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Excavation and Analysis of a Stone Enclosure Complex in San Diego County

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THIS report documents the excavation and subsequent analysis of a complex of circular stone features designated Feature G of Locus 1, CA-SDI-5938, located in a granite bedrock outcrop on a high knoll overlooking San Pasqual and Westwood valleys in San Diego County (Fig. 1). Investigations of CA-SDI-5938 were conducted by WESTEC Services in the winter of 1985-86 (Carrico and Kyle 1987:1-1). The site is composed of four loci located on both sides of a large seasonal drainage. The outcrop containing the enclosure complex is roughly oval and measures 22 m. east/west by 12 m. north/south. The bedrock outcrop and terrain immediately to the west are relatively level, forming a shelf. The ground rises to the north at a moderate angle and drops off steeply to the south and east.

The complex is similar in construction to others previously recorded in San Diego County (May 1975; Minor 1975; Oxendine 1981). It consists of circular to semi-rectangular enclosures built of stacked native stone. Larger bedrock boulders have been incorporated into the walls. Walls, where intact, were approximately 0.5 to 1 m. in height. Recent vandalism had destroyed and altered the shape of rooms in the center of the feature. The sizes of well-defined enclosures ranged from approximately 1 by 1 m. to 3 by 2.5 m. One large area, designated Room 14, measured 3.7 by 4.0 m. This was not a walled enclosure, but a natural open area located on the east end of the complex. Although surrounded by large bedrock boulders that have been incorporated into other rooms, this area had apparently never been enclosed. It contained dark artifact-bearing midden, as did all the rooms. A small pictograph is located on the southeast corner of the complex.

The presence of rock rooms and enclosures in San Diego County has been reported increasingly by several researchers (May 1975; Minor 1975; Oxendine 1981; Taylor and Carrico 1982). They have commonly been described in the literature as defensive and habitation structures, or storage areas (May 1975; Minor 1975). These enclosures are stacked or tiered rocks arranged in such a manner to form a circle or crescent. The features are rarely more than three tiers in height and vary in size from relatively small (2 m. in diameter) to large (4 m. in diameter). At least 28 sites in San Diego County are reported to have rock rooms or enclosures. These structures are most often built into bedrock formations or outcrops, although their bases are frequently sunk into A Horizon soils. Excavation within these features has produced artifacts and refuse clearly associated with habitation, including formalized tools, faunal remains, and ornamentation.

The goal of the excavation of the stone enclosure complex at CA-SDI-5938 was to determine function through artifact analysis. If the features were defensive or storage structures, a

