

**CULTURAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT FOR
THE PROPOSED COOKE SUBSTATION
IMPERIAL IRRIGATION DISTRICT PROJECT,
RIVERSIDE COUNTY CALIFORNIA**

Prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

Peak & Associates conducted a cultural resource assessment of a proposed substation in Thousand Palms, California (See Figures 1 and 2). This new substation has been identified as a high priority due to new demand for new developments within the region (Cities of Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert). Riverside County in the community of Thousand Palms, in addition to the Cities of Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert, are experiencing a high demand for new developments with a large amount of loading/capacity requirements. This substation has been identified as part of the 10-Year Coachella Valley Transmission/Distribution Expansion Plan, mainly triggered by planned developments in this area. Developers are required to bear the cost for the substation, transmission line extensions, and distribution getaways in preparation for future distribution feeders. The Imperial Irrigation District, Riverside County, City of Rancho Mirage, and City of Palm Desert and developers in this area, are working together for the implementation of this new substation with 2-50 MVA transformers and associated equipment.

Melinda A. Peak, senior historian/archeologist with Peak & Associates, Inc. served as principal investigator for the study (resume., Appendix 1), She completed the field survey of the Study Area. and prepared the report.

CALIFORNIA REGULATIONS

State historic preservation regulations affecting this project include the statutes and guidelines contained in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA; Public Resources Code sections 21083.2 and 21084.1 and sections 15064.5 and 15126.4 (b) of the CEQA Guidelines). CEQA Section 15064.5 requires that lead agencies determine whether projects may have a significant effect on archaeological and historical resources. Public Resources Code Section 21098.1 further cites: A project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment.

An “historical resource” includes, but is not limited to, any object, building, structure, site, area, place, record or manuscript that is historically or archaeologically significant (Public Resources Code section 5020.1).

Advice on procedures to identify such resources, evaluate their importance, and estimate potential effects is given in several agency publications such as the series produced by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR), *CEQA and Archaeological Resources*, 1994. The technical advice series produced by OPR strongly recommends that Native American concerns and the concerns of other interested persons and corporate entities, including, but not limited to, museums, historical

commissions, associations and societies be solicited as part of the process of cultural resources inventory. In addition, California law protects Native American burials, skeletal remains and associated grave goods regardless of the antiquity and provides for the sensitive treatment and disposition of those remains (California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5, California Public Resources Codes Sections 5097.94 et al).

The California Register of Historical Resources (Public Resources Code Section 5020 et seq.)

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) maintains the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR). Properties listed, or formally designated as eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places are automatically listed on the CRHR, as are State Landmarks and Points of Interest. The CRHR also includes properties designated under local ordinances or identified through local historical resource surveys.

For the purposes of CEQA, an historical resource is a resource listed in, or determined eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. When a project will impact a site, it needs to be determined whether the site is an historical resource. The criteria are set forth in Section 15064.5(a) (3) of the CEQA Guidelines, and are defined as any resource that does any of the following:

- A. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California's history and cultural heritage;
- B. Is associated with the lives of persons important in our past;
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual, or possesses high artistic values; or
- D. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

In addition, the CEQA Guidelines, Section 15064.5(a) (4) states:

The fact that a resource is not listed in, or determined to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, not included in a local register of historical resources (pursuant to section 5020.1(k) of the Public Resources Code), or identified in an historical resources survey (meeting the criteria in section 5024.1(g) of the Public Resources Code) does not preclude a lead agency from determining that the resource may be an historical resource as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(j) or 5024.1.

California Health and Safety Code Sections 7050.5, 7051, And 7054

These sections collectively address the illegality of interference with human burial remains, as well as the disposition of Native American burials in archaeological sites. The law protects such remains from disturbance, vandalism, or inadvertent destruction, and establishes procedures to be implemented if Native American skeletal remains are discovered during construction of a project, including the treatment of remains prior to, during, and after evaluation, and reburial procedures.

California Public Resources Code Section 15064.5(e)

This law addresses the disposition of Native American burials in archaeological sites and protects such remains from disturbance, vandalism, or inadvertent destruction. The section establishes procedures to be implemented if Native American skeletal remains are discovered during construction of a project and establishes the Native American Heritage Commission as the entity responsible to resolve disputes regarding the disposition of such remains.

Assembly Bill 52

Assembly Bill (AB) 52 establishes a formal consultation process for California tribes as part of CEQA and equates significant impacts on tribal cultural resources with significant environmental impacts. AB 52 defines a “California Native American Tribe” as a Native American tribe located in California that is on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission. AB 52 requires formal consultation with California Native American Tribes prior to determining the level of environmental document if a tribe has requested to be informed by the lead agency of proposed projects.

