

Indigenous cultural heritage resources of the Tecate-Nejí-Rumorosa region

*Michael Wilken-Robertson
Instituto de Culturas Nativas de Baja California*

Introduction

This study examines the indigenous cultural heritage resources of the area from Tecate south to Juntas de Nejí and east to the Vallecitos/La Rumorosa area in Baja California, Mexico. The study includes a general description of the prehistoric and historic indigenous cultures of the defined area based on the identification of relevant bibliographic data, the determination of archaeological sites registered by Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), the documentation of current indigenous perspectives and proposals based on interviews with indigenous community cultural authorities; the geo-referencing of salient cultural features and general recommendations for sustainable development of cultural heritage resources.

Archaeology: record of indigenous presence in the prehistoric period

For at least 10,000 to 12,000 years, native people have inhabited the study area, hunting and gathering the many resources that abound in the region and adapting to the changes in their environment over time. The earliest inhabitants were probably PaleoIndian peoples who arrived toward the end of the Pleistocene, hunting the now-extinct megafauna that roamed the area during the moister period at the end of the last ice age. These nomadic groups of big game hunters left only scant evidence of their presence, including stone tool assemblages and trails; however PaleoIndian sites are particularly important since they represent the earliest documented evidence of humans in the region. Several of these sites have been documented in the area north of the study area, and there is every reason to assume that they will be found south of the border as more archaeological reconnaissance and excavation work is carried out.

As the climate became more arid and the Pleistocene mammals retreated to the north or became extinct, native people adapted to the changes in their environment through greater use of plant materials. This is reflected in the types of stone tools found in sites of the Archaic period from around 8,000 to 1,300 years before present, particularly grinding stones which show that milling of plant materials was increasingly important in native people's adaptive strategies. This way of life persisted for thousands of years, leaving evidence in the form of spear, dart and atlatl points, leaf-shaped knives and milling stones (Gallegos et al. 1998).

Beginning around 1,300 years ago, changes in technology as manifested in archaeological evidence suggest that either demographic changes or the diffusion of new cultural complexes impacted native peoples of the wider region. Small projectile points and ceramics found at sites of the Late Prehistoric period suggest that the bow and arrow and pottery had been introduced from the eastern deserts. More intensive exploitation of the area's many resources, including oak and piñon groves, probably led to increases in population. During this period, the

pattern of material culture began to resemble that of the Native American populations -- most likely the ancestors of the Kumiai -- who were present upon the arrival of European cultures in the area.

Kumiai (the conventional spelling in the U.S. is Kumeyaay) people belong to the larger Yuman family of cultures and languages, which includes other groups of California, Baja California and Arizona (Hinton and Watahomigie 1984). Kumiai/Kumeyaay territory originally extended from near what is now Santo Tomás, Baja California up to Escondido in California and eastward over the mountains toward the Colorado River. The study area is in the heartland of the southern part of this territory, where Kumiai people often refer to themselves as Tipai, meaning Indians or the people. Both the archaeological and the ethnographic records describe Kumiai as highly mobile hunters and gatherers, exploiting a wide variety of resources in annual cycles of movement from the coast in the winter to the mountains in the summer. The study area contains two of the most important resources in this seasonal round: oak and pinyon groves. Although detailed excavations have not been carried out, many archaeological sites have been identified in relation to these vital resources, and some have been officially registered (Serrano 2002).

Many of these consist of bedrock milling stone sites in association with springs and seasonal campsites. In general, wherever important plant resources (particularly oaks) are found in association with sources of water and specific geologic formations such as granitic outcroppings, there is a high possibility of finding archaeological sites. This important link between cultural and natural resources suggests an important goal for future studies: land-use patterning analysis, which with the help of geographic information systems can help predict where sites may be located and consequently which areas should be given priority for conservation. According to Gallegos et al. (1996),

the goal of land-use patterning analysis is to: 1) identify patterns of past human use and occupation; 2) determine zones of greater or lesser activity by past human populations; 3) identify the environmental variables that form the most accurate prediction of cultural resource sites; and 4) discover the range of cultural resources variability within the [study area].

