

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT THE YORBA AND SLAUGHTER FAMILIES ADOBE,  
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

RICHARD CIOLEK-TORELLO  
STATISTICAL RESEARCH, REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

KAREN K. SWOPE  
STATISTICAL RESEARCH, INC., ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

JUSTIN LEV-TOV  
STATISTICAL RESEARCH, INC., REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

ASHLEY M. MORTON  
STATISTICAL RESEARCH, INC., TUCSON, ARIZONA

JAMES CLARK  
STATISTICAL RESEARCH, INC., REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

TERESITA MAJEWSKI  
STATISTICAL RESEARCH, INC., TUCSON, ARIZONA

*Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI) recently completed data recovery at the historic Yorba-Slaughter Adobe in the Prado Basin. The research, conducted for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Los Angeles District, resulted from planned construction of a protective dike around this property. Our excavations uncovered numerous structural features relating to the operation of the Yorba-Slaughter ranch during the middle twentieth century, as well as several prehistoric roasting features. More important, however, were several refuse pits and rock features dating from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Thousands of artifacts and faunal remains recovered from these features provide a rare in-depth look into early Californio and Euro-American ranching in southern California.*

Located in the southwest corner of San Bernardino County, the Yorba and Slaughter Families Adobe stands beside the old Pomona-Rincon Road and just east of what is today California State Highway 71. The adobe is situated on a hilltop on the east slope of the Chino Hills overlooking the Chino Plain and Chino Creek, a tributary of the Santa Ana River (Figure 1). Construction of Prado Dam in the 1940s has resulted in an elevated water table, which today supports extensive riparian woodlands that have replaced much of the historic-period farmland on the Chino Plain. The adobe (CA-SBR-2317H, California Historical Landmark No. 191) is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and is an historic site and house museum maintained by the San Bernardino County Museum. Today, the grounds surrounding the adobe and several associated buildings are landscaped with lawns, ornamental plants, and sidewalks. Mature eucalyptus and olive trees dominate the landscaping, along with introduced cacti and other plants (Figure 2).

Data recovery excavations were undertaken at the site by Scientific Research, Inc. (SRI) in May and June of 2010 for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Los Angeles District, as a result of planned construction of a protective dike around the perimeter of the landscaped area surrounding the buildings. This dike was made necessary because of the recent raising of Prado Dam, which would subject the property to the danger of flooding in a 100-year flood event.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The adobe was built between 1852 and 1853 by Raymundo Yorba, grandson of José Antonio Yorba, one of the soldiers who escorted Father Junípero Serra during his early travels in California. The