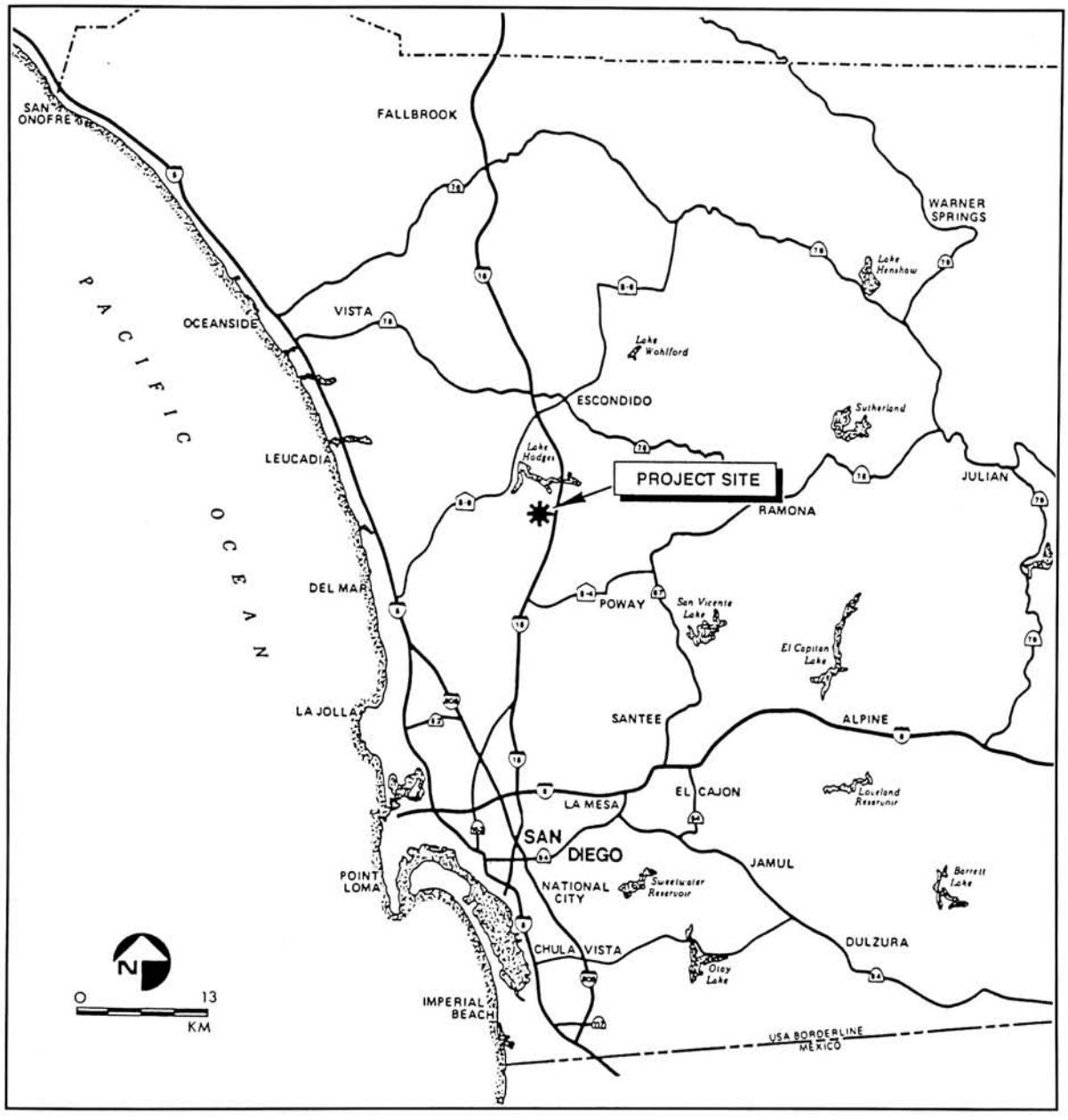

Fig. 1. Location of the CA-SDI-5938 site.

limited and specialized artifact assemblage would be expected. If they served as habitations, however, the artifacts should reflect a wider range of domestic activities.

METHODS

Prior to excavation, the complex was mapped and each enclosure given a room number designation. Sixteen enclosed areas were identified. Three rooms (5, 6, and 7) had been extensively altered by recent vandalism and did not represent original enclosures (Fig. 2). Rooms were excavated separately as homogeneous features in stratigraphic levels. Eight of the 16 rooms (7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, and 16) were excavated. In addition, three 1 by 1-m. units

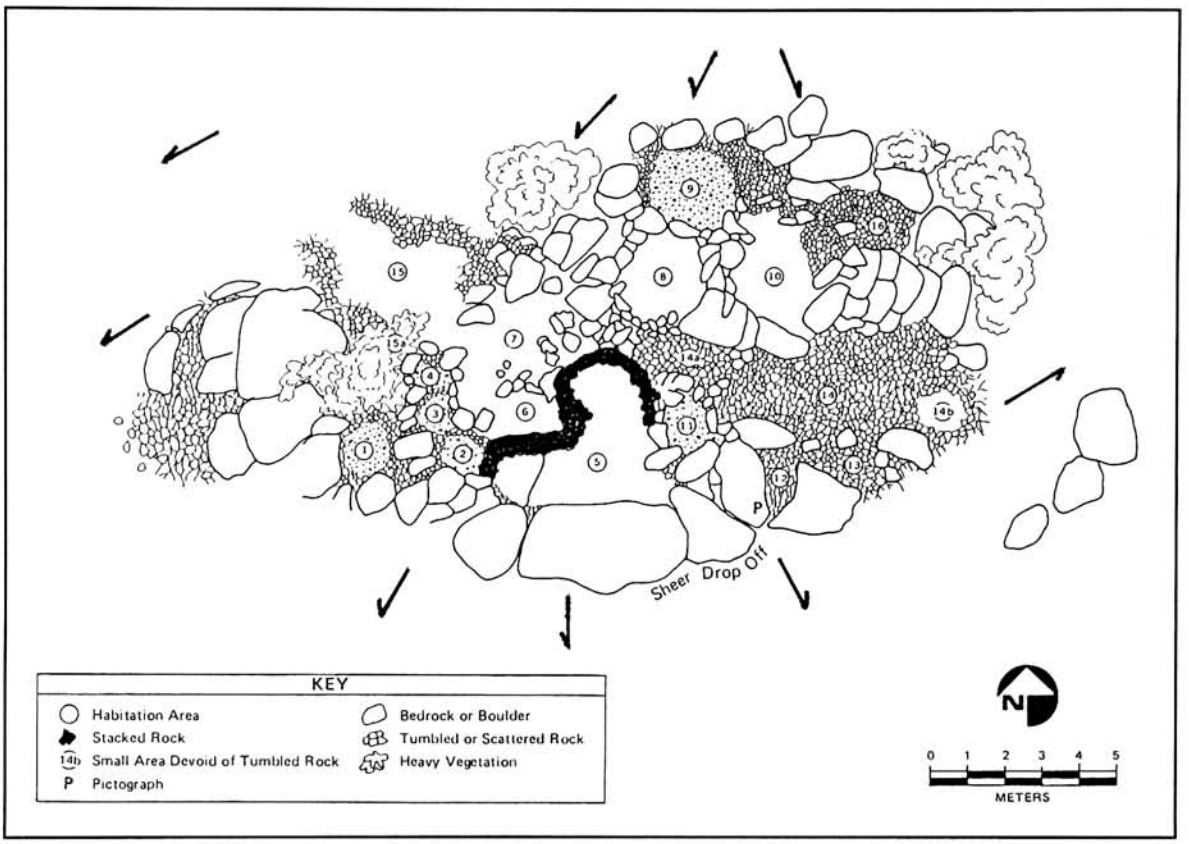

Fig. 2. CA-SDI-5938, Locus 1: Map of Feature G before excavation.

were excavated, one each outside the north, south, and west edges of the complex. These units were sterile, indicating that the artifact-bearing midden at Feature G was associated specifically with the room complex.

