

**DAMAGE AND THEFT
AT ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE CA-FRE-2109
THE CUPULE POINT SITE
FRESNO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

Daniel G. Foster
State Archeologist II
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246, Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Archeological site CA-FRE-2109 is a prehistoric rock art site situated on a point of land between Los Gatos Road and Los Gatos Creek, approximately seven miles northwest of Coalinga (see Map #1). The site consists of a cluster of large sandstone boulders, 33 of which have been decorated with broad shallow pits called cupules. A total of 237 cupules are/were present at Cupule Point, as well as scattered surface artifacts including manos, chert flakes and cobble tools used to produce the cupules. The site probably functioned for magico-religious activities.

On December 6, 1989, CDF Battalion Chief Bill Johnson discovered that the rock art at Cupule Point had recently been destroyed. Someone using a backhoe and truck had removed most of the boulders at the site. He contacted CDF archeologist Richard Jenkins on 12/7/89 seeking advice concerning laws which protect archeological sites. Fresno County Deputy Sheriff Lee Nilmeier later took a report and began an investigation.

A break in the case occurred on January 10, 1990, when Mr. Johnson observed boulders resembling those removed from site CA-FRE-2109 at the Peppertree Townhomes in Coalinga. Deputy Sheriff Nilmeier requested assistance from the CDF Archeology Office on 1/10/90 and the author accompanied by Richard Jenkins arrived in Coalinga at 9:30 p.m. The following day we visited the archeological site and documented the extensive damage which had occurred. We then accompanied Mr. Nilmeier and Mr. Johnson to the Peppertree Townhomes and examined the sandstone boulders which apparently were used in an attempt to "beautify the property".

We found that at least six of the boulders located at the Peppertree Townhomes contained cupules. Two of these boulders were positively identified as boulder #1 and boulder #13 of the Cupule Point site. I can state without any uncertainty that these two boulders found at the Peppertree Townhomes came from archeological site CA-FRE-2109, and it is my opinion that everyone of the numerous boulders also came from the site.

EXTENT OF DAMAGE

Archeological site CA-FRE-2109 has been terribly damaged by the illegal rock quarrying operation. Most of the large boulders have been removed with a backhoe which caused extensive fracturing of remaining rocks. Hundreds of rock fragments occur near the pits where boulders were broken during the removal or crushed by the backhoe as it was driven across the site. The following 14 cupule boulders have been removed from the site: Boulders #1-3, 5-13, 16, and 22. The location of these boulders at the Cupule Point site is shown on Map #3. Boulders #4, 14-15, 17-21, and 23-33 are still present at Cupule Point. Although only 14 of the 33 decorated boulders have been removed, all of the most visually impressive cupule boulders are gone. These 14 boulders contained 154 cupules. Boulder #1 for example, contained 33 cupules, #16 had 23 cupules, #13 had 24 cupules, and #2 had 14 cupules. All of these are gone.

IDENTIFICATION OF CUPULE BOULDERS AT PEPPERTREE TOWNHOMES

We were led to the Peppertree Townhomes location by Deputy Sheriff Lee Nilmeier and Detective Fernando Maldonado. They asked us to examine the boulders on the property to determine whether or not they originated from the damaged archeological site. Since this site had been carefully studied by myself, Richard Jenkins and John Betts for a rock art research project, we had in our possession a great deal of material useful for the task of identifying boulders from the Cupule Point site. These included color photos, black and white photos, color slides, sketches, and detailed maps of the site. Each decorated boulder had been numbered and described. During an earlier study, archeologists Wren, Johnston, and Belt sketched each cupule boulder and measured each cupule. We had all of this material in our possession for the inspection and analysis of the boulders at the Peppertree, as well as a sample of fractured sandstone from the actual site.

All of the boulders at Peppertree are similar in color and texture to the rocks at Cupule Point. The rocks are dark brown sandstone with distinctive patches of colored lichen. A distinctive cupule boulder was found on the east side of Townhome "D", near the manager's office, at the location shown on Map #4. This rock was immediately recognizable to me as boulder #13. We carefully inspected close-up photographs of boulder #13 in its original position. It was a perfect match. A large and distinctive crack and a bullet hole made recognition of this boulder rather easy. We confirmed our identification by measuring the cupules and comparing this with the cupule map and measurements from the Wren, Johnston and Belt site record (in this record, this rock was designated feature #8). I am one-hundred percent certain that this rock came from the Cupule Point site and that it is the same rock as the one we documented as boulder #13.

Another cupule boulder from Cupule Point was found at the Peppertree Townhomes location on the south side of the building located at 151 East Cherry. This area between the building and the street has recently been landscaped with an arch of eight large sandstone boulders and a mound with plants. Two of these eight boulders contained cupules. One of these was positively recognized as boulder #1 (see Map #4 for location of these boulders at Peppertree Townhomes). Boulder #1 was the largest cupule boulder at Cupule Point, the most distinctive one, and one which we immediately recognized. The boulder is in an inverted position at Peppertree and the bottom portion has been broken off. The pattern of cupules, their size and shape, and their position are relative to each other, certain cracks, and colored patches of lichen made the identification unmistakable. In addition to the color slides, photos, maps, sketches and measurements mentioned earlier, this rock was carefully illustrated by artist John Betts and a print of this photo-realistic drawing was also in our possession.

All of the boulders at Peppertree Townhomes are of the same type of rock - a distinctive dark brown sandstone. All of it was similar to the rock sample I brought with me from Cupule Point. Four other boulders in addition to the two boulders described above also contained cupules. We could not positively identify these to any specific boulder at Cupule Point since these boulders contain few cupules (they are not as distinctive as boulders #1 and #13) and because the rocks have been broken during the quarry operation or their transport from Cupule Point to Peppertree Townhomes. It is possible that additional boulders at Peppertree contain cupules as we did not invert the rocks to inspect the bottom surfaces.

In conclusion, I can state with certainty that two of the boulders inspected at Peppertree Townhomes came from the archeological site known as Cupule Point (CA-FRE-2109), and that in all likelihood they all did.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

The Cupule Point site was one of the most significant pitted-boulder rock art sites in the Western San Joaquin Valley/Diablo Range region. True, there are other cupule sites known for the area, but none were as spectacular as this one. There were several unique properties to this site. Unlike other cupule boulder sites in the area, this one seems to have functioned largely as a ceremonial/ritual site and consequently, is devoid of habitation debris usually found at sites of this style. This fact allowed archeologists an opportunity to search for evidence related to the ceremonial activities which took place here, and for evidence concerning the techniques employed by the Indians to produce these fantastic sculptured cupule boulders.

