Wukchumni and the cremations could correspond to the general custom of the historic Patwisha. Since the two groups lived so close to each other, it would not be particularly unexpected to find a sharing of practices, with the predominating practice attributable to the longer-resident group, in this case probably the ancestral Wukchumni.

Another point in favor of the suggested relationship between the residents of Slick Rock Village and the Wukchumni is that the house pits themselves are quite in accord with the kind used by the latter. Where the Greasy Creek pits averaged 31 feet in diameter, the 13 Slick Rock Village pits ranged from 10.5 to 16 feet in diameter (refer to Map 4). The depths of these pits from the surface of the site range from 3 to 9 inches, and, as at Greasy Creek, no separate floor levels or post holes could be identified. Probably this is attributable to the friable, porous nature of the midden deposit, which was not suited to preserving such features.



Map 4: Slick Rock Village. Features designated 10 and 15 are milling places while the remaining features are house pits. (After Fenenga, 1952) [\(click on image for a PDF version\)](#)

Artifacts presumably surviving from an older culture period at Slick Rock Village are large

concave-based obsidian points or knives, the metate or portable milling stone (one specimen), manos (two specimens), stone scrapers, and relatively crude choppers probably used as woodworking tools for house construction.

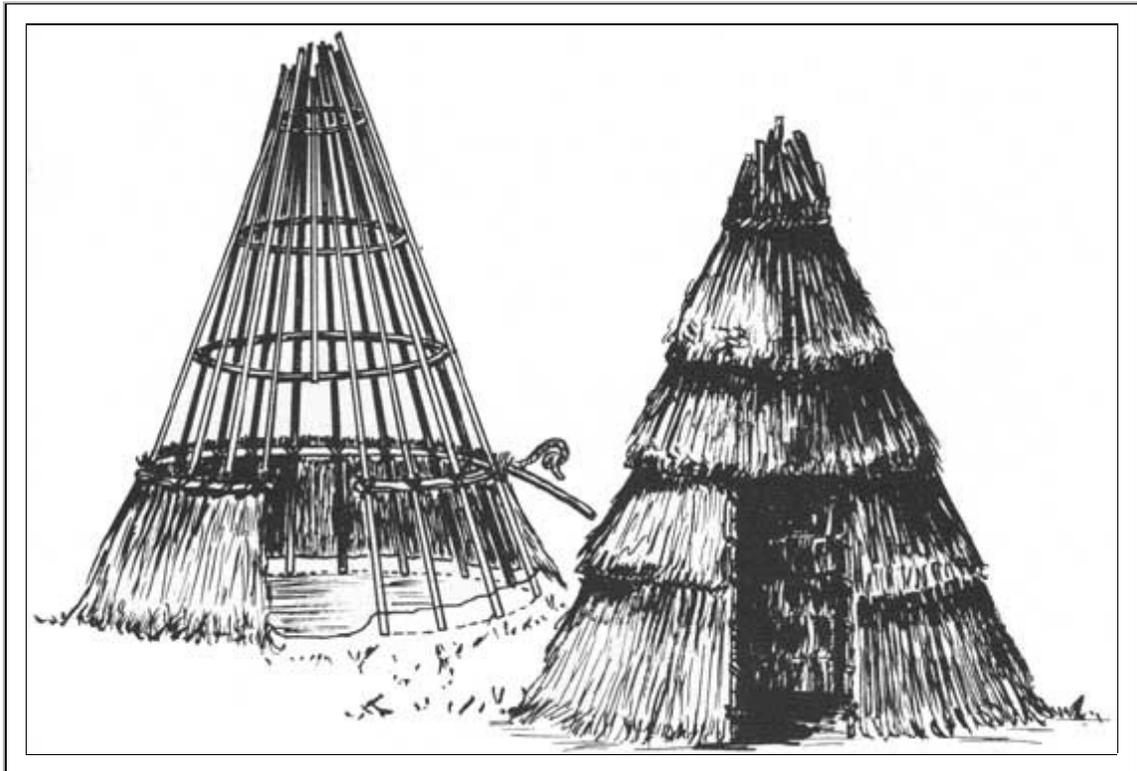


Figure 12: Yokuts conical house, central foothill type with mat door and inner ring at smoke vent. (After Rogers)

