



At a recent project in the eastern Sierras we had to leave our site while a herd of 300 head of cattle moved through the area. The line of cows extended for several miles and could be seen from miles away as they kicked up clouds of dust. It's hard not to love what you do when you get to explore and enjoy sites like this while working.

Please keep in mind that thousands of California residents have been evacuated from their homes. More have been without power (for some that means without water) and are all dealing with the terrible smoke. There are several fires burning. Currently the largest is the Kincade fire in Sonoma; it has consumed 77,800 acres and is only 68% contained. Being without power for several days and having to drive to get internet and phone has been a good reminder for me about being prepared for the worst case scenario.

Does your family have an emergency plan? Everyone should have an evacuation plan including a "go bag" and an identified person out of your area that your family will all contact if you lose communications and have to evacuate in a hurry. I can't encourage people enough to be prepared for a disaster, whatever it is.

Stay Safe

~Adela~



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## Funerary Customs

"Show me your cemeteries, and I will tell you what kind of people you have."

Benjamin Franklin

(1706 - 1790)

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### Decommissioned Cemetery Goes To The Dogs

In the middle of downtown Ventura there is a 7-acre city park. Opened in 1862 under the name St. Mary's Cemetery, it was owned and operated by the Catholic church for years. The city of Ventura assumed control of the land in the early 1940s. When city officials determined the cemetery to be full, it was home to a long list of people noteworthy to the city and beyond.

Many of the city's early leaders including William Dewey Hobson, the "father of Ventura County," are buried there. So is Brig. Gen. William Vandever, who commanded troops in the Civil War and was a two-term congressman.

As time passed the cemetery became overgrown with weeds and fell into disrepair. Decisions were made by the city and in 1963 they began removing headstones and crypts, storing them in a city-owned canyon near town. Relatives were notified by letter that they could claim the markers of their family members. Unclaimed markers stayed in Hall Canyon. With approximately 500 markers remaining, the city hauled them to Olivas Park Golf Course and turning them into rubble, they were used for a levee.

The more recent city officials stand by the decision to turn the cemetery into a city park, now called Cemetery Memorial Park, saying it was done legally, even if the legalities were murky at the time. Their view is that it wouldn't be practical or probably even possible to try to return the park to cemetery status. The park is busy daily with folks strolling and dog owners exercising their pets in what is advertised as an off-leash dog park.

I discovered this park while visiting Ventura on business and looking for historic cemeteries in the area to work my human remains detection dogs who specialize in historic burials. Very curious about a park with burials, but no markers or headstones, I visited the spot and sure enough, I had found a challenging training opportunity for my HHRD work. I spent the afternoon working through the 7 acres, using my two dogs separately which gave me corroboration of alerts indicating odor emitting from a burial(s). It was great to see the dogs work through all the "extra" smells and scents that working in a "dog park" entail, which they did without a problem, and be so focused on their work that the dogs playing nearby and balls flying through the air were not a distraction.

This was indeed a unique working situation. The cemetery that was, but now isn't, but really still is the resting place of so many souls.

Karen Atkinson

K9 Handler – Institute for Canine Forensics





The closest head stone is orientated east-west, is the other head stone purposely oriented north - south or has it been replaced incorrectly?

## East West Orientation of Grave Markers

Burials in traditional Western cemeteries are usually placed on an East-West

line. Many cultures and religions orient burials this way. Efficient use of space explains alignment with one another, but why East-West? The tradition may have begun with pagans, who prayed and buried the dead facing the rising sun. This seems to have been adopted by Christians who aligned their churches with the congregation facing east with the bible referencing "the dazzling light of the presence of the God" in the East. And with the belief that Jesus' second coming will be from the east, the departed will rise from the grave already facing His direction.

The magnetic compass existed when early settlers and pioneers came to this country around the early 1600's but it was seldom used to determine true east. East - west was most likely determined by the position of the sun at sunrise. As the seasons changed the sun's position changes in the sky. This is most likely the reason why the east - west angle varies from grave to grave and cemetery to cemetery.

When we use the dogs to identify where burials are placed in an unmarked cemetery we start looking for a pattern from the dogs alerts to help determine where the next grave might be. As we know east - west is not always followed and we can't count on graves being lined up in rows either. By knowing what kind of cemetery we are working it can help fill in the picture. Usually small family cemeteries are in groups, potter fields and military burials tend to be more in rows.

~Adela~



## **Mt. Hope Cemetery, Pescadero CA**

Pescadero is a small historic town on the California coast and is the home to Mt. Hope Cemetery. It has burials dating from the early 1900's and is still in use today. The original cemetery records were lost in a fire in 1946. And as you can imagine, some of the markers have been lost to vandals or degraded over time. With unmarked graves, where do you put locals who would like to be buried in the cemetery with their relatives or allow others to purchase new plots? To that end, the Mt. Hope Cemetery Committee is attempting to identify areas without (marked or unmarked) burials. That's where we came in...

Back in April 2018 we worked with the Mt. Hope Cemetery Committee to help locate unmarked graves in their historic cemetery. Once the dogs indicated an area, the coordinates were recorded, and later a marker added so the grave would not be disturbed. Since we do not know who is buried in many of the places the dogs identified, the markers just read, "UNKNOWN."

We love partnering with local historical cemeteries, we help them identify unmarked burials and we get a very valuable training location. At a recent training we met with Tim Gregs, head of the Cemetery Committee, to see the new markers they have added. As we worked the dogs in the cemetery they once again were drawn to the same locations and alerted.

~Adela~

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We are happy to talk with you about your project and  
how our dogs might help locate human remains or burials.

Call, email, or check out our website.

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