

**CUYAMA VALLEY, A CORRIDOR TO THE PAST:  
ARCHAEOLOGY, ETHNOGRAPHY, ETHNOHISTORY,  
AND PUBLIC OUTREACH**

PAT MIKKELSEN  
FAR WESTERN ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH GROUP

*This was a themed symposium, with authors presenting their data with reference to posters, followed by an open discussion. The topics included major archaeological findings from 1968-1973 excavations in Cuyama Valley, tracking social interactions and kinship of Native individuals from Cuyama Valley villages, concerns and activities of today's Chumash, and presentation of the collective data for public outreach in the form of exhibit panels and a booklet for the public.*

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the California Division of Highways carried out three highway realignment projects along State Route 166 in Cuyama Valley, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties. The projects entailed large-scale earth-moving activities, including changes to the Cuyama River channel, resulting in impacts to seven known archaeological sites. Salvage archaeological work was conducted at the seven sites, first by Archaeological Research, Inc. (ARI) and then by students at California State University, Northridge. The amount of hand excavation was extraordinary—175 m<sup>3</sup> of soil at one site—resulting in large, diverse collections of artifacts and faunal and plant remains representing a long span of occupation. Unfortunately, given the times, prior to full regulatory oversight, there were no funds available to fully document these excavations.

In 2011, some 40 years after the Cuyama salvage excavations, Valerie Levulett (Val), then Chief of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Central Coast Environmental Specialist Branch, submitted a grant proposal to finalize analysis of the seven Cuyama collections. She never forgot those long-ago excavations, in which she had actually participated. Val was relentless in searching for anything and anybody she could find relating to the sites and was a full participant in every aspect of this project. She recently retired, knowing that this one previously forgotten collection was taken care of. So we honored her in this symposium.

Five volumes were ultimately prepared to fully document the archaeological, ethnographic, ethnohistoric, and historic aspects of Cuyama Valley and the surrounding regions. Interpretive materials intended for a general audience were also created. An amazing group of people worked hard for a year and a half to pull all the data together, which was summarized in our presentation. Most of the major authors contributed to this symposium, so thanks to all of them.

Archaeological work for the Cuyama project began with extensive research by Far Western Anthropological Research Group (Far Western) and Caltrans to locate and assemble all the collections, along with primary documentation. This was truly an extensive investigative effort; we were trying to contact anyone who had been on the crew (Val, Jeanne Binning, Bruce and Leslie Steidl, and Robert Gibson, to name a few), we went for any leads, sent emails, and made phone calls. Old faunal catalogues were found in bookshelves, radiocarbon samples were found tucked away, photos were dredged up by crew members and visitors, there was even an unsuccessful trip to a Barstow storage unit to find lost artifacts on a long-shot tip, and we scrutinized pages upon pages of field notes and correspondences for any potentially insightful information.

The bulk of the collection ended up being accessioned at UC Santa Barbara, with the San Luis Obispo Archaeological Society having some material and paperwork from one of the sites. Luckily, we did have catalogues for all sites, field notes for four of them, and level records for almost all of them. UC Santa Barbara went over five of the site collections under contract to Caltrans and created electronic catalogues.

Far Western transported about 120 boxes of material to Davis. Jill Eubanks has presented information on the cataloguing and analysis process and what we learned. She was instrumental in achieving what we did with the collection.

Documentation of the archaeological research has been presented in three volumes—a synthesis, site reports, and analytical reports and data (Gibson et al. 2014; Mikkelsen, Meyer, Whitaker, Levulett, Wohlgemuth, and Stevens 2014; Mikkelsen, Stevens, Rosenthal, and Jones 2014). Some important contributions to the archaeology of the region include: (1) a graphic representation of local temporal indicators across time, and temporal charts of local projectile point and bead types; (2) identification of and focus on site-specific temporal components; (3) extensive original research and discussions on landscape evolution and geoarchaeological sensitivity by Jack Meyer, including a map of buried site potential in the Caltrans right-of-way in Cuyama Valley; (4) a detailed description and discussion of a fully exposed Chumash structural depression; (5) descriptions of yucca-roasting ovens, (6) a contribution to the ongoing debate on artiodactyl abundance; and (7) patterns of technology, settlement, and social interactions.

