

PH 0505773

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED OCT 13 1977  
DATE ENTERED AUG 18 1978

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

El Portal Archeological District

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

El Portal

STATE

California

CODE

06

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

Yosemite National Park

COUNTY

Mariposa

CODE

043

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

National Park Service-Western Region

STREET & NUMBER

450 Golden Gate Ave. P. O. Box 36063

CITY, TOWN

San Francisco, California

VICINITY OF

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Western Archeological Center

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 49008

CITY, TOWN

Tucson

STATE

Arizona

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Department of Parks and Recreation, State of California

DATE

1952, 1976

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

State Archeologist, Department of Parks and Recreation

CITY, TOWN

P. O. Box 2390

Sacramento

STATE

California

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## El Portal Description DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The El Portal Archeological District is located in a [REDACTED] [REDACTED] On both sides of the river the canyon walls rise abruptly for ca. 2500'; elevation of the stream bank rises from about [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] is narrow here with a maximum width of approximately one-half mile at [REDACTED] and the water is quite swift. The valley floor is primarily composed of sandy soil and stream boulders. At present, National Park Service administrative, maintenance, visitor and residential facilities, concessioner establishments, and private structures and inholdings are contained within the El Portal Archeological District. Non-related historic resources relating to Anglo occupancy of El Portal may be located within the District.

The El Portal district occupies an Upper Sonoran ecological zone with vegetation typical of the Foothill Forest belt. A variety of oaks, conifers and streamside trees and plants bordering grassy flats are present throughout the area. El Portal is the only area within the Upper Sonoran zone under the protection of Yosemite National Park.

While level land is generally limited, it is within the El Portal area that the [REDACTED] is sufficiently wide to allow ample space for occupation and village sites. The major portion of the flat land lies to the north of the river; this corresponds well with the distribution of archeological sites, over 75 percent of which occur north of the river. The main exception to this is the presence of 4-Mrp-362 and 4-Mrp-363, both historic Miwok sites located on a [REDACTED]. While sites are generally located on flat areas in the valley, rock shelters were also utilized by the prehistoric and historic inhabitants. Surface evidence of El Portal area sites consists of bedrock mortars, chipped and ground stone tools and at times dark midden soil. Past artifact collecting, both amateur and professional, has removed most artifacts from site surfaces. For this and other factors, sub-surface deposits cannot be accurately delineated from surficial indications.

Historically the El Portal region has been heavily utilized by miners, ranchers, concessioners and park staff. Mining as well as railroad, road, park and residential construction activities have caused considerable destruction to archeological sites in the district. Impacts vary from minor disturbance to total destruction. For example, road construction, especially [REDACTED] undoubtedly destroyed portions of several sites [REDACTED] crosses terrain which likely contained bedrock mortars and occupation sites with midden deposits. The construction of the [REDACTED] caused disturbance to 4-Mrp-183, a major occupation site which was later heavily impacted by the construction of the [REDACTED] 4-Mrp-179, originally recorded in 1952 was the only site that was not relocated during the 1975 survey of El Portal, although two

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separate attempts to do so were made. While there is some locational confusion resulting from the original survey, it is likely that the site has been totally destroyed by construction activities. On the other hand, sites such as 4-Mrp-362 remain virtually undisturbed because of difficulty [REDACTED]

Bennyhoff (1956) has tentatively identified three complexes in the Yosemite National Park region. These are the Mariposa (AD 1200-1850), the Tamarack (AD 500-1200) and the Crane Flat (pre-AD 500). The Mariposa Complex represents the occupation of the area by the Central and Southern Miwok. This separation is based upon temporal stylistic variation in chipped stone tools and grinding implements. Fitzwater, (1962) however, assigns an initial date of 2000 BC to the Crane Flat Complex on the basis of excavations at 4-Mrp-181. He found no evidence for the Tamarack Complex at this site and extended the terminal date for the Crane Flat Complex to AD 1250. He lengthens the terminal date for the Mariposa Complex from AD 1850 to 1900. The cultural chronology of the El Portal area will remain indeterminate until further excavations with more precise temporal control are undertaken.

A pioneer study in Yosemite National Park was conducted by C. Hart Merriam in 1917. With the aid of local Indian informants, he was able to locate and name 37 villages [REDACTED] and an additional 16 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This accounts for at least 53 villages [REDACTED] Within the El Portal Archeological District, there are 11 archeological sites which correspond to Miwok settlements recorded by Merriam in 1917.

Miwok Name	Archeological Site Number	Estimated Amount Destroyed
Sas-oo-lah	4-MRP-6	30%
Sal-lah'-to	4-MRP-178	10%
Po-Ko-No	4-MRP-180	30%
Choo'-pi-tah	4-MRP-181, 382	50%, 10%
To-yo-ng-an	4-MRP-182	20%
Soo-wut-oo-lah	4-MRP-183	80%
Oi-ko-bah	4-MRP-184	?
Sit'-ke-noo'-al-lah	4-MRP-362	10%
Kep-pek'-oo-lah	4-MRP-363	10%
Kah-wah'-koo-lah	4-MRP-361	?

