Welcome

Chitactac Adams Heritage County Park is a beautiful and culturally significant 4.5-acre park along Uvas Creek located just minutes from the cities of Gilroy and Morgan Hill. Visible cultural artifacts include bedrock mortars and petroglyphs, left by indigenous people who occupied the area for thousands of years prior to arrival of the Spanish in the late 1700s. An exhibit shelter and interpretive trail signs feature bilingual (Spanish/English) information and images about tribal culture and the Adams schoolhouse, which was located on this property from the 1850s until 1956.

Location, Hours and Fees

The park is located at 10001 Watsonville Rd. Gilroy, CA 95020 and is open year-round from 8am to sunset. There are no parking or entrance fees.

Activities

Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park offers a unique view into the Native American culture of Santa Clara County before and after arrival of the Spanish. A peaceful walk along the interpretive trail reveals a series of bilingual interpretive signs about the Adams school, village life and structures, petroglyphs (rock art), colonization on the indigenous culture, and the natural history of Uvas Creek.

An interpretive shelter further highlights village social structure, buildings, language, trade networks, petroglyphs, and use of native plants. On display is a large, authentic petroglyph from thousands of years ago. Guided tours and educational programs are available by reservation for schools and community groups. For information about tours, programs, and educator resources, go to parkhere.org and follow the “education” and “education programs” links.

The site includes a paved parking lot, chemical toilets, potable water, and a limited number of shaded picnic tables. No barbecue facilities or reserved areas are available.

Cultural History

The Uvas Creek/Little Arthur Creek area had been the site of Indian villages for thousands of years prior to first contact with people of European origin. Archaeological evidence indicates that the indigenous people inhabited this site for over 3,000 years. Radiocarbon dating of site materials placed habitation dates between 1,700 and 2,700 b.p. (before present).

According to records of the Smithsonian Institute based on notes from Ascension Solarsano, one of the last native speakers of the Mutsun language, the village at this site was called Chitactac, which in English translates loosely to the big dance place. Located above the marshy South Santa Clara Valley and nestled in a little valley sheltered from the north winds, the earliest inhabitants likely found this an ideal place to live. Food resources were available and abundant from the nearby foothills, creeks, grasslands, and marshes. The site contains many petroglyphs and bedrock mortars. A petroglyph is marking picked, abraded, grooved, or incised into a rock surface. Two types of petroglyphs are found here: cupules (cup-like depressions) and cup-and-arching (concentric circles with center depression). Their meaning and age are unknown, however similar motifs found globally have been associated with rain-making, fertility enhancement, puberty rites, or spiritual rituals. A mortar is a stone bowl used for processing nuts, seeds, meat, and fish with a pestle (cylindrical rock hand tool used to mash or pound).

European contact with the village of Chitactac and neighboring people began in 1769 when an expedition funded by the King of Spain and led by Gaspar de Portola reached California’s central coast shore. As part of this colonization, Indians were harshly recruited to provide labor for the missions. Records show that people from Chitactac were taken to Missions Santa Cruz and San Juan Bautista, approximately equidistant to the site of the village.

John Hicks Adams, a retired military captain, settled on the property in 1853. He donated the property to create the Adams School District in 1859. Adams was elected to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors in 1860, and from 1863-1876 he served as Sheriff. At least two schools were built on the property, the last of which burned down in 1956. The school was not replaced, and in 1963 the site was deeded to Santa Clara County and later became a county park.

Interpretive Shelter Exhibit Topics

- A Region of Great Diversity
  - Regional tribal populations and languages between San Francisco and Monterey
  - Traditional Culture Through Generations
  - Petroglyph Types and Efforts to Study and Preserve Them
  - What Makes a Village?
  - Village structures and tribal use
  - Village Social Structure
  - Roles of various members of a tribal community
  - A Plant for Every Purpose
  - Native plants and traditional uses
  - Petroglyphs
  - An authentic petroglyph recovered from this site

Activities at the Adams School Site

- An exhibit shelter and interpretive trail signs feature bilingual (Spanish/English) information and images about tribal culture and the Adams schoolhouse, which was located on this property from the 1850s until 1956.
- An interpretive shelter further highlights village social structure, buildings, language, trade networks, petroglyphs, and use of native plants.
- The site contains many petroglyphs and bedrock mortars. A petroglyph is an ancient rock art marking picked, abraded, grooved, or incised into a rock surface.
- Two types of petroglyphs are found here: cupules (cup-like depressions) and cup-and-arching (concentric circles with center depression). Their meaning and age are unknown, however similar motifs found globally have been associated with rain-making, fertility enhancement, puberty rites, or spiritual rituals.
- A mortar is a stone bowl used for processing nuts, seeds, meat, and fish with a pestle (cylindrical rock hand tool used to mash or pound).
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Accessibility

In compliance with the requirements of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the County of Santa Clara, Parks and Recreation Department will not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities in its programs, activities, or services. ADA Compliant facilities or reserved areas are available. If you need assistance with an ADA request, please contact our ADA Coordinator at ADACoordinator@prk.sccgov.org.

Carbon Dating of Site Materials

- Radiocarbon dating of site materials placed habitation dates between 1,700 and 2,700 b.p. (before present).
- The site was deeded to Santa Clara County and later became a county park.

Funds at Work...

Thank You!

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