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Title

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Journal

The Journal of California Anthropology, 5(2)

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Publication Date

1978-12-01

Peer reviewed

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A Series of Discoidals from Northern San Diego County, California

MARK Q. SUTTON

Discoidals, or stone discs, have been found in a number of sites in southern California (e.g., Shumway, Hubbs, and Moriarty 1961; Walker 1951; Herring 1968; Treganza and

Malamud 1950). Unfortunately, there is very little published synthesis or interpretation on them. A recent study by Moriarty and Broms (1971) has summarized much of the information on discoidals from the western United States. In their article, a series of ten discoidals from various archaeological sites in the San Diego region were specifically considered. These discoidals are dated to the Encinitas or La Jollan Tradition (Moriarty and Broms 1971), some five to six thousand years old.

Recent work by the author in the San Elijo Lagoon in northern San Diego County (Sutton 1978) revealed the existence of a large series of discoidals in a private collection. Through the cooperation of the owner, Mary Ann E. Wood, the site specific provenience of the discoidals was determined. The collection includes thirteen discoidals (Fig. 1), several of which are very large, and they apparently came from site SDi-4575, on the south side of the lagoon.

The SDi-4575 site was originally recorded during an archaeological survey for a housing project (Laughlin and Bull 1974) and was assigned to the Encinitas Tradition. While there have not been any controlled excavations at the SDi-4575 site, several other Encinitas sites in the immediate vicinity have been tested (May 1973, 1974; Carrico 1974, 1975), but no discoidals were recovered from those sites.

As noted above, not all tested Encinitas sites yielded discoidals, although the excavations were not extensive. Thus, discoidals may not be just part of the normal artifact inventory from Encinitas sites but may have distinguishable non-random distributions.

The discoidals discussed by Moriarty and Broms (1971) include ten specimens. They have an average diameter of 9.3 cm. and an average thickness of 5.3 cm. (the largest one is 11.9 cm. by 7.0 cm.). Most of the specimens have convex faces and rounded edges.

In their study of early Milling Stone complexes in northern San Diego County (Warren,

True, and Eudey 1961), a number of discoidals were recovered from several sites. These sites date to the Encinitas Tradition. Many other Encinitas sites are discussed in that report that did not yield discoidals. The artifacts are listed by maximum and minimum sizes (Warren *et al.*, 1961: Table 1). The sizes are as follows: Length: max. 12 cm., min. 7.2 cm.; Width: max. 11.3 cm., min. 6.7 cm.; Thickness: max. 6.5 cm., min. 4.0 cm. This would roughly translate to an average diameter of 9.3 cm. and an average thickness of 5.3 cm. Interestingly, most of the discoidals reported by Warren *et al.*, (1961) come from inland sites and not from the coast as in the case of the series from SDi-4575.

Herring (1968) discussed a series of discoidals from ORa-83. The average dimensions of those artifacts (compiled from Herring 1968: Table 5) are 8.3 cm. in diameter and 3.6 cm. thick. Two of the discoidals from ORa-83 are notable for their exceptional diameter, slightly in excess of 20 cm.

The discoidals from the SDi-4575 site are much larger (Table 1) than the other series discussed above. The average diameter of the series from SDi-4575 is 14.47 cm. and the average thickness is 6.22 cm. The thickness overlaps considerably with the other series but the diameters of the discoidals from SDi-4575 are, for the most part, much larger than any of the others, with the exception of the two from ORa-83 (Herring 1968).

Most of the discoidals from the SDi-4575 site have both surfaces convex and have rounded edges. Several of them are only slightly convex and slightly rounded, and are almost flat. Two of the specimens are slightly convex on one face and slightly concave on the other. Both of them have flat edges. The concavity on one of them (not pictured) had been pecked into the center. Moriarty and Broms (1971) reported that several of their discoidals had concavities pecked into the center as did one reported by Warren *et al.* (1961).

With one exception, the artifacts from

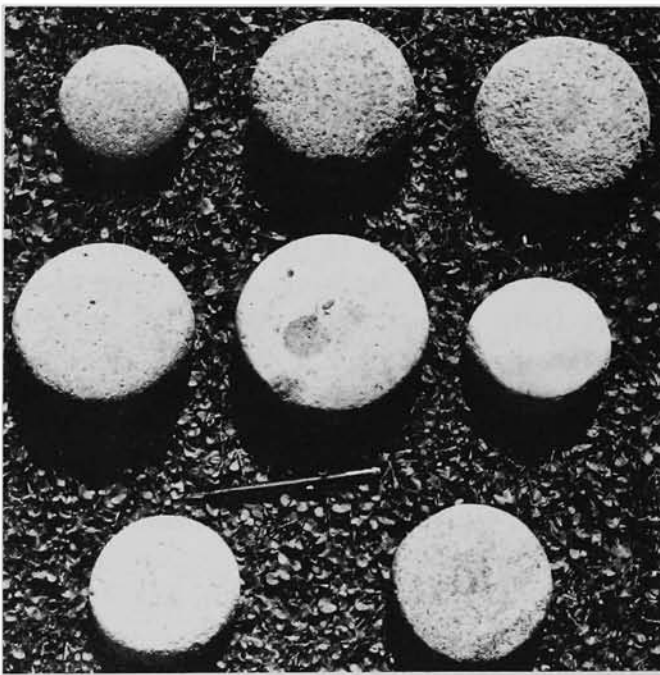
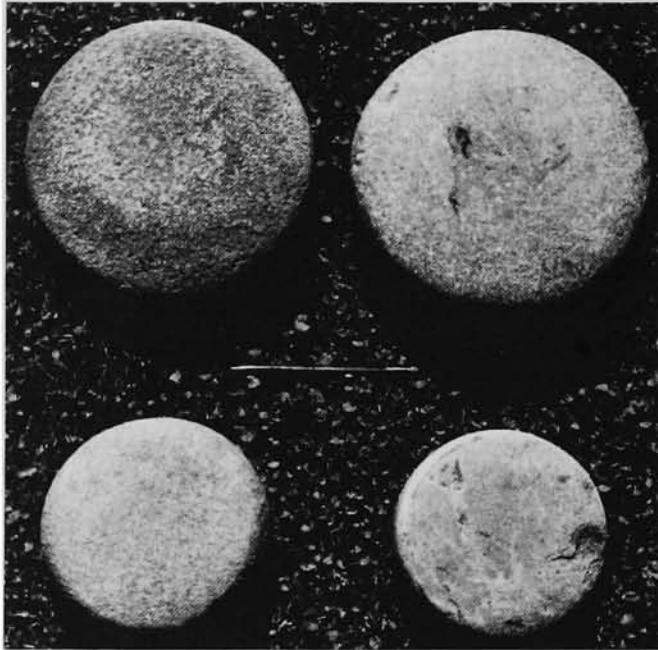