In Volume IV, John R. Johnson and Shelly Tiley presented ethnographic and ethnohistoric data which document the Native history of Cuyama Valley (Johnson and Tiley 2014). Important contributions of their work include: (1) estimates of non-mission populations in Cuyama Valley, and the effects of European-borne diseases, especially on children; (2) discussions and complex diagrams of social interactions between Cuyama Valley inhabitants and surrounding villages; (3) detailed kinship charts of Native individuals associated with Cuyama Valley villages; (4) first-hand accounts from court dockets of Cuyama Valley Native Americans in the 1840s and 1850s; and (5) a focus on the concerns and activities of today's Chumash who are carrying on the traditions and languages of their ancestors.

Volume V, by Paula Carr and Julia Costello, covered Cuyama Valley after the arrival of Europeans (Carr and Costello 2014). Important contributions include: (1) a documented history of Cuyama Valley's early settlement and land use, with special reference to the occupation of sites during the Spanish and Mexican periods in California; (2) evolution of transportation corridors through the valley; and (3) development of adjacent road- and highway-related features that have encroached upon the seven Cuyama Valley project sites.

Three types of public-oriented interpretive material were prepared. In close collaboration with Northern, Barbareño, and Ventureño Chumash individuals, Tammara Norton designed a series of bookmarks and exhibits to be used for public lectures and social events. In addition, a publication entitled *The Long Road Traveled: Archaeology, Native Americans, and Europeans in Cuyama Valley* summarized many of the relevant findings from this study for a more general audience (Mikkelsen, Carr, Tiley, Costello, Stevens, and Johnson 2014). It has been made available for free by Caltrans.

Posters presented at the SCA annual meeting and now available online include:

- “The Importance of Field Records, Notes, and Maps for Future Research,” by Jill Eubanks (2015), reviewed the challenges Far Western encountered while dealing with the scattered site data (incomplete electronic and hand written catalogues, scattered and missing artifacts, missing catalogues, mislabeled and incomplete field records, photographs without proper documentation, and incomplete maps).
- “Changes in Technology in the Cuyama Archaeological Record,” by Nathan Stevens (2015), noted that the large and diverse artifact assemblages from a wide range of temporal periods provided ideal data for elucidating technological changes through time, particularly focusing on the adoption of the bow and arrow and the switch from the millingslab and handstone to the mortar and pestle as the dominant plant food processing technology.
- “Change and Stability in Late Holocene Plant Use in the Cuyama River Canyon,” by Eric Wohlgemuth (2015), reported abundant plant remains recovered from soil samples. Acorn and small seed remains were abundant in middens but scarce in thermal features, while the converse was true for yucca. Acorn and small seeds were much more common in Middle/Late Transition and Late-

period middens than Early period middens, with small seed use increasing dramatically during the Late Historic era, but yucca was constant in middens since the Early period.

- “Prehistoric Structures and Yucca Roasting Ovens in Cuyama Valley,” by Pat Mikkelsen (2015), described a Late-period structure with postholes, burned timbers, an entryway, a large hearth, and firepits. The complexities of interpreting architectural remains given use, alteration, abandonment, and post-habitation fill, and the resulting complex patterning of the archaeological record, were detailed. Also found was a series of roasting pits filled with fire-affected rock, several with charred yucca remains. Their use, construction, and archaeological configuration are presented.
- “Mission Period Trade Goods,” by Julia Costello (2015), reported on whetstones, portions of ceramic and glass vessels, roof tiles, a forged nail, a button, a needle case, and nearly 300 glass beads, reflecting trade between the Chumash residents of Wenexe'l and the Spanish from 1770 to 1805. Analysis of the bead collection, in comparison with other California sites, provided additional information on this temporally sensitive artifact group.
- “Population Structure, Social Interaction, and Chumash Descendants in the Cuyama Region,” by John R. Johnson (2015), described mission register analyses for 11 major rancherias located in the general Cuyama region. Genealogical diagrams were reconstructed to tabulate marriages that had existed prior to the couples coming to the missions, determine instances of inter-village social relationships, and discern post-marital residence data. Data were also presented on the continuity of Cuyama Valley Indian families and communities during the remainder of the nineteenth century and beyond.
- “Chumash Cultural Heritage and Public Interpretation,” by Shelly Tiley (2015), reported the results of interviews with individuals whose heritage was associated with Cuyama Valley. The primary concern for modern keepers of Chumash culture was for the various groups to be recognized within their larger communities. They want to reach out to smaller, more local venues to teach about Chumash culture. They are already involved in speaking to various groups about their cultural heritage, so a novel form of public interpretation was produced for the project—a travelling exhibit that would enhance Chumash lectures about their lifeways.

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