Another contributing factor to the significance of the site was its excellent condition. The site itself, the rock art and the

surrounding area had not been noticeably altered by recent human activity. Many of the other cupule sites in this area are not in pristine settings. Two of these sites are periodically inundated by man-made reservoirs and the rock art is covered with slime.

Recent studies also indicated that this type of cupule style might be linked to the presence of *Datura*, a native plant used during ceremonial rituals. The presence of this plant can still be seen at cupule sites where the area has not been disturbed. The Cupule Point site was the best example of this.

This site would have been "significant" or "unique" as defined by CEQA and would have been eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

THE VICTIMS

In a legal sense, the victim of this crime is the landowner. Mr. Craig Boyd (Foreman of the property) told Bill Johnson that this property is owned by Mr. Dave Wood and Mr. Dick Hewitson, and that no permission was given to remove any rocks from that location. These landowners lost an archaeological site and had their property turned into an unwanted rock quarry. These cupule boulders were stolen.

The people of California, especially local residents of Coalinga, and local Native Americans, are also victims of this crime. They lost a site that is a monument of the prehistoric occupation of this area, a relic of the past, and for Native People, a source of spiritual and religious power. For archeologists, it was a source of irreplaceable scientific information. It is lost for all of us. The true shame of this is that the people of the Coalinga area lost a real gem in their backyard, and for most, it was one which few people ever had a chance to see.

RECOMMENDATION

If the person or persons responsible for the destruction of archeological site CA-FRE-2109 is/are apprehended and convicted, I wish to offer the following recommendations for sentencing:

SUGGESTED PENALTIES

6 month jail

\$ 2,000 fine plus any penalty assessments

Probation:

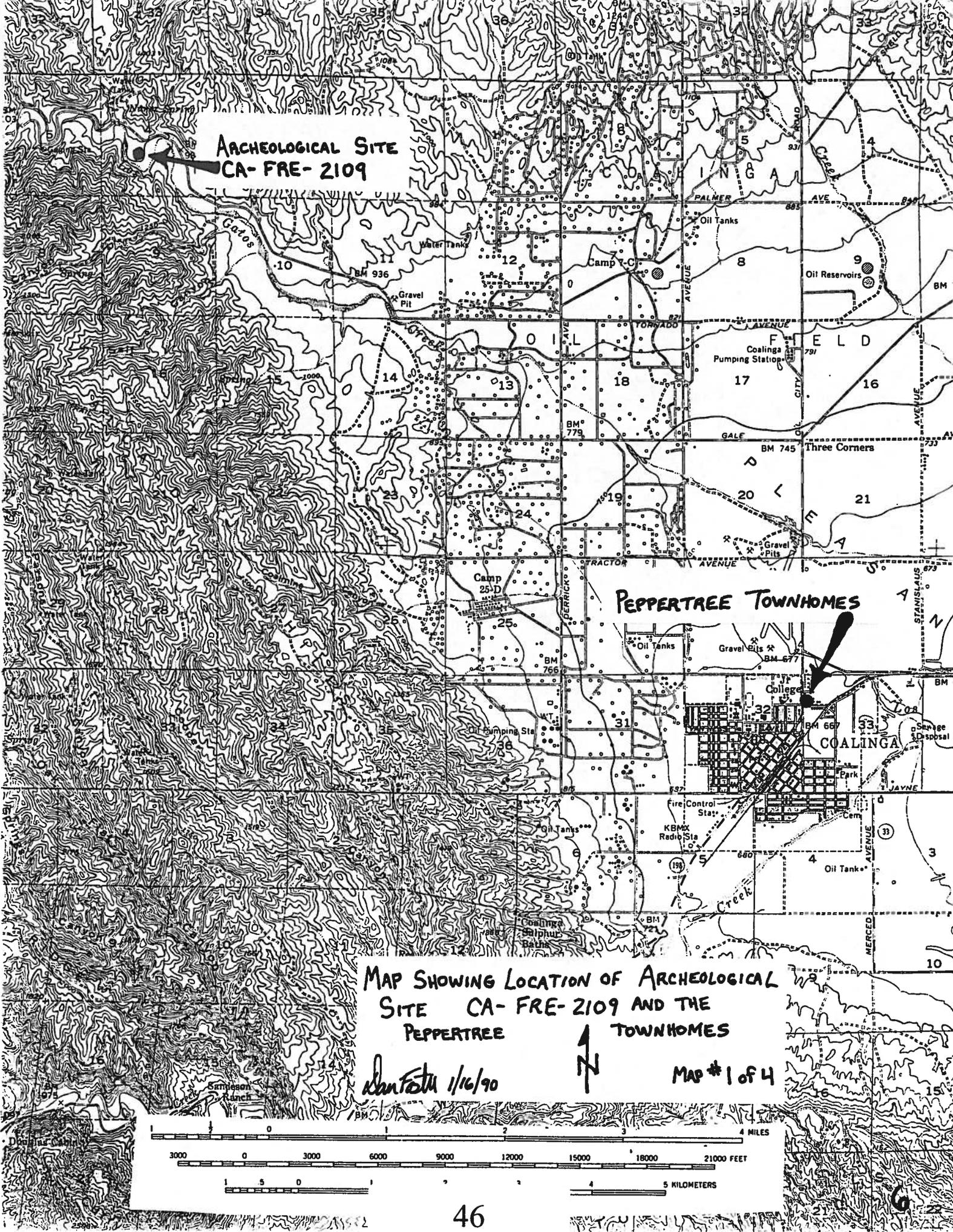
- 1) suspend jail and
- 2) suspend \$1,000 provided that the site rehabilitation-artifact restoration is completed as discussed on next page:

1. Boulders #1 and #13 should be carefully removed from the Peppertree Townhomes location and transported to the Coalinga Museum for permanent curation and public display. The rocks should be loaded and unloaded using netting and a pallet and forklift to avoid further damage to them during relocation.
2. All other boulders at Peppertree Townhomes should be carefully transported back to archeological site CA-FRE-2109 and put back in their approximate original positions as closely as possible.
3. All holes, tire tracks and other damage to the site be repaired using shovels - not mechanical equipment.
4. That a monument be built using mortar, rebar and fragments of broken rocks from the site which supports an interpretive plaque. This plaque will describe the site and include photographs of the boulders, and the setting taken prior to its destruction.
5. All of the above four rehabilitation measures be carefully supervised and monitored by the CDF Archeologist to insure that this rehabilitation effort results in the desired effect and to avoid further damage to the cupule boulders, artifacts and the site.

