

3.8 Cultural Resources

This section examines whether implementation of the General Plan will cause a substantial adverse effect on cultural and historical resources in Rancho Santa Margarita and the Northeast Future Planned Community. The information contained in this section is summarized from the Cultural Resources Study for the City of Rancho Santa Margarita General Plan prepared by Archaeological Associates, Inc. (May 2002). This report is located in Appendix H of this EIR.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Evidence of human habitation in the project area extends back some 6,000 years when the “Millingstone” people roamed the coast and interior of southern California. These early inhabitants subsisted through hunting and gathering. The Shoshoneans moved in from the Great Basin around A.D. 500 and subdivided into three groups. The Juaneño people settled in the project area. They subsisted primarily on marine animals and acorns. Life continued this way until the Spanish arrived in the 18th Century, at which time the Juaneño occupied the area from the coast to the Santa Ana Mountains. When the Mission San Juan Capistrano was established in 1776, the local Juaneño were gathered at the Mission and taught Christianity and the European way of life.

The planning area, Trubuco Mesa, became an outpost of the Mission and traditional European agriculture was established. In 1841, the Mesa was granted to Santiago Arguello by Governor Alvarado. Arguello and his two sons raised cattle and grew corn on the Mesa until 1847 when they sold Rancho Trubuco to “Don Juan” Forster. In 1884, Rancho Trubuco and Rancho Mission Viejo were purchased by Richard O’Neill and James C. Flood. The combined properties became known as Santa Margarita. In 1940, O’Neill heirs decided to divide the Santa Margarita holdings and in the ensuing decades the Planned Community of Mission Viejo was established. In January 2000, the Mesa part of the planned community known as Rancho Santa Margarita was incorporated as the City of Rancho Santa Margarita.

Archeological Resources

More than 30 prehistoric archaeological sites have been recorded at locations within the project area. Although many of these have been destroyed by modern development, several important sites survive. Many, but not all of these archaeological sites are situated within O’Neill Regional Park where they are managed by the County. The majority of the prehistoric resources outside of O’Neill Park are located along the Arroyo Trubuco, Tijeras Canyon, Oso Creek, Robinson Ranch and Dove Canyon. These sites include razed structures, earthenware, house foundations, a well head and watering trough, and a farm service and maintenance structure that has since been destroyed by construction. General locations of areas within the City which potentially contain

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archeological resources are depicted in figures contained within Appendix H, Cultural Resources Technical Report.

O'Neill Park/Old Trabuco Adobe

The old Trabuco Adobe site in O'Neill Park is regarded by many as the single most important historical location within the City. The first formal record of the adobe was made by C.E. Roberts around 1936. At that time, the adobe was in ruins but its walls were still intact.

The Trabuco Adobe dates back to 1818 when a band of pirates from Buenos Aires, sailing under the command of a man named Bouchard, landed at San Juan Capistrano. The Padres and Indians carried the mission treasure to the Trabuco Adobe for safekeeping. Meanwhile, the pirates were repulsed by Santiago Arguello and 30 of his men assisted by some Indians from San Luis Obispo.

The adobe then served as the home of the mission mayordomo and finally a succession of Basque sheep herders until sometime around 1890 when Richard O'Neill purchased the Trabuco. With its roof missing, the three-room adobe began melting early in the 20th century and was half melted away by the 1930's. The building was little more than an adobe mound by the 1960's. Today, the adobe is fenced for protection from vandalism and a small portion of standing wall is covered by a roof.

A limited archaeological test excavation was conducted at the Adobe. Thus, it was determined that the demise of the Adobe's roof was probably due to a single fire during which the roof collapsed. The adobe bricks were also found to contain prehistoric cultural material (mostly chipped stone flakes); it was concluded that the bricks were manufactured from soil taken from the surrounding prehistoric archaeological site. It was also determined that the original adobe had only two rooms, the third being an addition of unknown date (the addition apparently lacked a cobble foundation and tile roof).

Several other sites in O'Neill Park were destroyed by construction.

Arroyo Trabuco Region

The majority (19) of the known prehistoric archaeological locations within the City are distributed more or less evenly along the City's segment of the Arroyo Trabuco. However, 11 of the 19 sites are known to have been previously tested or salvage excavated by professional archaeologists. Several of the sites in the Trabuco Arroyo merit special mention.

ORA-472 yielded a radiocarbon date of 5,070 B.P., the Millingstone Period. One interesting feature of ORA-472 is that it produced "red beads" and "red bead blanks," items which indicates the Millingstone Period and/or the Intermediate Period. The Intermediate Period may be represented by ORA-871, now destroyed. It is believed to be a campsite dated between 1500 B.C. and 750 B.C. This site is also said to have yielded

material for making “red beads,” as well as a “red bead blank.” ORA-874, also now destroyed, is recorded as having yielded a stone “discoidal” (a very well-formed stone disc). These bits of evidence also suggest use of the Mesa during the Intermediate Period. ORA-853 and ORA-867, two other destroyed deposits, are thought to be encampments in use from the Millingstone era through Late Prehistoric (Juaneño) times. Another site, ORA-862, appears to be the only known campsite deposit surviving mostly intact in the Arroyo Trabuco. ORA-862 is a habitation (midden) deposit which was exposed in the escarpment of a road cut. Hearths, marine shell, and other cultural debris were observed in the cut.

