

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES ELEMENT

PURPOSE

The Archaeological and Historic Resources Element of the General Plan provides a summary of the cultural and historical traditions of the City of Desert Hot Springs and vicinity. It also provides the basis for the identification of and planning for present-day cultural activities and traditions. The Archaeological and Historic Resources Element is intended to briefly describe the documented pre-history and history of Desert Hot Springs, and set forth goals, policies and programs which preserve this heritage and help perpetuate it for future generations.

BACKGROUND

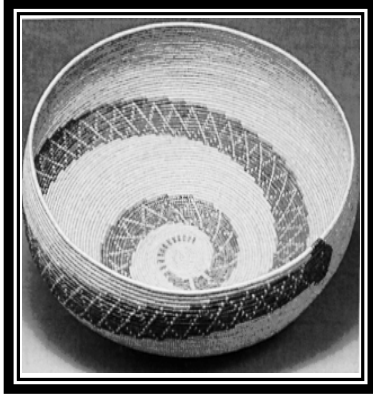
Cultural traditions and artifacts are the most important links between the past, present and the future. They are the elements that bind communities together and are the common ground that provide community cohesiveness and historic and cultural perspective. The Archaeological and Historic Resources Element is directly related to the Arts and Culture, Biological Resources, Land Use, and Open Space and Conservation Elements, and may influence the Community Design Element.

Issues addressed in the Archaeological and Historical Resources Element are a part of those set forth in subdivision (b) of California Government Code Section 65560 and Public Resources Code Section 5076. Also, the implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Section 21083.2(g), empowers and directs the community to require that adequate research and documentation be conducted when the potential for significant resources exists. A detailed discussion of resource management requirements and guidelines can be found in the General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and its technical appendix. The City currently reviews and provides comments on development proposals and the potential for impacts to archaeologically or historically significant resources, and may require additional study if the potential for resources warrants. As future development proposals are received, they will be evaluated and the need for cultural resource assessments will be determined.

THE PREHISTORIC PERIOD

Based upon the current knowledge of artifacts and habitation sites dating back approximately 12,000 years, archaeologists have divided the pre-European epoch into five periods: Early Man Period, Paleo-Indian Period, Early Archaic Period, Late Archaic Period and the Late Prehistoric Period. Each is discussed below.

Hunting and butchering tools of the earliest prehistoric periods were distinguished by the use of large stone points to hunt and process large late ice age mammals, and the lack of milling stones and other food grinding implements.



The Diamond-backed rattlesnake design was used often by the Cahuilla

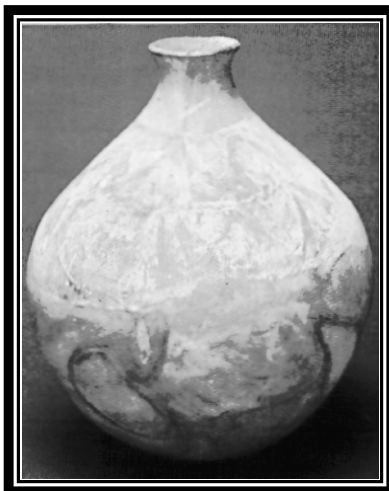
One of the epoch's important characteristics is the lack of milling stones and other food grinding implements. It may have been that these earliest Americans took advantage of the vast numbers of potential game animals and subsisted primarily on an animal fat and protein diet.

As climate conditions and available food changed, local inhabitants started using smaller projectile points on the smaller game; there was also substantial migration going on during this period. Seeds, grains and their processing became more important about 4,000 years ago and stone-tools became more sophisticated; there was also a corresponding increase in cultural complexity and variation. By about 1500 years ago, the bow and arrow had been introduced and a wider food base was exploited. Milling of foodstuffs also

continued extensively. By the latest period starting about 800 years ago to just before contact with Europeans, there is evidence of extensive contact and trade between local tribes and those of the Colorado River. This included the distribution of pottery across the upper Colorado and Mojave Deserts. It is from this period that ethnic or tribal affiliations are best known. In the Desert Hot Springs region, the oldest cultural remains date back about 1500 years and are located in the Anza Borrego Indian Hill Rock Shelter (also see General Plan EIR). The oldest radiocarbon dated occupation in the Coachella Valley comes from the intersection of Washington Street and Highway 111, a site known as Point Happy. The artifact was a Patayan-style broken pot that dated to about 900 years ago.