REFERENCES

- Betts, John
 1988 Illustration of Boulder #1 at the Cupule Point Site CA-FRE-2109. In possession of John Betts.
- Foster, Daniel G., Richard C. Jenkins, and John Betts
 1989a Archeological Site Record Supplement for CA-FRE-2109. (5 pages) on file at Central San Joaquin Valley Information Center, California State University, Bakersfield.
- 1989b Rock Art in the Coalinga Backcountry. Manuscript in possession of the authors. (33 pages)
- Wren, D., E. Johnston, and D. Belt
 1986 Archeological Site Record for CA-FRE-2109. (16 pages) on file at Central San Joaquin Valley Information Center, California State University, Bakersfield.

Daniel G. Foster
 CDF Archeology Program Manager
 State Archeologist II



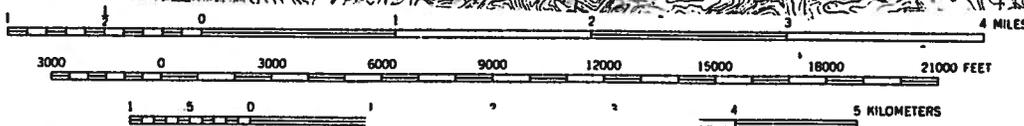
ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE
CA-FRE-2109

PEPPERTREE TOWNHOMES

MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF ARCHEOLOGICAL
SITE CA-FRE-2109 AND THE
PEPPERTREE TOWNHOMES

San Tom 1/16/90

MAP # 1 of 4



State of California - The Resources Agency
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
 ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE
 MAP

Permanent Trinomial: FRE-2109 / _____ mo. yr.
 Temporary Number: _____
 Agency Designation: _____

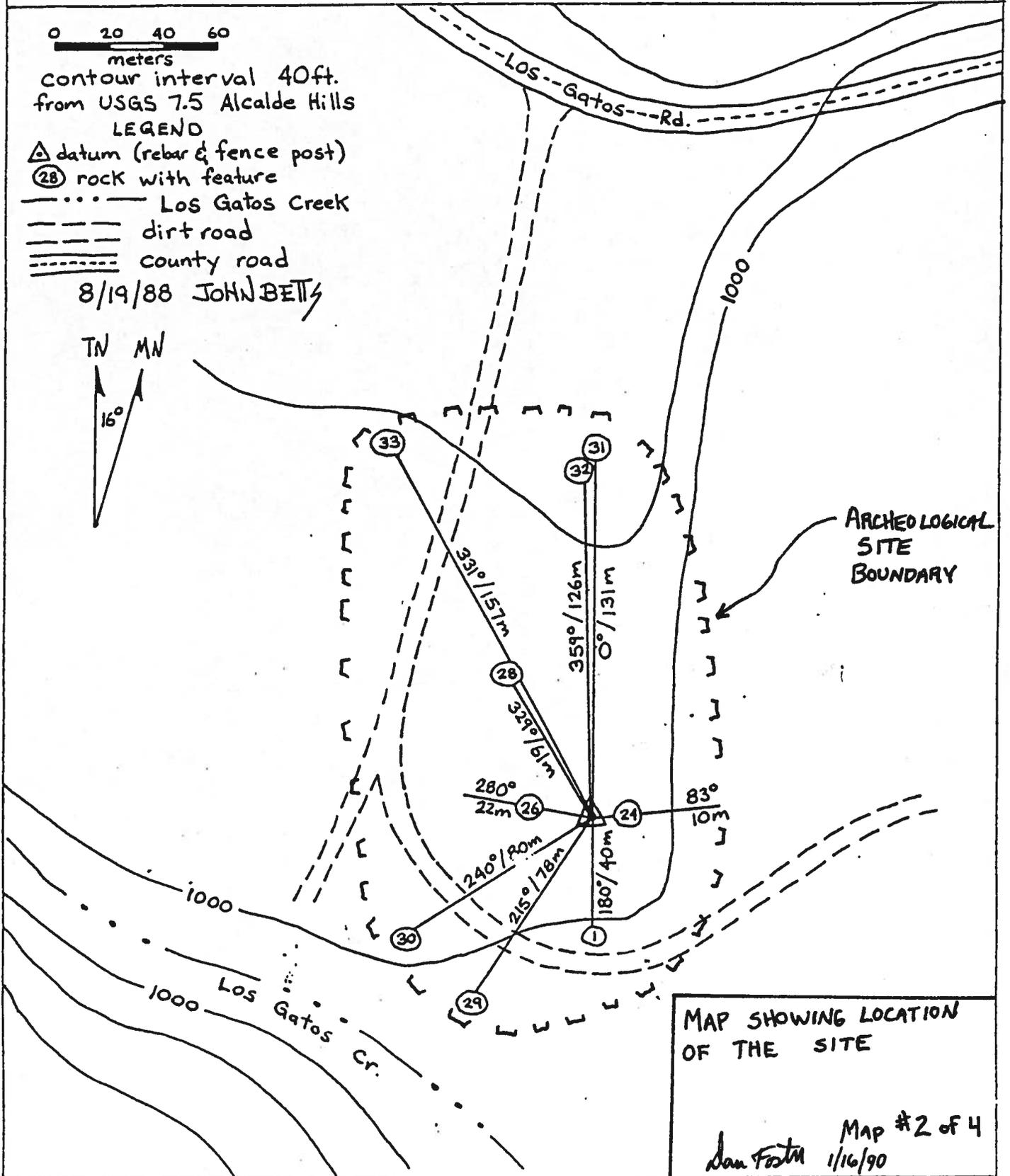
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contour interval 40ft.
 from USGS 7.5 Alcalde Hills
 LEGEND