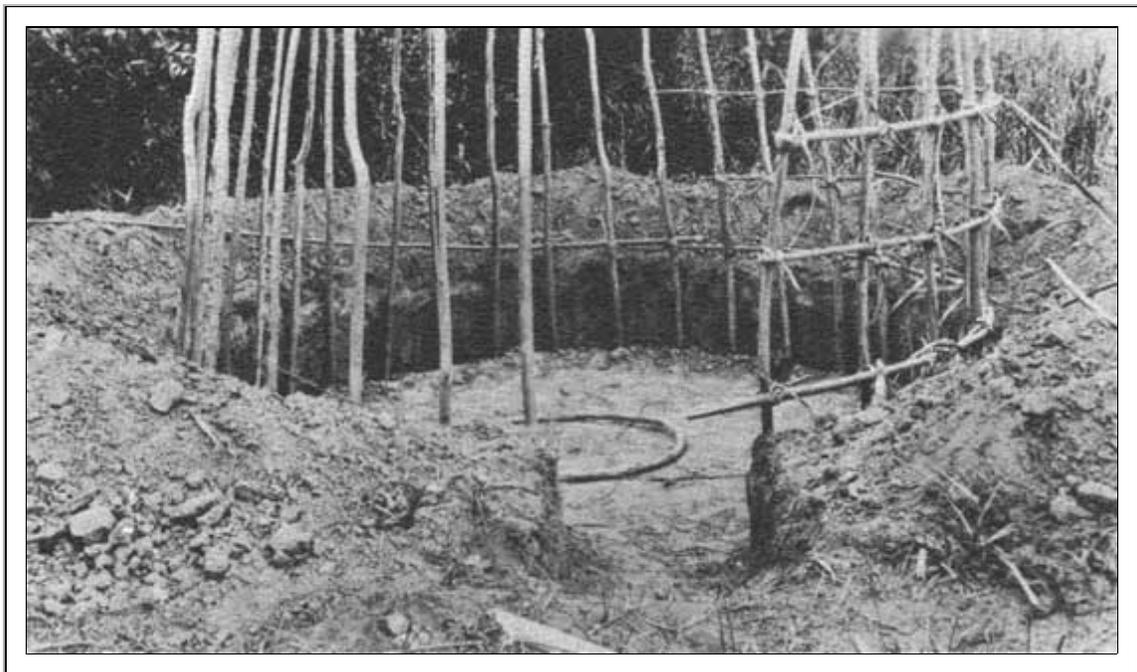


Figure 13: Yokuts conical house under construction.

Artifacts definitely paralleling the upper levels of the Greasy Creek site included tubular clay pipes, pottery fragments, and vessels (called "Tulare Plain" ware by Fenenga, but evidently the same as Owens Valley brown ware mentioned in the description of the Greasy Creek site); small, triangular, side-notched obsidian points (rare); *Olivella* disc beads; bone awls; and steatite vessels and disc beads, the Slick Rock Village showed a rich array of steatite specimens, including labrets and pendants, "comals" or frying pans, and stones with pits gouged in them, possibly for use as acorn anvils, i.e., stones with holes in which one end of the acorn could be placed in order to stabilize it for cracking.

Remains of food animals at Slick Rock Village were not essentially different from those found at Greasy Creek. The fresh water mussel was evidently used in both sites and deer bones were present in abundance. Considering the proximity of both sites to the river, it is surprising that fish bones were not mentioned by Pendergast and Meighan, though they suggested that poor preservation may be the explanation for the comparatively small collection of faunal remains of any kind found in the site. Fenenga specifically commented on the unexpected absence of fish bones at Slick Rock Village. Whether or not the condition of the soil deposits in the Terminus Reservoir site was responsible for the dearth of faunal remains found there, the importance of plant foods demonstrated by the great number of milling stones is consistent throughout the length of the area under consideration.