Fig. 1. Discoidals from site SDi-4575. Specimens referred to in the text and in Table 1 are as follows: Upper row: a, b; second row: c, d; third row: e, f, g; fourth row: h, i, j; lower row: k, l. Pencil gives scale.

SDi-4575 are polished and well made. The exception (Fig. 1g) is a badly weathered piece that may have been polished at one time.

Of the thirteen discoidals from SDi-4575, eleven are made from granite, one from quartzite, and

Table 1
MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS
OF DISCOIDALS FROM SDi-4575

Specimen	Size (in cm.)		Form		Material
	Diameter	Thickness	Faces	Edges	
A	21.3	7.0	flat	slightly rounded	granite
B	22.0	8.0	slightly convex	slightly rounded	andesite
C	20.2	6.5	concave/convex	flat	granite
D	16.0	7.2	slightly convex	slightly rounded	granite
E	9.8	5.5	convex	rounded	granite
F	12.8	6.5	convex	rounded	granite
G	13.5	6.0	convex	rounded	granite
H	14.0	6.0	convex	rounded	granite
I	15.5	5.5	flat	flat	granite
J	10.3	6.2	convex	rounded	quartzite
K	10.8	5.5	convex	rounded	granite
L	12.5	7.0	convex	rounded	granite
M	9.5	4.0	convex/convex (pecked)	flat	granite

one from andesite. All of the discoidals were probably made from cobbles of the locally available Poway conglomerate. Moriarty and Broms (1971) reported that the Poway conglomerate was the main source of materials used in the manufacture of their discoidals as well.

Moriarty and Broms (1971) interpret discoidals as gaming pieces. There is no evidence available here to either support or refute this interpretation. We can suggest that there is a larger variation in discoidals than had previously been reported. While size may be related to function, we cannot demonstrate that at this time. About all we can say is that there are discoidals at some Encinitas sites, none at others, and that size may vary from site to site.

Discoidals would appear to have some relationship to cogged stones in southern California. In his study of cogged stones of southern California, Eberhart (1961) noted the co-

occurrence of cogged stones and discoidals at a number of sites. Eberhart (1961:361) stated that the cogged stones may be a distinguishing characteristic of the Milling Stone Horizon (6000 to 3500 B.C.) in southern California. This is roughly equivalent to the time of the Encinitas Tradition to which the discoidals from San Diego County are dated.

Winterbourne, in discussing his work in Orange County (1935, 1937, 1938) notes that cogged stones "rarely have been found associated with other artifacts except the discoidal" (from Eberhart 1961:368). Herring (1968) observed this same point. In his work at ORa-83, Herring recovered 137 cogged stones and 39 discoidals. Based on the similarity in form (round and flat), Herring (1968:8) suggested that "Since the cogged stone is basically a discoidal with cogs, the discoidal may also be considered to be a transitional stage in the manufacture of these artifacts [cogged stones]." Herring further suggested that some of the discoidals from ORa-83 may be unfinished cogged stones.

The association of discoidals with cogged stones in San Diego County is much less clear. In the sites that have discoidals (Shumway *et al.*, 1961, Warren *et al.*, 1961), there are no cogged stones reported, although there are several in private collections said to have come from San Diego County (McKinney 1968).

There seems to be a co-occurrence of discoidals and cogged stones in Orange and Los Angeles counties (Herring 1968; Eberhart 1961; Winterbourne 1935, 1937, 1938). This relationship does not appear to hold true for San Diego County.

Too little information is available on discoidals in southern California to make definitive statements at this point. Discoidals may be much more common in the archaeological record but may not be recognized, being viewed as unusual manos. This paper has attempted to expand the literature on discoidals and to make more people aware of their

existence. This will hopefully result in a broader understanding of them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Paul Chace, Dedra Siebert, Mary Lomholdt and an anonymous reviewer for reading and commenting on drafts of this paper. Special thanks go to Mary Ann E. Wood, the owner of the collection from SDI-4575, for her assistance.

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