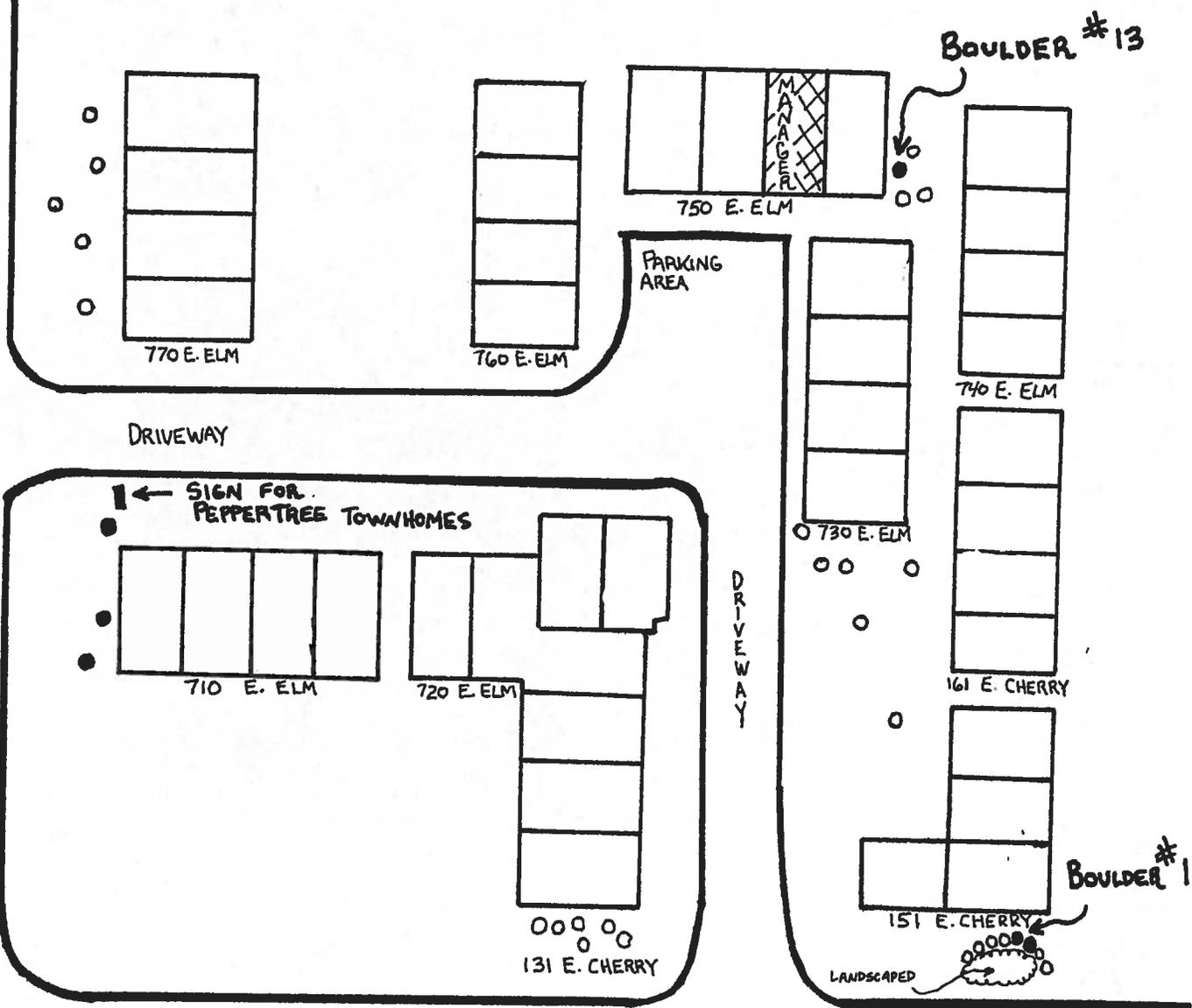
- Δ datum (rebar & fence post)
- $\textcircled{28}$ rock with feature
- Los Gatos Creek
- dirt road
- ==== county road

8/19/88 JOHN BETZ

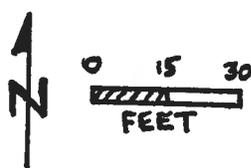


MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF THE SITE

Jan Foster MAP #2 of 4
 1/16/90



--- EAST CHERRY ---



- KEY :
- SANDSTONE BOULDER
 - SANDSTONE BOULDER WITH CUPULES

MAP OF THE PEPPERTREE TOWNHOMES
 CORNER OF EAST ELM AND EAST CHERRY STREETS
 COALINGA, CALIFORNIA MAP # 4 of 4
 SHOWING LOCATION OF CUPULE BOULDERS WHICH CAME
 FROM ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE CA-FRE-2109
 DANIEL G. FOSTER JANUARY 11, 1990



Photo #1
View of the Cupule Point site (CA-FRE-2109)
looking north. Taken August, 1988

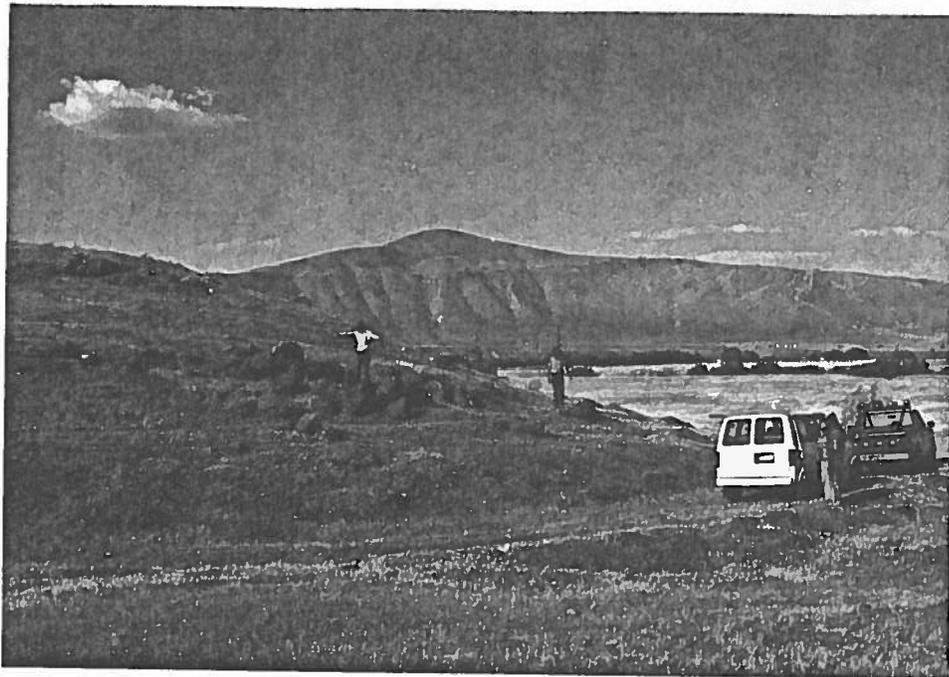


Photo #2
View of site looking northwest. Richard Jenkins
(far left, with outstretched arms) stands amongst
cupule boulders #1,2,5,3,8,6,7 and 9. Bill Johnson
(in CDF uniform) stands at boulder #13. All of
these are now gone. Photo taken August, 1988.