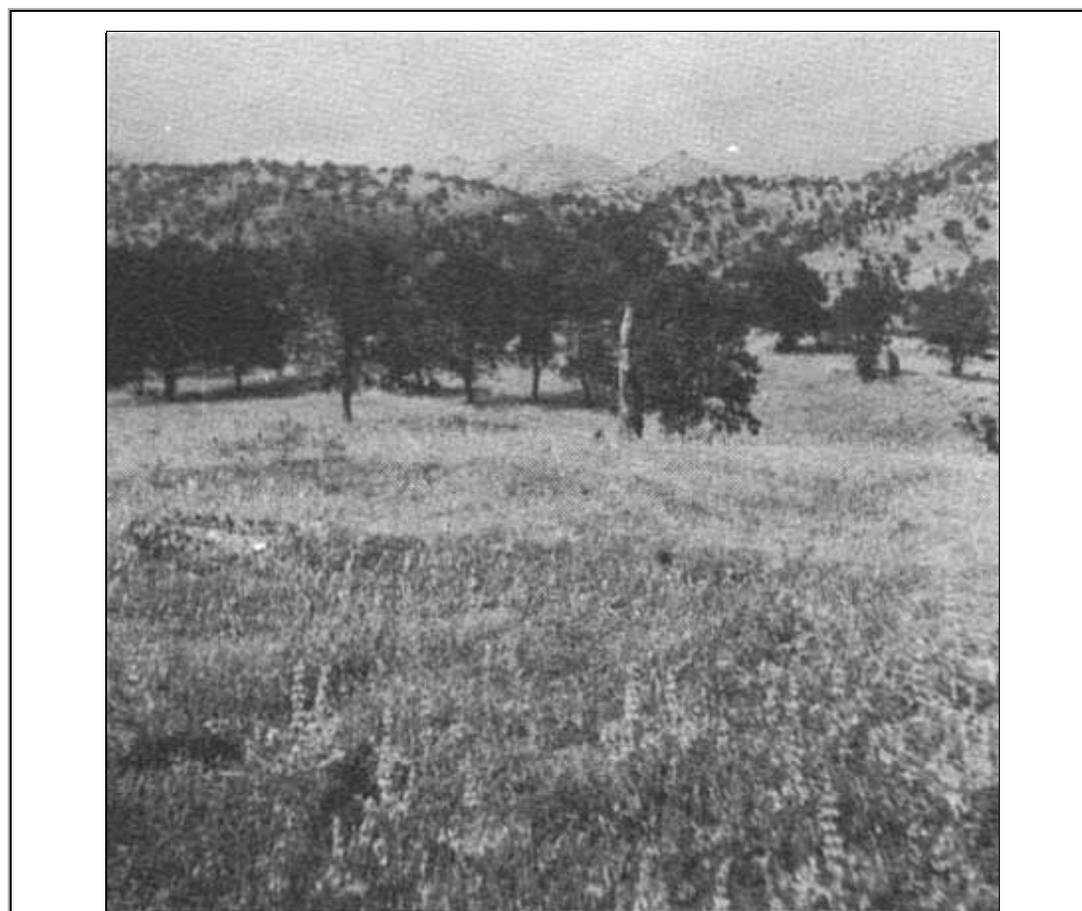


Figure 14: Site of Slick Rock Village. House pit depressions are visible in middle foreground.

Cobble Lodge Site

The Cobble Lodge site was not of the same pattern as the other two excavations here summarized. It appears that the area excavated was a burial ground only, perhaps used in connection with numerous sites in the region as well as with an adjacent occupation site partially destroyed by plowing during the decade of the 1930's. It happened that the occupation site was formerly part of the holdings of Hale Tharp, the first white settler in the lower Kaweah River country, and his living nephew had some significant information about the site which was imparted to von Werlhof. Mr. Vehrs, the nephew, stated that there were circular house pits on the occupation part of the site before about 1930, when that portion was plowed. Hale Tharp had told Mr. Vehrs that there were Indians living on the site in the 1860's, but that a smallpox epidemic had virtually destroyed this population. Thus we have an eyewitness account by a chain of white persons of occupation at the site, although Gayton does not list this site as one known to her Yokuts informants.

It cannot now be known positively whether any of the victims of the epidemic were buried at any level of the main cemetery. Although the burials following the epidemic were said to have been made in a wholesale fashion, von Werlhof [19] reported that the burials found were usually oriented with the skull facing west (Driver cites northwest as the direction of orientation for the Wukchumni dead). Furthermore, von Werlhof [20] believes that one of the main pits where fifty or more individuals were buried in a single day was detached, being located on the northeast side of the site that he excavated.

The main cemetery deposit showed a maximum depth of 96 inches and 130 burials (distributed in all of the eight one-foot levels which were dug by von Werlhof) were recovered. Unfortunately, these burials present a number of anomalies from what is known of Wukchumni practices and from those traits previously discussed for the Greasy Creek site or Slick Rock Village. Thus, the finding of red ocher (possibly indicating painting of corpses); possibly the use of wooden posts (masts) around burials; the use of burnt clay (plaster perhaps from the house of the deceased) as fill in the burial pits along with other stones; and evidence of flexed secondary burials in baskets have not been reported archeologically elsewhere in the Terminus Reservoir area, nor for the historic Wukchumni.

The practice of secondary inhumation, i.e., interment temporarily perhaps at the occupation spot but with subsequent removal to the final place, was noted in one of two burials at Greasy Creek, but has not been specifically reported for the historic Wukchumni. Von Werlhof [21] states that a larger number of small artifacts were found outside of grave plots than with the burials, and suggests that they may be in part related to the unavoidable disturbance involved in secondary inhumation.

If it is assumed that most of the unassociated artifacts found in the so-called cemetery were originally intended for use with burials, then it is not startling to discover, in an area where 130 burials were recovered, artifacts of types not noted in the less confusing excavations, at Greasy Creek or at Slick Rock Village. Eight finely made chert blades were unique for the area, and abalone pendants, six of which were found at the Cobble Lodge site, probably were not common in the Terminus Reservoir region. [22] Stone bowls or mortars reported for the Wukchumni by Driver were not found in any other archeological sites described, but seven complete or nearly complete specimens were recovered at the Cobble Lodge site. [23]

Elongate cobble pestles, manos, portable milling stones (basin metates), hammerstones, and

large obsidian knives with straight or concave bases are all elements that can probably be related to the lower levels at the Greasy Creek site. Steatite beads, pendants, and vessels; pottery sherds (rare); one complete vessel of Owens Valley brown ware; and small triangular chert and obsidian projectile points at the Cobble Lodge site can doubtless be equated with the upper levels of the Greasy Creek site and with the entire occupation of Slick Rock Village. Since the topmost level of deposit at the Cobble Lodge site was evidently removed by earth moving equipment, it was not possible to identify any definite historic artifacts there.

