

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECTS AT FORT ROSS

Archaeological investigations in the Fort Ross area have contributed valuable information and helped to authenticate the various reconstructions. They illuminate the history of the early Kashaya Indians and the Russian and subsequent American settlements. The earliest work, recording sites for excavation, was done by researchers from the University of California Berkeley in the late 1940s. Excavation projects have been undertaken at various times over the years by archaeologists and anthropologists from University of California Berkeley, San Francisco State University, Santa Rosa Junior College, Sonoma State University, Cabrillo College, the University of Wisconsin, and the California State Department of Parks and Recreation.

The first intensive series of excavations was done in preparation for the reconstruction of the stockade walls and blockhouses in the 1950s. Archaeological work was conducted in the early 1970s in preparation for rerouting Highway One from the center of the stockade area to its present location outside the fort. Additional work during these years was done near the chapel and at the sites of the officials' quarters, the Kuskov house, the old warehouse, barracks, and the provisions storehouse. Diggings were also focused on the areas of the Visitor Center, Fort Ross Reef Campground, archaeology camp, and the Russian orchard. In the 1980s, further exploration was made of the east and west stockade walls during their replacement. Archaeologists have also turned their attention to marine surveys, seeking to map the various locations of sunken vessels in Fort Ross Cove, and to determine the location of the Russian shipbuilding activity.

The Native American sites were first recorded by archaeologists in the 1930s and in the 1960s. In the 1980s archaeological work was extended from the coast to the ridge line northeast of the fort. Prehistoric occupation sites have also been examined at the Reef Campground and on the bluff up the coast from Fort Ross.

In 1990 the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee assisted the Department of Parks and Recreation in a project intended to restore the historic Russian cemetery to its former appearance. Excavations to locate and identify the individual Orthodox burials were conducted. Over one hundred and fifty individuals are known to have been buried in the cemetery (though most are not identified by name). Remains have been reinterred and given last rites by priests of the Russian Orthodox Church; gravesites have been marked with temporary wooden crosses. Artifacts, such as beads, buttons, cloth fragments and religious medals found in the cemetery restoration project, will help researchers better understand the Russian settlement's culture.

Archaeological investigations at Fort Ross are ongoing. Beginning in the summer of 1988, the University of California Berkeley and the Department of Parks and Recreation began a ten year project to enrich our understanding of Fort Ross' diverse population. Sites have been investigated at Sandy Beach and at the Native Alaskan village on the bluff in front of the stockade; archaeologists also surveyed the park for previously unrecorded sites.

Artifacts uncovered in Fort Ross excavations reveal the settlement's cultural diversity. Some examples are: bone harpoon points typical of those used by Native Alaskan hunters; corner-notched arrow heads of obsidian, chert, and bottle glass used by the Coast Miwok and Kashaya Indians; an extensive array of English and Chinese ceramics, and two pieces of Russian ware with Cyrillic hallmarks (Gusyatnikov and Poskochin); Orthodox crosses found with the burials; oversize Russian bricks made at Fort Ross and/or Bodega Bay; cannon balls and gun flints representing the main armaments of the fort; thousands of glass beads used for personal adornment and decoration by the California Indians and the Native Alaskans; chinaware from the period of the Fort Ross Hotel; a gold ring, probably once worn by a member of the Call family; a large *japaniserie* brass button which may have decorated the apparel of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century visitor to the dance hall; and telegraph insulators from the 1870s, which help date the arrival of modern communications to the Call Ranch. Although few of these are museum pieces, they tell their own stories of life on the Sonoma Coast over the past several centuries.