

Hearing the silences: mapping the Kumeyaay world in San Diego

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For people intimate with their physical surroundings, the landscape is a place with many attributes beyond simple physical description. With roots that extend back thousands of years in San Diego County and Baja California, it is no wonder that the Kumeyaay, also known as the Iipay/Tipay, have hundreds of words that not only describe a given landform but also show a close connection with nature and tell timeless stories associated with the land, with mythical events and with spirits.

Almost 100 years ago, Charles Saunders in his *Under the sky in California* penned what could be used as a perfect introduction to the current study of Kumeyaay place names. He wrote:

This whole region has the touch of the Indian everywhere upon it.... Every prominent object in the landscape around us, every hill and rincón and cañon, every oakwood and spring and arroyo, almost every tree that differs markedly from another, has its Indian name descriptive of its physical character or commemorating some event of Indian history that has happened there.

Although Saunders was speaking of California in general, his words ring true for the Kumeyaay of San Diego County. The following narrative provides a glimpse at several of the place names that have emerged from the study and reflect only a small sample of the more than 350 names currently documented. It should be stressed that while many places of the total word list have been obscure or virtually unspoken over time, many are still in the lexicon of native speakers, and a large number, although often Hispanicized or Anglicized, are retained on maps and as common place names.

Identification of the study group

The groups previously known as the Northern and Southern Diegueño have been known in the past decade or so more commonly by their traditional names (Kumeyaay, Iipai, Tipai). While there is no universal agreement on nomenclature amongst the various bands and tribes, for this study the native groups north of the San Diego River basin are identified as Iipai; those to the south as Tipai; and those in the generalized area of La Posta as Kumeyaay. Beginning in the 1970s, the term Kumeyaay was, perhaps incorrectly, used to encompass all of the people previously known as Diegueño. While some people and groups still self-identify themselves as Kumeyaay, the terms Iipai and Tipai may have more utility, certainly for this study.

The issue of what to call the late prehistoric and early historic people of southern and central San Diego County has loomed large for many decades. Malcolm Rogers, while acknowledging the term Diegueño, a historical and anthropological term in vogue in the 1900-1940s, seemed to prefer the term Yuman. Rogers was clear to assure the reader that use of the term Yuman was not meant to imply linguistic parallels deep into prehistoric time, but only roots in the Yuman territory of the eastern deserts. The writings of Rogers make it clear that he saw the

prehistoric roots of the people of eastern and southern San Diego County in the western deserts of the Salton Sink and the Imperial Desert.

The term Diegueño, as adopted by anthropologists and historians, was originally derived from Spanish usage beginning in the 1770s, although Brown asserts that the correct spelling is Dieguinos, a spelling that American ethnologists corrupted into Diegueños. The term was applied to those Indians under the jurisdiction of Mission San Diego and also connoted a generalized tribe differentiated from the Takic-speaking people to the north (Luiseños) and the Cocopah and Paipai to the south.

Similar glosses for Diegueño or Dieguino were used in the American period, including “Diegeenos” in 1849 by A. Whipple, Diegeno in 1850 by Bartlett, and Diegueños by Benjamin Hayes in 1870, and also by the anthropologist J. P. Harrington within several segments of his field notes, when he reported that the central Yuman group included “Diegueño (Kamyá),” with the term Kamyá referring to the eastern Diegueños.

In the 1970s, some groups of what were previously called southern Diegueños adopted the term Kumeyaay for themselves. This group, based in the Campo and La Posta area of eastern San Diego County, was aided by the noted anthropologist Florence Shippek in extending the term Kumeyaay well beyond the immediate area of the eastern mountain valleys. By the 1980s and well into the late 1990s, for many historians and anthropologists, Kumeyaay erroneously came to encompass both southern and northern Diegueños.

Langdon noted in 1975 that based on Gifford’s studies and on her research in the late 1960s and into the 1970, the term *tipai* was used to denote “people” in southern San Diego County and northern Baja California. By contrast, she provides the word *ipai* for the people of northern San Diego County. In part following Langdon, there has been a break from the ill-founded practice of generalizing Kumeyaay to all Yuman-speaking people and cultures with *Ipai* becoming more common for northern Diegueño and *Tipai* for the southern Diegueños. Kumeyaay, however, is still in wide use in the Campo region where it may, indeed have validity.

Spier, based on his 1920 fieldwork, may have been the first to apply the term *Tipai* to the Southern Diegueño and suggested that the Northern Diegueño were *Kumiai* (Kumeyaay). That there are significant linguistic variations between the northern and southern people is well documented in the literature and acknowledged by contemporary speakers. For example, an important bird dance recorded by Constance DuBois was called *ee-sha* at Manzanita (southern) and *ah-sha* at Mesa Grande (northern). In her introduction to the seminal book on *Ipai* language, Margaret Langdon noted that there are many variations of the ‘*ipai* language (her orthography) and in *Let’s talk ‘Iipay: an introduction to the Mesa Grande language*, Langdon stressed that the spellings and pronunciations were specific to Ted Couro and Mesa Grande people. Kroeber (1925:710) wrote that the speakers of the southern dialect in American California included Manzanita, Campo, La Posta, Guyapipe [Cuiapaipe], and La Laguna.