Habitation and village sites of numerous types developed throughout the area. These included villages occupied for extended periods of time, milling sites used seasonally as particular foods become available, lithic workshops and quarries for making stone tools and weapons, and rock art sites that were used for artistic/religious expression.

Cahuilla Culture In Historic Times



Olla, or Water Jar, shaped by hand from the exterior only

The most recent identifiable native culture to evolve in the Coachella Valley region is the Desert Cahuilla. They are generally divided into three groups: the Pass Cahuilla of the Banning-Beaumont area; the Mountain Cahuilla from the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains; and the Desert Cahuilla from the Coachella Valley as far south as today's Salton Sea. Rather than identified by a single name, membership was in terms of lineage or clans.

Clans had individually defined territories they called their own and used for hunting and gathering food and other resource necessities. The population prior to European contact is estimated to have ranged from 3,600 to 10,000. During the 1800s, however, the Cahuilla population was decimated by European disease, most

notably smallpox, against which the Native peoples had no immunity. The Desert Cahuilla had many villages throughout the Coachella Valley, including those associated with Ancient Lake Cahuilla until its last occurrence 500 years ago. With the lake's disappearance the mountains, canyons and fault-related mesquite dunes became more important sources of water, food and fiber. Today, the Cahuilla Indian population closest to the planning area lives on the Agua Caliente Reservation.

Known Local Prehistoric Resource Areas

Substantial portions of the planning area have been surveyed by archaeologists. Recorded significant archaeological resources are generally identified by a tri-nomial designation given the site by the Eastern Information Center (EIC) at the Archaeological Research Unit at the University of California at Riverside. Numerous archeological surveys and investigation/test reports have been conducted. Approximately thirty-two (32) prehistoric and historic resource sites have been recorded within the city limits and sphere-of-influence boundaries, of which 24 are prehistoric archeological sites and 8 are historic sites.

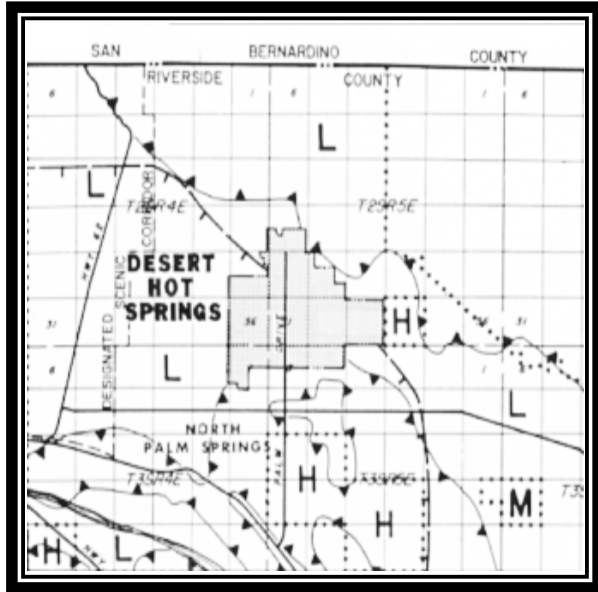
Many prehistoric sites identified in the General Plan study area have been recorded by the EIC, as well as The National Register of Historic Places, California Historic Landmarks, California Points of Historical Interest, the California Inventory of Historic Resources, and the Historic Properties Directory of the Office of Historic Preservation (Department of Parks and Recreation). These archives include information on prehistoric and historic sites and resources.

In the Desert Hot Springs area, fault zones and associated water and biological resources have harbored cultural resources in the San Bernardino and Little San Bernardino mountains. There is a high probability that prehistoric resources will occur in the vicinity of fault-related mesquite and palms, as well as resources associated with mountain washes, streams and canyons. Mesquite thickets that generally occur in dune areas are another high probability category since mesquite and screwbean pods were staples in the diet of the region's Cahuilla Indians. The Mission Creek branch of the San Andreas fault passes through the city limits, while the Banning branch passes through the City's sphere-of-influence (SOI). Both areas should be considered as sensitive potential resources areas.

Cahuilla Cultural Heritage Sites

Undiscovered prehistoric sites within the planning area probably exist which could expand our understanding of prehistoric life of the region. Many of these sites may be situated in Areas of High Sensitivity for Archeological Resources (see exhibit). It is likely that additional unmapped areas of high sensitivity are located within the planning area but can no longer be identified because the mesquite trees have been removed or the water source has disappeared. Other sites may be situated in Low Probability Areas outside the Areas of High Sensitivity for Archeological Resources.