Photo #3
View looking southwest showing cupule boulders
#1 and 2. Note. Datura plant mentioned in
report. 8/88



Photo #4
View looking west of the main cluster of cupule
boulders. 8/88

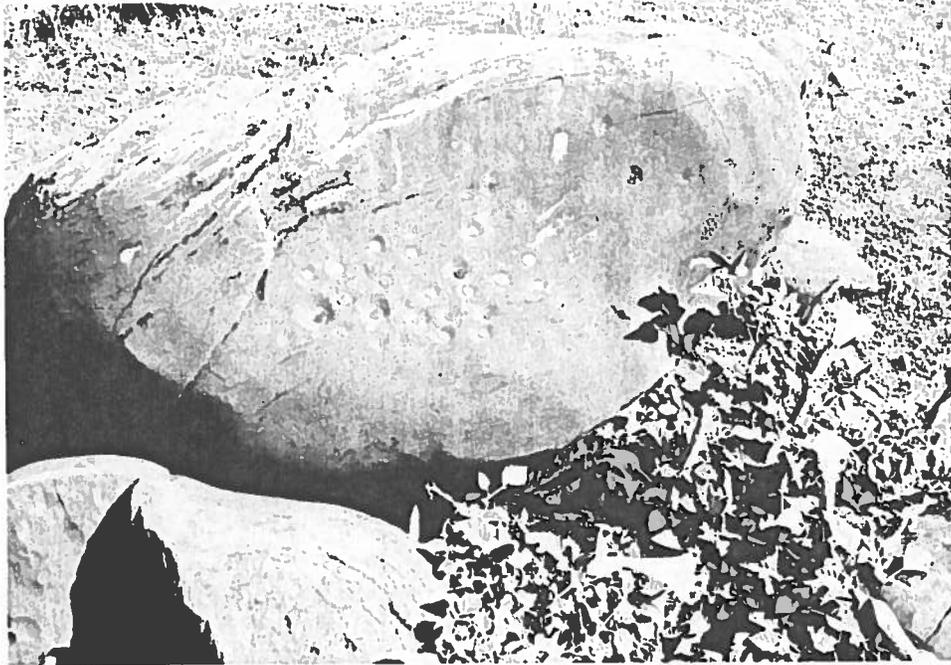


Photo #5

Close-up view of the south face of Boulder #1 which contains 33 cupules. Coins have been placed in the pits to show the cupule pattern more clearly. This rock was found at Peppertree Townhomes. 8/88

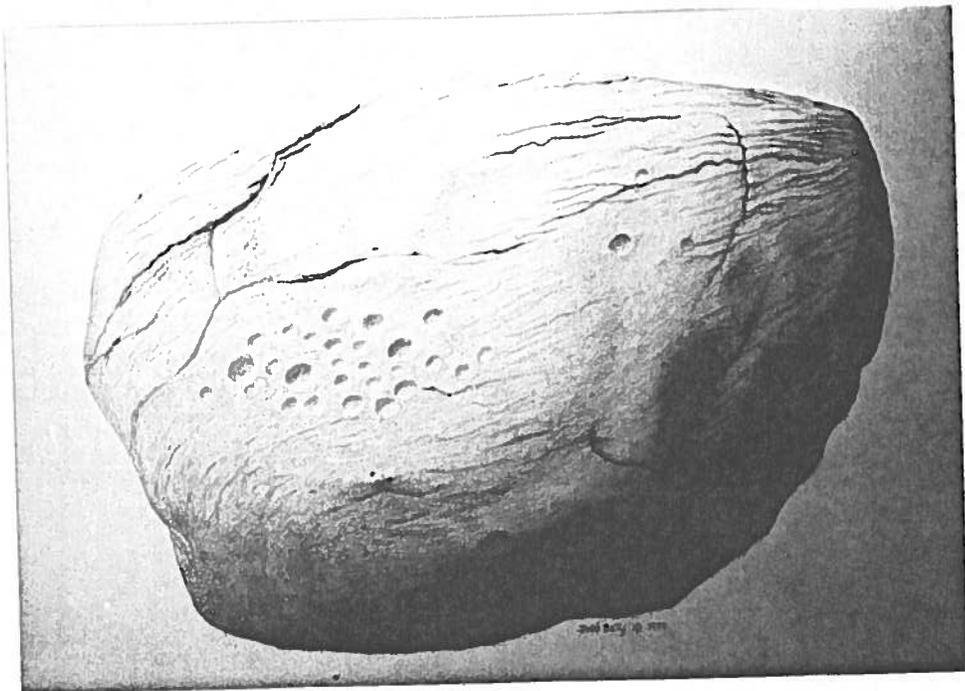


Photo #6

John Betts illustration of Boulder #1 at Cupule Point.

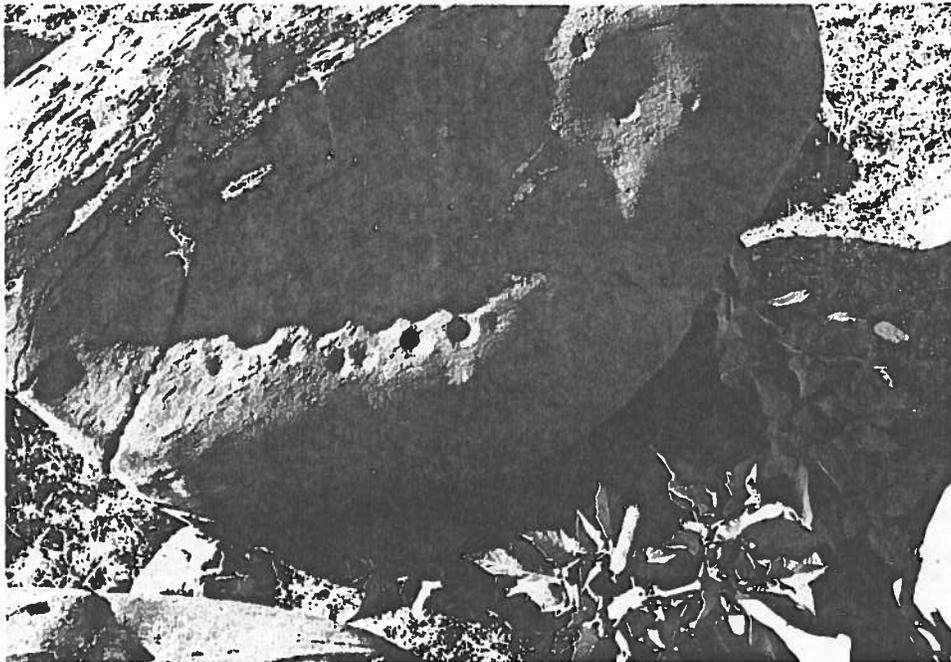


Photo #7
Another view of Boulder #1. 8/88



Photo #8
Close-up view of cupule boulder #13 which was
also found at Peppertree Townhomes. 8/88



Photo #9
General view of what was the Cupule Point site looking north. The cluster of boulders used to occur just to the right of the CDF vehicle, but most are now gone. Photo taken 1/90.



