

The lost village of Milejo and archaeological research in the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park, San Diego County, California, USA

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Introduction

In 2004, SWCA Environmental Consultants undertook a cultural resources study in support of the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park Habitat Restoration and Trails Enhancement Project for the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (SWCA Environmental Consultants 2004).

This 1,800-acre park is located along a portion of the Tijuana River in the U.S. west of Interstate 5 and east of Border Field State Park (Figure 1). A portion of the park, as well as the delta of the Tijuana River, is presented in Figure 2. The purpose of the cultural resources study was to identify cultural resources located within the park and to assess which portions of the park have been previously surveyed for cultural resources. This research allowed SWCA to make management recommendations for the avoidance and/or mitigation of impacts to cultural resources that could result from habitat restoration and trail improvements.

To develop a baseline of known resources and previous research in the park, SWCA conducted a records search of the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS). The CHRIS repository for San Diego and Imperial counties is associated with San Diego State University and is known as the South Coastal Information Center (SCIC). The SCIC maintains and updates sets of topographic maps depicting the locations of formally recorded archaeological sites, isolated artifacts, and historic built-environment features, as well as the areas covered by cultural resources studies. It also maintains site records for all previously recorded cultural resources and copies of previous reports. SWCA searched the entire park, as well as a 0.25-mi. radius around the park boundary.

In addition to the CHRIS records search, archival research was conducted with great assistance from San Diego County Historian Dr. Lynn Christensen. The archival research and the records search both described a “lost” ethnographic village site known as Milejo (or Melijo, Millejo, Melejo, Milijo, and possibly even Mel-lajo cerca de la Santo Domingo).

Curiously, though previous researchers have suggested that various known archaeological sites could be the ethnographic-period village site, no conclusive evidence of such a village has been identified in the area. This paper provides an overview of Milejo, previous archaeological research in the park vicinity, possible reasons why the village has not been re-located, and potential avenues for future research.