Prehistoric Resources The Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) identifies the Archeological Probability Areas in the Desert Hot Springs area in the subsequent manner as an effort to conserve and protect these sensitive archeological areas:



N - National Register
H - High
M - Moderate
L - Low

Archeological Probability Area Map Source: Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG)

Of the four designations, only two, H (High) and L (Low), apply to the City and its SOI.

In many cases, it is not possible to determine whether sites include prehistoric archeological resources without conducting a comprehensive site-specific field survey of the area being proposed for development.

THE HISTORIC PERIOD

Sites of historical significance are generally more than forty-five to fifty years of age, but range from the period of the earliest European contacts, around the end of the 1700s, to about the end of World War II. Types of potentially significant sites range from permanent trails and highways to living areas and small-scale remains of single activities. The following discusses the historic period and also identifies significant historical resources.

Earliest European History of the Desert Hot Springs Region

Spaniards making forays northward from Mexico along the coast and the Colorado River were the first to explore the Desert Hot Springs region. Tradition has it that a Captain Juan Iturbe sailed a vessel into the Salton Sea and explored westerly as far as the Santa Rosa and Little San Bernardino Mountains area. No concrete evidence has been located to document this story and the physical isolation of the Salton Sea from the Sea of Cortez makes such a story closer to myth than fact. The earliest documented period of Spanish influence began in 1769 when explorers

moved into what was then referred to as Upper California to establish a military, political and religious foothold. The development of land routes to supply inland missions brought the Spanish into the region in the 1770s.

Mexican and Post Mexican-American War Periods

Although there is no historical evidence of settlements in the Desert Hot Springs area, by 1821 the region had fallen under the influence of Mexico as it secured its independence from Spain under the Treaty of Cordova. The issuance of land grants and the establishment of agricultural enterprises, under the organization of rancheros, dominated the region for the next thirty years. The defeat of Mexico in the Mexican-American War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 ushered in a new era. With the region under American control and the discovery of gold in California, the stage was set for admittance of California into the union in 1850, and led to the influx of peoples from many countries. The first U.S. Government Surveys were made in the Coachella Valley in 1855-56, by surveyors Henry Washington, John La Croze and James G. McDonald, who observed a number of trails and roads crossing through the region.

The Bradshaw Trail and Ocean-to-Ocean Highway

The most prominent of these trails was one labeled as a “road” on the U.S. Government Survey maps and ran along the course of the Whitewater River. It was joined by a trail that skirted the base of the Santa Rosa Mountains in a more southerly course.

The surveyors also noted an “Indian Trail” apparently passing through a portion of the study area west of Edom Hill.

By the 1880s, the trail along the base of the Santa Rosa Mountains had become the main route for travelers passing through the study area. By 1885 it had been identified as part of the road from San Bernardino to the Colorado River and was to become known as the Bradshaw Trail, one of the most important desert trails in Southern California during the 1860s and 70s. An historic route between Los Angeles and the Palo Verde Valley, the Bradshaw Trail was in fact an ancient Indian trade route variously named the Cocomaricopa Trail or the Halchidoma Trail. In 1862 the William David Bradshaw exploration party had “rediscovered” the route, which for the next few years served as the primary access to the goldfields along the Colorado River.

By the late 1870s the railroads expanded into the region and eventually connected the coast directly to Yuma. This completed second transcontinental railroad, authorized by Congress in 1866, and was later known as the Sunset Route. After the turn of the century the Cocomaricopa Trail was revived as the Bradshaw Highway, ultimately becoming State Highway 111.

In 1926, the federal government established the National Highway System, which included the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway that ran “along the Southern Pacific Railroad”. Exact dates of construction are unclear, with archival sources tracing it to the late 1930s. Right-of-way for this highway was granted by the federal government in November of 1938, which was delineated as U.S. 60/70/99. Apparently proof of construction was never filed on this segment of the highway.

A segment of Varner Road running through the City SOI was apparently part of the original Ocean-to-Ocean Highway.