Excavation resulted in better definition of rooms as floor depressions, and remnant wall edges were exposed (Fig. 3). A substantial amount of cultural material, including bone, shell, pottery, and lithic artifacts, was recovered. Stratigraphic data, as well as exposure of floors and walls, provided insight into construction techniques, while room function was determined through artifact analysis. Generally, the rooms were elliptical to circular in shape. Stratigraphy and construction of the enclosures, however, varied and will be described in detail below. The three units placed outside the complex were sterile. Soil in the units consisted of a light tan, sandy loam, as opposed to the dark brown midden within the bedrock outcrop.

ROOM DESCRIPTIONS

Rooms 7 and 15

Room 7 was within the area disturbed by vandalism and may not have represented an original enclosure. The room was irregular in shape and measured 3.3 by 3.2 m. It was formed by an alignment of granitic stones placed upon the midden surface. Room 15 was oval in shape and measured 2.5 by 1.3 m. Granite bedrock formed the enclosure's east and west sides. The south side was of stacked stones while the northwest side was open.

Rooms 7 and 15 exhibited similar stratigraphy. Both rooms contained a lens of dark brown midden approximately 20 cm. deep over-

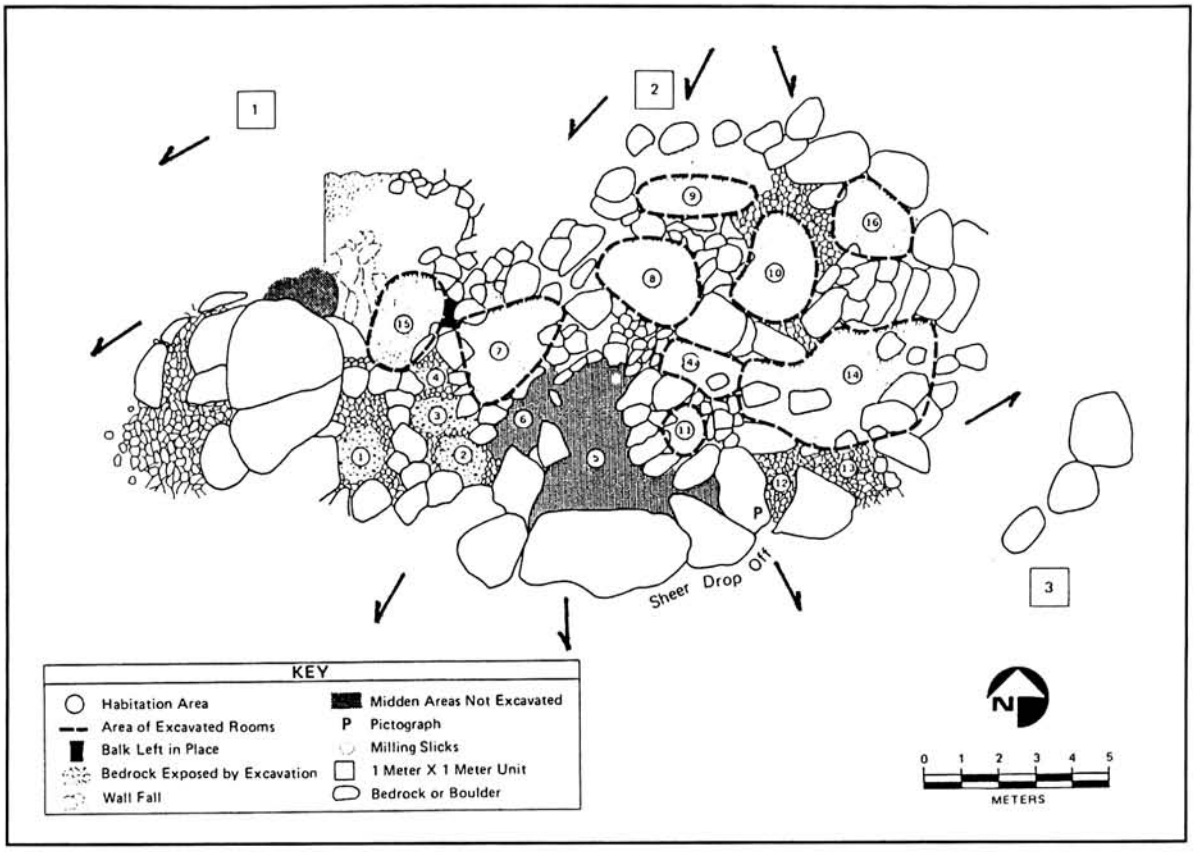

Fig. 3. CA-SDI-5938, Locus 1: Map of Feature G after excavation.

lying a dense lens of fist-sized pieces of fragmented granite ranging between 25 and 40 cm. in depth and resting on decomposing granite bedrock. The granite fragments were tightly packed together (Fig. 4). Artifact-bearing midden was present in the small spaces between the stones. The fragments appeared to be the result of decomposition of larger stones due to exposure from heat when used as fire hearths. Small pieces would have broken off larger hearth stones and become concentrated under the floor as a result of traffic within the rooms, eventually forming the dense lens of stone fragments.