Additional recorded sites in the El Portal Archeological District,

4-MRP-179	100%
4-MRP-250	80%
4-MRP-251	10%
4-MRP-355	10%
4-MRP-358	30%
4-MRP-360	30%

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El Portal has been archeologically surveyed twice. In the early 1950's James Bennyhoff of the University of California, Berkeley, recorded 8 sites, 7 of which had been identified by Merriam. Bennyhoff (1956:18) describes the survey as being incomplete and lacking an adequate sample. In 1975, L. Kyle Napton of California State College, Stanislaus, resurveyed the valley under contract to the National Park Service; he recorded an additional 7 sites. Of the 10 perviously known archeological sites in the El Portal region, Napton was able to recover and record all but one, 4-Mrp-179, which is presumably totally destroyed. Napton's survey was more intensive than Bennyhoff's and covered both the north and south banks of the river. While exact areas surveyed are not shown, it appears that all areas were checked with the exception of small parcels of private land for which permission for survey could not be obtained. In 1959 and 1960, Robert Fitzwater of the University of California, Los Angeles conducted excavation at 4-Mrp-181, 182 and 183; these are the only archeological excavations in the El Portal area. The research potential for El Portal sites may be predicted from these excavations (reported in Fitzwater 1962).

The site of 4-Mrp-181, Merriam's "Choo'-pi-tah," has received the only extensive excavation of the sites in El Portal. Surface evidence consists of 90 bedrock mortars and obsidian flakes scattered over an area 300' by 500'. Excavation in approximately 1 percent of this area disclosed a midden up to 8' deep, exposed 23 burials and recovered over 1,400 artifacts. The report gives little information beyond a catalog of artifacts, but it is presumed that pollen analysis, soil pH, analysis of bone and charred plant remains, and radiocarbon dating could provide data on site environment, diet, use-areas and age. Test excavations at 4-Mrp-182 and 4-Mrp-183 recovered few artifacts; soils were not described or analyzed, but presumably there was no midden within the tested areas. Napton (1976) however, reports that there are indications of sub-surficial deposits at both sites. The primary inference to be drawn from the excavations at these two sites is that surface evidence gives no clear clue to sub-surface deposits.

Since within this District are a number of privately owned structures on Federal lands and several commercial establishments on private lands, the Park Service must uphold certain legal rights of these private owners. However, if known archeological resources are in close proximity to a federally owned structure or land for which alterations, expansion or removal is proposed, the Superintendent will consult with the Regional Director in a determination of effect or no effect upon the cultural materials according to CFR Part 800.4-5. Disruption of previously altered ground areas, as in the removal of below grade foundations, utility lines, or structural elements does not constitute disturbance of new ground only if no cultural resources

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are identified as being in close proximity to a removal project. The Superintendent will consult with the Regional Director as to determinations of effect or no effect upon cultural materials prior to removal actions. The most recent archeological site inventory records will provide data as to site locations and relative sensitivity for cultural resources in proximity to existing developments. If cultural materials not known are discovered during removal or alteration actions, activities should cease and professional archeological evaluations made for data recovery.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
<input type="checkbox"/> IAD-present		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		<input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The El Portal archeological resources appear to have significance at the regional level. Both historic and prehistoric Indian sites are located within the district. A primary archeological value is the potential of these resources for aiding our understanding of how past native communities utilized the various natural resources of the Sierra and of how environmental variables affected their community life and yearly round. This research orientation was set over 20 years ago as a result of pioneer survey and excavation in the early 1950s by Bennyhoff and others. Bennyhoff derived a general pattern of settlement from his data, based on a correlation of site size and features with elevation. El Portal's unique situation in the Upper Sonoran Zone and its intermediate location between Yosemite Valley and the San Joaquin Valley make it an important resource for comparative studies of settlement, subsistence and trade along the Merced River drainage. Archeological sites here also have unique ties to a native ethnic population and value for interpretation in the park.

The archeology of El Portal represents National Park Service Historical Themes 1a4 (The Earliest Americans--Archaic Indian Horizon); 1c1 (Indian Meets European, Indian Life at the Time of Contact with the European) and 1c2 (Indian Meets European, Changes in Native Life Due to Contact).

Ethnic significance of the district resides in the fact the El Portal along with Yosemite Valley may be the only areas in the Sierras where historic Indian settlements have been identified ethnographically. In 1917, Merriam, with the help of local Indian informants, located and recorded 7 Miwok villages in the El Portal Archeological District; an additional 6 villages were located

The primary significance of archeological resources in the El Portal area lies in the potential of buried deposits, as well as surface remains, to provide new information for comparative archeological and environmental studies. This knowledge can be obtained through more detailed recording of surface features, collection and analysis of surface artifacts and professional excavation and analysis of buried deposits. At this time, midden deposits have not been sufficiently analyzed to determine what data they contain and what may be recovered through the application of currently available analytical techniques.