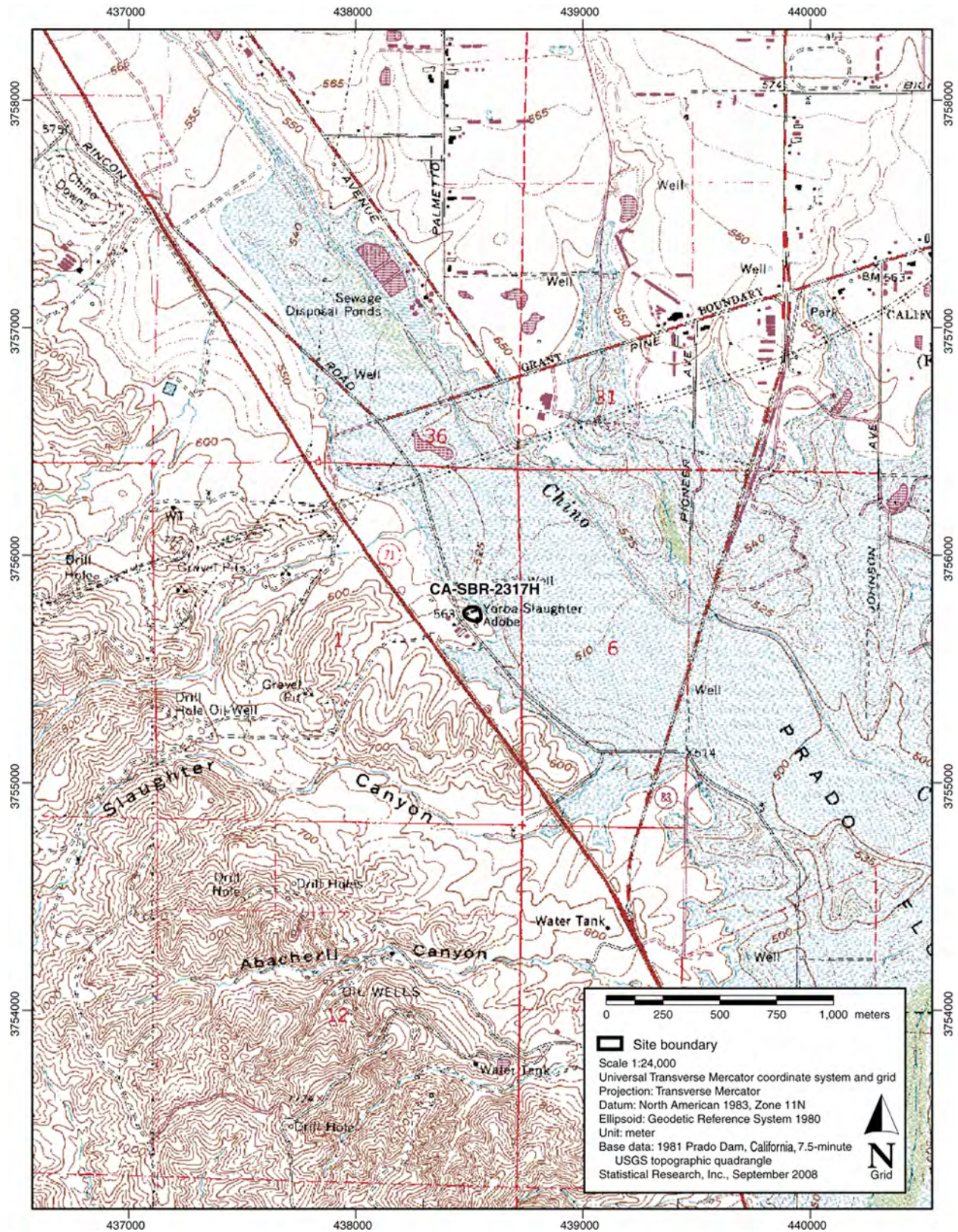


Figure 1. Location of Yorba and Slaughter Families Adobe, Prado Dam 7.5-minute USGS quadrangle.



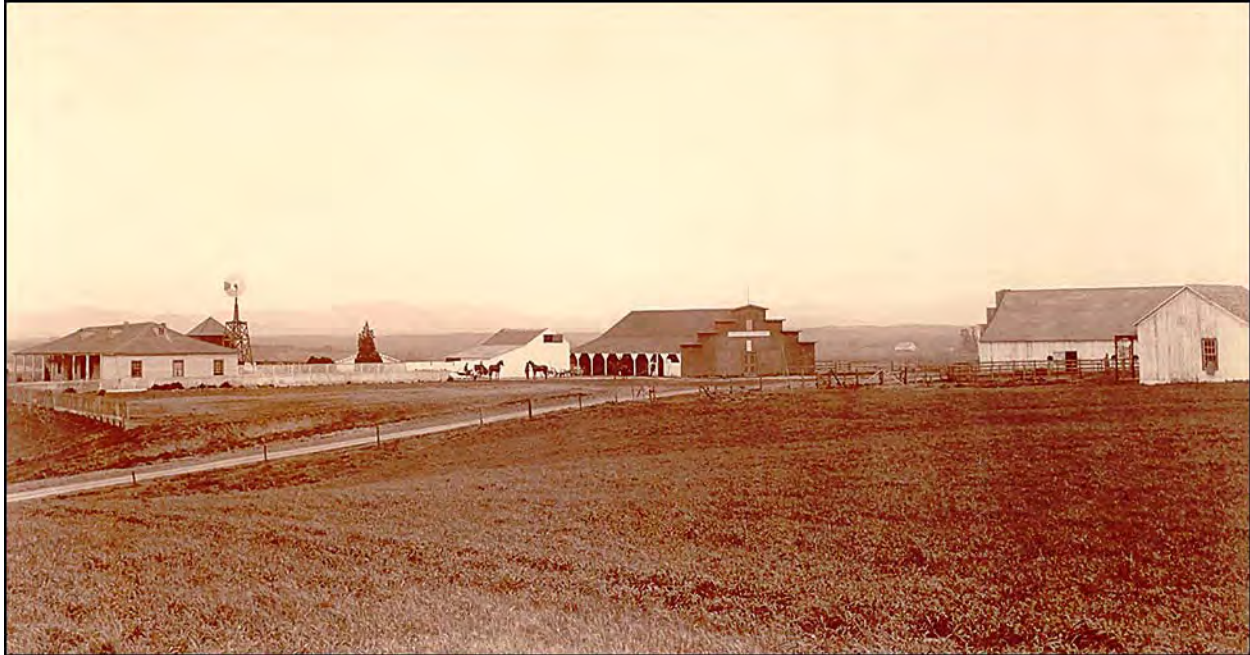
*Figure 2. Photograph of Yorba and Slaughter Families Adobe, view to northeast.*