Rooms 9, 11, and 14

These rooms contained no overlying lens of soil. They were filled exclusively with 10 to 30 cm. of densely packed, fist-sized pieces of fragmented granite resting on decomposed granite bedrock, identical to the lower levels of rooms 7 and 15. Artifact-bearing midden filled the small spaces between the tightly packed stones. Room 9 was elliptical in shape and consisted of a level area that measured 2.0 by 1.2 m. It was surrounded by naturally occurring bedrock boulders. Room 11 was a small circular area between larger bedrock outcrops. It measured 1.3 by 1.8 m. Room 14, as discussed above, was a large open area between bedrock boulders that measured 5.2 by 5.6 m.

Room 8

Room 8 consisted of a roughly shaped pit that measured 2.4 by 2 m. The depression apparently had been dug into the soft decomposed granite bedrock to a depth of 40 cm. Fill was a dark brown midden with occasional fist-sized pieces of fragmented granite. The straight walls

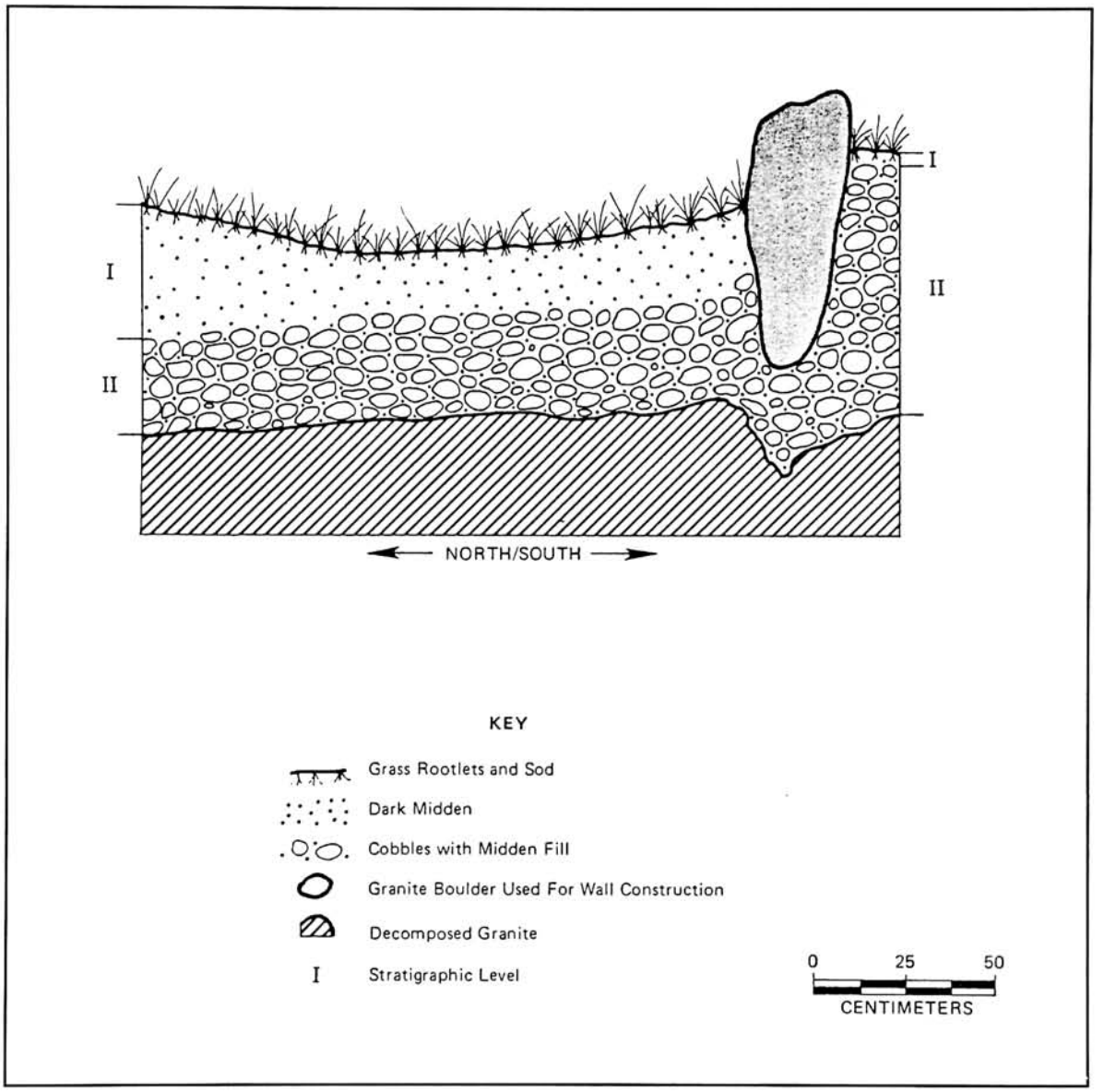

Fig. 4. Cross section of Rock Room 15.

and extremely level floor of the feature led to the conclusion that it was a purposefully excavated pit as opposed to a natural depression. A barrier of stacked stones enclosed the room on the south side. Remnants of fallen wall debris were noted on the north side, both on and below the midden surface. Large- to medium-sized bedrock boulders formed the rest of the room.

