
South Bay Historical Society Bulletin

December 2017

Issue No. 17

First People

by Steve Schoenherr

Who were the First People? Where did they live? How were they able to survive? At our meeting on Monday, December 11 at 6 pm in the Chula Vista Library, Dennis Gallegos will answer these questions. His new book, *First People: A Revised Chronology for San Diego County*, examines the archaeological evidence going back to the end of the Ice Age 10,000 years ago. The ancestors of today's Kumeyaay may have come down the coast from the shrinking Bering land bridge. Ancestors who spoke the ancient Hokan language may have come from the east, overland from the receding waters of the Great Basin.

These early people (California's first migrants) were called the "Scraper-Makers" by the pioneering archaeologist Malcolm Rogers in the 1920s.¹ The name came from the stone tools that Rogers discovered at many sites in San Diego County, from the San Dieguito River in the north to the Otay River in the south. Rogers described their culture as the "San Dieguito pattern" based on his research at the Harris site near Lake Hodges on the San Dieguito River. This same cultural pattern and stone tools have been found at the Remington Hills site in western Otay Mesa. It has been dated at 9400 years old and is the earliest site found in the South Bay.

Very little is known of these "Scraper-Makers" now termed Paleo-Indians. Except for their stone tools, we don't know where they came from or what they looked like. No human remains or burial sites have been found. Small fossilized bones at the site indicate they hunted

small animals such as squirrel and rabbit. They ate clams and oysters and shellfish from the ocean and from the broad Tijuana River lagoon that existed back then. Also found was Coso obsidian from Inyo County over 300 miles away, showing that these people had an extensive trade network.²



Java Man, displayed here as a sculpture in San Diego's Museum of Man, may be one of the ancestors of the First People of the South Bay.



The Cerutti Mastodon bones are on display at the entrance to the San Diego Museum of Natural History.

The First People may have come to the South Bay long before those found at Remington Hills. Scientists from the San Diego Natural History Museum have examined mastodon bones unearthed at a site uncovered by Richard Cerutti in 1992 along state Route 54 near Reo Drive in National City. After 25 years of analysis, they found fracture patterns commonly used by early humans to extract the edible marrow. Although no tools or human remains were found, radiometric dating of the mammoth bones convinced paleontologist Thomas Deméré that they were 130,000 years old, and he published his findings in the April 2017 issue of *Nature*.³

Deméré was not the first to claim human migration began in the Pleistocene era rather than the more recent Holocene. In the 1950s

George F. Carter at the San Diego Museum of Man excavated a site along Texas Street in Mission Valley and found evidence of primitive hearths more than 200,000 years old. Similar cobble hearths were found in the 1970s by Herbert Minshall at the nearby Buchanan Canyon site, and also by Brian Reeves in the 1980s at the Mission Ridge site.⁴

Even earlier claims have been made. Gold Rush miners in the 1800s found fossils as they dug shafts deep into the mountains. One such fossil became known as the Calaveras skull, found by a gold miner in 1866 in a gravel layer 130 feet deep, under the lava beds that created the Sierra Nevada range. Josiah Whitney, the State Geologist of California, examined the skull and claimed it came from the Pliocene age, over one million years ago.⁵ Many such

discoveries are described in the 900-page book *Forbidden Archeology*, published in San Diego in 1993, including the stone tools and an arrowhead from the Pliocene found at Miramar, on the Argentine coast.⁶

Could it be possible that *Homo erectus* who emerged from Africa and migrated to Europe and Asia also came to the Americas? “Java Man” fossils that are over 1 million years old have been found on the islands of Indonesia. Stone tools dated to 880,000 years ago have been found at Mata Menge on the island of Flores in Indonesia. The DNA of branch of an ancient people known as the Denisovans has been found in the populations of Southeast Asia and Papua New Guinea. Very little is known about the Denisovans but they could have been the first to cross Pacific islands by boat.⁷

During the Pleistocene Ice Age, the water level of the oceans was much lower than today. At the time Remington Hills was settled, the shoreline of the South Bay was three miles to the west. Archaeologists believe there are more Paleo-Indian settlement sites that are now covered by hundreds of feet of water. The bones of Arlington Man were discovered at Arlington Springs on Santa Rosa island in 1959 and are 13,000 years old. Dozens of sites have been found in the Channel Islands 40 miles west of Santa Barbara that show overwhelming evidence of occupation by early fishermen using boats and bone fishhooks.

It seems probable that the South Bay was settled by such fishermen who came here by boats by way of what has been called the “Kelp



The Kumeyaay exhibit at the Museum of Man includes examples of trade between this area and the Channel Islands that began as early as 3000 BC. Island influence is shown by distinctive chert projectile points and knives, certain shell ornaments, and soapstone implements and carvings like this whale effigy found at Descanso.

