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# Memorial to James Allan Bennyhoff

(January 3, 1926 - August 4, 1993)



James A. Bennyhoff excavating at Stone Lagoon (CA-Hum-129), summer of 1978.

**CALIFORNIA** archaeology lost one of its most influential senior scholars in the early morning hours of August 4, 1993, when James Bennyhoff died in his sleep at his home in Mill Valley, California, after an extended battle with cancer. He was buried next to his parents in the Memorial Park Cemetery in Oroville, California, on August 6, 1993.

Jim was born in Sacramento, but his formative years were spent in small, provincial northern California towns. His father was a machinist for the Western Pacific Railroad who retired as a roundhouse foreman, and his mother was a grade school teacher who saw to it that Jim completed a high school college preparatory

program. The first 13 years of his life were largely spent in the railroad town of Portola on the upper Feather River, followed by four years in Quincy. Because travel was so difficult during the depression years, his firsthand knowledge of the outside world was drawn principally from trips to Reno, Chico, and Oroville, with only three trips to San Francisco. His father was an ardent fisherman, so many weekends were spent camping at nearby streams and lakes.

Jim's first interest in anthropology was stimulated by an article on Maya archaeology in *National Geographic* magazine. Throughout high school, he read everything available on Mesoamerican archaeology in the county library—including all three books by James Churchward on the Lost Continent of Mu! He decorated his class notebooks with Maya glyphs (he could, at that time, decipher Maya dates), and was hoping to make archaeology a career, despite parental objections to this field as a rich man's hobby.

The means to his goal of a career in archaeology were provided by World War II and the G.I. Bill. In 1943, just after graduating from Quincy Union High School at the age of 17, he entered the Navy V-12 program and (as he put it) by some miscalculation of his aptitude test, was assigned to the engineering program. He fulfilled his freshman college requirements at the Montana School of Mines in Butte, and completed his sophomore year at the University of Washington in Seattle. By this time, he was convinced that he did not want to be an engineer—the only “D” he ever received was in calculus. So, rather than learning to master the art of drawing screws, he spent his study hours exploring the anthropology holdings of the University of Washington library, reading not only technical reports on the Maya but expanding his interest to the Indians of the

Northwest Coast. His last year in the Navy (as a yeoman) was spent on a minesweeper clearing Kobe Harbor in Japan.

After his discharge from the Navy, Jim was eligible for four years of college under the G.I. Bill. He completed his junior and senior years at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as two years of postgraduate work. He chose to attend Berkeley largely because it was close to home, and because he heard that Ronald Olson taught a course on Mesoamerican archaeology. He had heard of Kroeber but had little interest in studying California Indians. Kroeber retired the year Jim arrived at Berkeley, and he had never heard of the other members of the department—Robert Lowie, E. W. Gifford, Theodore D. McCown, Robert Heizer, and David Mandelbaum. Although he desperately wanted to be an archaeologist, at that time Berkeley did not allow such a narrow specialization—the major was anthropology in all its many aspects. Fortunately, Berkeley did have an active, voluntary, weekend field program of excavation led by graduate students, and Jim was soon a core member of the group.

His first excavation, at the invitation of Heizer, along with Franklin Fenenga and Harry and Francis Riddell, was at Sac-104 on a cold, foggy day in the winter of 1946. It was, as Jim put it, "a marvelous experience" which hooked him on California archaeology. He quickly became immersed in the problems of California archaeology, and by the end of his junior year was invited by Heizer to participate in the summer excavation of an Early Horizon site (SJo-68, the Blossom Mound), then thought to date around 5,000 B.C. The early date and unusual burial practices (one of the few examples in the world where the dead were typically buried extended face down instead of on the back or in a flexed position), plus the opportunity for more intensive field training, kindled his interest in California archaeology. His primary interest soon shifted to the Late

Horizon, where he believed that the continuity between the living Indians and their immediate past was such that interpretation could be firmly guided by ethnographic analogy. As his knowledge of culture process broadened, he began to realize that problems of culture change were as applicable to the California Indians as to the Maya.

