

THE COMMUNITIES OF BAJA CALIFORNIA AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE DEFENSE OF THEIR ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEGACY

JULIA BENDÍMEZ PATTERSON
CENTRO INAH EN BAJA CALIFORNIA

The archaeology of Baja California is new to its inhabitants. It differs from the pyramids of Mesoamerica and is thousands of kilometers from the ruins of the Aztecs and the Maya.

The National Institute of Anthropology and History was established in 1939 to conserve, study, and protect archaeological, paleontological, and historical sites on Mexican soil. As a result, Mexico's rich cultural heritage has needed the participation of the state and municipal governments, as well as society in general, to carry out this work.

The Federal Law of Archaeological, Artistic, and Historic Monuments and Zones established in 1972 by the federal government contains the juridical basis to achieve the preservation of our cultural heritage with the cooperation of the communities.

In 1990, the Regional Center of INAH in Baja California began to carry out "Forums for the Conservation of our Cultural Patrimony." At these meetings, we began learning how we could get the community to involve itself in conserving sites throughout the state. We began by forming five Commissions for the Preservation of Historic and Archaeological Sites (one for each of the larger cities of the state). This form of organizing small groups was recognized by INAH.

The prehistoric archaeological resources of Baja California have been shared with the public in a variety of ways.

In 1996, we established the Historic Corridor project called "Camino Real Misionero of the Californias" (CAREM). The objective was to instigate a binational effort in conserving the cultural and natural heritage that exists along what Harry Crosby called "the Royal Highway." The project acknowledged the fundamental importance of the involvement of local communities. For this, we created CAREM committees at most of the mission sites, which are basically historic archaeological ruins. We made many friends and allies, such as the Fundación Carem, now the Corredor Histórico CAREM A.C., a nonprofit organization that is still helping INAH to protect our cultural patrimony.

We also began the series of binational academic conferences known as "Balances y Perspectivas," an annual symposium on the anthropology and history of the peninsula, organized by INAH's regional center in Baja California and sponsored in part by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Society for California Archaeology.

The actions described above are some of the many activities we have carried out. More recently, as a result of the increasing amount of research carried out in Baja California, there has been a growing interest in the local communities and the general public to be active in the conservation of archaeological and historic sites.

People want to know who the first inhabitants were, their relationship to the first settlers of the peninsula, how they can have access to information about the studies that have been carried out, and how they can be active in helping to conserve these vestiges.

In 2003, we initiated a program inspired by the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (Figure 1). The first workshop took place at Tecate, Baja California, where there were numerous volunteers ready to participate in the endeavor. We named it "*Adopte un sitio arqueológico*." In 2004, it was a successful program and was praised in the media. The program has been carried out under the leadership of Archaeologist Jorge Serrano González (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Site volunteers at Cataviña (above) and La Rumorosa (below).



Figure 2. Jorge Serrano (standing, center front) and site volunteers in the Valley of Mexicali.

Unfortunately, it was subsequently determined that the program, as implemented, did not conform to the Federal Law on Archaeological, Artistic, and Historic Monuments and Zones, which specifies in INAH's bylaws, Chapter 1, Article 1, that "the...Institute will organize grass-root associations, neighborhood groups, and rural residents' associations...." These organizations should obtain written authorization from INAH in order to assist in protecting our cultural patrimony. In the case of grass-root organizations such as nongovernmental organizations, you have to be formally constituted as a nonprofit association, which involves creating bylaws and clear objectives. To accomplish this, bylaws are certified by a public notary. The time and the cost of acquiring formal NGO status is one of the obstacles that made volunteers who were already helping to monitor several vulnerable sites in Baja California lose interest.

Notwithstanding, we have continued to work with communities through educational programs such as "May Month of Archaeology," an idea we got several years ago at the SCA meeting. During this month, investigators from our regional center give talks in different places, especially at schools in Tijuana, Rosarito, Ensenada, San Quintín, San Vicente, and Mexicali, in order to disseminate the research we have carried out to a broader public (Figure 3).

At the Ejido Ignacio Zaragoza, 60 km north of Ensenada on the road to Tecate, we discovered an archaeological site that has an abundance of tools dating back to the San Dieguito Complex. The site is on the land owned by a group of communal women farmers, who stopped cultivation at the site in order to conserve it. INAH, under the leadership of Antonio Porcayo, carried out archaeological work at the site, after first contacting the families that live there. Through their work, they learned of the importance of the



Figure 3. Students learning about the archaeology of San Felipe.

site. We helped them set up signage and a small community museum so that the site could be visited. With the tourism that arrives, they have the means of making an income.

Another important initiative we carried out with the Secretariat of Natural Resources and the Environment (Programa de Conservación y Manejo del Área de Protección de Flora y Fauna, Valle de los Cirios) was to work with the local community of Cataviña in finding a way to stop vandalism and protect an important rock art site there (Figure 4). The community participated directly in the restoration of the paintings. We also gave the inhabitants of the region a course and found that they decided that the tourist guides at the site should be mainly young people.

Another important way we are making progress in conserving sites has been by having students from the National School of Anthropology and History do their fieldwork in Baja California. For example, after working at Algodones (east of Mexicali) and at shell middens on the gulf coast at San Felipe, they have given talks for students emphasizing the importance of their finds (Figure 5).

To summarize: Baja Californians are anxious to learn more about the past of the state, which has been occupied only recently by non-Indians. Questions asked are: Who were the ancient people who arrived a long time ago? Who were the settlers that followed them? Why did they come here? How are they related to us? How can we preserve this heritage, especially since INAH's resources are not enough?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the work of Jorge Serrano, an archaeologist who worked for INAH's Regional Center from 1987. He was a pioneer in the site survey work INAH has done in this region, and



Figure 4. Seminar at Cataviña.



Figure 5. Students learning about protecting San Felipe shell middens.

that is why I personally asked him to present the plan to protect the most vulnerable sites, which he did in 2002. A year after that plan, we emulated the Site Stewardship model of the Society for California Archaeology, which under his guidance was very successful. I would also like to acknowledge the valuable community work done by Antonio Porcayo in the San Felipe, Ignacio Zaragoza, and Cataviña areas and by Andrea Guía and Aida Anchondo in the region of Rosarito and Valle de Guadalupe.