For the Kumiai and neighboring groups such as the Paipai, the pinyon groves of the Sierra Juárez were an important shared resource which not only provided an important component of their diet but also represented a time of great social and ceremonial importance. Like many foraging groups, Kumiai band organization allowed for a highly adaptive flexibility in group size, so that when resources were relatively scarce, groups could break into smaller units and spread out across the landscape. However, at times of abundance such as the pine nut harvest, many bands might gather in an area such as the sierra pinyon groves for times of feasting, ritual and seeking of mates. Historic documents (Rojo 1972) describe such gatherings when many groups met in the pine nut groves during late summer and carried out the *gran lloro* or *wakeruk*, a festival commemorating the dead. Even today, some Kumiai and Paipai still head up to the pinyon groves of the sierra for the pine nut harvest in late summer (Wilken 1981). Not surprisingly, many rock art sites in the study area are associated with the pinyon habitat or other areas where there are concentrations of natural resources (Serrano 2002).

For pre-contact Kumiai people, the study area probably represents an important axis between four directions. To the north, closely related bands or *shimuls* with whom they shared a common language linked them with the rest of native California. To the east, related desert peoples such as the Cocopah were important trade partners who often joined the Kumiai for the pine nut harvest gatherings, and who linked them to vibrant agricultural cultures of the Colorado

River region and the greater southwest. To the south were other Kumiai, Paipai, Koatl, Kiliwa and other peninsular groups with whom they also had frequent contact, including intermarriage. To the west, the watershed flowed into the Pacific Ocean with its abundant marine resources and milder winter temperatures. Unfortunately the ancient interrelations between peoples of these areas would change drastically with the arrival of European cultures to the area (Wilken 1993).

Recommendations for sustainable management of archaeological resources

All archaeological sites in Mexico are under the care of INAH, a Mexican federal agency. Any work carried out that could impact Mexico's cultural patrimony must have the permission and in some cases the supervision of the Instituto. This is more thoroughly explained in the document "Cultural Resources as a Tool for Conservation and Management" (Leyva et al. 2002). Today the study area, like the rest of Baja California, faces exponential population growth, mega-development schemes from tourism and industry as well as political, economic and social pressures to extract immediate value from any available resources, all of which inevitably impact the region's unique and vulnerable cultural and natural heritage. An unfortunate example of these pressures and their disastrous effects on cultural resources in the study area is vividly described by Serrano Gonzalez (2001).

A number of cultural resource sites have been officially registered by INAH (Serrano 2002). Many other sites exist in the region; however, until they are registered, it is difficult to officially protect them. Unfortunately the lack of resources and personnel to identify and register more sites in the area, the difficulties in enforcing cultural patrimony laws, the lack of a private cultural resource management sector and the economic pressure to develop unsustainably make it difficult to provide adequate protection for many sites (Serrano 2001). Fortunately, one example of successful site conservation already exists in the area: Vallecitos. This area is maintained by INAH and provides appropriate protection, guided tours, trails, restrooms and other basic infrastructure. Another interesting model is that of the Great Mural art region of the Sierra de San Francisco, Baja California Sur, where tours to the rock art have had many direct benefits for the mountain communities who have themselves become stewards of the land and its cultural resources.

Archaeological sites exist within a natural context and add an intrinsic value to a habitat or ecosystem since they are nonrenewable resources that provide a record of thousands of years of human history and interaction with the environment. Their presence should be one factor in identifying priorities for land conservation. However, these resources can also provide an added value to an environment when incorporated in strategies designed to involve local communities in conservation and sustainable development. Two important strategies are appropriate site management and ecotourism.