Jim completed his B.A. degree in anthropology at Berkeley in 1948 and began graduate work there that fall. As a student, he took courses from Robert F. Heizer, Robert H. Lowie, Theodore D. McCown, John H. Rowe, E. W. Gifford, Carl Sauer, Ronald L. Olson, David G. Mandelbaum, Sherburne F. Cook, and from visiting scholars A. V. Kidder and Gordon R. Willey. His training at Berkeley was truly varied, including a graduate course from Robert Lowie on "Basque Dancing," and another from E. W. Gifford on "The Breadfruit in Polynesia," as well as specialty courses on archaeology taught by Heizer, Rowe, and Olson. By the time he began graduate studies, he had already accumulated a tremendous amount of archaeological field experience. In 1947 alone, he participated in Berkeley's Napa Valley survey, excavating at Nap-14 and Nap-39 in the spring, at SJo-68 (with Heizer) in the summer, and at Nap-1 in the fall. He participated in both spring and summer field work in 1948 and 1949, even excavating in February in sub-zero conditions at Tommy Tucker Cave (Las-1) in northeastern California.

He was employed by the Anthropology Department at Berkeley as a teaching assistant from 1950 to 1952, during which time (the summer of 1952) he served as Kroeber's chauffeur on his last trip to work with the Mohave. Jim spent the next three years (1952-1955) as Graduate Research Archaeologist for the former U.C. Archaeological Survey (see Heizer 1972). Under Heizer's direction, Jim's duties were to run what was then the statewide office, recording and maintaining the site record files,

directing limited excavation projects, and occasionally editing manuscripts planned for publication. The breadth and pace of his field activities during these years were truly remarkable; from 1952 to 1955 he directed a major survey (in Yosemite National Park), seven prehistoric excavations (in Contra Costa, Mariposa, Sacramento, Shasta, and San Joaquin counties), and one historic project (at Sonoma Mission, later published in collaboration with A. B. Elsasser).

The period from 1957 to 1966 was one Jim devoted to his long-held Mesoamerican research interests (in the summer of 1950, he and Clement Meighan had paid their own way to British Honduras to excavate at Weston). In 1957, he worked with Heizer at Cuicuilco in the Valley of Mexico, then later that year participated in the Teotihuacán survey with René Millon. In 1959, he was assistant director of excavations at Teotihuacán, and returned to Mexico in the spring of 1961 to direct excavations at Cuicuilco. From 1962 to 1966, he served as survey field director on the Teotihuacán Mapping Project.

Jim's first formal academic position was at Yale University, where he was an instructor from 1958 to 1960, offering courses in North American archaeology and ethnography and Mesoamerican archaeology. From 1960 to 1966, he was a Research Associate in Anthropology at the University of Rochester. After returning from Mesoamerica, he held the posts of Acting Assistant Professor and Lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, from 1967 to 1970, where he again offered lecture, laboratory, and field courses on the archaeology and ethnography of North America and the archaeology of Mesoamerica. Jim began his long-term relationship with Sonoma State University (then California State College, Sonoma) in 1972, lecturing courses in California archaeology and archaeological field methods. In the summer of 1972, he was Lecturer at Cali-

fornia State College, Hayward, where he taught a course on Indians of North America. For the next 14 years (1973 to 1986), with the exception of a two-quarter appointment (in 1983) as Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Davis, he was continuously affiliated with Sonoma State, holding appointments as Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology and Research Archaeologist for the Sonoma State University Academic Foundation. At Sonoma, he offered courses on the archaeology of California, Mesoamerica, and North America, archaeological field and laboratory methods, and seminars in archaeology. He was always well-prepared as a teacher, and his courses were renowned for their breadth and detail. Consistent with his own training as a student, Jim explicitly advocated a holistic, four-field approach to archaeology, and attempted to integrate "normative" and "processual" perspectives in his own course offerings. Despite his intimate familiarity with his course material, he was not particularly comfortable as a lecturer.

I first met Jim in 1971 when, as an awestruck student who had only heard of him, I was introduced to him socially at Dave and Vera-Mae Fredrickson's home in Berkeley. I got to know him somewhat better in 1972 when I served as his archaeological field and laboratory assistant at Sonoma State College. One of my fond memories of this time is of post-excavation social gatherings at my home in Cotati, featuring consumption of (sometimes) large quantities of beer (Jim usually brought 16-ounce cans of Olympia). During these gatherings, I was exposed to the breadth and depth of his wide-ranging knowledge of archaeology and anthropology.