Room 10

Room 10 was an irregular oval in shape and measured 2.4 by 1.7 m. It contained three stratigraphic levels (Fig. 5). The first level consisted of approximately 15 cm. of midden overlying a dense lens of fist-sized pieces of fractured granite that extended to a depth of 35 cm. In

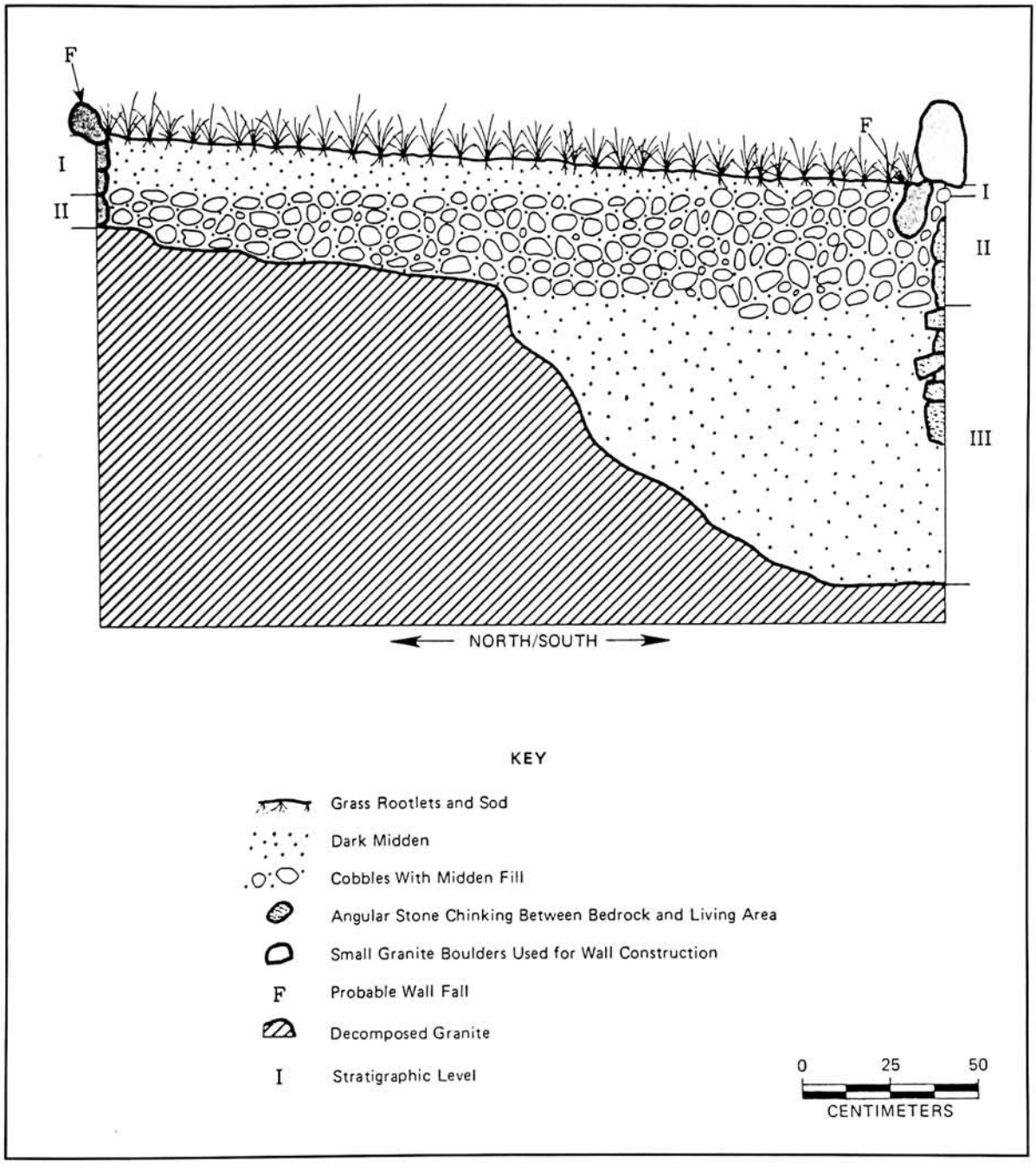

Fig. 5. Cross section of Rock Room 10.

the north half of the enclosure, the dense lens of fist-sized stones rested on decomposed granite bedrock. In the south half of the room, the stones overlaid a third level of dark brown midden, extending to a depth of 130 cm. The room was formed by bedrock boulders on the east, west, and south sides. A narrow gap located between two large boulders on the south side of the complex was filled with angular granite chinking.