Long-term management of archaeological sites in an area, from exposed rock art and milling stone sites to middens and other unexposed sites requiring excavation, requires a long-term commitment to preservation, conservation, education and close coordination with INAH. When unexposed sites such as middens do not face immediate threats, they are often best preserved by simply protecting them undisturbed for future generations. This is especially important since the excavation of a site actually involves the destruction of the site itself, thus a basic archaeological principal is to leave sites undisturbed when possible so that future archaeologists with advanced technological possibilities will be able to provide much more information. However, when excavation is appropriate or necessary, this can provide long-term

benefits for local community members who through education, training and employment in archaeological activities can become promoters and stewards of site conservation. Currently the perceived value of artifacts for many rural communities is the hope of selling them for a few dollars to the unethical collectors who unfortunately create a market for these materials. However, as local people realize the much greater cultural, historic and economic benefits that can be derived from the proper excavation and management of these resources, they will no longer be tempted to sell off their cultural heritage.

In order for this to work, land conservation strategies for community involvement should seek to create partnerships with local communities, INAH, academic institutions and foundations or government programs that can provide financing for systematic surveys and long-term archaeological site management projects within conservation areas. This is especially useful in indigenous communities, where tribal members may retain traditional knowledge that can provide valuable perspectives for understanding culture history. In broader terms, research and monitoring projects of both natural and cultural resource that employ knowledgeable local community members will benefit from the experience of local experts while also providing visible benefits to the community in exchange.

The results of archaeological excavation should provide invaluable materials for interpretive centers that can serve as centerpieces for ecotourism projects in rural communities. A visitor center/museum with information on the natural and cultural resources of an area is a first vital step in attracting and educating ecotourists on a regular basis. Archaeotourism -- the participation of visitors in the excavation of a site -- is a strategy that has worked in some areas but would require the permission and supervision of INAH.

Rock art and milling stone sites that do not require excavation are prime attractions for ecotours; however, an appropriate level of protection and management is crucial once these sites are opened up to the public. Fortunately the above-mentioned models, including the required use of local guides, have already proven successful and can be replicated. Well-designed ecotours can promote natural resource and cultural heritage conservation while teaching local communities the benefits of stewardship.

Ethnohistory: indigenous presence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Historic evidence of Kumiai people's yearly cycle of travel from the mountains to the ocean and the sudden disruption of this cycle is found in a nineteenth-century document quoting Janitin, a Kumiai from Nejí (an indigenous community that still exists within the study area).

I and two of my relatives went down from the Sierra of Neji to the beach of el Rosarito, to catch clams for eating and to carry to the sierra as we were accustomed to doing every year; we did no harm to anyone on the road, and on the beach we thought of nothing more than catching and drying clams in order to carry them to the village. While we doing this, we saw two men on horseback coming rapidly towards us; my relatives were immediately afraid and they fled with all speed, hiding themselves in a very dense willow grove which then existed in the canyon of the Rancho del Rosarito.

As soon as I found myself alone, I also became afraid of these men and ran into the forest in order to join my companions, but already it was too late, because in a moment they overtook me and lassoed and dragged me for a long distance, wounding me much with the branches over which they dragged me,

pulling me lassoed as I was with their horses running; after this they roped me with my arms behind and carried me off to the mission of San Miguel, making me travel almost at a run in order to keep up with their horses, and when I stopped a little to catch my wind, they whipped me with the lariats that they carried, making me understand by signs that I should hurry; after much traveling in this manner, they diminished the pace and lashed me in order that I would always travel at the pace of the horses [Rojo 1972].

