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## Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks

### Firefighters Find Prehistoric Pottery During Prescribed Burn

In June 2006, National Park Service firefighters discovered a prehistoric pot while working on the Horse Trail Prescribed Fire in the Cedar Grove area of Kings Canyon National Park. Based on information from well-dated archeological sites in the Owens Valley of eastern California, the pot is estimated to be 150 to 500 years old.



*Owens Valley Brownware estimated at 150 to 500 years old.*

“Finding a nearly complete pot is rare in my experience,” says Park Archeologist Tom Burge. “The engine crew should be applauded because their actions probably saved the pot from further damage.”

The firefighters, members of Engine 51 from the Grant Grove area, were assigned to patrol “hotspots” within the perimeter of the prescribed burn. When they noticed the pot on the ground, they immediately secured the area and notified park archeologists who retrieved it the following day. The Native American pot, referred to as “Owens Valley Brownware,” is undecorated, unpainted, and light brown in color. With a flat bottom, it stands about 7 inches tall and has a mouth 9 inches wide.

Before initiating prescribed burns, the National Park Service takes actions to protect significant cultural sites that could be harmed by flames, especially sites that have wooden, glass, or ceramic artifacts. It is standard procedure for archeologists to survey the burn area and identify sites where fire crews then cut protective “firelines.” While several prehistoric and historic sites were identified in the survey before the Horse Trail Prescribed Fire, the pot was hidden from view under an old oak tree. “On occasion, fires will uncover previously unknown cultural sites,” says Burge.

“Our understanding is that the Western Mono Indians who lived in the upper Kings River area brought Owens Valley Brownware pottery when they migrated from the eastside of the Sierra Nevada,” says Burge. “They not only traded pots with the Yokuts people who they met on the west side of the mountains, but the Western Mono peoples also shared their knowledge of how to make pottery.”

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