

## THE FOUND PENINSULA: PROSPECTIVE DIRECTIONS FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN BAJA CALIFORNIA

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*The vibrancy of anthropological research on the archaeology of Baja California is reflected in recent publications, a plethora of professional conference papers, and the current activity in the field. The recent renaissance of the archaeology of the peninsula is enriched by active indigenous populations of native speakers who maintain knowledge and traditions of the past, an extensive ethnohistoric record, mission register documents that have not fully been investigated, and strong leadership in the Instituto de Antropología e Historia (INAH). At this critical juncture when the archaeological record is at threat by expansive development, future research of the region, coupled with technological advancements, has the potential to serve as a model for archaeologists interested in hunter-gatherers, early peopling of the New World, colonial encounters, rock art, and a wide array of anthropological issues.*

I address five issues that are of relevance to the future of archaeological research in Baja California in this paper. Although there are many additional topics that are of significance to the region, I have chosen these topics based on current resources and the growing impacts of development. I also take into consideration the notable prominence of the INAH in Baja California at this time and their capabilities to effect change.

### SALVAGE ARCHAEOLOGY

One of the greatest threats to the archaeological record is the fast pace of development in Baja California. Except for the region around Los Cabos, the peninsula has been fortunate because it has been somewhat isolated from modern development that has affected Alta California and other portions of Mexico. However, we are now seeing development similar to that in the Los Cabos region along the coast in the northern portions of Baja California, as well as elsewhere. I propose that the best way to address this burgeoning development and the destruction of sites is trying to salvage as much of the archaeological information as possible prior to destruction. As in the United States, we all know that there are limited funds for mitigation. I propose that the INAH continue their efforts in working with universities and others to help in salvage operations.

By salvage excavations, I do not mean that monitors watch as archaeological sites get bulldozed (this has become an unfortunate and common practice in the U.S. today), but instead suggest that archaeologists try to recover as much as possible before a site's destruction. There are a couple of examples that illustrate how this might be done. The first is from the excavation of the Pitas Point site (CA-VEN-27) near

Ventura. Chester King excavated the site in 1969 and 1970 as part of a salvage project to realign Highway 101 (Gamble 1983). He knew that a portion of the site was planned for destruction by the highway. In an attempt to salvage as much information as possible from the site, King decided to use a grader to peel back the soil until cultural features were found (see Gamble 1983). As a result, he identified house depressions, ovens, hearths, posthole molds, and other features that never would have been observed without such an approach. His team then excavated these features by hand and was able to identify activity areas, such as the basket making area found in the house depression in Area 3 (Figure 1). Gamble (1991) took a similar approach when she led mitigation efforts at the historic settlement of Helo' on Mescalitan Island. In this case, the area was riddled with sewage pipes, but between these a house floor (Figure 2) was discovered after the excavation of hand trenches and units. Once discovered, we were able to salvage the structure before it was destroyed. Very few structural remains have ever been excavated in the Chumash region. These "salvage" efforts, therefore, contributed greatly to the understanding of the archaeology of the region.

If partnerships between the INAH and universities are developed, then some of the labor and other costs can be distributed; at the same time research interests can be advanced. Currently San Diego State University (SDSU) has a cooperative agreement with the INAH in Baja California (Figure 3), so that if extra labor is needed for salvage operations, students could be sent very quickly. At this time, we know very little about site structure in Baja California (or in many regions of Alta California). Salvage investigations could serve to recover more of the archaeological record that would otherwise be lost. At the same time, cooperative efforts will further research and international education.

