11 CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

The contemporary landscape of Mariposa County represents the accumulation of layer upon layer of values and uses imposed on the land by past cultures and events, both prehistoric and historic. It has become a composite landscape created by a variety of cultural systems, developed over a period of thousands of years to its present state. Mariposa County’s rich and diverse heritage includes Native American settlement, Spanish exploration, Mexican land grants, gold mining, logging, environmental causes, cattle ranching, unique geological phenomena, and one of the first and most spectacular national parks.

Mariposa County contains 1,495 square miles of land. Fifty-five percent of this land is classified as Federal Lands (e.g. National Parks, Bureau of Land Management and Army Corps of Engineers holdings, etc.). Within the 45 percent of land that is governed by the County, approximately 1,187 archaeological and historic resources have been recorded and evaluated to date. These resources include, among others, five structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 10 structures listed on the California Register of Historical Resources, 446 structures evaluated as part of the Mariposa County Historic Resources Survey in 1982, 642 prehistoric sites, and 31 bridges. Mariposa County is also home to 14 historic gold districts, including Bagby, Cathey, Cat Town, Clearinghouse, Coulterville, Hite Cove, Hornitos, Hunter Valley, Jerseydale, Kinsley, Mariposa, Mormon Bar, Mt. Bullion, and Whitlock. Many early communities in Mariposa County have not fared well over the years. For example, little trace is to be found today of Agua Fria, the first county seat, or of Mt. Ophir, or Mormon Bar.

11.1 PREHISTORY

The prehistory of the Sierra Nevada Mountains has been discussed in detail by Moratto (among others) in his comprehensive 1984 publication, California Archaeology. The reader is directed to that work for a more detailed discussion of the prehistory of the region.

Moratto has placed Mariposa and the Yosemite Valley in the central Sierran archaeological subregion, encompassing the watersheds of the Cosumnes, Mokelumne, Calaveras, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Merced, Chowchilla, and Fresno rivers (1984:288). Evidence indicates that Yosemite Valley has been inhabited for as long as 4,000 to 6,000 years before present (b.p.). In addition, archaeological sites in the vicinity of El Portal indicate that the Merced River canyon may have been inhabited as early as 9,500 years ago (NPS 2000).

Numerous reports of the discovery of human remains and artifacts appear in the literature with the start of the Gold Rush (Moratto 1984:292). Placer and hydraulic mining dislodged many artifacts from their resting places, while hardrock mining brought miners and the curious into contact with burial caverns. Archaeology in the region
progressed slowly in the latter half of the 19th century, with sites being recorded as they were encountered. Directed archaeological investigations did not truly begin until the late 1940s, early 1950s when the Smithsonian Institution’s River Basin Surveys archaeologists examined proposed reservoir areas in the west, including the Sierra Nevada area (Moratto 1984:294).

Yosemite Valley is rich in archaeological resources and has been designated as an archeological district in the National Register of Historic Places, with more than 100 sites containing evidence of human occupation over several thousand years (NPS 2000). The sites encompass milling stations, middens, artifact caches, lithic scatters, rock shelters, pictographs, human burials, house floors, hearths, and rock alignments.

In addition to Yosemite Valley, El Portal also has an archaeological district (17 sites) listed on the National Register, while the Wawona area, whose prehistory may pre-date Yosemite Valley, has an archaeological district (72 sites) that has been determined eligible for the National Register. Both prehistoric and historic human burials have been identified in El Portal in isolated locations and in cemeteries.

11.2 ETHNOGRAPHY

Mariposa County is located within the general territory of the Central and Southern Sierra Miwoks. The Sierra Miwok (Central and Southern), members of the Penutian language group (Barrett and Gifford in Heizer 1951:111), occupied the territory between the Mokelumne and Fresno rivers, as well as the full width of the west slope of the Sierra Nevadas, from the edge of the Central Valley to the Sierra crest (Moratto 1984:290).

The socio-political structure of the Central Sierra Miwoks is based on the patrilineal joint family acting as an independent autonomous political unit (Gifford in Heizer 1951:375). The men of the lineage remained at their ancestral home, bringing their wives to live with them, and sending their daughters and sisters to their husbands' homes. The patriarch, as head of the unit, was chief. Chieftainship was normally passed down directly from father to eldest son. As a land-owning group, the lineage maintained lands to be shared in common by all members of the family unit.