Photo #10
Another view of the site showing damaged area. 1/90.



Photo #11

Close-up view of the destruction of Cupule Point. Note how most of the large round boulders are gone and all of the fractured rocks from the quarry operation. 1/90



Photo #12

View looking south showing the disturbance to the main boulder cluster area. 1/90



Photo #13
Close-up view showing tire track from the backhoe
which destroyed the site and a few cupules on the
boulder at lower right. 1/90

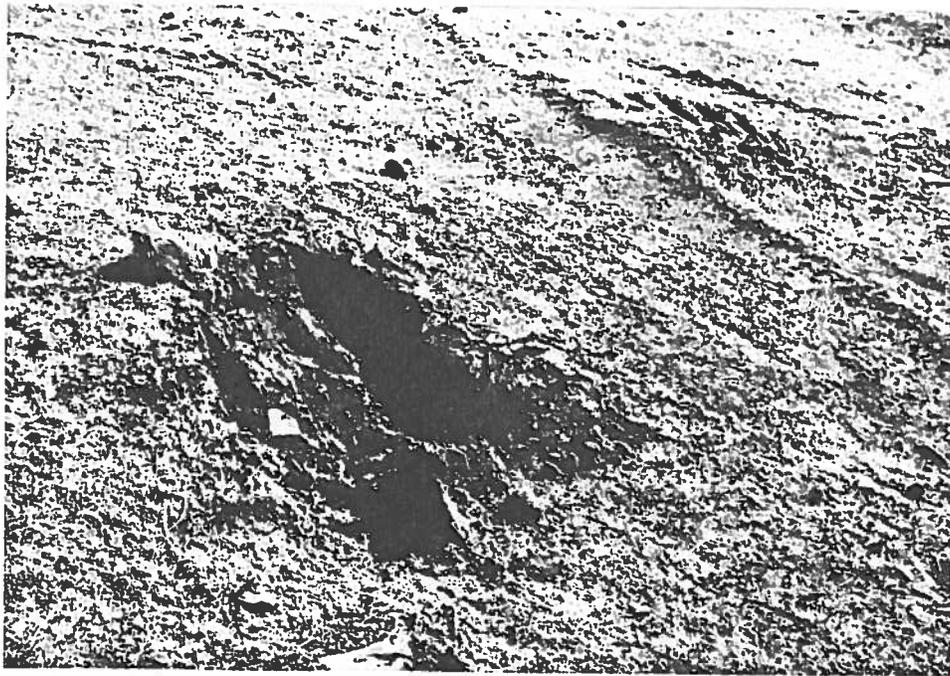


Photo #14
View showing the hole where Boulder #13 has been
removed.



Photo #15
View showing the sample of rock taken to Peppertree
Townhomes for comparison. 1/90



Photo #16
View looking south showing holes from rock removal.
1/90

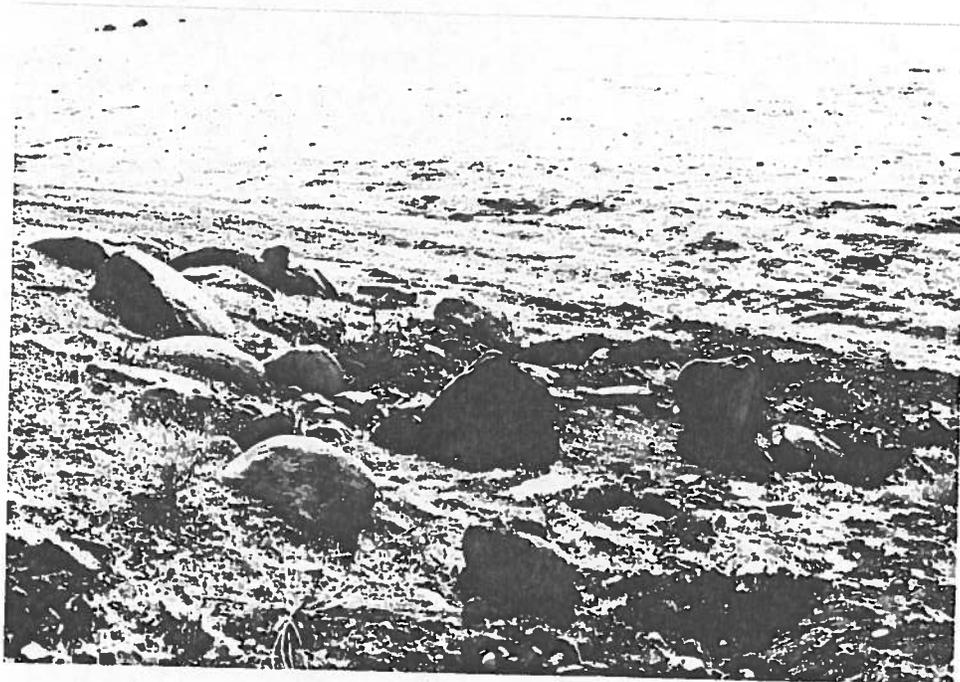


Photo #17
View looking southeast showing more holes. 1/90



Photo #18
Close-up view of disturbance to the ground. 1/90



Photo #19
View of the sign for Peppertree Townhomes the
location of which is shown on Map #4. 1/90



Photo #20
View looking southeast from the parking area
showing sandstone boulders similar to those
removed from Cupule Point. 1/90

