

**THE MULEGE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH PROGRAM:  
APPLIED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURISM ON THE BAJA CALIFORNIA PENINSULA**

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**ABSTRACT**

A multi-component education outreach program sponsored by the San Diego Natural History Museum is underway in Baja California Sur. The Mulege Education and Research Program encompasses community based education outreach, museum collections management, and research. Activities to be initiated this year include museum artifact catalogue and conservation projects at the Mulege Regional Museum, a bilingual student docent program, and natural and cultural history education outreach projects. The program is funded by two seven day educational tours per year highlighting spectacular rock art sites and unique biotic communities in and around Mulege.

"Experience the unique natural beauty and cultural history of Baja California's Mulegé, and Bahía de la Concepción. Join archaeologist Eric Ritter and wildlife biologist Scott Tremor on this 7-day adventure which will transport you to some of Baja California's most unique coastal and inland areas. Explore Mulegé's desert chaparral, riverine oasis, mangrove saltwater lagoons, turquoise waters, and white sand beaches. Discover the rich cultural heritage and ancient lifeways of the region's prehistoric inhabitants, and learn about the plant and animal resources they utilized. Visit a variety of archaeological locales, including some of the region's most spectacular rock art sites. Observe resident mammalian and reptilian fauna in Mulegé's diverse biotic communities. Enjoy the Bay of Concepción's protected waters, and island beaches and reefs. Nursery waters for the Gulf of California, the Concepción Bay is home to a variety of marine mammals, birds, and exotic fish. Survey the bay by panga boat for pods of dolphins, sea lions, and elusive resident whales. View marine life underwater with a mask and snorkel and seek out the rare fish eating bats. Activities include hiking, swimming, snorkeling, and kayaking. Lodging is provided at the private facilities of Villas de Mulegé located on the water at the mouth of the Bay of Concepción. Round-trip airfare, accommodations, all meals, and snacks are included in the package price of \$1,795."

— SDNHM Spring 1998 Education Program Brochure

**THE MULEGÉ EDUCATION AND RESEARCH PROGRAM**

Mulegé, an oasis town on the Sea of Cortez in Baja California Sur, is unique in its rich cultural history and abundant natural resources. Paleoindian camps, archaic period settlements, and numerous prehistoric sites dating from as early as 10,000 years ago to the late 18th century attest to the ongoing human interest in the fresh water and plentiful wildlife residing in the area. Colonization, missionary, and mining activities followed in historic times, as Spanish conquistadors, pearl divers, explorers, Jesuit missionaries, and other Europeans eager to enjoy Mulegé's bounty settled in the region.

The Mulegé Education and Research Program responds to the heritage of this community with a museum-based multicomponent cultural and natural history effort involving museum exhibit development and artifact conservation, ethnohistoric documentation and research, education outreach, and support for multidisciplinary natural history research in the Sierra Guadalupe mountain range. Sponsored by the San Diego Natural History Museum, the program works in partnership with The Mulegé Regional Museum, and with Mulegé's Colegio de Estudiantes Científicos y Tecnológicos (CECYT), and Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) to disseminate

information and to foster positive U.S. - Mexican relations in Baja California Sur.

## **THE MULEGÉ COMMUNITY MUSEUM**

The Mulegé Community Museum served as the locus for many of the projects initiated during the working expedition. Known as the "jail without doors," the museum was built by soldiers and local residents under the direction of Captain Arturo Alvarez in 1905-6. The prison served as a territorial penitentiary housing prisoners from La Paz, Loreto, and Constitución up until its closure in 1975. Prisoners with lesser infractions were released from the jail at 6:00 am to work odd jobs in order to pay for their clothes, a cot, and blankets. They were called back to their cells at 6:00 pm by the blow of a conch shell.

Listed in Mexico's Federal Register of Historic Places, the Spanish-style building and land on which it sits were donated to the municipality of Mulegé by the Federal Government for use as a community museum. The museum was designated a Museo Comunitario in 1993 by the Chief of Community Museums in Mexico City. The museum was subsequently awarded 10,000 pesos for exhibit assistance by Mexico's National Council for Culture and the Arts, and was later granted State funds to erect a magnificent stone stairway leading up to the museum where visitors may enjoy a commanding view of the town and Rio Mulegé.