adobe originally was one of several outlying residences of the vast estates of Bernardo Yorba, Raymundo's father and one of the most powerful and wealthy residents of the region. The adobe was one component of a far-sighted land tenure strategy in which Bernardo Yorba settled his adult children (Stoll 2005). Bernardo's heirs assured themselves of an inheritance by serving as wardens of their father's interests on the frontier of his holdings. With the passing of Bernardo Yorba in 1858, Raymundo assumed ownership of the adobe, which served as the headquarters of a large rancho used for cattle and sheep herding in Prado Basin. During his residence at the adobe, Raymundo Yorba was one of the wealthiest men in the area (Stoll 2005).

Unfortunately, like many other Californio landowners in the mid-nineteenth century, Raymundo Yorba's property was threatened by squatters, who laid claim to his lands under the California Possessory Claim Act of 1852. Wary of protracted legal costs and the high odds of losing his property, Raymundo decided to sell the adobe and rancho to Fenton M. Slaughter, a trusted friend, in 1868.

In contrast to Yorba, Fenton Slaughter had an English lineage, and his family had arrived on the east coast of North America in the early eighteenth century. Slaughter, however, did participate in the Californio life-style, marrying María Dolores Alvarado, daughter of the former alcalde of Los Angeles and administrator of lands owned by Mission San Gabriel in San Bernardino County (Stoll 2005). Thus, although not Hispanic, Slaughter and his family continued to live largely the Californio lifestyle of his predecessor. Slaughter was to expand the rancho into one of the largest and wealthiest in the area (Figure 3). He built vineyards and a winery, expanded the sheep herds, and raised racehorses.

Slaughter died in 1897, but his wife Dolores continued to live at the rancho and remained the head of the household until her death in 1916. Frank E. Slaughter, a distant cousin, built the Block House adjacent to the adobe between 1906 and 1909. Dolores spent her remaining years in this house with one



*Figure 3. Photograph of the Yorba and Slaughter Families Adobe ranch complex, ca. 1885 (courtesy of San Bernardino County Museum).*

of her daughters and her son-in-law. Upon her death, the estate was divided among the many heirs. Julia Slaughter Fuqua, the third of the nine children of Fenton and Dolores Slaughter, assumed control of the adobe in 1929. By this time, the adobe was in a bad state of repair that was severely aggravated in January 1933 by a windstorm that ripped the roof from the building, tore down the porches, and damaged the nearby winery building. With the assistance of other members of the family, Julia reconstructed the adobe, winery, and other structures on the property. In 1934, Julia, assisted by historian George Beattie, also applied to have the adobe designated as a California Historical Landmark. The preservation of the Yorba and Slaughter Families Adobe is due in great measure to her efforts.

Julia Fuqua resided in the Block House with her only child Louise, and later Louise's husband, Walter Fryer, until her death in 1957. Louise continued to live there until her own death three years later. In 1971, upon the death of Walter Fryer, the property was acquired by the San Bernardino County Museum Association. The museum acquired the adobe itself, outbuildings and associated structures, ranch equipment, furnishings, and artifacts on 1.7 acres of land (Stoll 2005:92). Today, the adobe and surrounding buildings serve as a satellite of San Bernardino County Museum, and house a collection of the Slaughter family's furnishings gathered by Fenton Slaughter's daughter, Julia Slaughter Fuqua.

### **PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS**

In addition to extensive archival and historical documentation of the Yorba and Slaughter families' tenure at the adobe, several previous archaeological investigations have been conducted at the site. The most important archaeological study was undertaken by Greenwood and Associates in 1988 (Greenwood et al. 1988) for the USACE. In her history of the Yorba and Slaughter Families Adobe, *Crown on a Landscaped Hill*, Stoll (2005) provides an excellent compilation of archival information and also summarizes archaeological research by Greenwood et al. at the adobe and three nearby sites associated with the Slaughter family.

The research by Greenwood et al. concentrated on architectural questions regarding the east wing of the adobe that had been built by the Yorbas but was subsequently demolished. Greenwood et al.'s research focused on the possible association of this building with Native Americans who worked on the ranch. A series of controlled excavation units, shovel test pits, hand-excavated trenches, and auger borings were concentrated at the southeast end of the adobe.

Those excavations yielded archaeological evidence of the destroyed east wing of the residence in the form of a platform paved with stone and brick, as well as two trash deposits and a nail cache. Artifacts recovered from excavations in this area represented domestic and ranching activities at the site; a small number of Native American ceramics and obsidian artifacts were also found near the foundation of the demolished east wing. A privy, containing artifacts from the 1930s, also was located but not excavated. Greenwood et al.'s project confirmed the presence of intact, important archaeological deposits that contribute to the site's NRHP eligibility. However, with the exception of the paved platform and associated artifacts, the deposits explored postdate both the Yorba and Fenton Slaughter periods of occupation and contribute little to our understanding of the early historic-period occupation of the adobe.

