



Zanja Madre

An access road next to the Gold Line approach to Chinatown station, to provide access and storage for trains in the railyard to the east, was being constructed. An important early water conveyance system from the Los Angeles River to the plaza of the fledgling City of Los Angeles was revealed. We were the on-call cultural resources firm and responded to the unanticipated discovery. The regulatory environment was CEQA and local. This work was performed partially as a subcontractor to Ultra Systems Environmental and partially through a direct sole source contract to Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Services Provided: Evaluation Plan, Archaeological Monitoring, Research, Historic Feature Analysis, Historic Trashpit Recovery, Historic Artifact Analysis, Selection of Conservator, Presentations, Coordination Meetings, Mitigation Recommendations and Interpretive Report.

Challenges: (1) Rapid response to an unanticipated discovery, (2) Providing rapidly researched accurate information to allay political and public concerns, and (3) Working with stakeholders for long-term preservation.

Solutions: (1) We responded within two hours to a phone call from Metro to evaluate the find. While field evaluation took place and a monitoring program was implemented, other personnel conducted research.

(2) Within weeks, we provided a public presentation for interested parties on the history and archaeology of the Zanja Madre followed by a guided tour of the project area. The original Zanja Madre (Mother Ditch) was the first water ditch from Los Angeles River to the pueblo of Los Angeles and was excavated within a month of the town's founding. Research revealed that the brick conduit uncovered by this project was installed in the early American period to direct the Zanja Madre into the town's first grist mill (Capitol Mills – still standing) to power the mill stones after which it continued on its original path to the plaza.

(3) We participated in all stakeholder's meetings and provided recommendations for preservation of the zanja segment including evaluation by professional conservators. Slight project redesign was implemented to protect the feature from impacts of road construction. Metro placed a retaining wall behind the Zanja to prevent landslides from the slope above from burying it in the future. The final result is about 75' of the Zanja preserved for all future citizens of Los Angeles.



Day Two: Segment of Zanja uncovered by MTA laborers under supervision of Cogstone archaeologist. The zanja is constructed of a double course of brick with mortar and is about 3.5' in diameter.