

Indian remains found

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VALLEJO — Remains of native American Indian villages and burial grounds dating back to 1000 A.D. have been identified in South Vallejo, according to the state Office of Historic Preservation and the Native American Heritage Commission.

Believed to be remains of either the Southern Patwin or Ohlone Indians, the sites have been recorded with the state and are considered among the most significant remaining archaeological sites in California.

"This is a known archaeological site first recorded in 1907," said William Johnson, a staff analyst for the Native American Heritage Commission, explaining that once the sites are disturbed their significance is destroyed. Because of the potential for vandalism, he requested that the exact site of the find not be revealed.

The local finds have been mostly undisturbed and for that reason still hold a wealth of information about prehistoric village life, he said.

First recorded as an archaeological site by the University of California in 1907 and 1912, portions of the sites were apparently uncovered in 1984 and again last year during construction.

The state was consulted at that time and a report was drafted by the Sacramento archaeological consulting firm, Peak and Associates Inc. That report advised developers how to avoid disturbing the site. The firm has also recommended steps be taken to protect the site from vandals.

And protection has been the state's major concern in the matter. Johnson visited the archaeological site last week and said Wednesday he is satisfied that it has been restored and its integrity as an archaeological site is intact.

"I was there last week and the site now meets with our normal mitigation procedures," Johnson said. Building at and around the site apparently isn't a concern as long as the underlying material isn't disturbed, he said.

Bones, tools, grinding imple-

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ments, shell mounds, small basins, "and things generally indicative of village life" are part of the ancient site, one of many that have been discovered in the Bay Area during this century. Few of those finds are still intact, however, since vandalism of such sites is rampant.

Particularly significant to the local site are piles of discarded shells, usually of mussels, a mainstay of the Indian diet. Indians who inhabited this area also buried their dead near their villages, so the local sites reveal information about both village life and burial customs.

Although the inhabitants of the Vallejo site were believed to be Southern Patwin or Ohlone, "this is a prehistoric site so we have no real way of knowing exactly what tribe" lived in the area, Johnson said. Archaeological investigations date the village's existence at just prior to 1000 A.D. through a dating method that is considered highly accurate.

"The Bay Area is full of areas

where tribes had a lot of commerce between them, and as a result this site could have been (inhabited by) two or three different groups. It's difficult to determine which one this was, but we're relatively sure they were Ohlone or Southern Patwin," Johnson said.

Authorities on the subject are reluctant to discuss the site, fearing information about it will draw vandals who dig up such sites to steal tokens that are sometimes kept and sometimes sold as occult items.

"We need the contextual information, (which is) the location of certain finds in relation to other finds. So in a sense, the vandal is tearing out a page of history that's gone forever," said William Seidel, staff archaeologist for the Office of Historical Preservation, explaining that the value of an archaeological find is significantly diminished after it's disrupted.

"We're not talking about amateur archaeologists. These people are vandals out looking for goodies that might be worth money," Seidel said.