During 1973 and 1974, I got the chance to interact with Jim in a different context. I was volunteering one day a week at the Lowie (now Phoebe A. Hearst) Museum, organizing the J. B. Lillard collection from Santa Barbara County

and recataloguing groundstone artifacts from the Tank site (LAn-1) in the Hearst gymnasium basement. Jim was at the museum almost every time I was, working on one or another of his ongoing research projects. One morning, after feigning an excuse to wash my hands at the sink next to his study area, I said hello and asked what he was working on. He was examining small chips of obsidian, and comparing something called hydration rim readings and their calendar date equivalents against a sequence of shell beads and ornaments from burials at the Hotchkiss site (CCo-138). Without looking up at me, he burst out "This is worthless . . . this date is wrong . . . it's 500 years off!" I knew practically nothing about obsidian or shell beads, but I was so taken off-guard by the excited, emphatic tone in his voice that I agreed with him right away! My agreement obviously did not impress him because he immediately launched into a proof of his position, leaning over and putting the biggest leather briefcase I had ever seen—one literally stuffed with manila folders filled with yellow and white-lined paper—onto the table. He reached into it and pulled out several folders, then opened one with page after page of detailed tracings and form outline drawings of beads, projectile points, charmstones, and bone artifacts (all color-coded by phase), with catalogue numbers and measurements penciled in, on, or below, each one. I thought to myself, "Now this is archaeology!" He quickly shuffled through this folder, pulled out other charts and phase diagrams, and showed them to me. "There," he said, "see for yourself!" Although I distinctly remember that he made his point, I was more impressed (actually, flattered) that he would think that I could possibly have anything substantial to contribute to the "debate." I would later come to learn that this incident captured one of Jim's enduring qualities—his ability and willingness to take others (particularly students) seriously and to immediately engage them in dialogue which

presumed, almost demanded, a commitment and interest equal to his. Regardless of the fact that few, if any, of us ever were able to live up to our part of the bargain and attain equal footing with him—especially when it came to recall of stylistic details and the particulars of sequences—Jim was always patient with students and rarely critical.

He was passionately devoted to archaeology and was a tireless field worker and researcher. When Jim and I were working on our joint article for the Great Basin volume of the Handbook of North American Indians and, somewhat later, finishing final revisions and additions to the "Shell Bead and Ornament" monograph, we decided on a work schedule in which he would arrive at my home in Davis on Friday—the trunk of his '74 Maverick stuffed to capacity with briefcases full of notes—and stay through the weekend to work. These were heavy-duty work sessions in which I was clearly the lightweight. I was usually good until about two in the morning, but Jim would work all night, sometimes for days in succession. When I would get up at around six to make coffee for us, I could (and still can) see him sitting at the card table I'd set up in my study, with another few pages of text and at least one new phase chart or table (some of which, unfortunately, were deemed "too detailed" for the Handbook and were never published).

Jim was extraordinarily unselfish with his time and knowledge, devoting inordinate amounts of time helping students and colleagues with one or another of their research problems (many of which, I suspect, he had already solved). His generosity in this regard is almost legendary in California, documented by "(Bennyhoff, personal communication)" citations in countless manuscripts and publications. This will surely prove to be one element of his enduring legacy. In recognition of his unique, outstanding, and long-term contributions to California archaeology, in 1990 the Society for

California Archaeology honored him with its Lifetime Achievement Award (see Fredrickson 1990).

Jim's careful scholarship and rigorous attention to detail exemplified a fast-vanishing academic tradition antithetical to the fast-paced, publish-or-perish climate of today's archaeology. He was well aware of this, and many times through the years acknowledged that his "perfectionist bent" prevented him from completing his dissertation on time (which almost certainly was the reason he was not offered a permanent position at Yale University [J. Rowe, personal communication 1994]) and from publishing the results of other studies because they were, in his view, "too incomplete." When he returned to Berkeley in 1967, Heizer began to lay the groundwork to offer him a permanent position there, but later withdrew his support because Jim refused to publish "until he was ready." The signal event leading to his estrangement from, and eventual split with, Heizer occurred in 1970, when Heizer arranged for him to attend the prestigious Wenner-Gren sponsored Burg Wartenstein conference in Austria on "Emergent Civilization in Mesoamerica as Compared to Parallel Developments in the Old World." Although he delivered a paper at the conference (Bennyhoff 1970), he withdrew it from publication in the conference proceedings (Heizer and Graham 1971) because he was "not satisfied with it." He was well aware of the career-track price he paid for this predilection but was willing, or compelled by personality, to pay it anyway.

