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REPORTS

To Trade, or Not to Trade: a Pomo Example

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Recently archaeologists have addressed themselves to the question of prehistoric trade relationships as shown by the distribution of obsidian; this concern has been especially apparent in California. Ericson (1977) presented a preliminary approach to the study of (alleged) egalitarian exchange systems within the state. Using obsidian as his focal point, he attempted to demonstrate the correlation between obsidian sources, trade routes (Davis 1961), and distance. In addition, he tested these data against Kroeber's (1925) ethnolinguistic boundaries. By plotting the various criteria and examining their distribution, Ericson argued for the existence of a definite trade network (or series thereof) which is reflected by lithic assemblages within archaeological sites. Upon comparing these distributions, he found a patterning which showed similarities between amount of obsidian (relative to other lithic materials) and trade routes and distance. He found no correlation between obsidian presence and ethnolinguistic borders.

It is my opinion that, while Ericson has certainly drawn attention to interesting patterning, he has in no way demonstrated the existence of trade networks. He has, in fact, only pointed out an obvious displacement in obsidian distributions.

There seems to be a widespread assumption among those archaeologists working with

prehistoric exchange that when obsidian (or any other resource) has as its origin a source some distance from the site in which it is found, the only reasonable way the material could have traversed the intervening area is by way of exchange. Distance, in fact, has achieved such status that Renfrew (1977) proposed a law to define the fall-off rate of exotic materials as they get farther from their source locale: the Law of Monotonic Decrement. It would seem that archaeologists are once again going beyond their data, and not necessarily in a positive direction. Tringham (1978) termed this condition "leapfrogging"; one cannot deal with higher level problems such as socio-political interaction without first explaining the more mundane, basic recovered data. And without having even demonstrated the existence of such a process as trade, certain archaeologists are, among other things, attempting to deal with the concomitant socio-political consequences.

This paper will attempt to demonstrate the inadequacy of this simplistic approach to trade. It will do so using ethnographic data from the Pomo Indians of California.

THE CASE

The Pomo of California have been divided into seven major groups based on linguistic evidence (Barrett 1908). The groups in their entirety cover a range reaching from approximately Fort Bragg to the north, Bodega Head to the south, and Clear Lake to the east (see Fig. 1). Within this area, at Clear Lake, Lake County, are two of the major California obsidian sources: Borax Lake and Mt. Konocti

