

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Old Mission Dam

AND/OR COMMON

Old Mission Dam

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER North Side of Mission Street on Gorge Road

CITY, TOWN San Diego

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
40th

VICINITY OF

STATE California

CODE  
06

COUNTY  
San Diego

CODE  
073

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER. dam

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Department of Parks and Recreation for the City of San Diego

STREET & NUMBER 202 C Street

CITY, TOWN San Diego

VICINITY OF

STATE

California

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC San Diego County Registry of Deeds

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN San Diego

STATE

California

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The dam was originally 220 feet long, 12 feet high and 13 feet thick, and constructed of native cobblestones placed in cement. The purpose of the dam was to control the flow of water down the bed of the San Diego River, which was dry during the summer season. The dam formed a lake, and a gate in the dam permitted the water to escape during the dry period. Because a considerable amount of water was lost in river sands, between the dam and the mission, a flume or aqueduct of tile two feet wide and one foot deep, resting on a bed of cobblestones and cement, was constructed to convey water from the dam to the Mission, some five miles distant.

By 1867 the dam and aqueduct were ruins. In 1874, or shortly thereafter, the dam was repaired and put back into use. A considerable portion of the dam stands and still backs up water in the valley. Nearly all traces of the aqueduct have vanished. In 1970 about twenty feet of the original tile flume was discovered in a clean-up operation below the dam, but it was too small and too distant to be easily related to the dam for purposes of interpretation.

In comparing the San Diego Mission irrigation system with similar sites in California, it should be noted that the Santa Barbara Mission system, built in 1806-1807, comprised of a dam, two stone reservoirs, a filter system, aqueducts, and fountain, has survived to a remarkable degree. The original remains of the Santa Barbara irrigation system are most impressive and other portions have been restored.

Unfortunately, all the ruins of the aqueduct of the Old mission Dam have been destroyed by vandals.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

C 1803

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Mission Dam, with its aqueduct and flume extending about five miles to the Mission of San Diego de Alcalá, was perhaps the first major irrigation-engineering project on the Pacific Coast of the United States. Water was impounded by the dam, near the head of Mission Gorge on the San Diego River, and released as needed for the fields around the mission and for milling and domestic use, thereby providing and assured supply throughout the year.

## HISTORY

The San Diego de Alcalá Mission, founded by Father Junipero Serra July 16, 1769 on Presidio Hill, was the first of the 21 California Missions. To remove the Indian neophytes from the corrupting influence of the soldiers and also to obtain a location affording more water for agricultural purposes, Serra moved Mission San Diego to its present location, on Friar Road, 6 miles northeast of San Diego, in 1774. On November 4, 1775 the 136 converts and other Indians rose in rebellion, destroyed the mission buildings and killed a friar and guards. New structures were erected 1776-1780, and by 1800 San Diego Mission, with 1,523 Indian neophytes, had become the most populous as well as one of the wealthiest of the 18 existing California missions. Damaged by an earthquake in 1803, the mission was again rebuilt, enlarged, and assumed its final form in 1813.

Research has not shown exactly when Old Mission Dam was commenced, but it was not likely before 1800, and was probably started in 1803, following the drought years of 1800-1802. The large irrigation system, however, had certainly assumed its final form by 1817.

Floods in 1821 and, presumably, other years did much damage to the dam, but the dam remains are still impressive and still impound a small amount of water.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bancroft, Hubert H., History of California, Vol. II, San Francisco, 1886.  
 Engelhardt, Fr Zephyrin, San Diego Mission, San Francisco; 1920;  
 Mills, James, Historical Landmarks of San Diego County, San Diego Historical Society, 1960;  
 Pourade, Richard, Time of the Bells, San Diego, 1961;  
 San Diego Public Library California Room, "Old Mission Dam, A Chronology and Annotated Bibliography, "October 4, 1962. This paper relies heavily upon F.E. Green,

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately .25

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 1	4 9 6 1 0 4 0	3 6 3 3 3 5 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Dam is located in an area which has been found to possess value as an Indian archeological site and which will be included in a large joint City-County Park of several thousands acres. However, the boundary has been drawn to include only the Mission Dam which is an isolated historical feature since none of the irrigation system remains, Beginning at the huge boulder that displays the NHL plaque which is located on the southern bank of the San Diego River, proceed north across the river approximately 235' to the northern bank of the San Diego River, thence west approximately

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Boundary prepared by Patricia Heintzelman, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project, original form prepared by Charles Snell, 1964

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street

TELEPHONE

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATES:

NATIONAL

STATE

Landmark D.C.  
 Designated MAY 21, 1963  
 Boundary Certified  
 [Signature]  
 date  
 June 1, 1978

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

[Signature]

DATE

9/20/83

ATTEST

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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CONTINUATION SHEET Old Mission Dam ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

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"San Diego, Old Mission Dam and Irrigation System," typescript, San Diego, 1933.

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42' to a point, thence south Approximately 235' to a point, thence east approximately 42' to the point of origin.