The deep depression in the southern half of the enclosure appeared to be natural. Its irregular shape, steep sides, and small area would not have provided a convenient living space. However, chinking on the south side of the room extended well below the fragmented granite lens and into the pit. The chinking, combined with the fact that the pit was filled with artifact-bearing midden, documented the complex history and variable uses of this enclosure.

At one time, this natural depression had evidently been cleaned out and the bedrock gap on the south filled with chinking. It must have been incorporated into a larger room, or complex of rooms, and may have served as storage since, as previously noted, it is too small for a living space. The depression was later filled in and the dense lens of fractured granite that covered it was formed by accumulation of fragmented hearth stones during the occupation of Room 10.

Room 16

Room 16 was roughly circular in shape and measured 2.9 by 2.6 m. It consisted of a cleared area between large granite boulders. Fill was of angular granite rubble in an artifact-bearing midden. Decomposed granite bedrock was encountered 50 cm. below the surface.

ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

A total of 14,699 items was recovered from excavation of the room complex, including 8,485 lithic artifacts (58%), 5,145 bone fragments (35%), and 1,069 pottery sherds (7%). The goal of this analysis was to determine the function of the complex and to see if any differences could be determined between individual rooms. If the rooms were defensive structures, a highly specialized artifact assemblage would be expected. If, on the other hand, they were habitations, cultural material representing a wide range of activities emphasizing domestic use should be present (May 1975; Minor 1975). To determine room function, lithic artifacts from each room were quantified according to type and converted to a percentage of the total, allowing a room-by-room comparison. The results are given in Tables 1, 2, and 3. As shown in Table 1, 91% of all lithic artifacts consisted of microflakes and biface trimming flakes, indicative of projectile point production. In addition, 1% of all lithic artifacts were either projectile points or point fragments; thus, 92% of all lithic artifacts were indicative of projectile point manufacture. This pattern seemed consistent throughout the rooms. Micro-flakes and biface trimming flakes, ranging from 82 to 94%, dominated all assemblages (Tables 2 and 3).

After projectile point manufacture refuse, unmodified flakes, at 7%, was the next highest category. This pattern was also consistent in all rooms, and constitute from 4 to 14% of the assemblage. Manos made up 1% of the lithic artifacts. All other lithic artifact types constituted less than 1% of the assemblage. This pattern was also reflected throughout the rooms.

To determine what other types of activities were represented by the lithic assemblage, unmodified flakes, microflakes, biface trimming flakes, and projectile points were deleted from the totals and percentages of the remaining lithic artifact types recalculated (Tables 4 through 6).

Manos now dominated the assemblage at 52%. Once again, this pattern was consistent in all rooms, with manos dominating all sub-assemblages, ranging between 28 and 71%. The next most common artifact types were angular hammer pounders and flake scrapers at 13% each, which again was reflected throughout all room assemblages. Each of the remaining artifact types constitute less than 10% of the assemblages.

Subsequent to the deletion of lithic artifacts representing projectile point and tool manufacture, a strong association in the lithic artifact sub-assemblage between manos, flake scrapers,

Table 1
LITHIC ACTIVITY ANALYSIS FOR ALL ROOMS, CA-SDI-5938

Type	Total	Percent
micro and biface trimming flakes	7,681	91.45
unmodified flakes	530	6.31
projectile points	61	0.73
utilized flakes	5	0.06
flake scrapers	15	0.18
unretouched cores	13	0.15
battered cores	4	0.05
retouched core	1	0.01
hammer pounders	16	0.19
manos	65	0.77
metates	8	0.09
Totals	**8,399**	**99.99**

and angular hammer pounders was seen. At other sites in San Diego County, a relationship between these three artifact types has been interpreted as indicative of food preparation (Hector 1986).

FAUNAL ANALYSIS

Food preparation was also indicated by the faunal remains and pottery sherds recovered. Game remains identified included rabbits, ground squirrel, woodrat, deer, pond turtle, bony fish, and birds (Reynolds 1987). Reynolds, in his report on the faunal material, did not discuss the remains from Feature G separate from the total Locus 1 assemblage. He noted, however, that the assemblage from the rock room complex was not "characterized by faunally-distinctive or unusual faunal distributions . . . from the rest of Locus 1" (Reynolds 1987:E-113).

Table 2
LITHIC ACTIVITY ANALYSIS, ROOMS 7-10, CA-SDI-5938

	Room 7		Room 8		Room 9		Room 10	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
micro and biface trimming flakes	1,418	97.26	1,100	93.06	97	82.91	986	93.90
unmodified flakes	7	0.48	66	5.58	16	13.67	43	4.09
projectile points	15	1.03	9	0.76	--	--	6	0.57
utilized flakes	3	0.21	--	--	--	--	--	--
flake scrapers	1	0.07	4	0.34	--	--	1	0.09
unretouched cores	4	0.27	1	0.08	--	--	2	0.19
battered cores	1	0.07	--	--	2	1.71	--	--
retouched core	1	0.07	--	--	--	--	--	--
hammer pounders	3	0.21	--	--	--	--	4	0.38
manos	4	0.27	2	0.17	2	1.71	7	0.67
metates	1	0.07	--	--	--	--	1	0.09
Totals	**1,458**	**100.01**	**1,182**	**99.99**	**117**	**100.00**	**1,050**	**99.98**