### **SRI INVESTIGATIONS**

SRI's excavations were restricted to the 20-ft.-wide footprint of the proposed dike surrounding the main property (Figure 4; Ciolek-Torrello and Swope 2011; White and Majewski 2010). A total area of approximately 26,000 ft.<sup>2</sup> was mechanically stripped and trenched to locate historic-period features. These excavations resulted in the discovery of approximately 35 features, including concrete foundations, metal and concrete water lines and drains, gravel lenses, rock clusters, and historic-period trash deposits. The majority of these features date to the mid- to late twentieth century and relate to the operation of the property as a dairy farm and horse and cattle ranch during this time. Several rock clusters and the trash deposits, however, are much older in age, dating perhaps from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century and represent occupation of the site by the Yorba and Fenton Slaughter families. In addition, at least three of the rock clusters appear to be prehistoric in age and represent hearths or hearth cleanouts associated with fire-affected rock and small numbers of ground and flaked stone tools (Figure 5).

Three historic-period trash deposits alone produced almost 10,000 artifacts and thousands of faunal remains dating from the mid-nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century. Feature 192 was a deposit consisting largely of burned and highly fragmented bone. The more than 5,400 pieces of bone, primarily from cattle, recovered from this feature represent the majority of the faunal remains recovered during the project. This collection appears to represent activities of the Yorba family, when local ordinances required the burning of butchered bone prior to disposal (Gust 1987:124). Near this feature are two rock clusters, Features 184 and 415, which contained a small number of local Native American ceramics, three ground stone tools, as well as a few manufactured historic-period artifacts. A few additional Native American ceramics and ground stone tools were recovered from excavation units nearby.

Feature 276 is a much larger and more diverse deposit dating to the time of the Fenton Slaughter residence. This deposit was contained in an irregular, oval-shaped pit about 2 by 4 ft. in area and 5 ft. deep (Figure 6). Over 8,000 artifacts, including large numbers of food, beverage, and medicine bottles, ceramics, house furnishing and clothing items, tools and hardware, and construction materials, as well as over 700 pieces of bone, were recovered from this feature alone. Feature 470 is a smaller deposit representing a similar and contemporaneous collection. Together, these two deposits provide a detailed picture of life and consumer habits of the Fenton Slaughter family in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