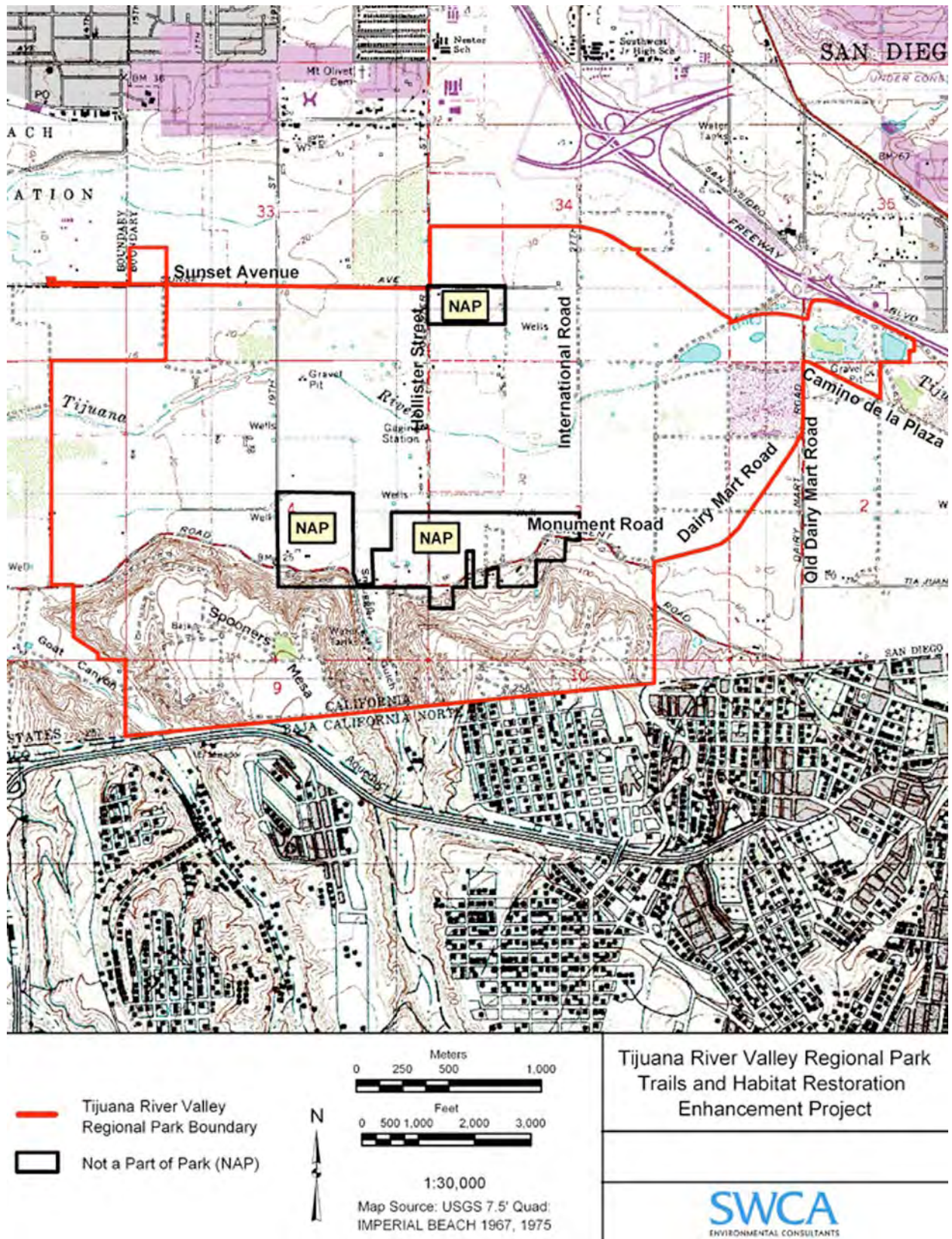


Figure 1. Project location.



Figure 2. View of a portion of the park.

The protohistoric village of Milejo

In 1769, the first written descriptions of the Tijuana River valley were provided by Father Juan Crespí and Father Junípero Serra, who both arrived from the south in separate Spanish overland expeditions. As described in Harry Crosby's 2003 book *Gateway to California*, Father Crespí likely entered the valley near present day Goat Canyon, where he described "a large plain of good land with much green grass. We stopped near the village, where we had good water and pasture for the animals. Although firewood is scarce, the mountains, which are not far off, have it in abundance" (Crespí 1927). Crespí mentioned "a populous village," adjacent to which his expedition spent the night. In *Writings* of Junípero Serra edited by Antoine Tibesar in 1955, Father Serra also described seeing a "thickly populated" village in the valley while heading north to "another hamlet some leagues farther."

Both of these accounts are believed to describe the village known by the name Milejo, which purportedly means "meadow at the orifice of the hose" (Shipek 1976). Kumeyaay from Milejo participated in the 1775 revolt at Mission San Diego de Alcalá (Carrico 1997), and the village was reportedly inhabited until approximately 1850. Florence Shipek was the first modern researcher to record the possible location of Milejo, but her mapping was based on the Spanish accounts rather than on archaeological evidence. Shipek suggested that the archaeological remains of the village may have been buried under silt in the floods of 1895 and 1916.

The actual location of the village remains an enigma. No conclusive evidence of the village site has been identified in over 30 years of professional archaeological research in the valley.

Previous research

Prior to SWCA's study, at least 43 cultural resource studies had been conducted within 0.25 mi. of the park, 32 of which were at least partially within the park boundary.

The CHRIS records search revealed 50 previously recorded cultural resources located within 0.25 mi. of the park. Three additional cultural resources were identified in a report not yet in the CHRIS system but made available by the consultant that performed the work (EDAW, Inc.). In addition, another prehistoric archaeological resource was identified and recorded by County personnel during the fall of 2004 (Table 1).

Of the total 54 previously recorded cultural resources, 29 are located entirely within the park, five have portions within the park, three are immediately adjacent to the park, and 17 are within 0.25 mi. of the park. (It is important to note that our research was conducted in 2004; it is possible that additional studies have been conducted and/or that additional resources have been recorded since then.)

Four of the 54 previously recorded resources are isolated prehistoric artifacts. Of the remaining 50 cultural resources, 41 sites contain prehistoric components, 12 contain historic components and three sites are described as having possible ethnographic period components. Two of the three possibly ethnographic sites are recorded as being the possible location of the ethnographic village of Milejo.