AB 52 also requires that consultation address project alternatives, mitigation measures, for significant effects, if requested by the California Native American Tribe, and that consultation be considered concluded when either the parties agree to measures to mitigate or avoid a significant effect, or the agency concludes that mutual agreement cannot be reached.

Under AB 52, such measures shall be recommended for inclusion in the environmental document and adopted mitigation monitoring program if determined to avoid or lessen a significant impact on a tribal cultural resource.

CULTURAL SETTING

Ethnology

Ethnographic literature is often uncertain in definition of cultural boundaries for Indian groups. Early displacement by white intrusion resulted in population shifts to avoid conflict with the Spanish, and later with the miners and settlers. The ravages of disease and warfare decimated the native people, further weakening cultural identity. Informants were often uncertain of original territories of the various tribal groupings.

The Study Area lies in the territory of the Cahuilla. The Cahuilla territory was topographically complex; mountain ranges interspersed by passes, canyons, and desert, with elevations from 11,000 feet in the San Bernardino Mountains to 273 feet below at the Salton Sink.

During some years, abundant water was available, while in other years, drought conditions prevailed. The result was inhibited plant growth and decreased in the faunal population. With hunting the primary occupation of adult men. The diversity of habitat provided a floral domain of immense variety. Especially important were acorns, mesquite and screw beans, piñon nuts and the fleshy bulbs of various type of cacti.

The population of aboriginal Cahuilla was estimated to be 3,600. This was later revised to about 6,000 to 10,000, based on an estimate of 80 lineages. In the 1850s, government census figures for villages numbered as many as 300 people. In 1974, 900 people claimed Cahuilla descent, most were enrolled on one of several reservations in the region (Bean 1978).

Historical Background

Origin of Regional Place Name

Until 1900, the name of the valley between the San Bernadino line and the Salton Sea was Cahuilla Valley, because the native inhabitants were the Cahuilla. In 1901, the name appeared on a topographic map, and the post office was established on November 30, 1901. No evidence of the earlier use of the name could be found. One idea for the origin of the name: since shells could be found from an earlier epoch, a speech was given in 1888 calling it Conchilla Valley after the Spanish word for shell. A proposal was made to change the name of the valley to that. As late as 1909 the name of Conchilla was still in use. The cartographers apparently missed that name, and later, the name Coachella appears on maps. In 1909, the Geographic Board made the name official (Gudde 1969).

The presence of isolated groups of the California fan palm in Riverside and San Diego counties suggested a number of place names. The presence of the palms suggested to the traveler not only water but shade and the chance for grass for their animals. Thousand Palms was first called 100 Palm Spring in its 1874 mapping, and on the 1890 General Land Office plat. The post office was established in the town in 1915 and called Edom after the ancient country in Asia. In 1939, the name was changed to the much more appropriate Thousand Palms because of the many trees for date cultivation in the area. (Gudde 1969).

Date Production

The dry climate of the Coachella Valley combined with adequate groundwater produces the greatest amount of date culture in the United States. The first dates were imported from Algeria in the 1880s.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture encouraged cultivation in cooperation with private enterprise, and today, there are 5,000 acres of date groves in the Coachella Valley of many varieties. Indio is the chief city of the Coachella Valley, starting as a rail center (Kyle 2002).

Imperial Irrigation District

The Imperial Irrigation District (IID) is an irrigation district that serves the Imperial Valley and a large portion of the Coachella Valley in the Colorado Desert area in Southern California. The IID supplies roughly 500,000 acres of Imperial Valley farmland with raw Colorado River water to support irrigation. The IID also supplies electricity to the Imperial and Coachella valleys. IID was formed in 2011 to acquire the properties of the bankrupt California Development Company.

Before 1942, irrigation water delivered to the Imperial Valley was diverted from the Colorado River through Mexico and into the IID Alamo Canal. Since 1942, water has been diverted at Imperial Dam on the Colorado River through the 82-mile All-American Canal, with structures owned by the Bureau of Reclamation and operated by IID. IID provides electric power to many customers in the Imperial Valley and parts of Riverside and San Diego counties. IID is the third largest public power utility in California.

RESEARCH

Record Search

Normally, the first step in a cultural study is to undertake a record search of the affected area with a 0.25-mile buffer area through the appropriate Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System. The record search provides information on both prehistoric and historic sites. The search provides site location information, locations of surveys by other groups of the Study Area.

Riverside County cultural site records were formerly handled by the Eastern Information Center. This Center closed in 2024, and the records were eventually transferred to the South Coastal Information Center in San Diego, but the collection is reported to be poorly organized. We requested a record search for the project area with a 0.25-mile buffer zone., which we received in August 2025.

