

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** September 25, 2019 (revised on April 7, 2022)

**To:** Ryan Bensley

**FROM:** Ivan Strudwick

**SUBJECT:** Cultural Resource Survey of the 5.1-acre Oak Grove Residential Project, Community of Coto de Caza, Unincorporated Orange County, California

This memo is intended to verify information from a previous memo (dated March 10, 2016) and to provide a field check with updated information concerning archaeological resources and buildings in the project area, situated at 23432 Vista del Verde in the community of Coto de Caza, California. All work was performed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

### PROJECT LOCATION AND INFORMATION

#### Project Location

The project is a 5.1-acre area located in the Oak Grove portion of Coto de Caza, a gated community located in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains in the southeastern area of unincorporated Orange County (County), California. Regionally, the project area is located near the head of Cañada Gobernadora just southeast of Plano Trabuco along the east side of Vista del Verde and west of Via Pajaro, less than 0.2 mile east of Coto de Caza Drive at a point 1 mile east-southeast of where Antonio Parkway crosses State Route 241 (Foothill Transportation Corridor/Toll Road). The project is situated on the south side of the Coto Equestrian Preserve and is depicted on the United States Geological Survey (USGS) *Cañada Gobernadora, California* 7.5-minute topographical quadrangle map in Township 6 South, Range 7 West, within the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 26 (USGS 1988) (Attachment A: Figure 1). Elevation within the project area ranges from approximately 820-860 feet (ft).

#### Background Information

*Coto Equestrian Preserve* – The Coto Equestrian Preserve has a storied history, including hosting the 1984 Olympic Games modern equestrian pentathlon event where United States competitors won silver and bronze medals.

*Merryhill School* – Merryhill School was a private pre-Kindergarten through Kindergarten elementary school that could enroll 200 students. The school building, located at 23432 Vista del Verde in Coto de Caza, was constructed in 1980, shut down in 2013 because of enrollment issues, and was partially destroyed by fire in 2015. It occupied the southern portion of the current project area along the east side of Vista del Verde portion of the project area. Buildings, play area, and parking lot are

within an area measuring approximately 700 x 400 ft with greatest length fronting Vista del Verde. The existing buildings remain abandoned and boarded up.

*Record Search* - On February 22, 2016, a record search for the project was conducted at the South Central Coastal Information Center (SCCIC) of the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS), located at California State University, Fullerton. The record search included the project area and a 0.25-mile buffer area around the project. It was completed to provide a review of known cultural resource survey and excavation reports, as well as an examination of the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources, California Historical Landmarks, California Points of Historical Interest as identified in the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) Directory. Because the record search is less than 5 years old it is still valid for purposes of the current assessment. The record search information was described in a memo by LSA archaeologist Phil Fulton dated March 10, 2016 (Fulton 2016).

The record search showed that cultural resource surveys and studies had been completed for nearly the entire Coto Equestrian Preserve and current project area. The record search identified no previously recorded cultural resources within the current project area. The OHP listed no properties within or near the project area. Only one previously recorded site was recorded near the project area. The recorded site, prehistoric artifact scatter P-30-562<sup>1</sup>, contained 8 ground and flaked stone tools on a knoll northeast of the Coto Equestrian Preserve, and was over 0.25-mile from the current project area.<sup>2</sup>

Background information shows that in 1970 Coto de Caza was a privately owned 5,000 acre recreation park. At that time, no buildings existed in the current project area. Aerial photographs available online (NETROnline 2019) show that in 1967, the area was completely natural with no development, but that by 1980, the Merryhill School building and equestrian-related structures such as a long pole-barn and stables had been built in the project area. Other structures, including additional stables and the covered bullpen, had been built just north of the project area by 1980. Many of these structures were removed after 2016. For this reason, none of the buildings within the 5.1-acre project area are older than 42 years. Although the Via Pajaro road existed in 1980, Vista del Verde had not yet been constructed, suggesting that the area was just becoming developed.

*Previous Cultural Resource Survey* – The March 10, 2016 memo (Fulton 2016) describing the record search also describes a pedestrian cultural resource survey of the 5.1-acre project areas at 23432 Vista del Verde. The survey, conducted in early March of 2016, did not result in finding any prehistoric or historic cultural resources in the project area (Fulton 2016). The record search and survey from the March 10, 2016 memo (Fulton 2016) remain valid due to their recent age.

## CURRENT SURVEY

On September 12, 2019 the project area was surveyed for cultural resources. The survey was conducted by walking transects spaced by 7-10 meters (m) in open areas and by intensive surveying

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<sup>1</sup> This site was identified as 30-000562 in the memorandum dated March 10, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> This site was misidentified as being within 0.25 mile of the project area in the memorandum dated March 10, 2016.

of confined areas. The project area exhibited excellent ground visibility except in areas where trees, principally eucalyptus, sycamore, and oak left scattered leaves on the ground. In leaf-covered areas ground visibility ranged from 0-70 percent. Open areas contained in excess of 90 percent ground visibility. Sediment was silt loam with little rock or gravel. Discarded and fragmented wood, concrete, and bits of metal and plastic indicate that the area once contained a built-environment.

No cultural resources were observed in the project area. The only buildings that exist within the project area are the Merryhill School buildings near Vista del Verde, and a maintenance building within the project area just east of the school buildings. None of the buildings are older than 39 years and for this reason were not evaluated under CEQA for historical significance or eligibility for listing in the California Register.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A memo dated March 10, 2016 (Fulton 2016), describes the results of a cultural resource record search and survey for the current 5.1-acre project area at 23432 Vista del Verde, Coto de Caza. The record search did not identify any previously recorded prehistoric or historic resources in the project area and the survey also failed to identify any sites. The record search and survey from the March 10, 2016 memo (Fulton 2016) remain valid due to their recent age.