However, of the 41 sites with prehistoric components, only one site record noted the presence of diagnostic artifacts indicative of late prehistoric, protohistoric, or ethnographic activity. Site CA-SDI-11,099, recorded by ASM Affiliates in 1989, featured several ceramic sherds of Tizon Brown Ware, a hallmark of the late prehistoric period. It is also interesting to note that this site yielded several flakes of chert, in addition to the metavolcanic material noted at virtually every other prehistoric site within the park and its vicinity.

The artifacts recorded at a majority of the prehistoric sites appear to be typical of the Archaic period. Assemblages are predominantly comprised of local metavolcanic lithic artifacts and marine shell.

Very few of these sites contained temporally diagnostic artifacts or have been dated using radiometric dating techniques. However, records for two such sites provide three calibrated mean radiocarbon dates: 4380 years before present (YBP), 4960 YBP and 5970 YBP. These dates fall in the middle of the Archaic period. Both of these Archaic-period sites are deeply buried (5-7 m below current ground surface).

In short, none of the previously recorded sites within 0.25 mi. of the park possess convincing evidence of the lost village of Milejo.

Recent SWCA research

Subsequent to archival research, SWCA conducted an archaeological survey of several portions of the park (approximately 240 acres total) that would potentially be affected by habitat restoration and trails work. Historic architectural and paleontological surveys were also undertaken, but these are not described in this paper. The archaeological survey resulted in the identification and recordation of four previously unrecorded archaeological sites, three previously unrecorded isolates, and site record updates for one previously recorded site. Only one of these resources was historic in nature; the other nine were prehistoric.

Although none of the newly recorded or updated resources were tested, several

Table 1. Previously recorded cultural resources within the park or within a 0.25-mi. radius.

Site number	Site description	Recorded or updated by, date
SDI-2611	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	J. Moriarty & G. Carter, 07/23/73
SDI-3627	Historic structures (military) and prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	J. Buysse, D. Pemberton, & M. Waters, 11/17/98; J. Moriarty, 03/24/74
SDI-4933	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter with possible hearths	R. Coleman, 07/31/92; R. Collett & S. Wade, 12/25/90; Hanna 1977
SDI-4934C SDM-W-1244	Sparse prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	R. Collett & S. Wade, 12/25/90; D. Hanna, 01/13/1976
SDI-7456 SDM-W-2418	Sparse prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81; S. Van Wormer, 01/04/80
SDI-8595 SDM-W-2899	Historic trash dump/scatter	J. Buysse, D. Pemberton, & M. Waters, 11/18/98; K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8596 SDM-W-2900	Sparse prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	J. Buysse, D. Pemberton, & M. Waters, 11/18/98; K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8597 SDM-W-2901	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8598 SDM-W-2902	Prehistoric shell and lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8599 SDM-W-2903	Prehistoric shell and lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8600 SDM-W-2904	Sparse prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8601 SDM-W-2905	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8602 SDM-W-2906	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8603 SDM-W-2907	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81
SDI-8604 SDM-W-2908	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter and quarry	K. Polan, 01/12/81; R. Coleman, 06/23/92; J. Buysse, M. Waters, & D. Pemberton, 11/98; A. Pigniolo, 11/14/00
SDI-8605A&B SDM-W-388	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	K. Polan, 01/12/81; R. Coleman, 06/19/92; J. Buysse, M. Waters, & D. Pemberton, 11/98
SDI-8773	Possible ethnographic period site with adobe ruin and possible prehistoric materials	T. Campbell, 1981; J. Buysse, M. Waters, & D. Pemberton, 11/98
SDI-9183 SDM-W-3647	Prehistoric shell and lithic artifact scatter	Henry & Brown, 11/27/81; A. Pigniolo, 04/14/86
SDI-10,486	Prehistoric shell and lithic artifact scatter	A. Pigniolo & L. Christenson, 03/25/86
SDI-10,487 plus Loci A & B	Prehistoric shell scatter with at least one flake	R. Collett & S. Wade, 12-25-90; A. Pigniolo & L. Christenson, 03/25/86
SDI-10,488H	Historic wall and foundation with associated trash deposit	A. Pigniolo, 03/25/86
SDI-10,669 SDM-W-1140	Supposed location of ethnographic village of <i>Milejo</i> , site number also used to identify a series of deeply buried isolated prehistoric artifacts as well as at least one archaic period hearth feature	R. Perry, 01/14/92; R. Collett & S. Wade, 12-25-90; F. Shipek, 11/02/76; R. Coleman & M. Bilsbarrow, 02/25/92, 02/28/92, 03/02/92, 03/04/92, 03/06/92, 04/14/92, 04/22/92, 04/29/92 ; C. Lintz & M. Bilsbarrow, 03/19/92, 03/20/92; R. Collett & M. Bilsbarrow, 02/15/92; G. Brown & M. Bilsbarrow, 03/31/92; E. Goldborer & M. Bilsbarrow, 10/28/92, 11/19/92, 12/03/92; M. Bilsbarrow, 11/02/92; 11/09/92