The map provided by the Information Center indicated several surveys had been completed in the vicinity of the Study Area. For a 1987 study of the Center Pointe project, Beth Padon appears to have surveyed the northern portion of the Study Area and possibly the entire parcel with negative results. All surveys in the area had negative findings for both historic and prehistoric sites.

Native American Heritage Commission

The Native American Heritage Commission provided a letter dated July 25, 2025 stating negative results were found for the search of the Sacred Lands filed for the Study Area. They provided a list of potential contacts for further information on the presence of tribal cultural resources (Appendix 3).

FIELD ASSESSMENT

A field survey was conducted of the Study Area by Melinda Peak) on July 13, 2025 using complete coverage with 10-15 meter wide transects. There do not appear to be any natural water sources in the area, suggesting the lack of food sources and water made this area not suitable for a permanent camp or village site.

The parcel is open white sand, with scattered bushes. The land has several road tracks crossing it. No other historical or prehistoric artifacts, features of other cultural remains were observed during the survey. The land contains many food wrappers scattered about, likely related to the ongoing camping of homeless people on the property.

It can be concluded that there are no resources are present in the Study Area, and therefore no properties eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources within the Study Area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although no prehistoric sites were found during the survey, there is a slight possibility that a site may exist and be totally obscured by fill, or other historic activities, leaving no surface evidence. Should artifacts or unusual amounts of stone, bone, or shell be uncovered during construction activities, an archeologist should be consulted for on-the-spot evaluation of the finding. If the bone appears to be human, state law requires that the Riverside County Coroner be contacted. If the Coroner determines that the bone is human and is most likely Native American in origin, he must contact the Native American Heritage Commission (916-322-7791).

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APPENDIX 1

Resume

**PEAK & ASSOCIATES, INC.
RESUME**

MELINDA A. PEAK
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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Ms. Peak has served as the principal investigator on a wide range of prehistoric and historic excavations throughout California. She has directed laboratory analyses of archeological materials, including the historic period. She has also conducted a wide variety of cultural resource assessments in California, including documentary research, field survey, Native American coordination, and report preparation.

In addition, Ms. Peak has developed a second field of expertise in applied history, specializing in site-specific research for historic period resources. She has completed many historical research projects for a wide variety of site types.

Through her education and experience, Ms. Peak meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for historian, architectural historian, prehistoric archeologist, and historic archeologist.

EDUCATION

M.A. - History - California State University, Sacramento, 1989
Thesis: *The Bellevue Mine: A Historical Resources Management Site Study in Plumas and Sierra Counties, California*
B.A. - Anthropology - University of California, Berkeley

PROJECTS

In recent months, Ms. Peak has completed several determinations of eligibility and effect documents in coordination with the Corps of Engineers for projects requiring federal permits, assessing the eligibility of many sites for the National Register of Historic Places.

She has also completed historical research projects on a wide variety of topics for many California projects including the development of navigation and landings on the Napa River, wineries, farmhouses dating to the 1860s, bridges, an early roadhouse, Folsom Dam, and a section of an electric railway line.

In recent years, Ms. Peak has prepared numbers of cultural resource overviews and predictive models for blocks of land proposed for future development for general and specific plans. She has been able to direct many surveys of these areas, allowing the model to be tested.

She served as principal investigator for the multi-phase Twelve Bridges Golf Club project in Placer County. She served as liaison with the various agencies, helped prepare the historic properties treatment plan, managed the various phases of test and data recovery excavations, and completed the final report on the analysis of the test phase excavations of many prehistoric sites. She is currently involved as the principal investigator for the Teichert Quarry project adjacent to Twelve Bridges in the City of Rocklin, coordinating contacts with Native Americans, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Office of Historic Preservation.

Ms. Peak has served as project manager for many major survey and excavation projects in recent years, including the many surveys and site definition excavations for the 172-mile-long Pacific Pipeline proposed for construction in Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Los Angeles counties. She also completed an archival study in the City of Los Angeles for the project. She also served as principal investigator for a major coaxial cable removal project for AT&T.

Additionally, she has completed hundreds of small surveys, served as a construction monitor at several urban sites, and conducted emergency recovery excavations for sites found during monitoring. She has directed the excavations of several historic complexes in Sacramento, Placer, and El Dorado Counties.

Ms. Peak is the author of a chapter and two sections of a published history (1999) of Sacramento County, *Sacramento: Gold Rush Legacy, Metropolitan Legacy*. She served as the consultant for a children's book on California, published by Capstone Press in 2003 in the Land of Liberty series.

APPENDIX 2

Information Center Record Search

APPENDIX 3

Native American Heritage Commission