Early Desert Hot Springs

Available historic sources from 1856-1975 indicate that several old roads and Indian trails once crossed portions of the planning area. The area that was more recently occupied by Seven Palms Ranch (Desert Dunes Country Club) was recorded as containing an Indian village, with an Indian trail leading to the village site. U.S. Government Survey field notes of the 1850s describe the Cahuilla settlement:

“The rancherita at Seven Palms, in the upper Coachella Valley, was situated atop a low sandhill, surrounded by low, thorny mesquite bushes, and comprised ‘some 8 or 10 huts and about 30 Indians, mostly old men, women, and children’. By the 1850s many were employed, at least seasonally, at white settlements west of the mountains”.

The arrival of permanent settlers into the area around Desert Hot Springs seems not to have begun until the second decade of this century. Some took advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862, which allowed settlers access to unclaimed, surveyed public lands in the west. However, early government surveys recorded very little evidence of settlers in the Desert Hot Springs area before 1917.

Cabot Yerxa’s Discovery of Hot Mineral Water

Cabot Yerxa is credited for having discovered hot mineral water in the area of Desert Hot Springs. Born in the Dakota Territories in 1883 to trading post operators, he was a descendant of John Henry Cabot, discoverer of Newfoundland. As a young adult, Yerxa traveled to the Klondike in the Yukon Territories in search of gold. While there, he opened a small grocery business. It was through the grocery business that Yerxa met Vice President Theodore Roosevelt. As a result of their friendship, Yerxa was appointed Postmaster of Sierra Madre, California. He served this post from 1906-1913.

Following his appointment as postmaster, Yerxa moved to the Desert Hot Springs area. Around 1912, Cabot Yerxa became one of the Desert Hot Springs area’s first citizens when he began homesteading a 160-acre tract around the desert oasis of Two Bunch Palms.

After purchasing a burro that he named “Merry Christmas”, he built his first house known as “Eagle’s Nest” on the peak of a prominent hill. It comprised a one-room cabin with a fireplace that was constructed out of cement, wood, and stone. For water, Yerxa and Merry Christmas were forced to travel to the railway station at Garnet, a round trip of 14 miles.

In 1913 Yerxa discovered the hot springs that gave the community its name. Determined to find his own water supply, had Yerxa purchased well digging equipment and began an excavation for a well. He encountered natural hot water with a temperature of 132 degrees. Afraid that the water might contain arsenic, Yerxa used it only for bathing. He later dug a second well, located approximately 600 yards away, which produced cold water. Yerxa named the entire areas

surrounding the wells “Miracle Hill”. Sometime later Yerxa learned that he had actually dug these holes on either side of an earthquake fault.

The Founding of Desert Hot Springs

Yerxa homesteaded the site until around 1918, leaving it to join the army during World War I. Upon his return from the war, Yerxa tried to interest developers in the resort potential of his hot springs.

It was not until 1932 that L.W. Coffee and Aubrey Wardman to ventured to develop the springs. After considering the pros and cons of developing hot mineral water in the area, Coffee was convinced of its potential by Desert Hot Springs’ spectacular view of the snow-capped mountains.

Coffee procured the necessary equipment and supplies to drill a test well. He dug a well over 170 feet deep and struck hot mineral water. Coffee then dug a second well, which was also successful.

Completion of the second well led Coffee to subdivide the surrounding property into acre lots, and many were sold. The entire property, however, was soon tied up in litigation due to complications with the trust. In 1938 the trust was dissolved. The property reverted back to the original owners.

Aubrey Wardman of Whittier relieved Coffee’s predicament by giving him complete control of his 160 acres to develop a community focused upon the area’s therapeutic mineral water. Additional acreage was purchased by Wardman, and Coffee was able to develop the area into a promising health resort.

The town of Desert Hot Springs witnessed most of its early growth in the 1940s as a result of Coffee’s efforts. In addition to selling land for homes, Coffee opened the first public bath house in Desert Hot Springs known as “Coffee’s Hot Mineral Baths”. Soon other bathhouses opened and people began taking advantage of the therapeutic value of Desert Hot Springs’ hot mineral waters. Consequently, Coffee became known as the “originator, founder and developer of Desert Hot Springs”.

Cabot’s Old Indian Pueblo

Yerxa’s intense fascination with the Indian lifestyle led him to construct “Cabot’s Old Indian Pueblo”. This 35-room Hopi-style pueblo was constructed of salvaged lumber and adobe bricks mixed with cement. Although the framing of the building took approximately seven years to complete, Yerxa continually worked on the pueblo for over twenty years. At the time of his death in 1965, the pueblo was still unfinished.