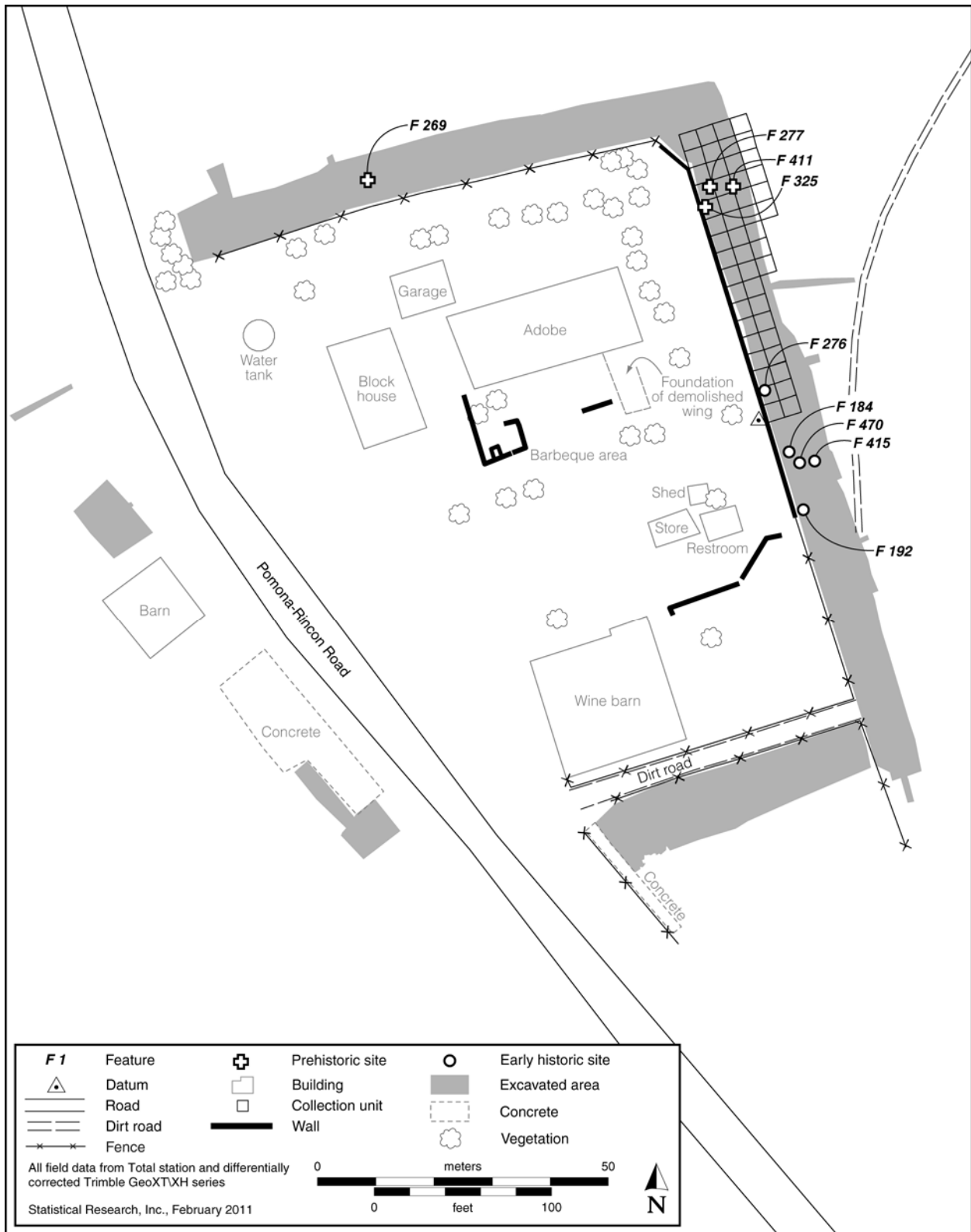


Figure 4. Map of investigated area of CA-SBR-2317H, showing locations of prehistoric and early historic-period features.



Figure 5. Photograph of prehistoric hearth, Feature 269 at the Yorba and Slaughter Families Adobe.

## DISCUSSION

At the outset of this study, the historic-period chronology of the site was well understood from written records. The site occupies an important transitional position during California's formative period, with continuous occupation spanning the shift from the Californio to the American way of life. Available archival information largely addresses the Slaughter family story; less written documentation remains to illuminate the Yorba story. Consequently, much of the picture presented to museum visitors relates to the Slaughter family. One goal of this investigation was to locate and differentiate between separate archaeological residues deposited by the Yorba and Slaughter families. In order to make that distinction successfully, it was necessary to discover intact features containing temporally diagnostic artifacts. The Yorba family ended their tenure at the site at a critical time, before domestic and industrial life was revolutionized by rapid changes in technology and increased market access. Artifacts and features that provide a *terminus ante quem* of 1868 would be attributable to the Yorba family's residence.

### Yorba Family Occupation

It was expected that data recovery would result in a better understanding of the various historic-period industries performed at the site. The Californio economy and lifestyle had their emphasis on ranching, and associated activities would have included production for trade of beef, hides, tallow, horses, sheep, grains, and grapes; yet the ranchos relied on their economic independence and the maintenance of a self-sustaining community (Cleland 1941:52; Robinson 1948:45). Under Yorba tenure, the ranch produced cattle and horses, with fences erected for management of range cattle (Stoll 2005:37). Eventually, Yorbas' work came to include modest herds of sheep (Stoll 2005:29).