The Sierran Miwok lived in permanent settlements of “10 or 15 to several hundred people,” usually on the southern exposure of ridges or knolls and close to water sources (Moratto 1984:290). The larger, main villages generally consisted of family dwellings, acorn granaries, bedrock mortars, a sweat house, a headman’s house, and a ceremonial structure. The main villages were usually surrounded by smaller settlements related by kinship and economic ties to the primary village.

Dwellings were conical, ranging from 8 to 15 feet in diameter, and covered by slabs of cedar bark, or bark from other conifers (Barrett and Gifford in Heizer 1951:333). Each dwelling had a shallow dirt fireplace in its center for warmth and light. Most cooking was done in the earth oven located next to the fire. The oven was often a simple pit, 12 to 18 inches deep by as many inches wide. Food was cooked, baked, or steamed by placing hot stones among the cooking items; acorn bread, greens, bulbs, corms (short, thick, solid, food-storing underground stems), meat, and fish.

Subsistence was gained by harvesting plants, hunting, and fishing (Moratto 1984:290). Important staple items included black and golden oak acorns, buckeye nuts, and pine nuts. Additionally, snares, traps, nets, and bow and arrows were used to hunt mule deer,
pronghorn, black bear, rabbits, quail, and pigeons. Salmon, trout, suckers, whitefish, and sturgeon were caught by hook, net, trap, poison, and captured by hand.

The influx of outsiders to the central Sierra region during the Gold Rush period signaled the beginning of the end for the Miwoks and their way of life. Within a decade, introduced diseases, environmental damage, and cultural conflicts with the outsiders had all but eliminated the remaining members of the local tribes.

Today, Native American ethnographic sites in Mariposa County include Ahwahnee (in Yosemite Valley), Foresta Big Meadow, Rust’s Cemetery, Wilson Cemetery, and Yosemite Rancheria (California Department of Parks & Recreation 1988).

11.3 HISTORY

11.3.01 SPANISH EXPLORATION AND MEXICAN PERIOD

On September 27, 1806, shortly after crossing the San Joaquin River, Gabriel Moraga’s expedition to explore the San Joaquin Valley encountered an area where “myriads of butterflies” perched in the trees (Koeppel 1995). The name El Arroyo de Las Mariposas was given to the area that, 43 years later, would become a thriving mining region.

In 1844, Juan Bautista Alvarado took title to the 44,000-acre Las Mariposas land grant located north of the San Joaquin River in the general area of the Merced and Chowchilla Rivers. As with most Spanish and Mexican land grants of the period, Las Mariposas had no established boundaries.

11.3.02 AMERICAN SETTLEMENT

John C. Fremont first came to the area in 1845 as part of an extensive western expedition. Two years later, Thomas Larkin, Consul for the United States at Monterey, purchased the Alvarado grant for Fremont for $3,000. Four years later, in May, gold was discovered in Agua Fria Creek by Fremont's Sonoran miners working under Alexander Godey. The region soon became known as the “Mother Lode” country (Rawls and Orsi 1999).

The following year, 1850, Mariposa County was created as one of the original 27 counties of California with an area of about 30,000 square miles (Hoover 1990).
Covering one-fifth of the state, Mariposa County originally contained land now included in ten other counties, but by 1880 it had been whittled down to its present size of 1,455 square miles. Briefly, from 1850 to 1851, the no-longer-extant mining community of Agua Fria served as the county seat, after which the governing body was moved permanently to the Town of Mariposa. The Mariposa County Courthouse (SHL #670) was built in 1854 in the new county seat, and has been in use as a courthouse ever since. In addition to being a State Historic Landmark, the structure is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

SETTLEMENTS IN MARIPOSA COUNTY

Many areas in the County have a history of American settlement in addition to the Town of Mariposa. The most well known of these are outlined below:

- Coulterville (SHL #332) was settled in 1848 after the discovery of gold in the area. Originally called Banderita, the community was renamed for George Coulter who established one of the first stores in the area.
- Mormon Bar (SHL #323) was settled in 1849 by Mormons who discovered gold in the area, but shortly thereafter returned to Utah.
- James Savage, miner and Indian leader, established trading posts at Horseshoe Bend on the Merced River and below El Portal (SHL #527) in 1849.
- In 1850, gold was discovered at Haydensville, later renamed as Bear Valley (State Historical Landmark [SHL] #331).
- Hornito (SHL #333) was settled in 1850 by Mexican miners driven from the nearby settlement of Quartzburg. In 1871, hornitos became the first and only incorporated town in Mariposa County (the town is no longer incorporated). Hornitos is recognized today as an ethnographic site for its historical association with the early Mexican miners (California Department of Parks & Recreation 1988).
- Greeley Hill was settled and named after Josiah Greeley, who established the Greeley Lumber Mill in the 1850s.
- Mt. Bullion, originally known as La Mineta, was settled in early 1850 as a rich placer camp. The name was later changed to Princeton after the nearby Princeton Mine was opened in 1852 (Koeppel 1995). The name Mt. Bullion (the name of the local post office) did not become widely accepted until the Princeton Mine closed sometime after 1862.
- In 1852 Catheys Valley, originally known as Vallecita, was settled by members of Andrew Cathey's wagon train from Arkansas and was renamed for him.
- Wawona is the site of the log cabin built by Galen Clark in 1857, the same year in which Clark discovered the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. Today Wawona is the home of the Pioneer Yosemite History Center and some of the Park Services’ oldest buildings that have been moved from other locations. Wawona is also the site of a covered bridge that bears the settlements name, spanning the south fork.
of the Merced River. The bridge was begun by Clark in 1858, covered in 1875 and restored in 1956 (Hoover, et al, n.d.).

The Chowchilla Mountain Wagon Road was completed to Clark's Station (Wawona) in 1870. Four years later, in 1874, McLean's Coulterville Road was established as the first road into Yosemite Valley. The following year, the Mariposa Road to Yosemite Valley was completed, thereby making it easier for tourists to reach the Valley through Mariposa and Wawona.

The Yosemite Valley Railroad was built from Merced Falls to El Portal between 1905 and 1907, and operated to bring tourists into the Park until it closed in 1945.

### 13.4.2.2 MARIPOSA INDIAN WAR

Hostilities between local Native American tribes and settlers erupted in 1851 when a local militia, the Mariposa Battalion, was formed in Agua Fria to fight the natives upon authorization of the governor. James Savage was the commander receiving the commission of Major to lead the battalion. Training of the troops ensued but a restraining order was issued to allow federal Indian commissioners to try to negotiate treaties with the various tribes. When efforts failed, the battalion began tracking the natives, a task that led them to Yosemite Valley on March 25, 1851. This event has been historically recorded as the first sighting of Yosemite by Anglos. After much discussion, the men voted to name the valley after the tribe of Native Americans who inhabited it; thus was Yosemite Valley named and entered into the Battalion’s log. The battalion was mustered out of service in July of that same year following the end of hostilities.

### 11.3.03 YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

The discovery of the magnificent Yosemite Valley is widely debated, but in all likelihood it was first seen by members of the Joseph R. Walker Expedition of 1833 (Rawls 1993). The Walker Party descended the western slope of the Sierra-Nevada along a ridge between the Merced and Tuolumne rivers. Although evidence supports the fact that the party did not enter the Valley, they almost surely caught a glimpse of the future National Park. By all accounts, it was the Mariposa Battalion who first entered the Yosemite Valley while in pursuit of a band of the Miwok Indians in 1851 (see section 13.4.2.2. above). The discovery of the one-of-a-kind geological wonder did not generate much interest at the outset primarily because of the California Gold Rush; this would all change beginning in 1855 (Hall 1921).