Site number	Site description	Recorded or updated by, date
SDI-10,967	Possible ethnographic village site of <i>Milejo</i> , however, only small lithic artifact scatter recorded	M. Roeder, 01/22/80
SDI-11,095H	Historic building debris scatter	S. Van Wormer, 04/20/89
SDI-11,096H	Historic house structure with associated outbuildings	S. Van Wormer & R. Coleman, 04/20/89, 06/92, 11/10/94
SDI-11,097	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	J. Cook & C. Serr, 03/23/89
SDI-11,098	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	J. Cook & C. Serr, 03/23/89
SDI-11,099	Late Prehistoric lithic artifact, ceramic, and shell scatter and deposit	J. Cook & C. Serr, 03/23/89
SDI-11,100	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	J. Cook & C. Serr, 03/24/89
SDI-11,101	Sparse prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	J. Cook & C. Serr, 03/24/89
SDI-11,544	Prehistoric lithic artifact and shell scatter	R. Collett & T. Hardin, 11/03/89
SDI-11,545	Prehistoric shell scatter associated with post-historic trash dump with 24 isolated prehistoric lithic artifacts recorded in the vicinity	R. Collett & T. Hardin, 11/03/89; R. Coleman, 06/17/92, 06/09/92, 06/18/92, 06/29/92, 07/29/92, 08/03/92; R. Coleman & M. Bilsbarrow, 06/29/92; E. Goldborer & M. Bilsbarrow, 07/01/92, 07/06/92; K. Adams, 12/13/93
SDI-11,945	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	R. Coleman, 07/13/92, 08/92; F. Ritz & M. Davis, 08/29/90
SDI-11,946	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	F. Ritz & M. Davis, 08/29/90
SDI-11,947H	Historic structure foundation	F. Ritz & M. Davis, 10/12/90; R. Coleman, 6/17/92
SDI-11,948H	Historic stacked cobble terrace walls, cobble-lined walks, and two concrete slabs	F. Ritz & M. Davis, 10/12/90
SDI-12,023H	Historic farm house and associated outbuildings	R. Collett, S. Wade, and S. Van Wormer, 01-30-90
SDI-12,962H	Historic to post-historic trash deposit mixed with shell and artifacts registered as SDI-4934	L. Pierson, 11/23/92
P-37-013485 SDI-13,485	Prehistoric lithic artifact and shell deposit and historic foundation	A. Pigniolo, 11/14/00; R. Coleman & E. Goldborer, 07/30/92
SDI-13,486	Prehistoric lithic artifact deposit identified during geotechnical trenching	R. Coleman, 07/30/92
SDI-13,487	Prehistoric lithic artifact deposit and possible hearth identified during geotechnical trenching	S. Dibble, 12/09/91
SDI-13,488	Prehistoric lithic artifact and shell deposit identified during geotechnical trenching	R. Perry, 12/13/91
SDI-13,527	Sparse prehistoric lithic artifact and shell scatter	R. Coleman, 07/31/92
P-37-01758 SDI-15099 SDM-W-1376	Prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	J. Buysse, D. Pemberton, & M. Waters, 11/18/98
P-37-024059 SDI-16,047	Prehistoric lithic artifact and shell scatter with historic reservoir, foundation, and water tank	A. Pigniolo, 11/14/00, 02/09/01
SDI-16,293	Prehistoric shell midden	A. Pigniolo, 06/21/02
P-37-014987 SDI-I-289	One prehistoric lithic isolate (scraper)	Robbins-Wade, Jacobson, Barrett, & Nelson, 07/16/90
P-37-014988 SDI-I-290	One prehistoric lithic isolate (flake)	Robbins-Wade, Jacobson, Barrett, & Nelson, 07/16/90
P-37-015154 SDI-I-456	One prehistoric lithic core	G. Carter, 02/82; R. Collett & S. Wade, 12/25/90