Von Werlhof [24] suggests some time after 1000 A.D. as the beginning of use of the cemetery, but this date may be taken with some reservation. In spite of the depth of the deposit, it is risky to speculate about the age of a site which had such a great number of burials. The latter would suggest fairly frequent disturbance, and this makes an estimation of age extremely tenuous, unless we specifically know more about the surrounding parent occupation site or sites.

On the other hand, the types of artifacts found, disturbance notwithstanding, can be equated in age with the Greasy Creek site. It seems certain that the occupation site adjacent to the cemetery at the Cobble Lodge locality site was a late prehistoric site. Von Werlhof [25] reported that test pits yielded midden to 42 inches and artifacts to 30 inches. This probably indicates that other occupation sites in the vicinity were also using the large burial ground. Driver [26] recorded the Wukchumni custom of placing cemeteries outside villages, and the relatively small number of burials at both Greasy Creek and Slick Rock Village possibly may be explained by the assumption that the people at both sites, in most cases, brought their dead to the Cobble Lodge site for final burial.

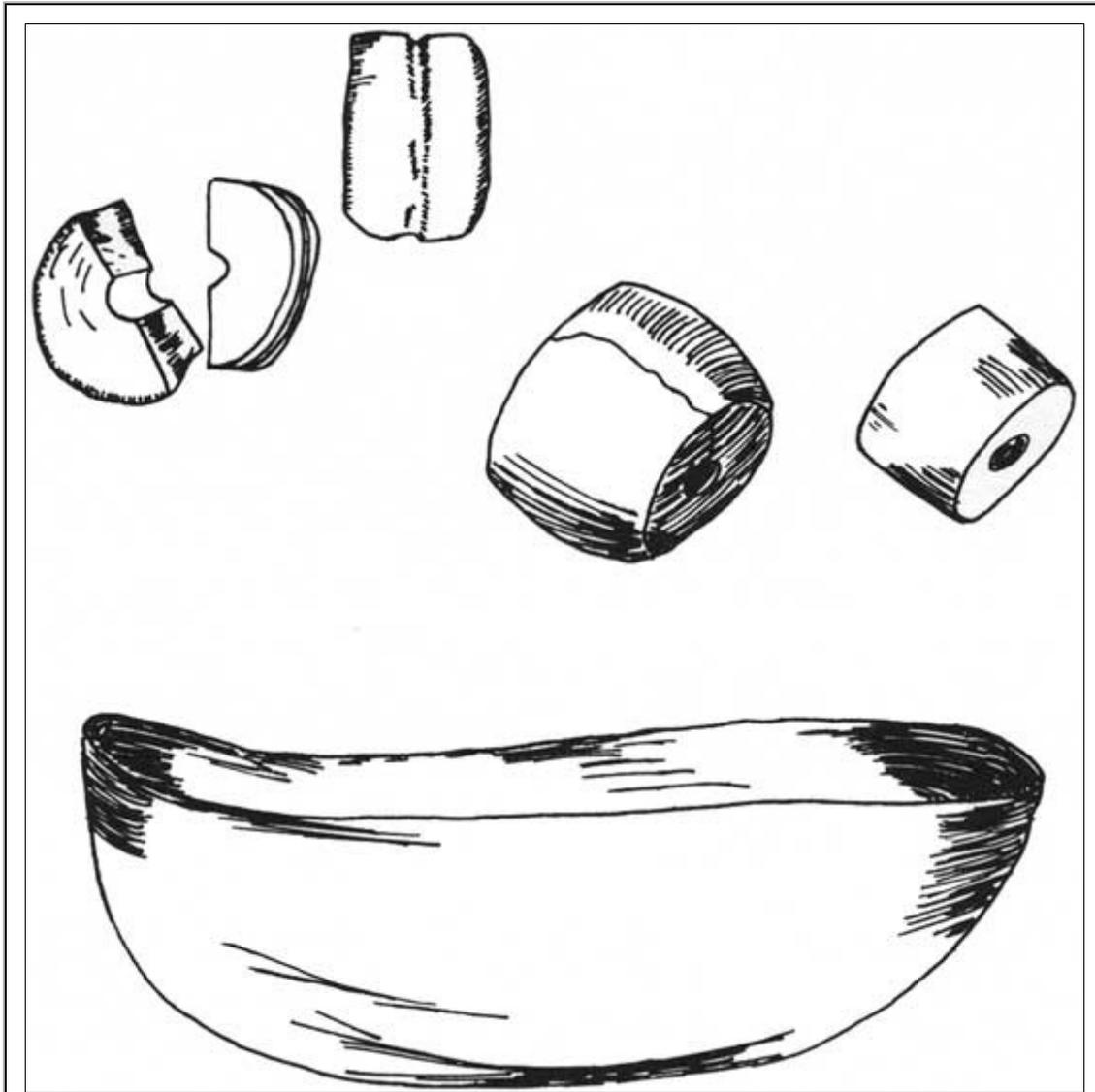


Figure 15: Steatite artifacts from the Cobble Lodge site. (After von Werlhof, 1961) *(top)* Bead with groove. The bead had been broken and mended with asphaltum. *(bottom)* Bowl, 1/2 size. Mills around edge are only slight indentations.