Clearly the Kumiai people who inhabited the study area were deeply impacted by the founding of the nearby Franciscan mission of San Diego Alcalá (1769) and the Dominican missions of San Miguel (1787) and Guadalupe (1834). Although the missions were established outside of the immediate study area, native people were soon drawn into their sphere of influence. Jatiñil, a chief of the Neji tribe, described to Clemente Rojo his changing relationship with the mission:

My name is Jatiñil, and I have been the chief of this tribe since the year in which Lieutenant Ruiz left here for the South (1822); my father was chief before me, and before my father, my grandfather; so that the command of our tribe was always in the hands of my family, and that's why the tribe bears my own name. I came to help Father Felix raise Mission Guadalupe from its foundations to the end, and I also helped him to sow every year and to harvest his crops; and the father used to give us what he wanted to--corn, barley, and wheat, from that which we ourselves had sowed and harvested but, not content with this, he tried several times to have us baptized in order to shut us up in the mission and handle us like the rest of the Indians. This made me very angry and for that reason I went to look for him in Guadalupe with the intention of killing him. After that, I returned to this settlement [Nejí] and I haven't gone anywhere. Look, I can't even see from old age; most of my people died in the war; others got stirred up and went to Upper California at the time of the placer mines and haven't returned; so, you see, I only have a few families left and we all work without stealing from anyone [Rojo 1972].

As the mission holdings were sold off after the end of the mission period, native people of the area were affected even more directly within their territory by the encroachment of ranchers such as Juan Bandini at Rancho Tecate. However, much of the area continued to be fairly remote, providing a refuge for non-Christianized Indians and others who were displaced by demographic pressures from San Diego and other coastal areas. In 1848, the Kumiai/Kumeyaay cultural region and the natural habitats that comprised it were divided into two separate countries as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Nonetheless, limited contact continued between the groups on both sides of the border, and some California Kumeyaay migrated to Kumiai settlements in Baja California as a safe haven from the persecution suffered in the U.S. One example was made famous by anthropologist Florence Shipek (1991) in the autobiography of Delfina Cuero, a Kumeyaay woman from San Diego who at times lived at El Alamo or Ja'a, a remote canyon of Neji.

By the late nineteenth century, most of the Kumiai people within the study area lived on remote ranches and settlements, surviving through a combination of hunting and gathering activities, ranching, horticulture and wage labor, primarily as cowboys. Many eventually left the land to work in Tecate, Tijuana, San Diego or other urban areas, where most lost their

identification with their Kumiai ancestry.

Twentieth-century ethnographic accounts of Kumiai in the study area provide useful information about Kumiai culture and settlements. Peveril Meigs III carried out interviews in 1929 and 1936 which were not published until the 1970s. "Creation Myth and Other Recollections of the Nijí Mishkwish" (Meigs 1971) includes examples of oral tradition, maps of settlements and place-names, and historical information regarding Jatñil. "Field Notes on the Sh'un and Jat'am, Manteca, Baja California" (Meigs 1974) features interviews of Kumiai living in Cañón de Manteca, near present-day Tanamá, and includes rare photographs of a potter with her pots, various Kumiai residents of the area, a bedrock mortar with brush shade, and an acorn granary.

William D. Hohenthal Jr.'s (2001) *Tipai ethnographic notes: a Baja California Indian community at mid-century*, based on fieldwork from 1948, 1949 and 1951, is the most complete ethnographic work related the study area. Hohenthal visited many of the indigenous settlements that would cease to exist or become *mestizados* by the end of the century, including Manteca, Los Coches, Las Calabasas, Jamatay, El Compadre, Jasai and Jacume, as well as those that have survived through the present: Nejí, Peña Blanca, Tanamá, and San José Tecate. Valuable information is provided on a variety of subjects: local and regional history; prehistory and archaeological sites; tribes, clans and territories; Kumiai placenames; native subsistence and lifeways, including specific information on wild plants gathered; material culture, including basketry, pottery, cordage, milling implements, leatherworking and structures. In many cases, Hohenthal provided drawings of the layouts of traditional settlements. Information on social life, traditional games, clothing and adornments, law and government, religious beliefs and ceremonies, oral tradition, healing and ethnohistory reflects both indigenous and Mexican lifeways, and may be useful in helping indigenous communities recreate or reconstruct aspects of their culture, especially for ecotourism/interpretive center projects.