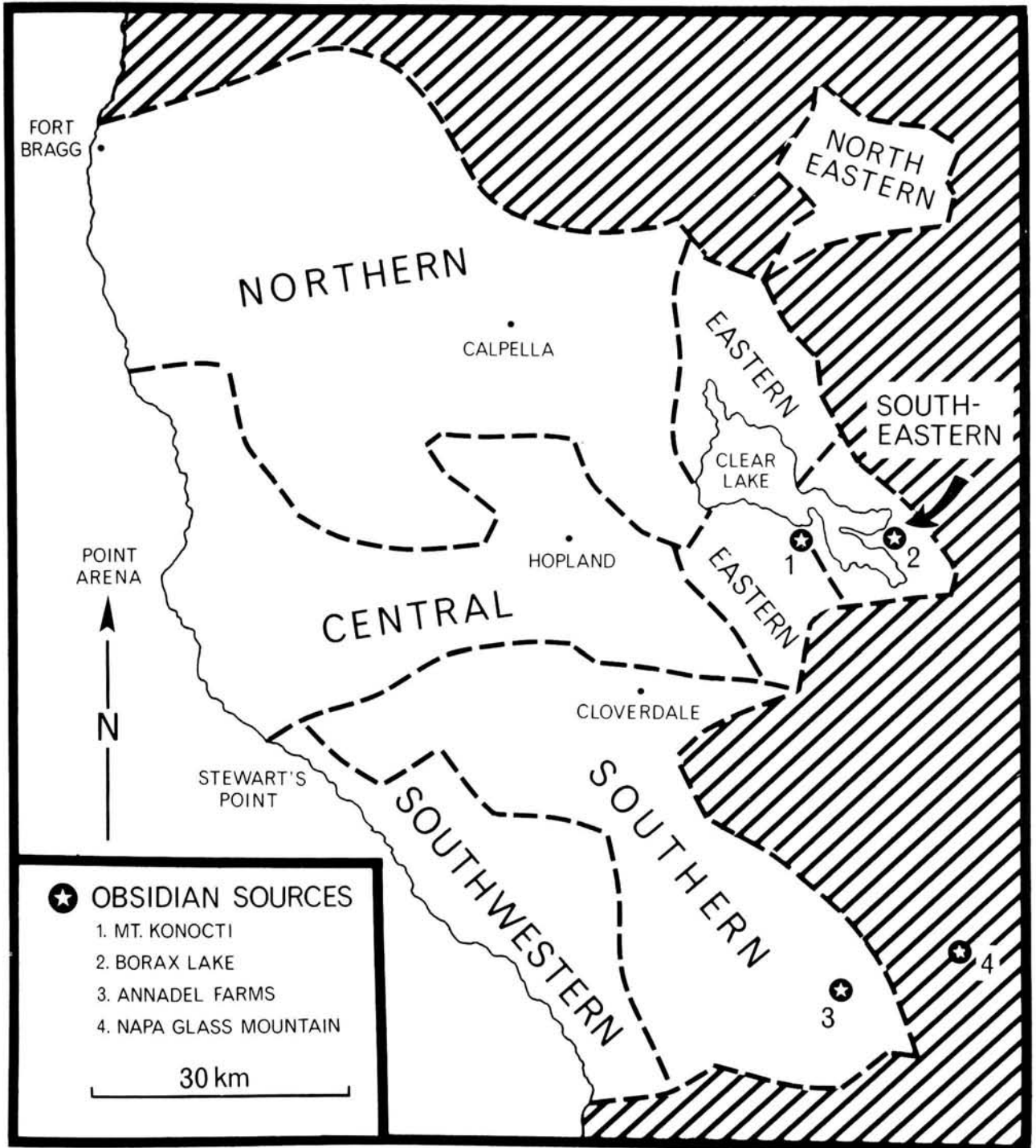


Fig. 1. Pomo ethnolinguistic boundaries with obsidian sources and cited tribelets.

(Ericson, Hagan, and Chesterman 1976). As Fig. 1 indicates, not all the Pomo groups have direct territorial connection with Clear Lake.

If the distribution of obsidian is to be viewed under the popular assumptions of archaeological exchange, we would expect those groups not in close proximity to sources to have acquired their stone through trade. This, however, is not the case as discussed in the ethnographic literature. Instead, it would seem that even the more distant peoples had direct access to Clear Lake obsidian and in fact traveled to the sources to collect it themselves. This direct procurement was done without the need for payment. Examples from Pomo ethnography illustrate this situation:

Obsidian was available in almost unlimited quantities in the Mt. Kanaktai region on the southern shore of Clear Lake, and people from many directions made pilgrimages thither to get it [Barrett 1952:176].

The choicest obsidian was found on the peninsula that extends between East and Lower Lakes. The area was open to all, but a declaration of intention to gather the material was considered proper [Kniffen 1939:360].

In terms of specific Pomo groups, the following information is of relevance:

The Masut [of Calpella] made fifty-mile trips to Lake County to procure obsidian and magnesite for the manufacture of "gold" money. When these raw materials were obtained directly from the sources of supply, no payments were exacted for the privileges by the owners of the area [Stewart 1943:38].

Occasional parties [of Southwestern Pomo] crossed the hills to the east and traveled as far as the country of the Clear Lake Pomo, for magnesite and arrowhead material . . . Probably not every year, but every few years, parties made the long trip to Clear Lake to obtain magnesite and

arrowhead material [Kniffen 1939:385, 388].

From Lake County [the Potter Valley groups] obtained "raw" magnesite and obsidian [Stewart 1943:39-40].