A June, 1997 directive issued by the Governor of the state of Baja California Sur to establish the museum's first paid staff position has allowed for the maintenance of regular visitor hours. All other museum operations are funded by a small entrance fee, donations, and limited assistance from Ricardo Castillo, the museum founder and president of the civil association established to insure municipal autonomy for the museum. Artifacts housed in the museum include a limited representation of the region's fossilized and modern natural history specimens, artifacts associated with historic mining activities, pieces from Mulegé's historic mission, and a range of important late prehistoric peninsular and mainland artifacts.

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

Among the main goals of the Mulegé Education and Research Program is the generation of funds to renovate the museum's exhibit rooms and displays, and to support the museum's mission of disseminating information about Mulegé's unique regional prehistory and natural history to local residents and visitors. To date, seed funds have been generated by two education travel tours to Mulegé, and from a generous grant from the Cotsen Management Corporation Trust. The monies will cover costs of some of the equipment and supplies needed for museum renovation work, for travel support, and food and lodging for an ambitious 9-day working group expedition to Mulegé from April 11-19, 1998.

The working expedition relies heavily on the generosity of 15 U.S. specialists and two native Spanish speaking students donating their time and expertise to initiate the projects outlined in the program. Among the specialists joining the expedition are Dr. Eric Ritter, archaeologist with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Research Associate with the University of California, and adjunct professor at San Diego State University; Bob Sonderman, archaeologist and Senior Collections Specialist with the U.S. National Park Service, National Capitol Region; Marc Frank, Collections Manager in the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology at the Florida Museum of Natural History; Sharon Blank, independent multiple objects conservator formerly with the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, and with the Los Angeles County Museum; Judy Aguirre, SDNHM Environmental Science and Education Center bilingual teacher trainer; Lindsay Sullivan, Curriculum Project Coordinator with the Teacher's Curriculum Institute in San Francisco; Carolina Espinoza, Founder and Director of Baja California's Museum of Nature and Culture at Bahia de Los Angeles; and José Luís Zuñiga, RARE Center for Tropical Studies trained naturalist guide, and Discover Baja Whale Camp Guide.

## **MUSEUM COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT AND EXHIBIT DEVELOPMENT**

Museum projects planned for the expedition revolve around collections documentation and exhibit renovation at the Mulegé Regional Museum, and on community education outreach. Working within INAH guidelines we will begin the process of cataloguing of over 1,000 objects currently housed in the Mulegé Regional Museum, and will assess conservation needs and prioritize stabilization efforts. Exhibit displays will be reorganized more succinctly based on the cultural, temporal, and geographic origins of the artifacts. Bilingual labels will be scripted and prominently placed to provide information about the artifacts. Education outreach activities will focus on the region's unique natural history and on Mulegé's regional history and cultural prehistory.

## **EDUCATION OUTREACH**

Education outreach is a major focus of the expedition. Our team members will present slide show lectures for interested students and community members. The presentations will focus on the region's archaeological heritage, the natural history of central Baja California, archaeological collections management, natural history collections management, and conservation of museum objects. Presentations will emphasize the relationship of these topics to collections housed at the Mulegé Community Museum and to the program in general. We will lay the groundwork for a bilingual student docent program at the Mulegé Regional Museum in partnership with the Colegio de Estudiantes Científicos y Tecnológicos (CECYT), and have enlisted the participation of a multimedia video team to assist with computer imaging of artifacts to transfer pertinent data to CD for use in training the student docents. We also plan to provide school administrators and teachers with regional natural

and cultural history subject matter for inclusion in CECYT curriculum.

## **INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

Interdisciplinary biological and archaeological research activities envisioned by the Mulegé Education and Research Program remain in the planning stages. To date, a portion of the proceeds generated from the program's maiden Archaeotour to Mulegé have been used to establish a fund at the SDNHM for natural history research in the Sierra Guadalupe Mountains west of Mulegé. A portion of this fund has already gone to support a research expedition to study the plants of the Guadalupe range. We look forward to developing a program of archaeological field research which will bring university students from the U.S. and Mexico together to document of some of the region's numerous rock art sites.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the goals of the Mulegé Education and Research Program are numerous. Fortunately, there exists an abundance of energy and enthusiasm on the part everyone involved in the program. The upcoming working group expedition will do much to forward the goals outlined in the program. Through the efforts of our multimedia video team, we plan to document all aspects of the expedition for use in promoting future Archaeotours, and securing additional grant funds. For now, it is our greatest hope that with the assistance of educators and translators, we will be able to interest community members in the projects we will be implementing, and to excite them about Mulegé's unique and wonderful natural and cultural resources. For the ultimate goal is to provide the community with the tools necessary for protecting their natural resources, and safeguarding the region's cultural heritage for generations to come.