Table 3
LITHIC ACTIVITY ANALYSIS, ROOMS 11, 14-16, CA-SDI-5938

	Room 11		Room 14		Room 15		Room 16	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
micro and biface trimming flakes	256	87.37	2,932	89.39	441	82.28	451	93.76
unmodified flakes	23	7.85	279	8.51	74	13.81	22	4.57
projectile points	1	0.34	20	0.61	7	1.31	1	0.21
utilized flakes	--	--	1	0.03	1	0.19	--	--
flake scrapers	--	--	6	0.18	2	0.37	1	0.21
unretouched cores	3	1.02	1	0.03	1	0.19	1	0.21
battered cores	--	--	1	0.03	--	--	--	--
retouched core	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
hammer pounders	1	0.34	7	0.21	1	0.19	--	--
manos	9	3.07	29	0.88	7	1.31	5	1.04
metates	--	--	4	0.12	2	0.37	--	--
Totals	**293**	**99.99**	**3,280**	**99.99**	**536**	**100.02**	**481**	**100.00**

Table 4
ADJUSTED LITHIC ACTIVITY ANALYSIS
ALL ROOMS, CA-SDI-5938

Type	Total	Percent
utilized flakes	5	3.94
flake scrapers	15	11.81
unretouched cores	13	10.24
battered cores	4	3.15
retouched core	1	0.79
hammer pounders	16	12.60
manos	65	51.18
metates	8	6.30
Total	**127**	**100.01**

Rabbit remains constituted 11% of the faunal material and included cottontail and brush rabbit (*Sylvilagus audobonii* and *S. bachmani*). Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*) constituted approximately 1% of the faunal assemblage. In addition, rabbit-sized mammal bone comprised 55% of the assemblage, suggesting that rabbit remains may constitute as much as 67% of the faunal material recovered. Burn marks on the bone indicated rabbits were skinned and roasted whole over a fire. The exclusive presence of adult lagomorph individuals reflected distinctive winter conditions suggestive of seasonal occupation (Reynolds 1987).

California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi nudipes*) constituted 1%, while woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes macrotic*, *N. lepida intermedia*, and *Neotoma* sp.) made up 0.5% of the assemblage. Although most ground squirrel bone appeared to be intrusive, some were burned, as were those identified as woodrat, providing evidence that individuals were broiled unskinned directly on coals (Reynolds 1987).

Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), Western Pond Turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*), hawk, crow, and robin-sized bird bone, as well as one bony fish vertebra formed approximately 1% of the faunal assemblage. Unidentified mammalian bone fragments, including deer-sized (549), coyote-sized (69), rat-sized (260), and mouse-sized (1), constituted 16% of the faunal assemblage. The remaining 15.5% of the faunal material represented nongame animals.

Table 5
ADJUSTED LITHIC ACTIVITY ANALYSIS ROOMS 7-10, CA-SDI-5938

	Room 7		Room 8		Room 9		Room 10	
	Total	**Percent**	**Total**	**Percent**	**Total**	**Percent**	**Total**	**Percent**
utilized flakes	3	16.67	--	--	--	--	--	--
flake scrapers	1	5.55	4	57.14	--	--	1	6.67
unretouched cores	4	22.22	1	14.29	--	--	2	13.33
battered cores	1	5.55	--	--	2	50	--	--
retouched core	1	5.55	--	--	--	--	--	--
hammer pounders	3	16.67	--	--	--	--	4	26.67
manos	4	22.22	2	28.57	2	50	7	46.67
metates	1	5.55	--	--	--	--	1	6.67
Totals	**18**	**99.98**	**7**	**100.00**	**4**	**100.00**	**15**	**100.01**

Table 6
ADJUSTED LITHIC ACTIVITY ANALYSIS, ROOMS 11, 14-16, CA-SDI-5938

	Room 11		Room 14		Room 15		Room 16	
	Total	**Percent**	**Total**	**Percent**	**Total**	**Percent**	**Total**	**Percent**
utilized flakes	--	--	1	2.04	1	7.14	--	--
flake scrapers	--	--	6	12.24	2	14.29	1	14.29
unretouched cores	3	23.08	1	2.04	1	7.14	1	14.29
battered core	--	--	1	2.04	--	--	--	--
retouched core	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
hammer pounders	1	7.69	7	14.29	1	7.14	--	--
manos	9	69.23	29	59.18	7	50.00	5	71.43
metates	--	--	4	8.16	2	14.29	--	--
Totals	**13**	**100.00**	**49**	**99.99**	**14**	**100.00**	**7**	**100.01**

Analysis of the faunal material, therefore, also indicated that food preparation was an important activity within the room complex. The hunting emphasis was on small game, especially rabbits. Winter occupation was a regular and recurring seasonal pattern at the site (Reynolds 1987).

Bone tools identified during the faunal analysis documented other activities that occurred within the rooms. Twelve awls, made from deer-sized long bones, and one deer antler pressure-flaker were identified (Reynolds 1987). The manufacture of projectile points and arrows is again indicated by the presence of the pressure-flaker. The awls could have been used for the manufacture of baskets or sewing blankets from rabbit pelts. Early ethnographers noted the importance of rabbit skin blankets among south-

ern California Native Americans (Hedges 1973).