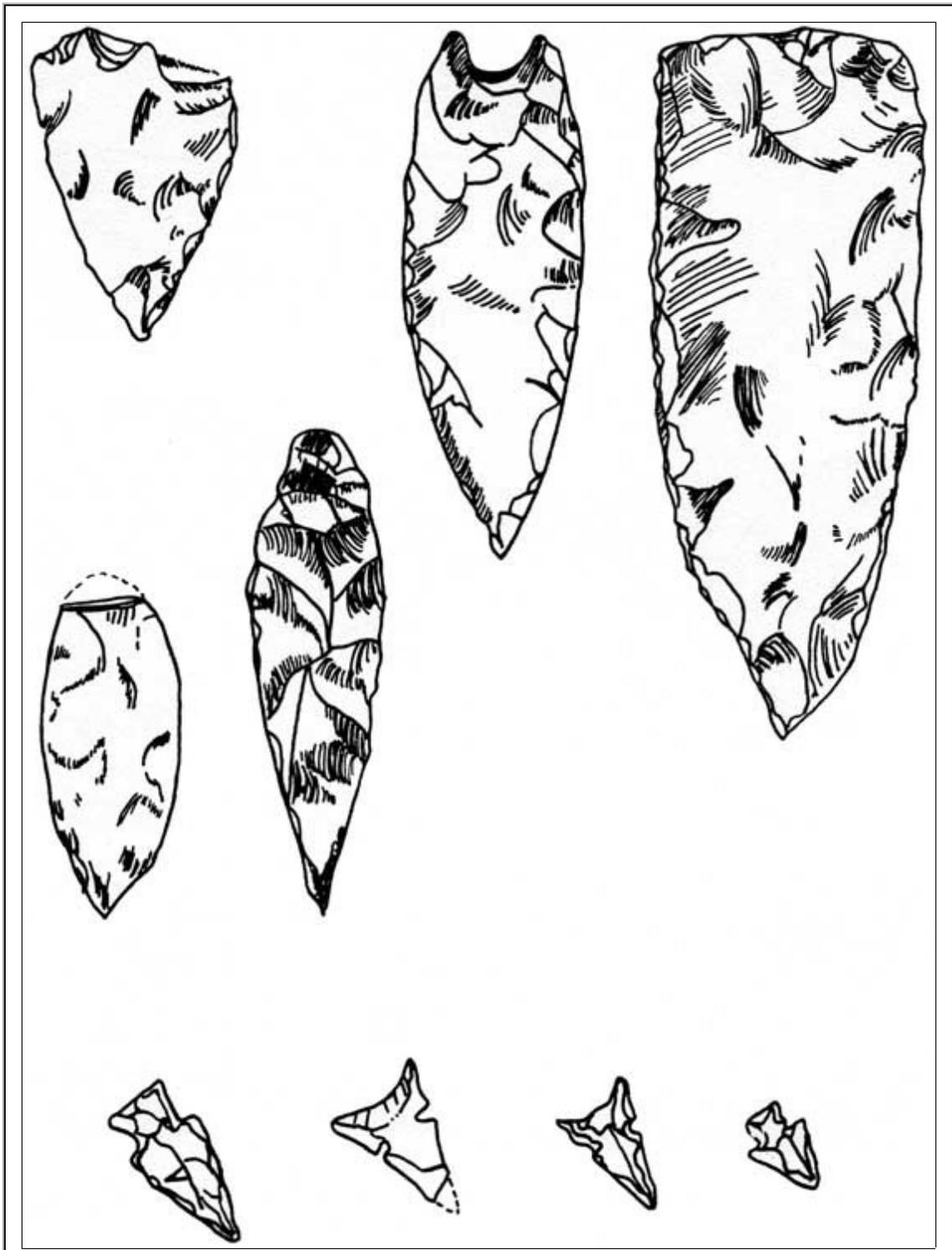


Figure 16: Obsidian artifacts from Cobble Lodge site. (After von Werlhof, 1961)