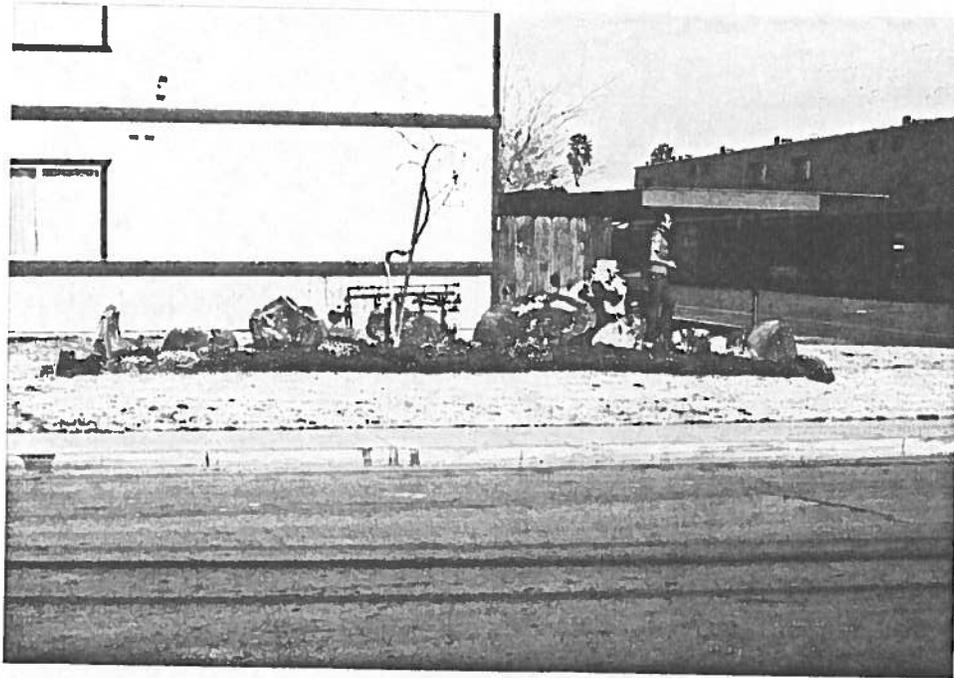


Photo #21
View showing the arch of sandstone boulders on
the south side of 151 East Cherry where Boulder #1
was identified. 1/90

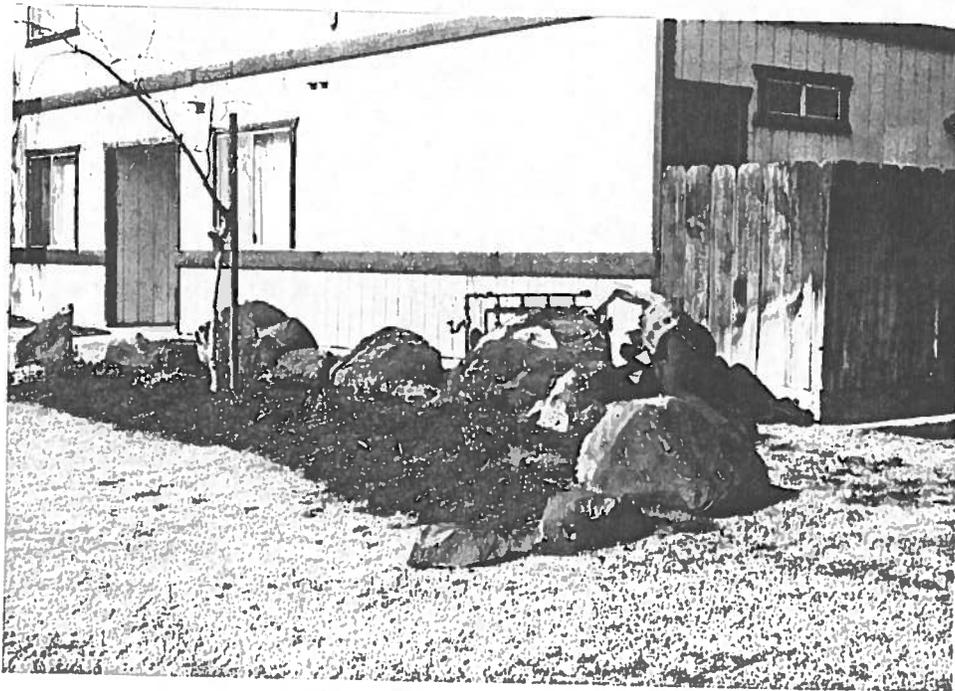


Photo #22
View looking northwest of this landscaped area
Bill Johnson has his hand on Boulder #1. 1/90

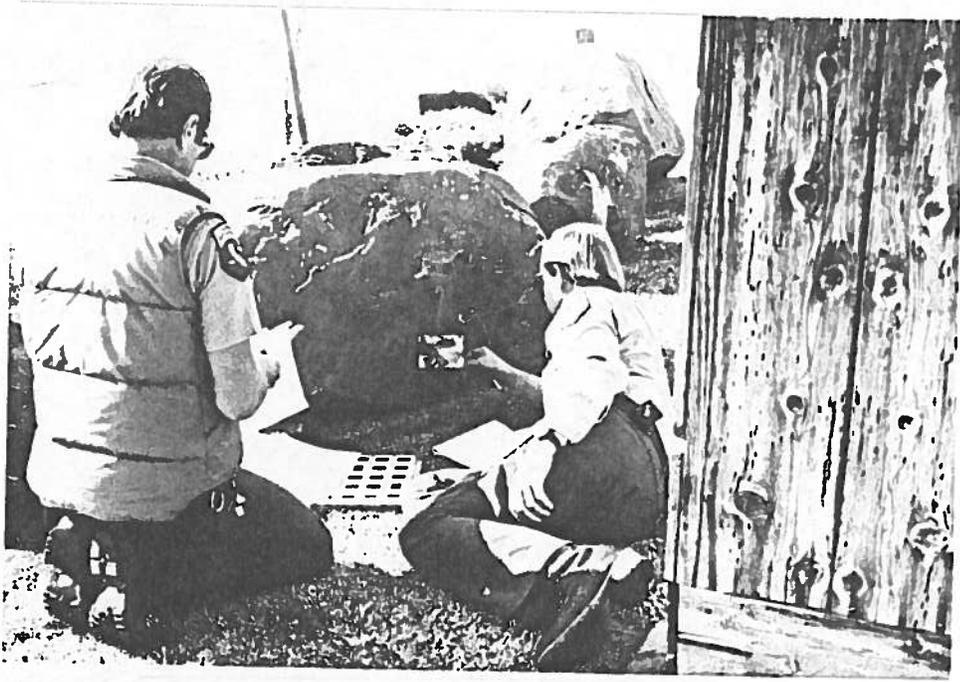


Photo #23

Bill Johnson and Richard Jenkins compare this cupule boulder with our documentation of Boulder #1 prior to its theft. 1/90