*Figure 6. Photograph of excavated refuse pit, Feature 276, view west.*

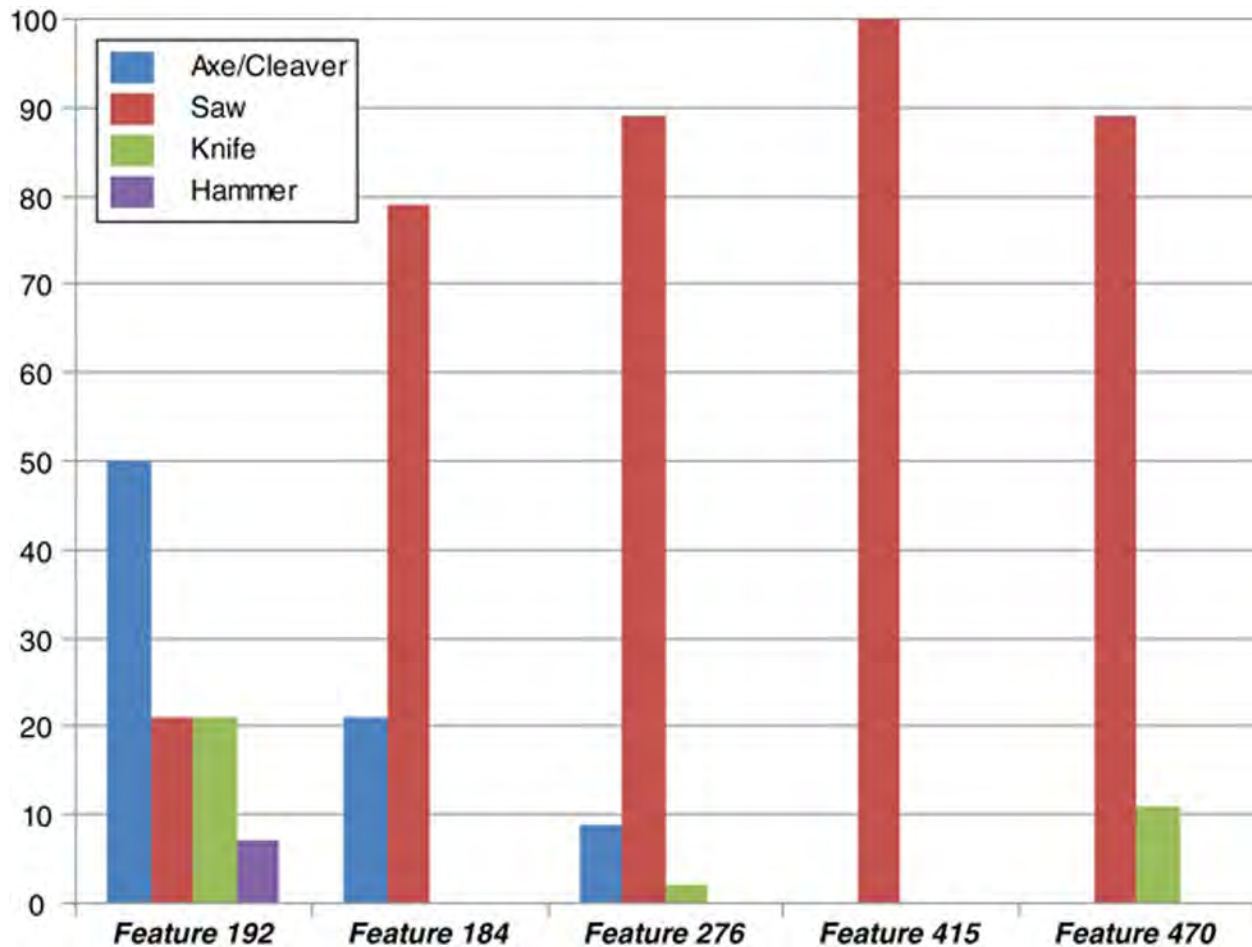


Figure 7. Graph showing percent and type of butchering marks from five early historic-period features.

Features 184, 192, and 415 may represent the remains of activities associated with the Yorba family residence, although few datable historic-period artifacts were recovered from these three features to pin down the date of use. Some degree of disturbance was suggested by the presence of several modern artifacts, but a few early ceramics, including blue shell-edge whiteware and semi-vitreous white-bodied earthenware ironstone made by British potter E. Challinor & Co. provide production dates ending in 1860 and 1862, respectively. Analysis of the faunal remains from this feature also demonstrates a relatively higher frequency of cattle bones than other refuse deposits at the site. This finding is consistent with the greater importance of cattle ranching during the Yorba occupation. In addition, the large collection of bone from Feature 192 also exhibited much more evidence of butchering using traditional butchering methods (axes, cleavers, and knives) as opposed to the use of machine sawing; albeit, nearly all the bones within this feature were calcined such that differentiating butchering marks from burning-induced cracking was not easy (Figure 7). This evidence lends some support to the feature's date, given that sawing as a butchering method was not widely practiced by the Californios (Gust 1987).

Features 184, 192, and 415 also may represent activities of Native American laborers, who built the adobe and may have resided in the east wing that was demolished in the nineteenth century. In fact, it is possible that the rocks comprising these features may have been discarded in this area after the east wing of the adobe was demolished. The articulated and rectangular arrangement of rocks in the northeast quadrant of Feature 184 suggests an alternative possibility that these rocks were part of the foundation of a small structure (Figure 8).



*Figure 8. Photograph of Feature 184, early historic-period rock cluster.*

The association of Native American ceramics and lithic tools with these features and the paucity of manufactured goods are also consistent with the importance of Native American servants and laborers, as well as the self-sufficiency characteristic of the Californio lifestyle. Interestingly, although Raymundo Yorba was one of the most wealthy and powerful men in the region, there is little in the archaeological record to demonstrate this.