The area's Kumiai communities today

Today only one community, Juntas de Neji, has title to its land, while several other traditional settlements -- Peña Blanca, Tanamá, San Jose Tecate and Aguaje de la Tuna -- struggle to regain or retain their land against the encroachment of *ejidos* and other powerful interests. Many of the members of these communities live only part-time in their communities, residing most of the time in Tecate, Valle de las Palmas, El Testerazo or other neighboring towns, where they find easier access to employment, schools and services.

The Kumiai community of Juntas de Nejí is the northernmost of the indigenous communities of Baja California, located within the municipality of Tecate. Nejí is divided geographically into two separate polygons, both of which lie relatively close to the international border and within the Tijuana River watershed and have a combined total of 11,590 hectares. The clans of Nejí have historically shared close familial and linguistic ties with the Kumeyaay (or Tipai) groups of southern San Diego County, such as Campo and Jamul. Bordering on the western polygon of Nejí is the traditional Kumiai settlement of Peña Blanca, an unofficial neighboring settlement to Nejí that is unrecognized by the Mexican government.

The two communities' mountainous terrain includes wide areas of high chaparral, oak woodlands, granitic outcroppings and in some areas pines, Tecate cypress and other flora indicative of the transition to the higher altitudes of the adjacent sierra. Water sources are scarce, usually consisting of small springs or shallow wells; these are used for both drinking water and

limited gravity-fed irrigation. Erosion is perhaps the most severe environmental problem for Nejí, especially in the eastern polygon, where large-scale grazing by neighboring ranches has caused serious soil and foliage depletion within the watershed.

Water quality and quantity also represent serious challenges, since none of the existing settlements has any kind of water system more sophisticated than hand-dug water collection basins, a few with cemented retaining walls and none with effective lids, seals or other protection. Residents have been advised that they should boil or otherwise treat their water, but usually drink the water untreated “because we're used to it.” The remote El Alamo (Ja'a) canyon of Juntas de Nejí is one of the few areas with a year-round flowing stream, as well as important historic and prehistoric archaeological sites.

All of the settlements in the community are located far from the highway, accessible only by dirt roads in poor condition. However Mexico's Tecate-Ensenada Highway 3 does cross a small part of Neji's land at one point, and access by dirt road is also possible from the town of El Hongo off Highway 2.

Acorns are one of the most important natural resources utilized in the area of Nejí, and residents also depend on other wild foods and medicinal plants as well as occasional hunting as part of a diversified survival strategy. Although a tradition of juncus and willow basketry once existed in the area, there are currently only a few women occasionally producing baskets.

Land tenancy is a serious issue for Nejí with its limited population base and even more so for Peña Blanca, due to the lack of land tenancy documents. Both communities are undergoing invasion by squatters and encroachment by neighboring *ejidos*. One informant from Peña Blanca commented that members of a neighboring *ejido* interested in claiming the land for their own use have tried to destroy archaeological sites and any other cultural resources that might strengthen the Kumiai families' right to their land. One of the most valuable resources for Nejí and Peña Blanca is the natural beauty of their landscapes and their sense of remoteness, even though they are actually surprisingly close to the metropolitan areas of Tijuana and San Diego.

San José Tecate and Aguaje de la Tuna are small traditional Kumiai settlements that have been deeply impacted by the urban sprawl of Tecate. Unfortunately, only a few Kumiai inhabitants still live in these settlements; for all of the above-mentioned communities, census data are unavailable, incomplete or questionable.

Tanamá, another traditional settlement a few miles south of Tecate, is also being swallowed up by urban growth. However, the location of the settlement near the Tecate-Ensenada Highway #3 and its many historic and prehistoric features give it a high level of ecotourism potential. Tanamá could be the first stop on an ecotour including Peña Blanca and Neji (Valdez 2002).