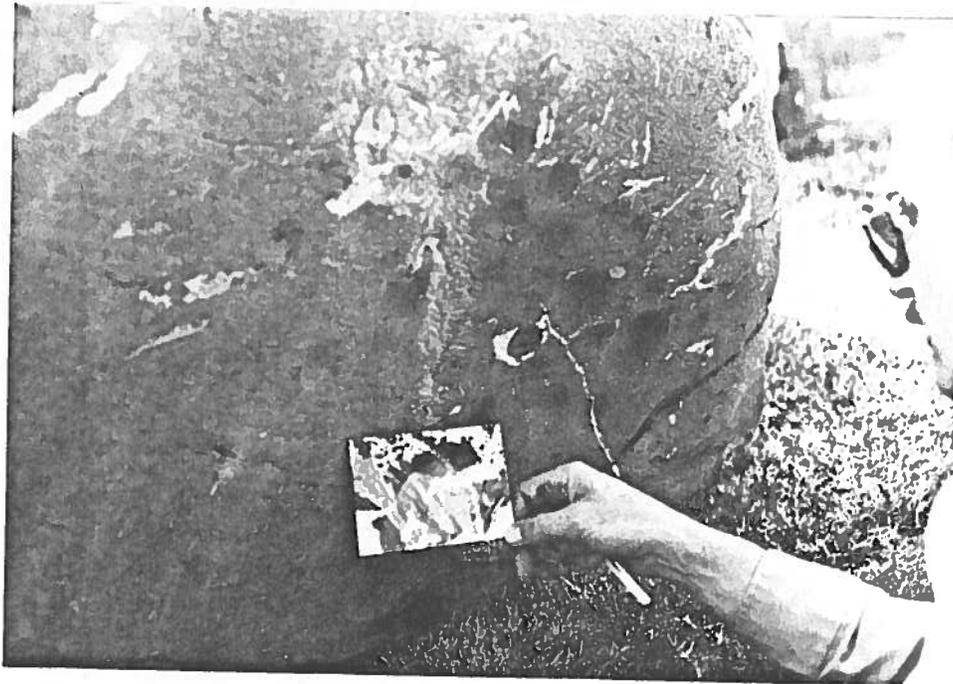


Photo #24

A positive identification was made - this is boulder #1 from Cupule Point. Note the damage to the boulder from quarry and transport - those are fresh scratches. 1/90



Photo #25
Bill Johnson and Rich Jenkins at 4 large sandstone boulders immediately east of 750 East Elm, near the managers unit, as shown on Map #4. Bill is pointing at Boulder #13. 1/90

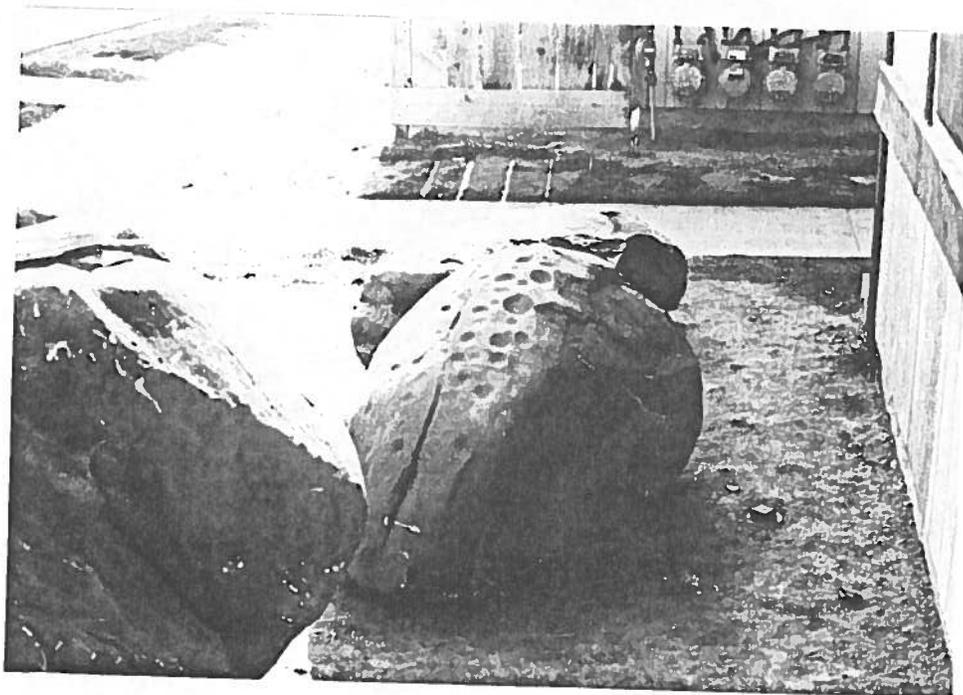


Photo #26
View looking south of cupule boulder #13 found at Peppertree and positively identified to have come from Cupule Point. 1/90

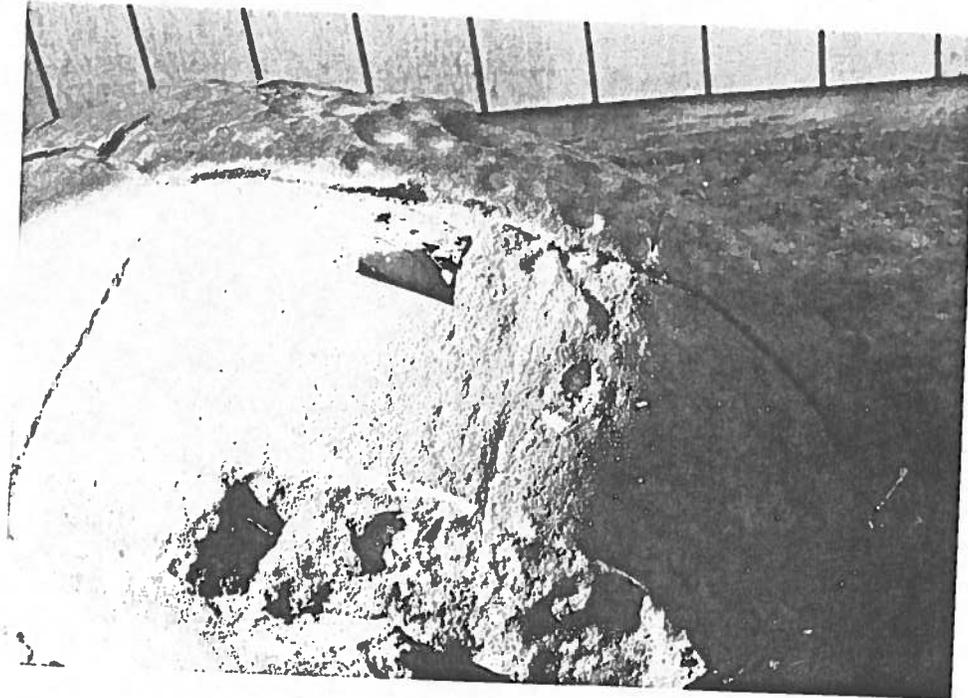


Photo #27
Close-up view of Boulder #13 at Peppertree
Townhomes with photo #8 on top of the rock.
Note the damage to this boulder from transport.