J. M. Hutchings has been credited for bringing the Yosemite Valley and its attributes to the public at-large. As early as 1855, Hutchings was laying the ground work for his new publication entitled *California Magazine*. Upon hearing of a great waterfall within Yosemite Valley, he decided that a trip was necessary. By the summer of 1855, Hutchings along with several companions, entered the valley and spent “five glorious days in luxurious scenic banqueting” (Hall 1921). Once back at the settlements Hutchings’ descriptive articles appeared in both the *Mariposa Gazette* and San Francisco’s *California Chronicle*. Later in 1855, the first trail
into the Valley was constructed by Milton and Houston Mann. Completed a year later, the road proved to be unprofitable and was later sold to Mariposa County. Within two years, a second road was opened, the Coulterville Road, making the Yosemite accessible from both the north and south.

The first permanent residence in the valley was James C. Lamon, who had taken up a preemption claim in 1859. Lamon stayed in the valley until the time of his death in 1876. Hutchings also entered Yosemite to live on a full time basis in the spring of 1864, and for over a decade became a leading figure in the Valley’s history. Others would come, including famed naturalist John Muir who would work the Hutchings Sawmill for a time. It was evident, however, that the grandeur of Yosemite should be protected and maintained for the public to enjoy. Prompted by leading naturalists, geologists, and interested parties in general, the U. S. Congress passed the Yosemite Act in 1864, which gave guardianship of the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove to the State of California (the surrounding forest lands fell under Federal control in 1890). In that same year, California Governor F.K. Low issued a proclamation “naming Frederick Law Olmstead, Professor Dwight Whitney, William Ashburner, I.W. Raymond, E.S. Holden, Alexander Deering, George W. Coulter, and Galen Clark as commissioners,” to administer the newly formed park (Hall 1921).

The Commissioner’s first order of business was to extinguish all private land claims within the Valley. Both Hutchings and Lamon refused to surrender their property, prompting litigation first in District Court, then later in the State Supreme Court. The California State Legislature also became involved with the claims, initially granting both Lamon and Hutchings 160-acre tracts each, subject to approval by the U.S. Congress. Congressional approval never came, however, and the two landowners were forced to leave the Valley. In 1874, the legislature recommended compensation to both Lamon and Hutchings in the amount of $60,000, along with two other landowners (Hall 1921). Other work by the Commission included authorizing the construction of roads (Big Oak Flat Route in 1864, and Coulterville and Yosemite Turnpike Company in 1872), the construction of bridges within both Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove, erection of the Stoneman House (hotel) near the upper end of the valley (ca. 1885), and the removal of all tolls on roads to the park.

Though the commissioners had performed admirably in their duties to oversee the Park, numerous instances of confusion concerning State and Federal responsibilities with regard to administrative matters were frequent. When Congress approved the legislation to set aside “reserved forest lands” in 1890, the act excluded the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove from federal jurisdiction, leaving both under the control of the California Commission. Dual control had its disadvantages. A case in point was a fire that raged for a week in the Illilouette Basin in 1903. Finger pointing by both State and Federal officials as to where the fire originated and who was responsible for putting the fire out had been debated. As Ralph S. Kuykendall commented, “This division of authority interfered with the improvement and development of the entire region” (Hall 1921).

Yosemite National Park, which included Mono Lake, Anderson Valley, and Hazel Green, but not Mariposa Grove and the Yosemite Valley, remained under state control until 1905 when the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove were re-ceded from the State of California to the Federal government becoming part of Yosemite Park under federal jurisdiction. At this
time, the Park was reduced in size to allow mining and timber operations in the region (Hall 1921; Rawls 1993).

With the creation of the National Park Service in 1915, Yosemite was transferred from the control of the War Department, its parent entity from the time of recession in 1905. Major developments ensued under this newly formed Federal arm. Improvements under the Nation Park Service included: upgrade and enhancement of the Yosemite Railroad line, the admission of automobile traffic into the park, and the rehabilitation of the old Tioga Road, allowing traffic from the east side of the Sierra-Nevada. As improvements under the National Park Service accelerated, so did appropriations. From just a few thousand dollars in the early part of the century; by the 1920 season, Yosemite National Park appropriations exceeded $300,000 (Hall 1921).