Recommendations for sustainable indigenous community development

The area's Kumiai communities have a wide variety of cultural resources, including milling stone and other prehistoric archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, ranches, trails, graveyards, and other historic sites, as well as large areas of well-preserved land that have excellent potential for conservation and sustainable development, especially ecotourism. Traditional indigenous knowledge, including fluency in the Kumiai language, mythology and the knowledge of the land, its plants and animals, is an extremely rare and valuable resource still held by a small number of community members (Wilken 2001). The conservation of all these cultural resources currently hangs by a thread and will depend in large part on whether

indigenous community members can derive direct benefits from these resources. Nejí and Peña Blanca both possess large tracts of fairly well-preserved habitat which is communally owned by a fairly small number of *comuneros*. Tribal leaders have already expressed an interest in both ecotourism and land conservation.

One strategy would be to work closely with the communities (see Magaña and Ceseña 1998) to develop the area's ecotourism potential in exchange for conservation of significant areas of habitat. While this approach would require a long-term partnership with the communities, it also represents an excellent opportunity for conservation as well as the possibility of helping to reestablish traditional Kumiai culture in the area. Well-designed ecotourism development, with employment for Kumiai cowboys and hiking guides with knowledge of the land; classes in traditional basketry, pottery, language, wild foods and medicines, games and storytelling; and the establishment of interpretive centers with sales of handcrafts, food and herbal medicines could all lead to tribal members returning to their land and re-valuing their culture.

Other sustainable uses of natural resources can include the harvest of wild foods (such as acorns) and wild-crafted native herbs as well as the propagation of native plant materials for sale to the public or for reforestation projects. The reintroduction of Kumiai juncus and willow basketry traditions would allow local Kumiai to sustainably use their basketry plants; the reintroduction of pottery-making would provide a high added value to natural clays.

In order to successfully plan and carry out these projects, it will be crucial to have careful coordination with the indigenous communities and their tribal governments, and to create broad binational partnerships between the indigenous communities, nongovernmental organizations such as the Instituto de Culturas Nativas de Baja California (CUNA), academic institutions such as the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (UABC) and San Diego State University (SDSU), Mexican federal agencies such as the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) and INAH as well as local stakeholders such as the La Puerta Foundation.

Cuchumaa: sacred mountain

One of the most significant cultural heritage resources in the study area is Cuchumaa, also known as Tecate Peak. Cuchumaa has long been considered a sacred mountain for Kumiai/Kumeyaay people (Shipek 1985). The mountain, which is divided by the U.S.-Mexican international border, is the subject of native oral tradition and has numerous archaeological sites that have not yet been registered through INAH. Cuchumaa represents an excellent opportunity to conserve land and preserve an important cultural heritage zone at the same time. In order to achieve this goal, it will be extremely important to include Kumiai and Kumeyaay people in the planning and implementation processes. A first step would be to bring together elders from both sides of the border to discuss their ideas about how the area should be managed. On the Mexican side of the mountain, systematic surveys should be carried out in order to register archaeological sites. Because the mountain itself transcends the international border, it could become a powerful symbol of the binational nature of the Kumeyaay heartland.

Summary of recommendations

- Institutions, organizations and individuals interested in the conservation of the area's cultural resources should develop a relationship with INAH in order to identify common

goals and possibilities for collaboration.

- Support studies to carry out systematic surveys and land-use patterning analysis, which with the help of geographic information systems can help predict where sites may be located and consequently which areas should be given priority for conservation.
- Implement strategies designed to involve local communities in conservation and sustainable development. Two important strategies which can benefit communities are appropriate site management and ecotourism.
- Work closely with the indigenous communities and their tribal governments, seeking mutually beneficial arrangements that will promote the conservation of both land and cultural heritage resources.
- In order to carry out these recommendations, support the creation of broad binational partnerships between indigenous communities, nongovernmental organizations such as CUNA, academic institutions such as UABC and SDSU, Mexican federal agencies such as the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) and INAH and local stakeholders such as the La Puerta Foundation.

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