

FOX 26

High tech radar being used to uncover Fort Visalia

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Early settlers from Iowa built a fort in Visalia when Millard Fillmore was President.

That's how Visalia got its start. Now a project is underway to determine the exact location of Fort Visalia before housing is built on the property.

Visalia's roots go back to 1852. Settlers built a fort in town for protection. Now they're using high-tech radar to see if this property is where the fort once stood.



High tech radar being used to uncover Fort Visalia.

The old lumberyard north of Downtown Visalia is getting a major x-ray by ground-penetrating radar. Jimmy Daniels is a senior archaeologist for ASM affiliates.

"We've got one big linear anomaly right here in the center."

Daniels plans to roll over every square inch of the property looking for remains of Fort Visalia.

"There's a possibility we could see some of those post holes from the structure. If the structure was ever burned it will pick up that signal because it will change the properties of the soil matrix."

The settlers from Iowa built the fort for fear they might be attacked by a Native American tribe. Terry Ommen is a local historian.

"We don't know how long the fort eventually stayed. We know they decided they didn't need the protection of the walls of the fort so they eventually started leaving the fort and I'm certain they abandoned it basically."

169 years later the search takes them to a small city block at Garden and Oak streets. Betsy McGovern-Garcia is director of real estate development for Self Help Enterprises.

"A lot of history and research has gone into exploring the local and they pinpoint it to this general block. And so now it's just a matter of finding the exact location of this 60 foot by 60-foot structure."

Soon the site will be leveled and an 80 unit affordable housing project will begin. If high-tech radar leads historians to the precise site of Fort Visalia there will be some kind of landmark to call attention to Visalia's early beginnings.

Construction on the housing project will begin in February. It's expected to be finished in 12-16 months.