A total of 1,069 pottery sherds was recovered from the room complex, and included 2 ground sherds, 2 pipe fragments, and 33 rim sherds. The sherds consisted of various types of Tizon Brown Ware, a residual clay brownware manufactured with paddle and anvil that is commonly found on late prehistoric sites in San Diego County (Rogers 1936; Dobyns and Euler 1958; Meighan 1959). Vessel styles suggested by the rim sherds were indicative of storage and cooking pots (Pigniolo 1987).

CONCLUSIONS

The rock rooms at Feature G, Locus 1, of CA-SDI-5938 appear to have been habitation structures. The artifact assemblage is consistent with items reflecting a variety of domestic chores. Food preparation is indicated in the lithic, faunal, and ceramic assemblages. In addition, various crafts that could have taken place in these dwellings, such as the manufacture of arrows, baskets, and rabbit pelt blankets, are indicated. No functional differences were noted between the rooms.

Stratigraphic analysis, combined with exposed floors and wall remnants, revealed variability in the shape and construction of the various enclosures, suggesting that they were rebuilt and altered over time. Although specific ethnographic information on the construction techniques of rock walled dwellings is lacking, patterns noted in the room complex conform to records of aboriginal housing. Circular to oval-shaped, brush-thatched huts with subterranean floors were common Native American dwellings and were recorded for both the Yuman-speaking Kumeyaay (also known as the Diegueño or Tipai-Ipai) and Luiseño in San Diego County (Dubois 1908:184-185; Curtis 1926:6, 42; Bean and Shipek 1978:550; Luomala 1978:592, 597). Roughly oval- to circular-shaped rooms dominated the complex. Subterranean floors were revealed in both Rooms 8 and 10.

Ethnographers who studied Kumeyaay and Luiseño housing recorded a pragmatic attitude by Native Americans toward dwelling construction. House design and building techniques varied according to individual, tribe, location, and material available (Lee 1928:100-105; Michelsen 1977:21). The attitude was best summed up by Melicent Lee, who noted that each Kumeyaay group ". . . built a slightly different house according to location, personal prejudice, and need. Consequently one cannot describe the exact type of . . . house . . . there are variations" (Lee 1928:100).

Given the well-documented practical attitude of the Kumeyaay and Luiseño toward dwelling construction, the occurrence of walled room dwellings built to take advantage of existing bedrock outcrops and materials is not unexpected. The rock dwellings at Westwood Valley conformed to traditional form, being oval to circular in shape with sunken floors. Stone and existing bedrock boulders were simply used in place of wooden poles to support a brush roof.

The scant ethnographic and ethnohistoric records for stone rooms among the Kumeyaay and other closely related Yuman speaking groups is also instructive. In his 1739 report, Miguel Venegas (1943:80) noted that several groups in Baja California lived in houses that ". . . are simply a small enclosure with stone laid upon one another, half a yard high, a yard square, and without any ceiling but the heavens . . . [author's translation]." While traveling through northern Baja California in 1791-1792, José Longinos Martinez similarly recorded that the dwellings of the natives ". . . are nothing but small enclosures of stones placed one upon another without clay or mortar of any kind, being hardly more than shelters of branches" (Simpson 1961:835).

Dubois (1908) cited Venegas when she described Kumeyaay stone enclosures on Spring Hill in Ballena Valley near Ramona, some 15 miles east of Westwood Valley. Her description

of the features indicated that "Upon first examination it seemed that the circles had been the foundations of Indian houses, though of what material the superstructure had been made it was impossible to conjecture" (Dubois 1908:169). In his description of the native groups of Lower California, North (1908) also noted that the natives built stone enclosures for dwellings. Aschmann provided more detail for the Peninsular Yuman of Baja California, who were closely related to the Kumeyaay, and San Diego County, when he noted that

> The most common were crescent-shaped windbreaks made of piles of brush or rock. Sometimes a shallow pit one or two feet deep was dug, either in the open or behind one of the windbreaks. A typical diameter was six feet, with the sheltering wall three feet high at the center and sloping down at the points of the crescent. The shelters were designed to accommodate a single family [Aschmann 1959:110].

Gates (1909:323) quoted a Yuman-speaking Mission Indian informant in the Colorado Desert east of San Diego County as relating that in the past, stone houses had been built in the mountains to the west. Throughout the desert and the foothills, Rogers (MS) reported stone enclosures that he clearly categorized separately from the ubiquitous fish traps of the Salton Sink. Rogers (MS) noted that these tiered enclosures contained charcoal, fishbone, and potsherds, and that they once had served as dwellings.

In configuration, size, method of construction, and ethnic affinity, the description above would seem to indicate that the Yuman and Shoshonean people of southern California generally, and San Diego County specifically, built and occupied stone enclosures. While the typical and widely reported brush and tule ramadas and domed structures may have been more common, it is clear that when stones were available, such as at Westwood Valley and throughout the interior of the County, these prehistoric people practiced basic masonry.

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