Tijeras Canyon Region

Three prehistoric locations have been reported in the Tijeras Canyon region: ORA-860, 877, and 1466. All are small stone tool scatters. ORA-860 and 877 appear to have been chaparral vegetation gathering areas since they feature tools such as chipped stone “choppers” (probably root digging tools), scraper planes (for fleshing yucca leaves), hammerstones (for dressing millingstones), and milling stone fragments. ORA-1466 consisted of a few chipped stone flakes and a scraper plane. Since it was discovered during a grading monitoring program, this site no longer exists.

Oso Creek Region

Three sites have been recorded in the Oso Creek portion of the City: ORA-641, ORA-866, and ORA-877. The first, now destroyed, is reported to have been a “quarry,” i.e., a location where raw material for chipped stone tool manufacture was gathered. The hills between upper Oso and Aliso Creeks are well known as a chert quarrying area. A second site, ORA-866, is believed to be intact, consisting of a light chipped stone scatter. The third site, ORA-727, is of special interest, consisting of a midden deposit reported to have yielded a chipped stone point, a discoidal (see Arroyo Trabuco above), an obsidian flake (probably the obsidian came from the Coso Mountains in the Mojave Desert), and assorted milling equipment. The site is situated on the edge of Oso Creek. This, combined with the presence of midden (darkened earth) suggests that ORA-727 is a habitation location. The discoidal suggests use during the Intermediate Period.

Robinson Ranch Region

Two prehistoric locations have been recorded in the Robinson Ranch region: ORA-558 and ORA-1099. ORA-558 is a large scatter of chipped and ground stone tools which also included a “discoidal” (see Arroyo Trabuco sites above). The tool array, characterized by millingstones, indicates chaparral plant food gathering while the discoidal suggests an Intermediate date for the location’s use. ORA-1099 is a similar but smaller scatter. These two scatters are along a small drainage leading down into Bell Canyon; they probably relate to other sites in the Starr Ranch area east of the City boundary.

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Dove Canyon Region

ORA-559 and ORA-560 are the only two prehistoric locations recorded in the Dove Canyon region. They are also flaked and ground stone tool scatters indicating chaparral plant food processing. They may also be associated with activity emanating from Bell Canyon to the east. Each of these sites covers areas over two acres.

Paleontological Resources

Paleontological resources have been uncovered in various portions of the City. In the 1920s, as part of an oil exploration, a geologist discovered fossil beds along the bluffs fronting Trabuco Creek. David Starr Jordan's paleontological exploration revealed thick-shelled oysters and six-inch shark's teeth. Atop Lone Hill, the rib of a giant whale was unearthed. These areas are considered of high paleontological importance.

Historic Architectural Resources

The City of Rancho Santa Margarita has no historic architectural resources.

THRESHOLDS USED TO DETERMINE LEVEL OF IMPACT

For the purposes of this EIR, a significant impact would occur if implementation of the General Plan would:

- Cause a substantial change in the significant of a historical resource;
- Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource;
- Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique feature; or
- Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Rancho Santa Margarita contains important archaeological and paleontological sites. In a region of growth and urbanization, these resources are threatened by the encroachment of urban development. To work towards conserving these important resources, the General Plan includes a Conservation/Open Space Element that addresses cultural resources. This Element includes the following goal and policies:

Goal 7-8: *Preserve and protect historical, archaeological, and paleontological resources.*

Policy 78.1: Balance the benefits of development with a project's potential impacts to existing cultural resources.

Policy 78.2: Identify, designate, and protect sites of historic importance.

The largest area for future development is located in the Northeast Future Planned Community, currently containing active nurseries and portions of Porter Ranch. No archaeological or paleontological resources have previously been identified. However, destruction or disturbance of such undiscovered resources, whether planned or inadvertent, will constitute a potentially significant impact.

Rancho Santa Margarita contains a number of important archaeological and paleontological sites within its boundaries. The majority of the archaeological sites are located in O'Neill Park, Robinson Ranch, Dove Canyon and Tijeras Canyon. Paleontological resources have been discovered on Lone Hill and near Trabuco Creek. The sites within O'Neill Park are currently managed by the County. Other sites have already been destroyed by modern development. However, further destruction or disturbance of archaeological and paleontological resources, discovered or undiscovered, will constitute a potentially significant impact.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The City will implement Implementation Programs LU-8, LU-9, and COS-23 to minimize development impacts on cultural resources. Implementation Program LU-8 requires a site development permit process and the California Environmental Quality Act in the review of proposed development projects to minimize environmental impacts detrimental to the community. LU-9 requires review and amendment (as needed) of the City Subdivision and grading regulations to provide consistency with new state legislation and court decisions, and to make other desired changes and provisions. COS-23 assesses development proposals, including those in the Northeast Planned Community, for potential impacts to important cultural resources identified in the Conservation/Open Space Element pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act. COS-23 also requires a professional cultural resources survey of all undeveloped property prior to issuing a grading permit. If cultural resource artifacts are discovered during site development, they must be donated to a suitable repository that will maintain the collection for future scientific study and exhibition within Orange County. Prior to donation, a certified cultural resources consultant will prepare the collection to the point of identification. The project should be prepared to pay potential curation fees for the long-term curation and maintenance of donated items.

LEVEL OF IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION

Through the use of Implementation Programs LU-8, LU-9, and COS-23, the potential for substantial adverse effects on cultural resources will be reduced to a less-than-significant level.

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