From the earliest period, concession operations in the park had begun in earnest, often coming into direct conflict with park concerns. In 1925, two major concessionaires were consolidated into the Yosemite Park and Curry Company. Impacts resulting from increasing tourism in Yosemite Valley continued to become apparent. Camper use of meadows and traffic on unpaved roads left the Valley dull with dust by the end of each summer. As visitation and need for year-round visitor services increased, village functions were relocated from their original flood-prone location on the south side of the Valley to the present Yosemite Village site on the north side. Visitation exceeded one million in 1954 for the first time, and by 1976, the visitor count was well over two million. In 2000, visitation was nearly 3.5 million. In the early 1970's, Yosemite management established one-way road traffic patterns, eliminating cars in the east end of the Valley, offered free shuttle bus transportation in the Valley and tram tours in the Mariposa Grove, converted the parking lot at the Valley Visitor Center to a pedestrian mall and generally encouraged visitors to park their cars and enjoy the park by walking or using public transportation.

11.3.04 MINING (1848 TO 1865; 1895 TO 1911; 1930 TO 1942)

Gold was discovered throughout the foothills of Mariposa County in 1848. Passage of Chapter 128 of the state’s legal codes, “An Act Concerning Corporation,” in April 1850 permitted companies to incorporate without seeking approval of the state legislature (Rawls and Orsi 1999:63). Under this new Act, the Mariposa Mining Company (MMC) became California’s second corporation. Operations began in 1850 with $1 million in capital stock, and by 1851, MMC securities were being traded on both the London and Paris stock exchanges.

The MMC headquarters were located at Princeton at the turn of the 20th century, for it was here they concentrated their mining efforts. The failure of the Las Mariposas grant as a mining enterprise finally lead to its breaking up into large ranches in 1840. Its policies of short term leases and consolidated ownership over that time were often resented as a hindrance to economic growth. By 1870 to 1895, with the exceptions of Hite's mines, the Washington Mine, and possibly some in the Whitlock/Sherlock area such as the Diltz Mine, mining in Mariposa County had reached a low ebb.

However, a second and third mining boom hit the region between 1895 to 1911 and 1930 to 1942. Especially productive during the 1895-1911 period were the Whitlock Mines, until about 1900, and the Princeton and Mariposa Mines. The third period ended with the Federal order to suspend gold mining operations in 1942. In addition to the Mariposa Mining Company, numerous gold mining districts within Mariposa County operated with
great success. The following descriptive narrative has been excerpted from William B. Clark’s *Gold Districts of California* (1970):

The Bagby District, located in western Mariposa County, had been mined as early as 1849 with the discovery of the Pine Tree and Josephine veins. Part of this area lies on the Las Mariposa Land Grant of General John C. Fremont. Interestingly, Bagby was first known as Benton Mills, the name of Fremont’s father-in-law Senator Thomas Hart Benton. The name was changed to Bagby in the 1890s after a hotel owner of the same name. The Bagby operated until 1875, then again at the turn of the century. Closed for nearly 30 years, the Bagby was opened once again for a brief period from 1922 to 1944. By 1967, part of the Bagby District, including the town, was inundated by the Exchequer Reservoir.

The Cathey District is located in southwestern Mariposa County, 10 miles southwest of Mariposa and near the town of Catheys Valley. Placer mining occurred during the Gold Rush period, and lode mining shortly thereafter (1850). Primary mines consisted of the Francis, Moore Hill, and Rich, which were last worked in the 1930s.

In the northwestern portion of Mariposa County was the mining camp of Cat Town. The height of mining activity in this district was between 1880 and 1890. Most prominent in this district was the Gold Bug Mine, which had operated along with other lesser mines up until the 1930s.

The Clearinghouse District is located in central Mariposa County, just west of El Portal and Yosemite National Park. The Merced River, which flows through the district was heavily placer-mined during the Gold Rush period. Discovered in 1860, the Clearinghouse had been mined heavily until the early to mid-1880s. After almost two decades of closure, the mine was reopened in 1900, and again in the 1930s after a second closure. At one time, the Yosemite Valley Railroad operated though the area all the way to El Portal, the line’s eastern terminus. From that point, passengers were taken by stagecoach into Yosemite Valley.