Although many western North American prehistorians remember him as *the* "Bead Man," Jim's 45-year field and research career included a remarkable variety of major accomplishments and substantive contributions to California archaeology that form the very foundation for today's students and professionals. It was Jim who was primarily responsible for the subdivision of central

California archaeology's original four temporal periods (Early, Middle, Late, and Historic) into 20 shorter phases. He was also the one who originally defined district and regional marker traits in central California (art styles in incised bone, serrated scapulae, effigy ornaments, etc.); developed new shell bead and ornament typologies; recognized and defined the unique Meganos cultural expression in central California; devised a new dating scheme for central California prehistory; contributed to a clarification of ethnic boundaries using California Mission records; and, in collaboration with David Fredrickson, developed a new taxonomic framework for central California archaeology (see Hughes 1994). In addition to pioneering a cultural sequence for the high Sierra (in the Yosemite area), he demonstrated a sequence of harpoon forms for the Northwest California region correlated with ethnic variation, and contributed substantially to Kenneth Whistler's archaeo-linguistic reconstructions of California prehistory. His "Californian Fish Spears and Harpoons" (1950), written originally as an undergraduate course term paper for Heizer, is a classic and remains today the definitive work on the subject. In my view, the "Shell Bead and Ornament Exchange Networks Between California and the Western Great Basin" (1987) monograph was one of Jim's greatest achievements, because it brought to fruition so much of what he had been working on over the previous 25 years. Although I helped make it happen, it was Bennyhoff's work all the way.

In Mesoamerica, Jim's fieldwork with the Teotihuacán Mapping Project doubled the known size of Teotihuacán. Prior to this work, the ruins were believed to represent only a ceremonial center about four square miles in size; in two years of work, the project proved that Teotihuacán was a major, nucleated urban center with a population between 125,000 and 200,000. He found the first petroglyph linked to astronomical observation; corrected the ce-

ramic/figurine sequence for Teotihuacán developed by Pedro Armillas; corrected the Chupicuaro sequence proposed by Porter; refined the Preclassic phases proposed by Vaillant; and clarified the Late Preclassic architectural sequence in central Mexico (cf. Milliken 1993). Albert Elsasser recalled an experience which illustrated Jim's facility with artifact seriation and mastery of the details of Mexican ceramic chronology:

The most memorable occasion, where I saw Bennyhoff in incredibly fast speech action, took place at Cuicuilco, on the Pedregal of Mexico City. I was there with R. F. Heizer, R. Millon, R. J. Squier and Bennyhoff, digging in the pyramid complex for the National Geographic Society. After about three weeks of excavation, we had acquired a tremendous lot of potsherds from ruins we had exposed from under the basalt cover of the Pedregal. We had all along been in the process of classifying them, and attempting to place them in the local chronological sequence.

Finally, in anticipation of the invited visit of Dr. Eduardo Noguera, one of the deans of Mexican archaeology at that time (1957), we unrolled many yards of wrapping paper on the ground and placed the sample sherds thereon in sequence, marked off in sections with blue chalk. It seemed to me that Bennyhoff was chiefly responsible for this arrangement, although he had never been in Mexico before. Noguera arrived (and) it seems to me that he looked slightly skeptical about this lay-out procedure when we first walked down the line with him. It was not long before I, at least, perceived that the talk had become a dialogue between him and Bennyhoff. It became plain that Noguera, perhaps 25 years Bennyhoff's senior, and a lifetime scholar of Mexican prehistory, was delighted to find that somehow Bennyhoff was such a worthy and knowledgeable discussant. Together they spent almost two hours gesticulating, denying, rearranging, and finally agreeing or compromising on each other's position. I think the rest of us . . . looked on agape at this wonderful performance. I'm sure that Noguera, who spoke perfect English, had probably talked with dozens of prominent archaeologists from the U.S. during his prominent career, but I would have wagered

at the time that he had never before encountered such a keen and articulate student as Bennyhoff [Albert Elsasser, personal communication 1994].

Despite his tremendous intellect and accomplishments, Jim was the most modest, unselfish professional I've ever met. However, his reserved demeanor sometimes made it difficult for others to get to know him. During the years we knew each other, months would pass without Jim speaking of personal issues. Then suddenly, for no reason I could identify, he would discuss and openly elaborate at length on interpersonal themes. Through these interactions, I came to know Jim as a sensitive, shy, and charming individual with a disarming sense of humor and wide-ranging interests. I was fortunate to have known him as a teacher, mentor, and friend, and feel particularly privileged to have worked closely with him. Like many others who knew him, I have a very deep affection for him and will miss him sorely. California archaeology will never again see anyone like Jim Bennyhoff.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In preparing this memorial, I have drawn freely from my own notes and recollections, from autobiographical materials in Bennyhoff's personal papers, from the transcribed text of an on-camera interview I conducted with him on May 6, 1991, at California State University, Sacramento, and from other notes on Bennyhoff's life and career (Fredrickson 1990; Anonymous 1993; Milliken 1993; Riddell 1993; Wallace 1993). Janet Beatty, Senior Editor at Mayfield Publishing Company, helped me track down information on Bennyhoff's contributions to the numerous revisions of "A Guide to Archaeological Field Methods" (see Bennyhoff 1949, 1958 below). George Cowgill, Albert Elsasser, David Fredrickson, Clement Meighan, Eugene Prince, Francis Riddell, John Rowe, and Donald Tuohy informally shared with me some of their personal history with Jim; I am grateful to George Cowgill, Al Elsasser, John Rowe, and Don Tuohy for providing written correspondence pertaining to their long-term associations with him. I thank Randy Milliken for all manner of assistance and for allowing me to consult Jim's personal papers, and Meredith Dreiss for contributing the photograph of