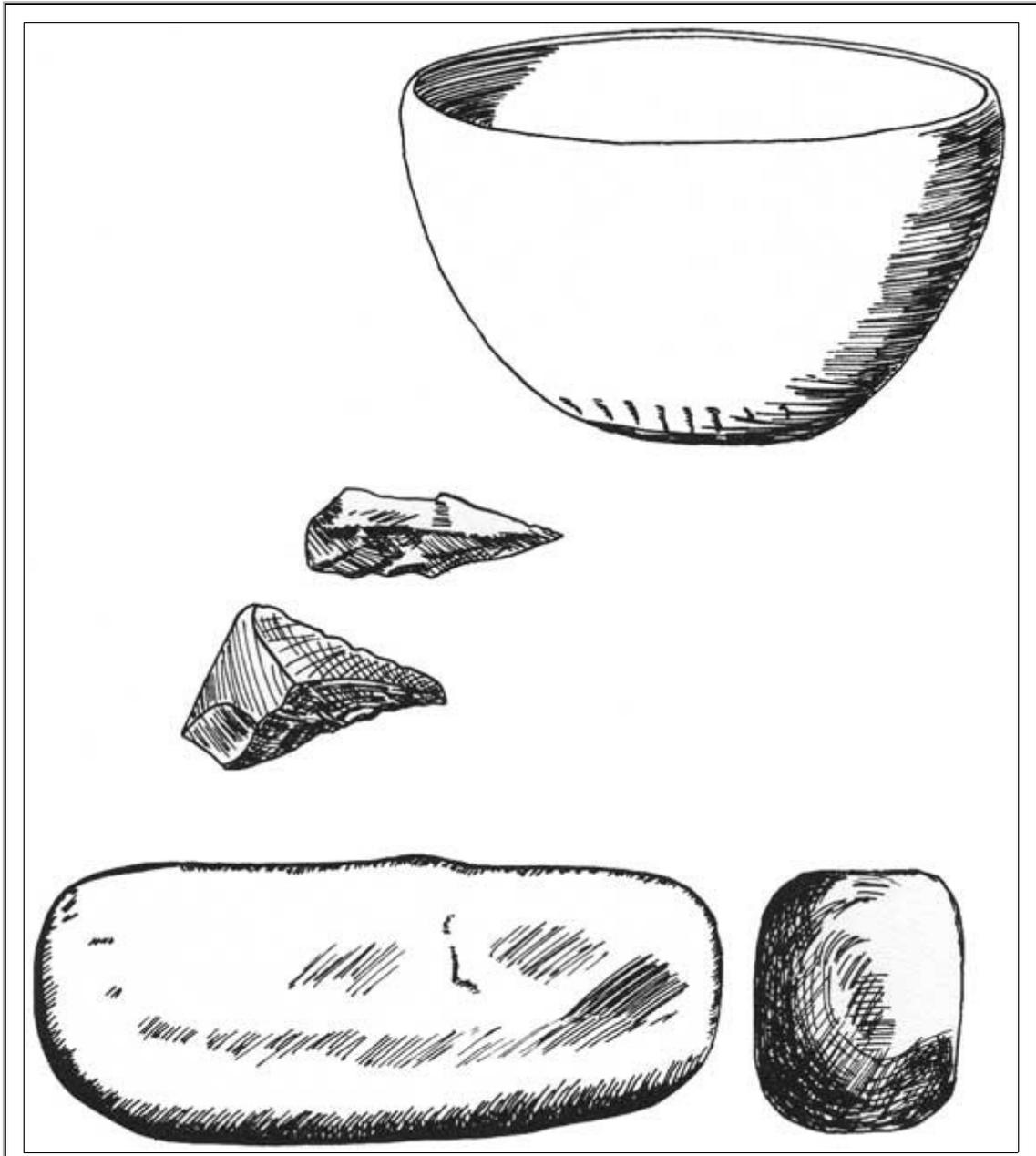
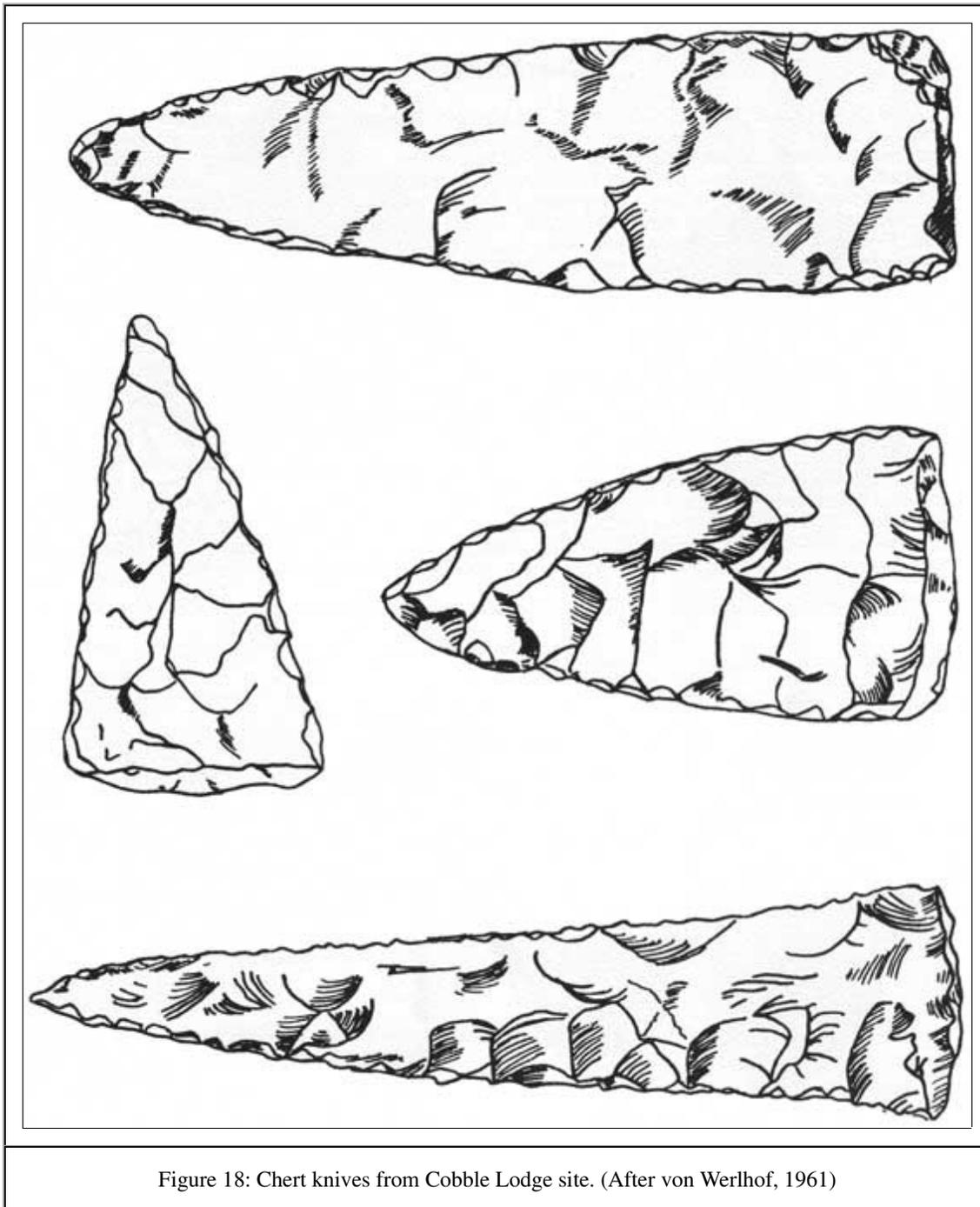