Considerable mining took place within the Coulterville District located in northwest Mariposa County. The Coulterville was a portion of the great Mother Lode gold belt that stretched up to ten miles in length from the McAlpine Mine, through Penon Blanco, the town of Coulterville to Virginia Point. The town was named after George Coulter, who had opened up a store in 1849. Quartz mining began in earnest in 1852 with the discovery of the Malvina and Mary Harrison veins. The hey-day of this district ended in the early 1890s, but was worked again with limited success beginning in the early 1900s until 1942.

Probably the most productive district in the Sierra-Nevada west gold belt was Hornitos. Located in western Mariposa County, Hornitos contained a wide belt of lode-gold that was several miles in width, extending from the Exchequer Reservoir area south-southwest to Indian Gulch. The streams within this district were first worked in 1849, and lode mining began in 1850 at the Washington Mine. Mining activity was greatest in this district from the 1860s to the 1890s, with sporadic operation until the 1930s (the Mt. Gaines Mine, however, operated on a major scale up until America’s entrance into the Second World War).

The Hunter Valley District is located in the northwest corner of the county in the general area of Hunter Valley, the Don Pedro Reservoir, and Lake McClure. The district was named for William W. Hunter, a respected engineer in the region. Extensive placer-
mining took place in the 1850s as well as some copper mining until the 1860s. Like most of the mines in the county, the Hunter Valley mines were reopened for a time during the 1930s.

Like her sister district Hornitos to the west, the Kinsey District was a substantial gold belt in the east Sierra-Nevada, located in north-central Mariposa County, approximately five miles east of Coulterville and 25 miles north of the Town of Mariposa. The Kinsey actually adjoins several other districts that are geologically similar. They include Greeley Hill, Bull Creek, Gentry Gulch, Smith Ridge, and Dog Town. This particular district was placer-mined during the early years of the Gold Rush, while lode-mining was conducted from the 1860s to 1900, and again during the 1930s.

According to William B. Clark, the Mariposa Mine was discovered by Kit Carson in 1849, and the first stamp mill in California was to be erected there in the same year. Much of this district, located in the general vicinity of the Town of Mariposa, was part of the Las Mariposas Grant of John C. Fremont. Mines in this district were operated up until the early 1900s, and even today are prospected to some extent.

Located in south-central Mariposa County, approximately three miles south of the town of Mariposa is the Mormon Bar. This area took its name from early Mormon miners who initially worked the mines until their departure back to Utah. This district was placer-mined during the 1850s and 1860s, and played-out by 1870. The area was being drag-line dredged during the 1930s. Total estimated gold production for the district was 75,000 ounces.

Lying northwest of the town of Mariposa is the Mt. Bullion District. The mines within this district were initially mined by those of Spanish descent beginning in 1848. As with the Mariposa Mine, much of the Mt. Bullion District was in the Las Mariposas Grant, originally taken out by Fremont. Interestingly, the mines in this district were not surveyed in the same manner as those on public lands. According to Clark (1870), “to this day the land plats within this grant are difficult to coordinate with established survey lines.” Fremont later went bankrupt, leaving only the name Mt. Bullion as a tribute to his father-in-law Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who was referred to as “Old Bullion.” The ghost town of Mount Ophir is also within the Mt. Bullion District, and contains the ruins of an early-day mint that operated from 1849 to 1854. Mining in the district operated from the 1850s to the 1870s, and apparently, a great amount of activity was carried out from 1900 to 1920 when other surrounding mines were being worked.

Essentially, gold mining in Mariposa County represents the majority of mining activity. Though other types of non-gold mining ventures went on, it was the mining of gold that was the most pronounced in this legendary county within the greater-Sierra-Nevada region.

### 11.3.05 CHINESE AMERICANS IN MARIPOSA

Following the discovery of Gold, Chinese immigrants joined the rush of gold seekers converging on California. When hostility and discrimination prohibited the Chinese from mining activities, they turned to other occupations such as merchants, laborers, and laundrymen (California Department of Parks & Recreation 1988). Examples of their handiwork remain in the County today: Chinese employed by the Golden Rock Water Company in the 1850's constructed the Big Gap Flume on the Quick Ranch, one of the best documented Chinese-built stone walls in California. The Chinese also constructed the 1851 Sun Sun Wo Company building in Coulterville.