On September 12, 2019, a cultural resource survey was conducted for the same 5.1-acre project area as described in the March 10, 2016 memo. No cultural resources were identified during the current survey. The current survey found that the only buildings in the project area were those associated with the Merryhill School (23432 Vista del Verde, Coto de Caza), as well as a single maintenance building just east of the school that is within the project area but appears associated with the Coto Equestrian Preserve. The Merryhill School buildings were constructed in 1980 and the maintenance building was also constructed about the same time. As such, the buildings are all about 42 years old. For this reason, the buildings are not historic resources for purposes of CEQA and are not eligible for listing in the California Register.

Because no prehistoric or historic resources exist within the project area, no additional cultural resource work is recommended for the current project area.

## REFERENCES

Fulton, Phil

2016 Memo dated March 10, 2016: Cultural Resources Memorandum of Findings for the Oak Grove Residential Project, Community of Coto de Caza, Unincorporated Orange County, California. LSA Associates, Inc. On file, LSA, 20 Executive Park, Suite 200, Irvine, California 92614.

National Environmental Title Research, LLC (NETROnline).

2019 Available at: <https://www.NETROnline.com/viewer> (accessed September 10, 2019).

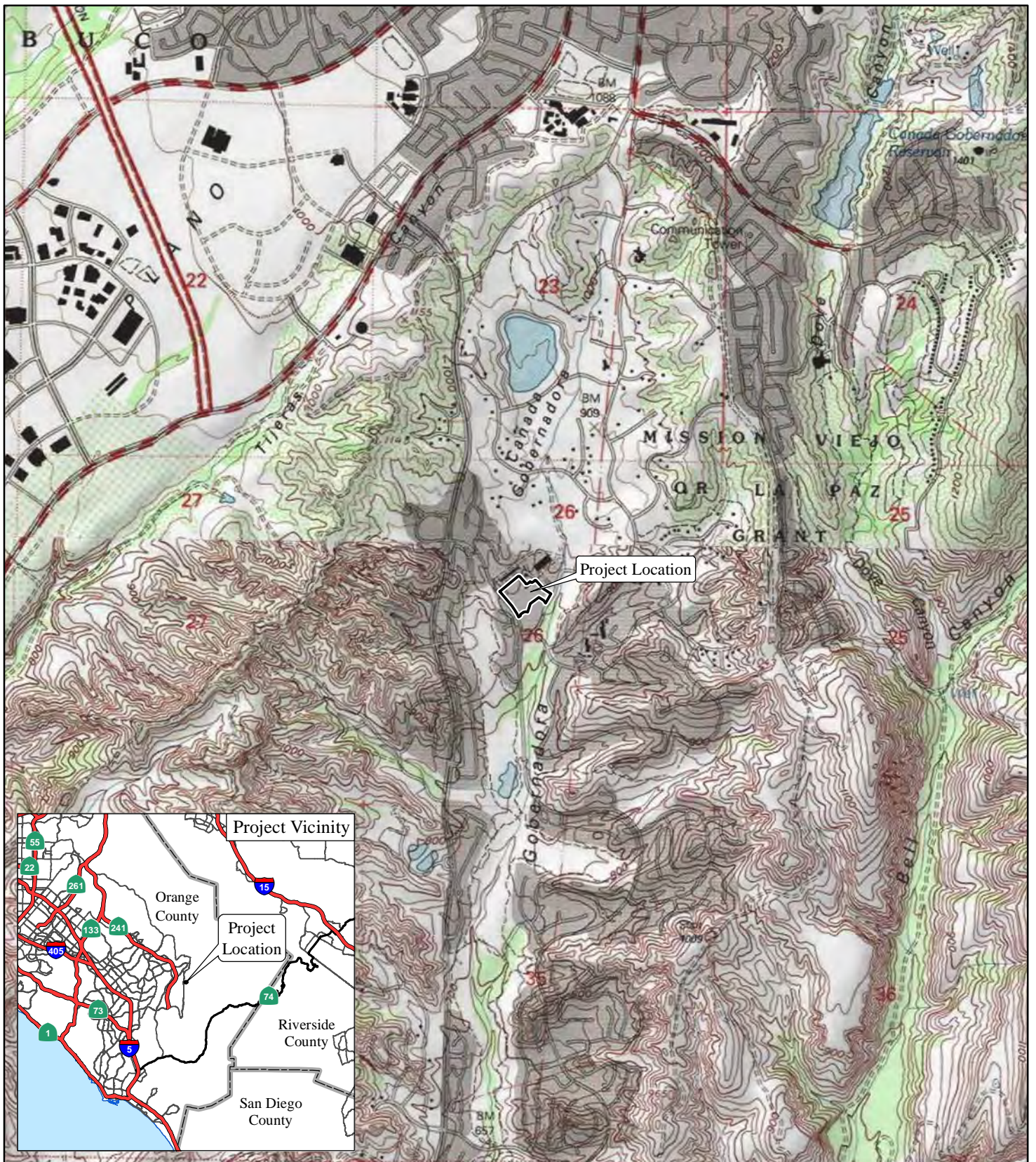
United States Geological Survey (USGS)

1988 *Cañada Gobernadora, California 7.5'* quadrangle map. United States Geological Survey, Denver, Colorado 80225.

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**ATTACHMENT A**  
**FIGURE 1 – PROJECT LOCATION**





LSA

LEGEND

 Project Location

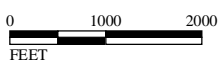


FIGURE 1

*Oak Grove Residential  
Project Location and Vicinity Map*