Site number	Site description	Recorded or updated by, date
P-37-015395 SDI-I-697	One prehistoric lithic isolate (flake)	K. Adams, 12/13/93
TJ-2	Sparse prehistoric lithic artifact scatter	Dr. J. Underwood, C. Gregory, S. Diaz, and M. Carroll, 9/17/02
TJ-3H	Historic pump house	Dr. J. Underwood, C. Gregory, S. Diaz, and M. Carroll, 9/17/02
TJ-4H	Historic house	Dr. J. Underwood, C. Gregory, S. Diaz, and M. Carroll, 9/17/02
New Trees Site	Deposit with shell and lithic artifact scatter	Dr. Lynne Christenson, W. C. Kierulff, 8/05/04

observations regarding the nature of the resources were made. At least two of the newly recorded archaeological sites contain subsurface deposits. One site had been recently disked, and artifacts were present within the disturbed topsoil. At another site, inspection of a stream channel bank revealed in situ debitage, ground stone, and marine shell at depths of approximately 0.75 m below the current ground surface (Figure 3).

At each of the prehistoric resources recorded during SWCA's fieldwork, only marine shell scatters and lithic artifacts made of local material were identified. No late prehistoric or protohistoric period artifacts (i.e., ceramics, arrow-style projectile points, mortar and pestle technology, exotic material types, or European materials fashioned into traditional Native artifacts) were observed. Although no temporally diagnostic artifacts were noted and no radiometric dating was conducted, the site assemblages observed resemble those typical of Archaic-period sites in San Diego County.

Patterns

The majority of known archaeological sites within and adjacent to the park appear to be Archaic. However, it is important to note that the absence of ceramics, arrow-style projectile points, mortar and pestle technology, exotic material types, and European materials fashioned into traditional Native artifacts does not automatically exclude these resources from a late prehistoric or ethnographic affiliation. As Cook (1989) noted, quarrying activities, for instance, leave behind archaeological evidence that appears much the same for any time period.

Future work may potentially reveal such a component at one or more of these sites; however, no evidence of late prehistoric or ethnographic period occupation was identified. Possible reasons why no conclusive evidence of Milejo found to date include incorrect mapping of the site, modern disturbance, and natural processes such as river hydrology. Each of these possibilities is briefly explored below.

It is possible that previous researchers have mapped Milejo's location incorrectly. Shipek's location assumed that the Crespi expedition entered the valley through the arroyo now known as Smugglers Gulch. Subsequent researchers followed Shipek's lead and suggested that archaeological resources in the same vicinity may be evidence of Milejo. However, Crosby's more recent interpretation that the Spanish entered the valley via Goat Canyon suggests that the village noted by Crespi and Serra was located farther to the west, closer to Goat Canyon. The landscape of this vicinity certainly fits Shipek's purported definition of the name Milejo: "meadow at the orifice of the hose." Perhaps the village of Milejo was located on the north side of the valley, or even farther to the west, thus placing it outside the area studied for this project.

The natural landscape of the valley has been altered over the years by human activity. During the Mexican period, Rancho Melijo and Rancho Tijuana likely used the valley for



Figure 3. Buried cultural deposit.

rangeland. Although cattle can damage archaeological sites, ranching did not disturb the valley as much as the agriculture of the American period starting in the mid-1800s. Large sections of the floodplain were cleared and brought under the plow, as the valley gained widespread acclaim for its fertile soil and mild climate. Although plowing and farming results in more ground disturbance and are thus more destructive to archaeological sites than ranching, agriculture alone does not typically obliterate or erase all traces of an archaeological site. Rather, it roils and mixes the soils within the upper reaches of the land, also known as the “plow zone,” and any cultural materials within this matrix. This has the effect of disturbing and confusing the chronological sequence of cultural strata but does not usually obscure the cultural materials completely.