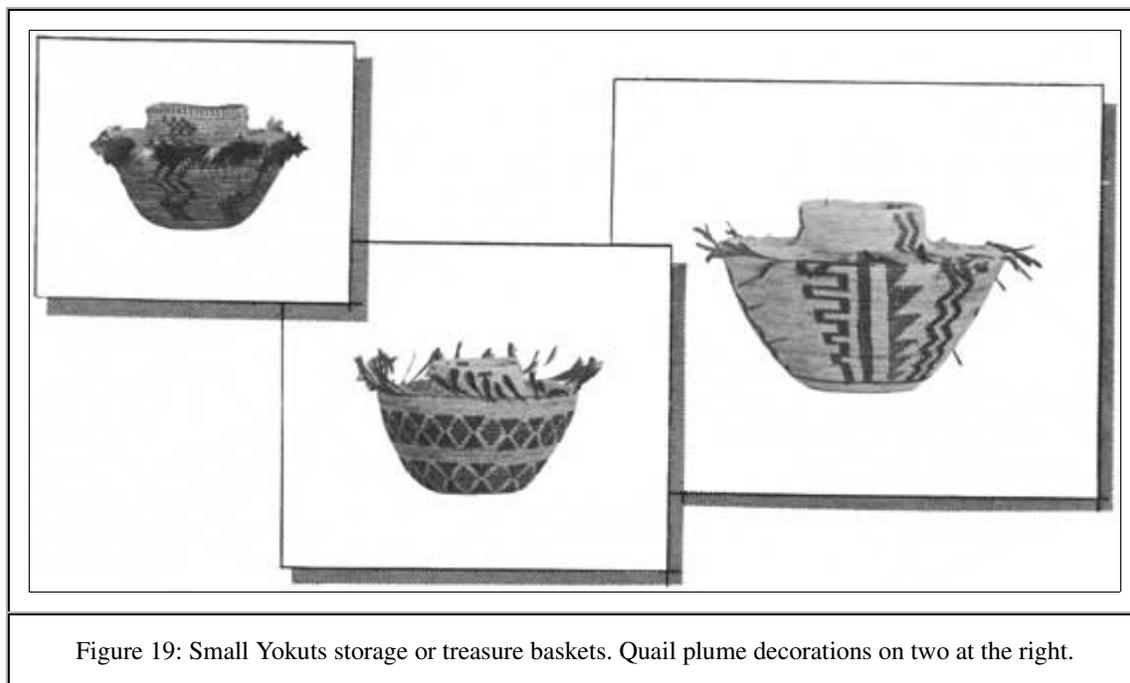
Figure 17: Miscellaneous artifacts from Cobble Lodge site. (After von Werlhof, 1961)



Conclusions

The unfortunate lack of Carbon 14 dating for the early native occupation of the Terminus Reservoir region is compensated for by the comparative richness of material, which allows construction of a picture of the life of its prehistoric people. Evidences of introduction of new elements from neighboring southern Sierran groups are not lacking, but the general portrait is one of a peaceful, stable population exploiting principally the rich flora of the region, but also depending in part upon the probably abundant local game. Presumably, the villages could have been occupied for a good part of each year, but we can infer that the people vacated these home villages in summer for the high mountains, in order to escape the heat of the Central Valley and perhaps to enjoy a temporary change of diet and scenery.