After Yerxa’s death, Cole Eyraud, a Burbank business executive, purchased the property and formed the non-profit educational organization known as Landmark Conservators. Cabot’s Old Indian Pueblo served as a museum, art gallery and trading post for many years. It has recently

undergone renovations and other improvements, and is expected to re-open to the public in Summer of 2000. It is located at 67-616 East Desert View Avenue.

Desert Hot Springs Heritage Properties/ Historic Sites

According to the Eastern Information Center's 1994 cultural resources records search, there are no National Register listed properties or California Historic Landmarks recorded within the planning area. Furthermore, there are no properties listed on the California Inventory of Historic Resources.

Desert Hot Springs does have one California Point of Historical Interest. This site is known as Yerxa's Discovery. A bronze plaque commemorating Cabot Yerxa's 1913 "discovery of hot well water" is located in front of Cabot's Old Indian Pueblo on Desert View Drive. Also important are Two Bunch Palms Artesian Well and Coffee's Well.

Additionally, approximately 40 properties in the City and its Sphere of Influence are listed in the Office of Historic Preservation's 1994 Historic Properties Directory.

For the most part, these properties comprise structures that are over 40 years of age that have been evaluated for National Register Status, but for one reason or another were determined ineligible for listing in the Register.

CULTURAL RESOURCES POTENTIAL (CRP) MAP

Based upon field and literature surveys conducted to date, a resource sensitivity map has been developed, which identifies various prehistoric and historic resource areas within the planning area. Field survey techniques used in past years for recording/documenting site surveys were more intuitive and less methodical than those practiced today.

Additional information can be made available on potentially sensitive archaeological resources areas by contacting the City Planning staff. The base data used to prepare the Cultural Resources Potential (CRP) Map are not published in order to protect resources from disturbance, damage or removal.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It is the obligation of the lead agency, the City of Desert Hot Springs, to assure that every reasonable effort is made to locate, identify and evaluate archaeological, historical and cultural sites within its jurisdiction. The City must determine what actions or development activities have the potential to adversely affect known or suspected sites of significance. The manner in which the City must review and address issues related to Archaeological and Historic Resources is set forth in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, Appendix J, 1992 Edition). Projects involving a federal agency, federal funding or some other federal assistance fall under and must conform to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA).

As time passes and the community continues to develop, opportunities for documenting and preserving archaeological and historic sites and artifacts will decrease. The City should encourage the research, documentation and recordation to register appropriate sites and structures within the community and vicinity. In this manner, positive action can be taken to identify, preserve and pass on the important traditions and history of the community.

RESOURCES GOAL, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

GOAL

Preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage and resources, including historic and prehistoric cultural artifacts and traditions.

Policy 1

The City shall exercise its responsibility to locate, identify and evaluate archaeological, historical and cultural sites, and assure that appropriate action is taken to protect these resources.

Program 1 A

An archaeological and historical resources data base shall be established and maintained at City Hall, and shall incorporate information from the Eastern Information Center (EIC), focused cultural resource studies conducted in the study area, and other resources.

Responsible Agency: Community Development Department.

Schedule: Continuous; five year Element update.

Policy 2

Development or land use proposals, which have the potential to disturb or destroy sensitive cultural resources, shall be evaluated by a qualified professional and, if necessary, appropriate mitigation measures shall be incorporated into project approvals.

Policy 3

Make every effort to ensure the protection of sensitive archaeological and historic resources from vandalism and illegal collection.

Program 3 A

Maintain mapping information and similar location-oriented resources in a confidential manner and assure that only those with appropriate professional and organizational ties are provided access to these sensitive records.

Responsible Agency: Community Development Department.

Schedule: Continuous.

Program 3 B

In the course of reviewing development proposals and cultural surveys that identify sensitive resources, staff shall, where appropriate, encourage in-place preservation or the recovery and preservation of materials for later study and display.

Responsible Agency: Community Development Department.

Schedule: Continuous.

Policy 4

The City shall support the listing of eligible properties, structures or sites as potential historic landmarks and their inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Program 4 A

In cooperation with local historical associations, the City shall periodically review the historical and archaeological resources of the area for possible application for status as a historical landmark or inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Responsible Agency: Community Development Department.

Schedule: Periodically.

Program 4 B

The City shall consider establishment of a Cultural Commission, which could meet with staff and elected officials in prioritizing and proposing action on the preservation and registration of important archaeological and historical resources in the community and vicinity.

Responsible Agency: Community Development Department; Cultural Commission.

Schedule: Continuous; with annual meetings.