As previous researchers have suggested, it is most likely that natural forces, rather than cultural ones, have been the primary agents in destroying or obscuring the archaeological traces of Milejo (e.g., Shipek 1976). Specifically, the Tijuana River itself has been blamed for washing away and/or burying the remnants of the village during one or more historic flood event. We know that at least two major floods have occurred since Crespí and Serra first noted a Kumeyaay village in the valley.

Potential research avenues

How can we find Milejo? Does the exact location of the village matter? Perhaps not, but

the lack of conclusive archaeological evidence for its existence poses a tantalizing research problem that could be addressed through several different disciplines of science and history briefly introduced below.

Archival research

Several researchers have conducted extensive archival studies of historic documents in an effort to illuminate and more fully understand life for the Kumeyaay and Mexican residents of the San Diego area in the protohistoric, mission, and Mexican periods. Richard Carrico, for example, has written extensively on early Native American and European/European-American relations (e.g., Carrico 1987, 1997). Recently, Antonio Padilla Corona published an article on the Rancho Tía Juana (Tijuana) Grant in the *Journal of San Diego History* (Padilla 2004). Padilla referenced several historic documents and maps in his discussion of the origin, extent and fate of this historic rancho on the international border. He also mentioned Rancho Melijo, located to the west of Rancho Tijuana, as a reference in an effort to discern the early boundaries of the Rancho Tijuana land grant. It is likely that some information regarding the location of the village of Milejo could be uncovered through archival research by a student or historian with the time and motivation to undertake such a project.

Hydrology

Archaeologists and ethnographers alike have posited that the Kumeyaay village of Milejo has either been swept away or buried by silts during floods of the Tijuana River. It is common knowledge that the power of rushing floodwaters can sweep away even concrete buildings and then deposit tons of sediment washed from above as the water velocity slows. However, it seems that the science of hydrology could provide a great deal of information on the actual evidence of scouring and deposition that has been left behind by the flood events in the river's history. Would a flood event the magnitude of the 1895 or 1916 floods have simply washed away all evidence of the village, or would it have buried it under silt? Would it have been one process or the other, or is it possible that both processes acted on the remnants of Milejo? It is likely that this would depend on a variety of factors, including the location of the village relative to the river channel, the elevation of the village site, the power of the flood, the flood's duration, and possibly other factors. It is our opinion that future excavations conducted in the Tijuana River valley for archaeological studies, pipeline trenching, geotechnical borings, etc. should be inspected and interpreted by a hydrologist or geomorphologist in an effort to better understand the signature left by each major flood event. Such data could then be applied to the search for Milejo.

Archaeology

What can archaeology contribute to the search for Milejo? It can certainly confuse matters, for instance, when very deeply buried deposits radiocarbon-dated to the Archaic period are circled on an official map and named "Milejo." More importantly, archaeological research, most of it conducted under the auspices of cultural resources management in association with public and private projects in the valley, has provided valuable information in the search for Milejo. Archaeologists describe and interpret the evidence that we find, but we also make note of

that which we do not find.

Milejo falls within in the latter category. As previously discussed, as of 2004, the SCIC has only one definitive late prehistoric site recorded within 0.25 mi. of the park. This site could comprise the remnants of Milejo, but this site was interpreted as a temporary camp, and with a total of three sherds of pottery, it hardly conjures up the image of the “populous” or “thickly populated village” described by Crespí and Serra in 1769. A wider study of previously recorded information for the entire valley, conducted at the SCIC, may provide additional clues. Additional archaeological research, in the forms of pedestrian survey, subsurface testing, data recovery, and construction monitoring will continue to build the body of our collective knowledge. Any evidence of late prehistoric or protohistoric activity in the valley should be considered with Milejo in mind. Should a site appearing to meet the criteria for Milejo be found, such a find should be published and not merely written up in a “gray literature” technical report to be shelved at the SCIC.

Conclusion

It is uncertain if physical evidence of this protohistoric village remains. Nonetheless, such evidence should continue to be pursued when conducting archeological studies in the Tijuana River valley. Studies on taphonomic processes in the valley could help explain how a known village site could disappear completely in such short time. Additionally, it is likely that additional archival studies can reveal more about this documented village site, even if it no longer exists. The purpose of this paper has not been to present an answer to the question, “What happened to Milejo?” but rather, to explore some of the possibilities and pose questions in the hope that other researchers will attempt to shed light on the fate of this enigmatic village.

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