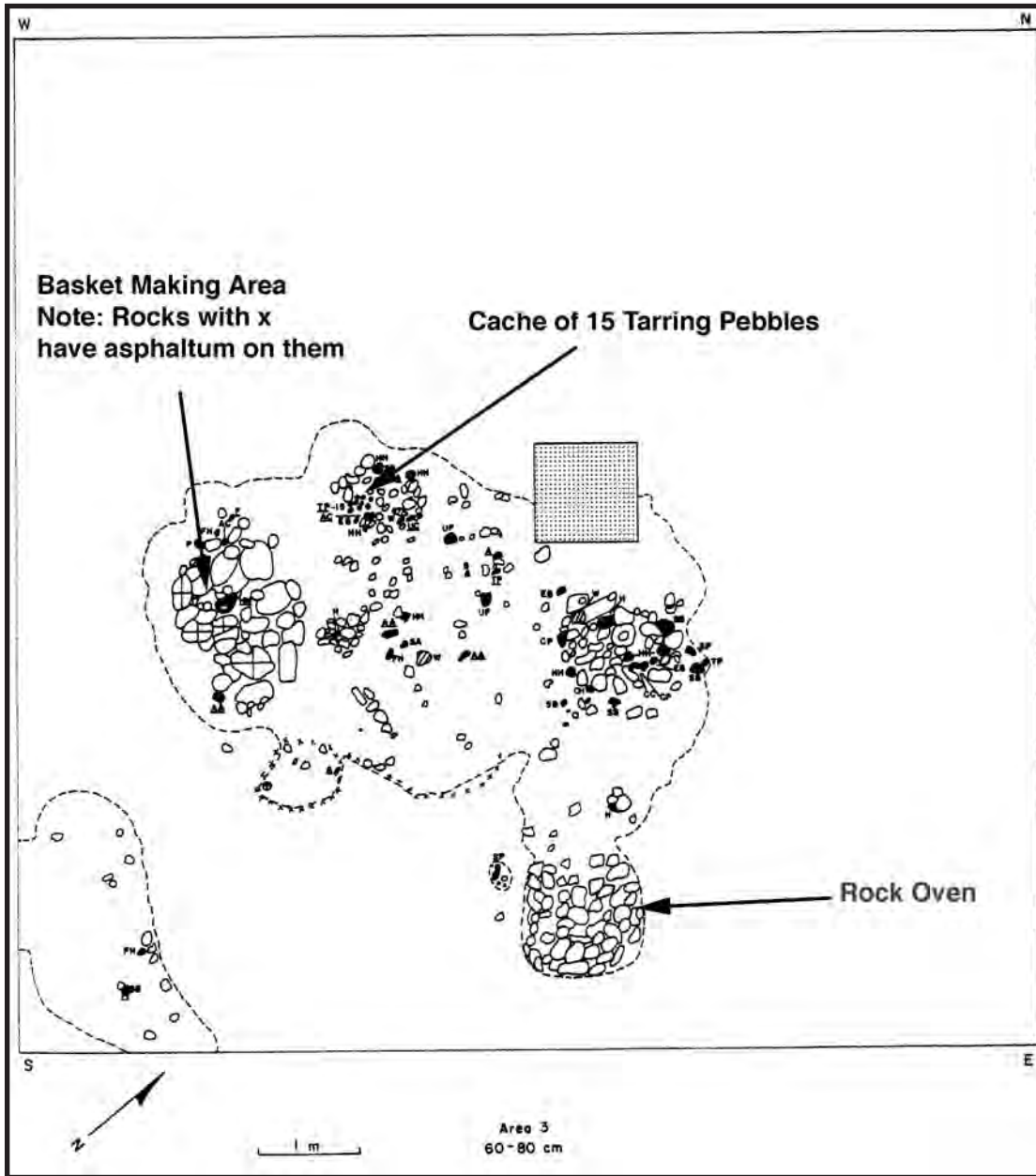


Figure 1. VEN-27, Area 3, 60-80 cm.



Figure 2. House floor at the historic Chumash settlement of Helo' (SBA-46).



Figure 3. Julia Bendimez Patterson, Director of the Baja California Center, INAH, and Lynn Gamble signing a binational cooperative agreement between San Diego State University and INAH.

## GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM TECHNOLOGY

The use of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology should facilitate the documentation and understanding of cultural landscapes in Baja California. Numerous GIS layers for various resources, including geological, hydrological, and biological, have been created for the Tijuana River Watershed (TRW) by the Geography Department at SDSU and are available online (see: <http://trw.sdsu.edu/English/homeFrame.htm>). A team of archaeologists and anthropologists from the U.S. and Baja California (Gamble et al. 2005) created a number of maps that include the locations and information about cultural resources, traditional collecting areas, sacred areas, and present-day Kumiai Indian communities. (The latter is displayed in Figure 4 and contains no sensitive cultural resource data.) The team was able to overlay archaeological maps on the existing sets of maps for the TRW in order to assess patterns in prehistoric and historic land use. In addition, photographs of the landscapes, photographs of artifacts, and other site documentation can be integrated into such a GIS. The use of GIS technology will serve as a powerful research tool and means to manage the complex cultural resources of Baja California.