Obsidian, unbaked magnesite, and lake fish were obtained [by the Cokoa of Hopland] from Lake County without payment, the Cokoa making trips to the sources [Stewart 1943:46].

Trips were also undertaken [by the Makamotceme of Cloverdale] to the obsidian and magnesite deposits of Lake County [Stewart 1943:52].

It would seem to be amply demonstrated that various Pomo groups obtained their obsidian from Clear Lake sources *without* the need of formal trade institutions, regardless of geographic distance or socio-political affiliation. Some of these peoples, in fact, traveled substantial distances to acquire the resource. As cited above, the Masut Pomo engaged in 50-mile trips, and without undue exaggeration one might propose a journey of 80-100 miles for the Southwestern Pomo groups.

IMPLICATIONS

Without the availability of this ethnographic detail, and operating under the currently widespread approach, the economic anthropologist *cum* archaeologist would have simply assumed that trade relationships existed between the various Pomo groups. Direct free access and acquisition would not have been seriously considered.

In addition, with regard to Ericson's (1977) paper, his lack of correlation between ethnolinguistic boundaries and proposed trade networks perhaps should be questioned. The Pomo data seem to indicate some connection between the two; within the general Pomo ethnolinguistic area, obsidian trade may be nonexistent, whereas the ethnographic record fails to mention the free access phenomenon with respect to outside groups.¹

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

For some time now, archaeologists have been both refining their methodologies and broadening the scope of their research interests. There has been a conscious effort to "go beyond" the artifacts and deal with the actual socio-cultural processes behind them. In 1968, Binford scolded a perhaps overly receptive audience to do just that, claiming "the practical limitations on our knowledge of the past are not inherent in the nature of the archaeological record; the limitations lie in our methodological naivete, in our lack of development for principles determining the relevance of archaeological remains to propositions regarding processes and events of the past" (1968:23). The various Binfordesque ceramic/residence studies in the American Southwest (Hill 1970; Longacre 1970) are examples of this expansive archaeology, this need to develop more elegant methods; however, perhaps they moved too quickly and utilized too simplistic an approach (cf. Dumond 1977; Stanislawski 1978).

The study of obsidian distribution frequency with reference to trade is probably useful and important, but such study must be carried out in a careful manner if the results are to stand any test of time. First we must demonstrate the existence of trade, then move to more complex levels of inference. The Pomo example points out the fallacy of equating distance of displacement with formal trade at all times and places.

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NOTE

1. There apparently exist minor exceptions to this. Gifford (1923:80) notes that the Long Valley Wintun and the Coyote Valley Miwok had free access to the Borax Lake obsidian source. The pattern described does appear to possess general validity, however.

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Ornaments of Two Extinct Marine Pelecypods from the Barrel Springs Site in the Colorado Desert

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The aboriginal use and modification of marine shell is well known throughout California and the greater Southwest. Ethnographic accounts and archaeological evidence indicate that native peoples found many uses for shell. The results of shell analyses from archaeological contexts have been used to interpret trade contacts (Tower 1945; Bennyhoff and Heizer 1958; Davis 1961), seasonality (Weide 1969; Drover 1974), paleoenvironmental conditions (Miller 1966; Warren 1968), tool use (Massey 1955; Rosenthal *et al.* 1978), and ornamentation (Gifford 1949; Haury 1938, 1950; Alvarez de Williams 1975).

This report documents the recovery of modified remains of two extinct marine pelecypod mollusks, *Rangia lecontei* and *Ostrea vespertina*, from an archaeological deposit at Barrel Springs (CA-SDi-4443) in eastern San Diego County. *O. vespertina* has not been reported previously in an archaeological context. Smith (in Alvarez de Williams 1975) briefly noted the occurrence of *R. lecontei* in an archaeological context in the Lake Cahuilla (Salton) Basin.¹

Surface collections and excavations at Barrel Springs were undertaken by the California Department of Parks and Recreation during May and June of 1977. The site lies within the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicle Recreation Area, and the excavation project was initiated due to the damaging effects of off-highway vehicles and wind erosion.

