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Metro Environmental Specialist Carl Ripaldi examines an exposed section of the Zanja Madre located just north of the Chinatown station. *Photo by Luis Inzunza*



### Workers at Metro Site Uncover Historic LA Waterway

- Zanja Madre served city from 1781 to 1904
- Metro will document and preserve the site

(March 31, 2005) Construction workers preparing the site for an expansion of the Metro Gold Line rail yard, last Friday, partially uncovered a 100-foot section of the Zanja Madre, an historic conduit that once served as the main water supply for Los Angeles.

Work was immediately halted at the site at the foot of a 60-foot slope, located on the west side of the rail tracks just north of the Chinatown station. This section of the Zanja Madre – the Mother Ditch – has probably been buried for at least 100 years below what is now North Broadway.

According to Metro Environmental Specialist Carl Ripaldi, the exposed section has been cordoned off to preserve the brick- and concrete-lined channel.

Metro's archeological consultants, Cogstone Resources of Santa Ana, made a preliminary evaluation of the find and will conduct a more extensive investigation and documentation of the 4-foot wide water line before it is covered over and preserved behind a retaining wall.

### Hazards prevent public access

Although the Zanja Madre segment is located just west of The

Cornfield, currently being developed as a temporary art project and eventually as a park, Ripaldi says it will not be open to the public due to hazards posed by the adjacent Metro Gold Line tracks and the lack of parking or access points.

The first segments of the Zanja Madre were built in 1781 to provide domestic and irrigation water from the Los Angeles River to the early settlers. A total of nine smaller ditches, zanjás, led off the main waterway.

The zanja system, which served the older parts of the city until 1904, was so important that a zanjero – water master – was hired to oversee the system.

Visitors to the Avila Adobe on Olvera Street can see an exhibit on the history of water in Los Angeles that includes an in-ground piece of the Zanja Madre. Museum hours are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Admission is free.

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