## RICH ETHNOHISTORIC RECORD

Early historic documents about the people, their settlements, and other aspects of the indigenous population abound for the Baja California peninsula (see Mathes 2006 for an excellent summary of ethnohistoric evidence in Baja California). Many of these documents have been made widely available (e.g., Brown 2001; Des Lauriers and Garcia-Des Lauriers 2006) and can be used for the interpretation of Late period prehistory. I suggest that archaeologists make use of these documents when conducting archaeological research (e.g. Des Lauriers 2005).

In addition, I propose investigating the mission register documents in greater depth. Although scholars have used these in their research (e.g. Moore and Norton 1992), the records have the potential to provide more information, particularly for contact period and Late period settlements. For example, John Johnson (1988) reconstructed Chumash society and mapped historic sites through the combined use of mission register documents, early historic documents, and archaeological field investigations. As a result, researchers have a better understanding of marriage patterns, exchange networks, and other social networks. The same type of research could be conducted in Baja California where the data is available.

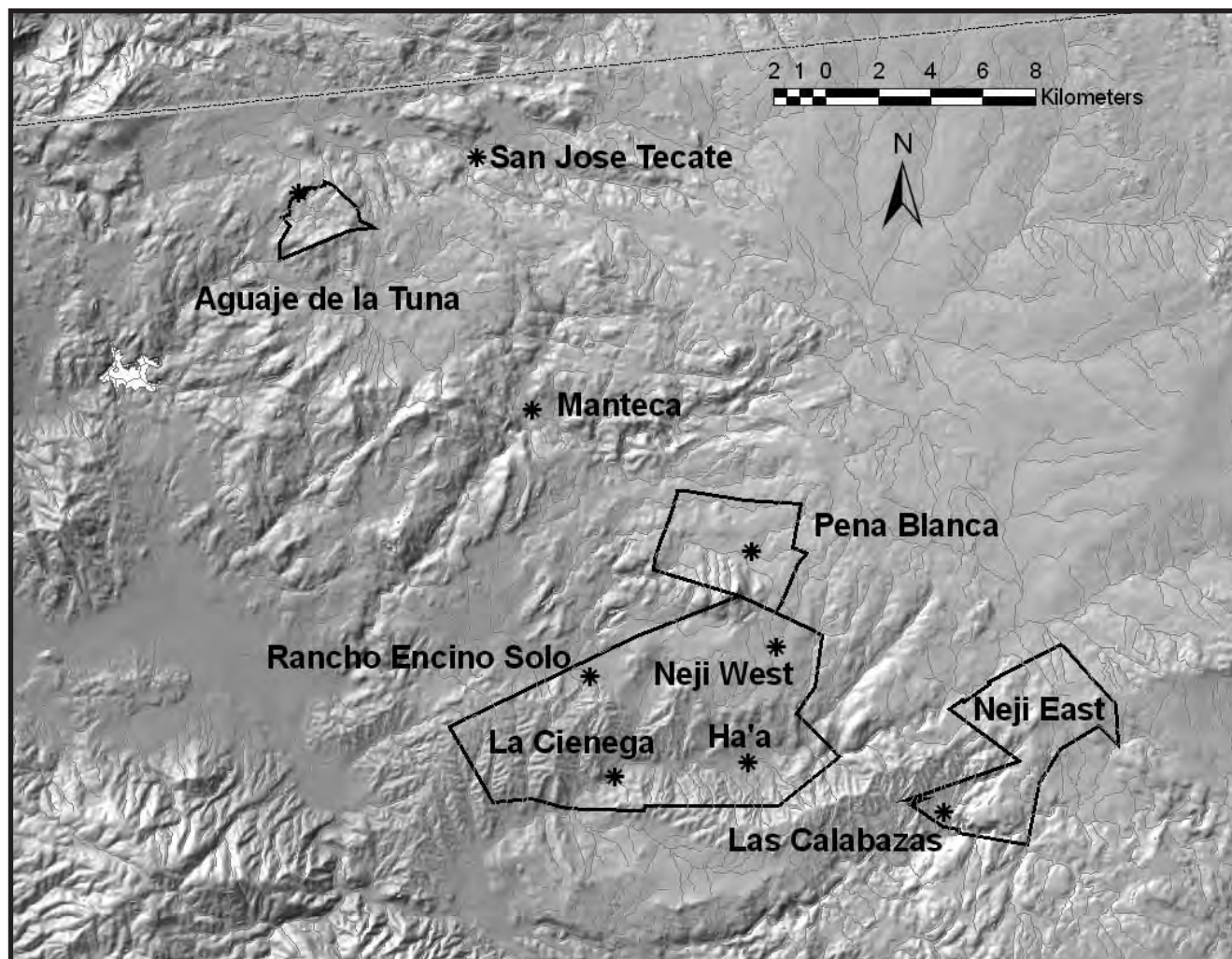


Figure 4. Map of indigenous Kumiai communities in the Tijuana River watershed in Baja California.

#### RICH ETHNOGRAPHIC RECORD

There is also a rich ethnographic record in Baja California (see Wilken-Robertson and Laylander 2006 for a review of sources), especially in the northern portion of the peninsula where many indigenous people remain. Some still hunt, gather and process traditional resources (Figure 5), speak their native languages, and remember traditional practices. Many of the indigenous cultural specialists living today are elderly. It is important to gather as much data as possible before these significant people are no longer available for consultation. The types of information that can be learned from these specialists will help inform archaeologists about a number of topics, including traditional manufacturing techniques (for example of pottery or houses), traditional environmental management practices, concepts of sacred and cultural landscapes, ethnobotanical practices, kinship, and marriage customs.

In addition to interviews with living indigenous specialists, existing written resources are also an important

and underused source of information. For example, some ethnographic notes have not yet been fully examined, such as those of John P. Harrington. His notes have information on place names, the landscape, sacred areas, ethnobotany, and clay sources. These and other ethnographic sources can provide the archaeologist a wealth of data.

#### CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

The hunter-gatherers that lived on the Baja California peninsula viewed the landscape as sacred. High mountains, unusually shaped rocks, springs, and other natural features in their environment were imbued with power and spirituality. Oral traditions document the significance of these places. There were also special areas for collecting medicinal plants, edible plants, and plants used for tools. Some of the indigenous groups in Baja California, such as the Kumiai, lived in a dispersed pattern, not in clustered settlements. Between 2004 and 2005, I worked with a team of anthropologists from both sides of the border interviewing



Figure 5. Benita Meza with daughter Aurora Meza collecting sage seeds in Baja California.

a number of Kumiai cultural practitioners as we traversed through their traditional regions (Gamble et al. 2005). Through this process, we gathered a wealth of information about their worldview, social relationships, history, land use, spiritual beliefs, seasonal movements, basketry sources, exchange patterns, clay sources, and medicinal practices. Other resources about cultural landscapes can be gleaned from ethnographic notes, such as Harrington's, more intensive ethnographic interviews with indigenous cultural specialists, and ethnohistoric accounts.

### CONCLUSION

It is an exciting time to be conducting archaeological investigations in Baja California. A dedicated group of archaeologists from different nationalities are working in many regions of the peninsula. Until recently, many California archaeologists have not paid much attention to the archaeology south of the border. A number of significant changes have occurred with the new millennium. Since the annual symposia on the history and anthropology of the peninsula was established by INAH's regional center in Baja California in 2000, scholars from Mexico, the United States, Canada, and elsewhere annually exchange their ideas. Other

collaborative research conferences have also become more common. The Society for California Archaeology (SCA), who held its first data-sharing meeting in Baja California in the fall of 2006, has supported Mexican scholars' travels to the SCA annual meetings in the U.S. The web site [bajacalifology.org](http://bajacalifology.org), where a compendium of radiocarbon dates, articles, news about recent excavations, and bibliographies are available, has also served to contribute to the exchange of information. More recently, Laylander and Moore (2006) have published an edited volume on the prehistory of Baja California with the most up-to-date syntheses of the region. Yet, even with all these collaborations and publications, there are large gaps in knowledge of the archaeology of the peninsula. Hopefully, the momentum of archaeological investigations will continue to grow and the technology, research, and collaborative efforts that are emerging can surpass the ongoing destruction of cultural resources.

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