

County of Nevada  
State of California

Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission  
Application for Registration of Historical Landmark

Name of proposed landmark - Arrastra

Location - in the vicinity of Meadow Lake

Name of applicant - Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission

Address - C/O Clerk of the Board, 950 Maidu Ave, PO Box 599002  
Nevada City CA 95959-7902

Home or work phone, cell phone - [REDACTED]

Name and address of owner upon whose property proposed landmark is located, if owner is not applicant: U. S. Forest Service, Tahoe National Forest, Yuba River Ranger District, 631 Coyote Street, Nevada City, CA 95959

I consent to this application with the understanding that no plaque or marker will be placed on site.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Tom Parrack, District Ranger  
Yuba River Ranger District  
Tahoe National Forest  
Owner

3-11-24

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Brief history and description of proposed landmark**

(attach additional sheets as necessary)

The arrastra (from the Spanish arrastar-to drag) is a device for crushing ore, a practical device used in California gold mines before the advent of stamp mills and then as a cheaper and often more practical alternative. This arrastra is located a few miles south of Meadow Lake. It is believed to have been in operation during the latter part of the 19th century.

Many 49ers had no knowledge about or experience in mining for gold. That lack was supplied initially in part by miners from Mexico and Chile, which had gold and silver mines. Hence the reliance on gold mining technology such as the Mexican arrastra and the Chile mill.

Nonetheless, contemporary newspapers largely ignored the Mexican and Chilean miners, unless they were involved in a fight or suspected of thievery, and they are largely omitted from the principal contemporary histories of Nevada County. Many of them left Nevada County because they experienced discrimination and violence and because of the Foreign Miners Tax.

## **Historically significant aspects or properties of proposed landmark**

The remains of this arrastra are believed to be the only example of original Mexican or Chilean mining technology still remaining in Nevada County and it remains on the site where it was originally used. Many modifications of the early Mexican arrastras and Chile mills were made over several years to increase their efficiency, but the basic principle remained and is even being used today in small gold mining operations.

There are presently no historical landmarks which reflect the presence of Hispanic miners in Nevada County. Although there will be no plaque marking the site, if the Board of Supervisors designates it as a county landmark, there will be a reference to it in the Landmark Commission's guide to the County's historical landmarks, *Exploring Nevada County*. There will also be a reference to it on the County's interactive map of landmark sites, though no precise location will be given. All this will heighten public awareness of the positive role that these miners played in Nevada County history. It will help correct the general omission of Hispanic miners from the county's history.

We are mindful of the problems posed by vandalism and the electronic edition of our guide contains this protection message:

"As you visit our landmarks, remember they are part of our history and should not be tampered with. Many are on federal or state land and subject to rules such as a ban on metal detectors and a prohibition on removing anything you find from the site. If you discover any vandalism, please notify the publisher."

### **How will the landmark be protected and maintained?**

There will be no plaque or marker. The arrastra is and has been under the protection of the Tahoe National Forest.

**Bibliography.** Cite or attach available books, records, articles or other materials pertaining to the proposed landmark.

Books and articles:

Bean, Edwin F. (1867) History and Directory of Nevada County, pp. 118, 203, 204, 220, 358, 404 (listing arrastras then in use in mines in Nevada County)

Van Bueren, Thad M., The "Poor Man's Mill": A Rich Vernacular History, Journal of the Society for Industrial Archaeology, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2004), pp. 5–23 ("The large Mexican and Chilean mining contingent can probably be credited with the greatest initial success at quartz mining. Faced with discrimination and restrictive laws such as the Foreign Miner's Tax of 1850, many Hispanic miners turned to hard rock mining, a pastime familiar in the places from which they originated. They made extensive use of arrastras, a technology of long standing tradition in their culture.")

Young, Otis E., The Spanish Tradition in Gold and Silver Mining, Journal of the Southwest, Vol.7, No. 4 (Winter, 1965) p. 312. (The transmission of Hispanic mining and milling techniques "to the American mineral frontier occurred chiefly in California. The large number of Mexicans and Chileans noted in the "diggings" by every Gold Rush diarist, together with the fact that the early placer methods were principally Spanish, was certain evidence of the direct connection between the Old World and the New.")

Kelly, Roger E. and Kelly, Marsha C. S., Arrastras: Unique Historic Milling Sites, Historical Archaeology, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1983), pp. 85-95.