The archeological evidence recovered from these three excavations reveals that early inhabitants of the Terminus Reservoir region probably were the direct ancestors of the historic Wukchumni, a sub-group of the Yokuts Indians who occupied almost the entire southern San Joaquin Valley. Even though the stone and bone artifacts taken from the excavations can provide but a thin sketch of the life of the people, the remarkably full ethnographic information can supplement this to show the life history of a small group in a small homogenous region in the lower foothills of the southern Sierra Nevada. This correlation of prehistoric and historic traits is even more striking when it can be made for an area that lies so close to a distinct linguistic and cultural boundary, i.e., that between the Penutian-speaking Yokuts and the Shoshonean-speaking Monachi.



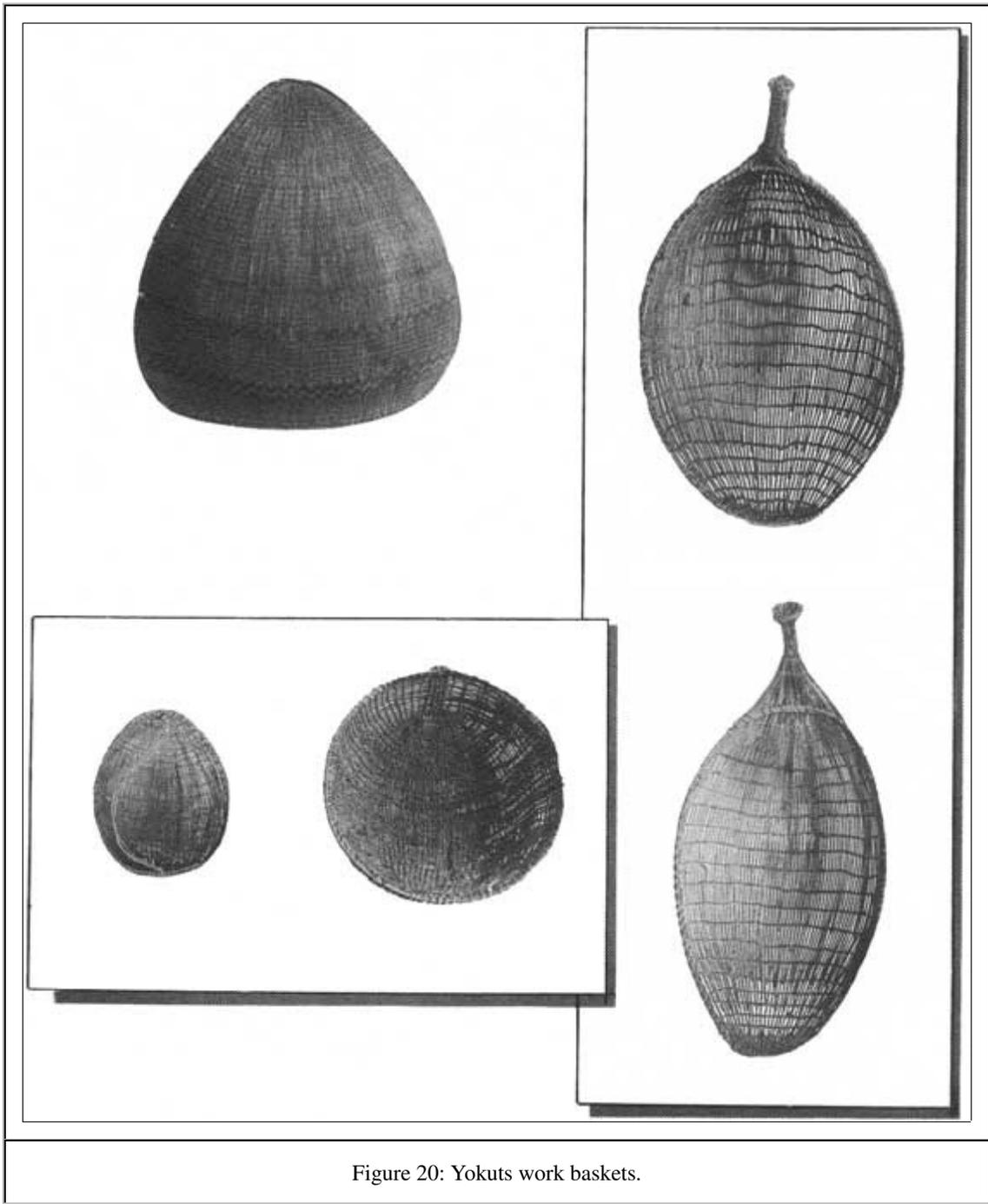


Figure 20: Yokuts work baskets.

[<<< Previous](#)

[<<< Contents >>>](#)

[Next >>>](#)

sec4.htm
Last Updated: 08-Sep-2008