Jim excavating at Stone Lagoon (CA-Hum-129) during the summer of 1978. I owe special thanks to Dave Fredrickson for reading and commenting on an early draft of the manuscript.

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- 1970 The Preclassic Background for the Emergence of Civilization in the Mexican Highlands. A 35-page paper prepared for Wenner-Gren sponsored Burg Wartenstein Conference, Austria.
- 1973 Description of the Nicolarsen-Jameson Cave (NV-Wa-197) Olivella Spire-lopped Beads, 8 pages.
- 1982 Ethnographic Background. In: *Emigrant Summit Trail: Archaeological Investigations and Historic Research of the Trail from Caples Lake to Maiden's Grave*, by James A. Bennyhoff, Vance Bente, Mary Hilderman-Smith, and Terry Jones, pp. 33-48. Report on file at the Eldorado National Forest, Placerville.
- 1982 Prehistoric Resources. In: *Emigrant Summit Trail: Archaeological Investigations and Historic Research of the Trail from Caples Lake to Maiden's Grave*, by James A. Bennyhoff, Vance Bente, Mary Hilderman-Smith, and Terry Jones, pp. 137-186. Report on file at the Eldorado National Forest, Placerville.
- 1982 Post-Borax Lake: Patterns and Aspects in the North Coast Ranges. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Society for California Archaeology, Sacramento.
- 1986 Shell Artifacts. In: *Final Report of Archaeological Data Recovery Program at CA-Mnt-229, Moss Landing, Monterey County, California*, by Steven A. Dietz, William Hildebrandt, and Terry Jones, pp. 224-250. Report on file at the California Department of Transportation, Sacramento.
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- Bennyhoff, James A., and David A. Fredrickson  
1967 A Typology of Shell and Stone Beads from Central California. Report on file at the Cultural Resources Section, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento.
- Bennyhoff, James A., and Clement W. Meighan  
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- Bennyhoff, James A., and René Millon  
1966 Description of Patlachique Phase through Oxtoticpac Phase Ceramics from Teotihuacán, 134 pages.
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1950 Concha Loma Shellmound Progress Report. Paper submitted in fulfillment of requirements for Anthropology 299 and Anthropology 199, University of California, Berkeley, 120 pages.
- In addition to formal publications, completed manuscripts, and conference papers, other manuscripts and notes pertaining to California archaeological research undertaken by Bennyhoff during his student days at the University of California, Berkeley (including the time he served as Archaeologist for the University of California Archaeological Survey [1952-1955]) are on file at the Archaeological Research Facility, University of California, Berkeley. The list below includes only those manuscripts and notes of which Bennyhoff was clearly the author; others, attributed by Heizer (1972:43-63) to "various authors," may contain sections by Bennyhoff, but I did not search each of these to verify whether this was the case.
- n.d. Analysis of Shell Ornaments. In: Appendix I for report by Sacramento State College on excavations at Berryessa Valley. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 245.
- 1948 (with Francis A. Riddell) Notes on Archaeological Specimens from Sacramento County in the Collection of Schultz Martine of Sacramento. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 40.

- 1952 Excavation Notes for Site CA-SJo-68. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 253.
- 1953 (with Albert B. Elsasser) Sonoma Mission Notes, Photographs and Diagrams. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 172.
- 1953 Field Notes from Site CA-Sha-52. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 185.
- 1954 (with P. Raab) Notes and Burial Records for Sites CA-SJo-106 and CA-SJo-107. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 174.
- 1955 (with Albert B. Elsasser) Data on Site CA-Sis-262. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 255.
- 1956 Description of Early Horizon Type Collection from Sites CA-Sac-107, CA-Sac-168, CA-SJo-56 and CA-SJo-68, Donated to Sacramento State College on June 7, 1956. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 231.
- 1956 Blade Cache, Site CA-Tuo-134. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 274.
- 1956- Notes on Oudjiu Site, Fresno County. 1957 Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 266.
- 1957 Notes from the 1957 Great Basin Symposium. Archaeological Research Facility Manuscript No. 254.