### **Fenton and Dolores Slaughter Occupation**

In contrast to these possible Yorba-related features, Features 276 and 470 contained large numbers of manufactured goods, but no Native American artifacts. Included in the Feature 276 collection was a large brass bell similar to a set of bells housed in the Slaughter family collection at the museum. Most of the datable artifacts from these two features date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Figure 9). Due to its size and depth, we suspected that Feature 276 may have represented a privy. Its informal shape and the complete absence of stratigraphy, however, suggest that it was, more likely, a deep refuse pit in which refuse accumulated very rapidly. It is possible that the material culture contained in Feature 276 represents a single episode of deposition associated with the transfer of residence of Slaughter family members from the adobe to the Block House. Among the thousands of artifacts recovered from this pit were at least 60 sanitary cans. Introduced in 1906, these sanitary cans were distributed throughout the pit, suggesting rapid accumulation of debris in the first decade of the twentieth century, precisely the time that Dolores Slaughter moved to the Block House. Furthermore, although electrical fixtures were recovered in our excavations, a single piece of glass from a light bulb was the only electrical item recovered from Feature 276 or the other early historic-period features. Several oil lamps and broken yellow-ware chamber pots were also recovered from this feature. This is significant,

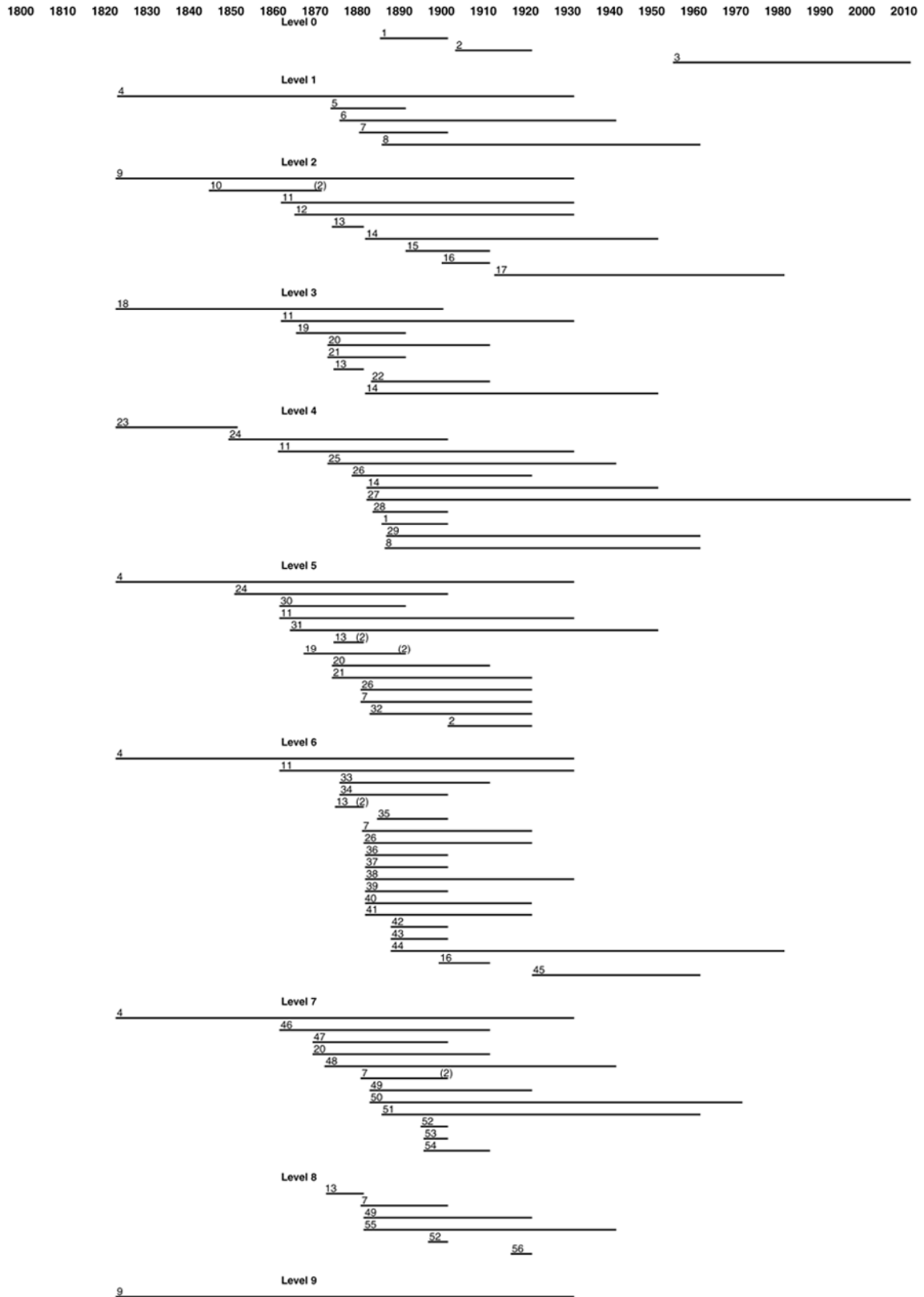


Figure 9. Time graph of temporally diagnostic artifacts recovered from Feature 276, large historic-period refuse deposit.