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Another substantial research value of El Portal's archeological remains lies in their intermediate location along [REDACTED]. Large sites which may have considerable depth, as at 4-Mrp-181, suggest possible year-round use where oaks could be harvested and winters were much milder than in the higher elevations. Merriam reports that most villages along this stretch of the river were permanent but were far larger in winter than in summer because of a population influx from the Yosemite Valley. Merriam also notes that the villages in Yosemite Valley were sharply divided into two categories: the area to the north of the [REDACTED] was known as the inside, grizzly bear or land side; the area to the south was referred to as the outside, coyote or water side. The same distinction could hold for the El Portal area and could be reflected in the archeological record through comparative studies. Further comparative studies can be expected to draw on sites in other contrasting environmental situations to identify and explain the differences in use of natural resources and influences of elevation on settlements. Such studies can compare: 1) high valleys like Tuolumne Meadows; 2) lower mountain valleys such as Yosemite, Wawona and Foresta/Big Meadow; 3) the intermediate canyon - El Portal; and 4) downstream portions of the Merced and similar tributaries of the San Joaquin River. El Portal is the only portion of Yosemite National Park to occupy the Upper Sonoran ecological zone; as such, it is extremely important for comparative studies.

It is presumed on the basis of ethnographic records that the Miwok moved seasonally up and down the Merced and that El Portal was the location of continuous traffic and trade. Eastern trade is suggested by the discovery of an Owens Valley Paiute sherd and Mono Crater obsidian during excavation of 4-Mrp-181. This site also provided evidence of coastal trade in the form of Olivella shell beads and Haliotis shell ornaments. Additional archeological research here can further establish the geographical extent of this trade, and possibly the social and economic factors involved.

The culture history and chronology for El Portal, and the Yosemite National Park region, are based on the results of a small number of very limited excavations which lacked good temporal control. At present the three cultural complexes identified are based on temporal variation in artifactual remains. Future work, conducted at a variety of sites, employing current analytical, recovery, and dating techniques could be utilized to greatly elaborate on the cultural sequence of the southern Sierra Nevadas.

Activities with the most potential for destruction of significant archeological remains are those resulting in ground disturbance, although relic collection can cause loss of important data. Because sub-surface deposits cannot be reliably traced from the surface, it should be assumed that any earth-disturbing action has potential for affecting archeological deposits. Although

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professional excavation is an ultimate mitigation procedure, it is also basically destructive and should be utilized only to satisfy overriding research or management needs. Destruction of above-ground features, such as bedrock mortars will have less impact than will ground disturbance, as these can be fairly adequately recorded using current archeological techniques. However, these features lend themselves readily to interpretive exhibits. Extensive past destruction of cultural deposits as a result of construction and utilities installations enhances the significance of remaining deposits which should be carefully considered in future planning and development.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES NINE

- Bennyhoff, James A.  
1956 An appraisal of the archeological resources of Yosemite National Park. University of California Archeological Survey, No. 34, UC Berkeley.
- Fitzwater, Robert J.  
1962 Final Report on two seasons excavation at El Portal, Mariposa County, California. UCLA Archeological Survey Annual Report 1961-1962.
- Merriam, C. Hart  
1917 Indian Village and camp sites in Yosemite Valley. Sierra Club Bulletin Vol. 10:2.
- Napton, L. Kyle and Elizabeth Anne Greathouse  
1976 Archeological investigations in Yosemite National Park, California. Part 2a and 2b El Portal/Cascade. California State College, Stanislaus

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

TEN

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
E	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
F	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]



# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bennyhoff, James A.  
 1952 An archeological survey of selected areas of Yosemite National Park, 1952. MS on file Western Archeological Center, Tucson.

See Continuation Sheet

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

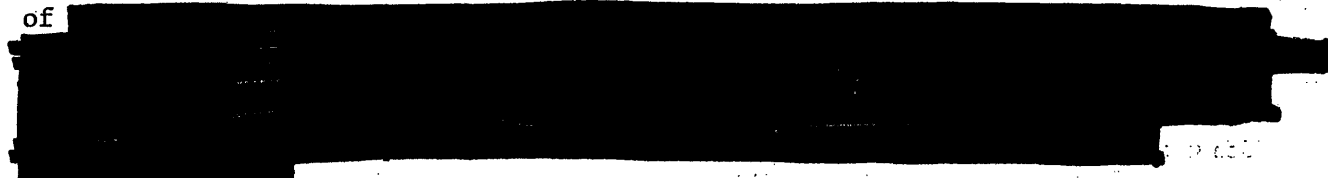
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1910 acres

UTM REFERENCES - See map

<u>G</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	ZONE
<u>B</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	ZONE

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The eastern and western boundaries are delimited by the eastern and western extent of



LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Kathleen Moffitt, Archeologist  
Keith M. Anderson, Regional Research Archeologist July 22, 1976

ORGANIZATION Western Archeological Center, National Park Service DATE  
 STREET & NUMBER P. O. Box 49008 TELEPHONE FTS 762-6501; 602-792-6501  
 CITY OR TOWN Tucson STATE Arizona

# 12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES  NO  NONE

Walter M. Lewis JUN 23 1977  
 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is  National  State  Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE David H. ...

TITLE Deputy Assistant Secretary

DATE OCT 11 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
<u>Charles Adams</u>	DATE <u>8/18/78</u>
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	
ATTEST <u>William LeBouch</u>	DATE <u>May 26, 1978</u>
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	