<https://westernmininghistory.com/1568/the-arrastra-illustrated-in-these-historical-photos/>

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/gila/recarea/?recid=82318>

<https://www.goldrushnuggets.com/arrastras1.html>

<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=144184>

From Hutchings and Rosenfield (1858), The Miner's Own Book, quoted on <http://www.piute.org/History/arrastra.htm>

"One of the first used, as well as one of the most useful and most important, is the Mexican Rastra, which is commonly spelled Arastra. Though rude in its construction and simple in its working, it is one of the most effectual methods of saving the gold which has yet been discovered. The Mexican method of constructing these is to lay a circular track of stone tolerably level, with a low wall around the outside of the track; and in the center a post made of a tree cut off at the required height, and generally just above a crotch or arm; another small tree is then cut in the shape required, for making a horizontal shaft; to this is attached one or more large stones; and these being drawn around by donkey or mule-power, grind the quartz to powder. Of course, as gold is the heaviest it naturally seeks the lowest places, and as quicksilver is always put in with the quartz the gold becomes amalgamated with it."

From <https://www.911metallurgist.com/blog/arrastra>

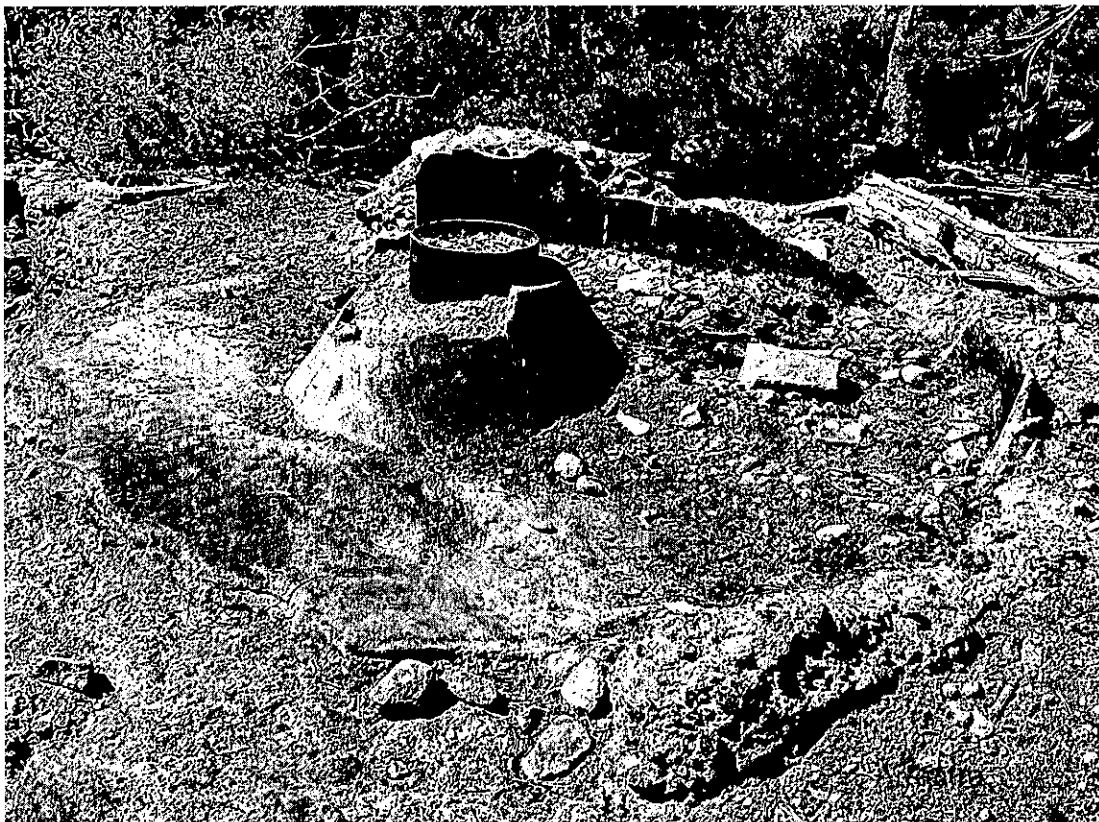
"There were about 100 **arrastras** at work in California in 1889, each treating from 1 to 3 tons of ore per day. They are used where only small quantities of high-grade ore are available for treatment."

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilean\\_mill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilean_mill)

**Historical or civil records:** (e.g., ownership, assessments etc.)

The arrastra is owned by the U. S. Forest Service and located within the Tahoe National Forest.

**Other:** (e.g. photographs, prints or drawings. Please list and attach



**ARRASTRA TO BE LANDMARKED**

separately).

*Bernard Zimmerman*

11 March 2024

Applicant's signature

Date

Bernard Zimmerman, Chair

Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission

This completed form and all related documents shall be sent to the:

Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission

Attention: Chair

C/O Clerk of the Board

950 Maidu Ave

PO Box 599002

Nevada City CA 95959-7902

Attachments and related documents may be submitted in electronic format to [info@nevadacountylandmarks.com](mailto:info@nevadacountylandmarks.com).

An application must be considered solely on its historic or architectural merits and not for commercial gain, political benefits, or other non-historical reasons.

An individual Commissioner can advise and counsel an applicant, but all applications must be considered by the full Commission, meeting in regular session.