because historical accounts indicate that the adobe was not plumbed or electrified during its occupation as a residence by Fenton and Dolores Slaughter.

Included in the collections were many canning jar fragments and fragments of jar closures. A variety of foodstuffs were represented, including several flavoring extract bottles from Schilling, Royal Remedy, Souder's, and Dr. Price. The portion of the collection representing vessels that once contained or served alcoholic beverages is not large; nevertheless, liquor was the most common bottled beverage represented. Bottles that had contained soda pop and bottled water were also identified, some coming from local southern California bottling companies. The preponderance of proprietary medicines over pharmaceuticals suggests the Slaughter household relied more on the former than they did on local druggists, or that they obtained medicines via mail-order catalog. Identifiable medicines were used to treat a wide variety of ailments, including gastrointestinal discomforts, respiratory ailments, urinary tract weaknesses, menstrual complications, and scalp and skin disorders. Anti-inflammatory medications, pain relievers, rheumatism treatments, ointments, diuretics, sedatives, dietary supplements and strengthening tonics were also identified. However, gastrointestinal treatments were the most common, followed by pain relievers and urinary tract treatments.

A variety of shaving paraphernalia and combs recovered from Feature 276 reflected gentlemen's concern for personal appearance during the Victorian era (Morton 2010). A fragment of a bottle of Hoyt's German Cologne was also indicative of this trend.

By the middle of the Slaughter family residence, southern California was connected to worldwide markets via the railroad. The Slaughters clearly took advantage of these connections through the consumption of manufactured products from the East Coast, Midwest, Canada, and England. They also exploited local markets, as evidenced by construction materials (bricks) and soda bottles from Los Angeles as well as pharmaceuticals from Pomona, Riverside, and Corona.

Among the artifacts were an almost complete hinged-frame 1877-model Smith & Wesson .38-caliber revolver and a pair of lead knuckles that were recovered from Feature 276 (Figures 10-11). We can only speculate why these weapons were discarded in the trash pit, but they do suggest that some members of the Slaughter family were concerned with personal self-defense.

Fenton Slaughter achieved even greater wealth and influence than Raymundo Yorba. Yet like his predecessor, with few exceptions the Slaughter family's wealth was not exhibited in any of the refuse deposits. A silver-plated turquoise brooch and an opalescent pitcher were the only recovered items that might be indicative of greater wealth (Figure 12).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, data recovery excavations at the Yorba and Slaughter Families Adobe investigated features that provide rare insights into Californio and early American period domestic and ranching sites in California, and the history of the Yorba and Slaughter families in particular. This research represents the most recent in a long string of archaeological investigations of historic-period ranches and townsites in the Prado Basin sponsored by the USACE. These include the contemporary Bandini-Cota (Greenwood et al. 1983) and Aros-Serrano adobes (Greenwood, Foster, and Duffield 1987), as well as later occupations at the Rincon townsite (Greenwood, Foster, Duffield, and Elliott 1987; Sterner 2004) and a ranch in the Prado Basin (Palmer and Gray 2006). Unfortunately, none of these excavations produced substantial information on the Californio and early American period.

Although we had difficulty differentiating between features created during the Yorba and Slaughter residencies, we found features that demonstrated the self-sufficiency of the Californio lifestyle and the important role played by Native Americans during the mid-nineteenth century. The Slaughters may have continued many aspects of this lifestyle, but, unlike the Yorbas, they clearly participated widely



*Figure 10. Lead knuckles and other artifacts recovered from Feature 276.*

in both local and global markets as well as ascribing to cultural patterns associated with contemporary American culture. On a final note, the archaeological collection complements well the Slaughter family collection housed at the museum. Several items are represented in both collections, but the archaeological collection provides important insights into food practices and other elements of daily life not represented in the museum collection.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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Figure 11. Revolver recovered from Feature 276.

cooperation, assistance, and sharing of their knowledge of the property's history. The site map was prepared by Steve Norris and Luke Wisner at Statistical Research.

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*Figure 12. Opalescent pitcher recovered from Feature 276.*