The neighbors of the *Ipai* to the north are the Luiseño and Cahuilla (Takic-speaking peoples); to the south of the *Ipai* are the Paipai (a related Yuman-speaking people); and to the southeast, the Cocopah (also a related Yuman-speaking group). Further to the east of both the *Ipai* and *Tipai* with an area of concentration along the Colorado River are the Quechan.

The following categories of Kumeyaay place names offer some insights into the people and the land for Alta California, and the same can certainly be said for northern Baja California and the land of the *Kumiai*. While no means exhaustive, this narrative is meant to accompany a large-scale map of the Kumeyaay landscape and the tabulation of place names that contains more than 350 examples.

Water on the land

Place names for water can be descriptive, denoting the type of water, the way in which the water flows, or some other important attribute. Examples include ‘Aha-kwesoyaay or ‘Ahakuesaaay (creek witched) at Witch Creek; Ah-hawa-pin (water's house) in the Cuyamacas; Ahakwasah (stinking water), a village north of Jacumba; Enyahaa (my water); Ahamuull (sweet water), name for the village of Jamul and for the Sweetwater River; Ahakeruwiyp (water in lines), a village east of Mountain Spring; Ahakwinch (resounding water), a village southeast of Mountain Spring; Ahaakupin (water warm) at Warner's Hot Springs; and Ahakum (bubbling water), a village at Jacumba Hot Springs.

Places where things live

Animals, spirits, and natural forces such as the wind all have homes in the Kumeyaay cosmos. Examples include Hellyaay nyewa (cottontail's house) at Los Conejos near Capitan Grande; Iquai (the nest), a cave on the west side of North Peak in the Cuyamacas where wild animals hid from bad weather or hunters; Chaup nywaa (the spirit Chaup's house) at a place near Black Canyon and Mesa Grande; Ahmataweer (strong wind land), a village at Mountain Spring; ‘Awirsumkwaw (place of the wild goose), a locale in San Pasqual Valley near the battlefield monument; and MetapitLpit (tall or strong man), a deep gorge below Green Valley Falls in the Cuyamacas and home to a cruel and powerful spirit.

Plants on the land

Many of the Kumeyaay place names are for specific plants that grow at a locale; often these plants are important for medicine or construction. Examples include Amta hapawu or ‘ehtaa shepwaawp (cane), a village in the desert at Carrizo; EeLshahar (grows only here), referring to a rare cypress tree growing on the north side of Guatay Mountain; ‘Esnyaawkiitunn (old oak falls -- not alive but standing), a village at Manzanita, the place name Sacaton is derived from this word; Hamacha (bitter gourd grows here), a village at the place now called Jamacha; Matamo (a tall plant that grows there by the river), a large village near Singing Hills in El Cajon; Chemilly nyewaa (ant's house), a place at Mesa Grande; Uu'tail (a type of weed or plant), village on the Otay River; Hilshkie (pine tree), Corte Madera Mountain; Sekwan (peone or yellow flower), village site now glossed as Sycuan; and Hatunpay (type of yellow flower) at Santa Ysabel.

Rocks, mystical and otherwise

San Diego County, and particularly the portion east of Highway 15, is comprised of a batholithic formation composed of granodiorite that offers the Kumeyaay myriad possibilities for shapes and objects. Some important places include Ahkwerup (disease cave), a massive white rock on the west side of South Peak in the Cuyamacas, believed to have curative powers; Ahmukachkach (rock with head and neck looking west), a formation in San Pasqual Valley; Amwiahpipah (slanting rock), on South Peak in the Cuyamacas; ‘Ewiilaayaayp (rock leaning on rock) at Cuyapaibe, a corruption of the original name; ‘Ewily hellyaa (moonrock), name for Mount Woodson, the prominent peak near Ramona; and Wikwinyul (striped rock), a village north of Jacumba, this may refer to the quartz veins that often run as a seam through some granite boulders.

One of the most important rock formations for the Ipai of northern San Diego County is the site known as Awi kuesaay, spirit rock. This rock outcropping is situated near Lake Hodges on the San Dieguito River and is colloquially known as “ringing rock”. It once played a major role in calling the east wind to help the Ipai vanquish a band of Quechan invaders, and its sharp ringing tones served as a signal call to distant tribesmen. This sentinel of the past has recently been relocated and is protected.

Spiritual and magical places

The Kumeyaay cultural landscape is replete with places where spirits live or have worked their magic. Prominent examples include Awihalya (where Toyaipa stomped), on the east side of Mount Woodson near Ramona; Ematkuseyaay (witch or shaman's land), a name for Mission Valley, perhaps referring to a powerful Kumeyaay or to the Franciscan priests who once lived there; Ahakuseyaay (water witched), a place between Volcan Mountain and San Felipe; and Matkuseyaay (witched land), a name for Table Mountain.

Conclusion and summary

These examples of the more than 350 place names documented thus far for the Kumeyaay of San Diego County are more than locational notations. The words evoke the past; they serve as a cultural basis for the worlds in which the Kumeyaay lived and still live. Certainly the Kumiai, Kiliwa, and Paipai of Baja California had, and have, an equally rich vocabulary of the land. Perhaps their story will also be documented and told in the near future.