Highway.” Dennis Gallegos explains that “during the end of the Late Pleistocene, kelp forests from northeastern Asia to South America provided the route by boat into the Americas, and the Kelp Highway facilitated the voyage by providing highly productive, nutrient-rich kelp forests with associated fish, birds, sea mammals, and shellfish as a food source.”⁸



Kumeyaay fishhook at the Museum of Man.

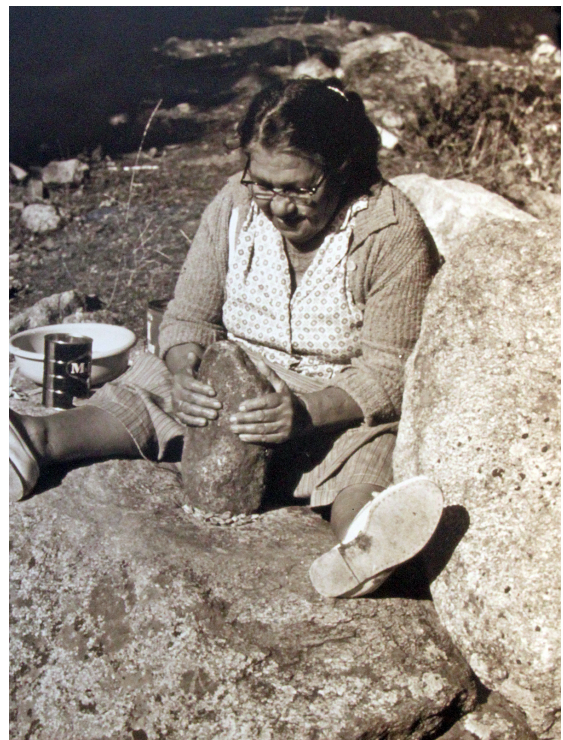
Before he called them “Scraper-Makers,” Malcolm Rogers used the term “Shell-Midden” people because he found so many shell fossils in his early archaeological sites. They were hunter-gatherers, subsisting on shellfish and small animals, gathering wild plants such as watercress and yucca. Fruit and berries were often dried for future use, such as elderberry and juniper and manzanita. Around 7500 years ago the tools and culture of these early people changed.⁹

The “Milling Stone Horizon” saw the introduction of manos and metates to grind seeds and acorns for baking flour. Wild grasses were cut and bound into sheaves. Harvested fields were burned to clear the land for the planting of new seeds. Malcolm Rogers called this culture “La

Jolla” because he found the new tools at sites excavated in North County. Modern terms for the period from 7500 to 3000 years ago are Middle Holocene or Archaic.¹⁰

The Paleo-Indians of the South Bay were nomadic, moving from one place to another in search of food or stones to make tools. Archaeologists have found hundreds of sites on Otay Mesa that were small and temporary, used to quarry tools or gather shellfish or hunt game. Only a few sites showed continued habitation over a long period of time. These major villages include Remington Hills, Kuebler Ranch, Rolling Hills, Otai, Melijo, and La Punta/Chiayp.

The Kuebler Ranch Site was located at the head of O’Neal Canyon, with access to the water and resources of the Otay River. It was occupied from the time of the Milling Stone Horizon until the Late Archaic era 3000 years ago. Many of the Otay Mesa camps were abandoned at this time as the climate became warmer and drier. The dry mesa was uninhabited until German homesteaders came in the 1880s. Claude B. Kuebler came in 1909 and built his ranch on 4000 acres.¹¹



Kumeyaay grinding acorns on bedrock metate (photo at the Museum of Man).



Artifacts found at the Rolling Hills site, on display at Thurgood Marshall Elementary School.

The Rolling Hills Site near the southern base of Mother Miguel Mountain at the head of Salt Creek and of Telegraph Canyon showed continuous occupation from 7000 to 800 years ago. It was a very large residential village, over one square mile in size. Tools found include small portable metates typical of the Archaic period as well as large bedrock milling stations typical of the later Kumeyaay period. It is one of the few sites where human bones were discovered, indicating burial practices of the more recent Kumeyaay people. After the Kumeyaay, the site was occupied by American farmers from the 1880s to the 1930s and by the San Miguel school. Artifacts from the site are on display at the Thurgood Marshall Elementary School.¹²

When the Spanish came in 1769 there were three major villages of the Kumeyaay in the

South Bay: La Punta/Chiayp, Melijo and Otai. Archaeologists have not been able to discover much about La Punta and Melijo as they were in the Tijuana flood plain. Whatever remained of these villages is deeply buried in the silt or washed out into the ocean by the floods of 1895 and 1916.¹³

Father Juan Crespi was the first to describe Melijo in 1769 as he recorded in his diary the journey from Mexico to San Diego with the expedition of Capt. Rivera y Moncada. According to the research and translation by Harry Crosby, Crespi entered the Tijuana River Valley through Goat Canyon on May 13. Crespi wrote in his diary: "We arrived close to a very populous heathen rancheria, along one side of which there was a handsome stream running with a good-sized flow of water that with great force issues up out of the ground upon the spot,

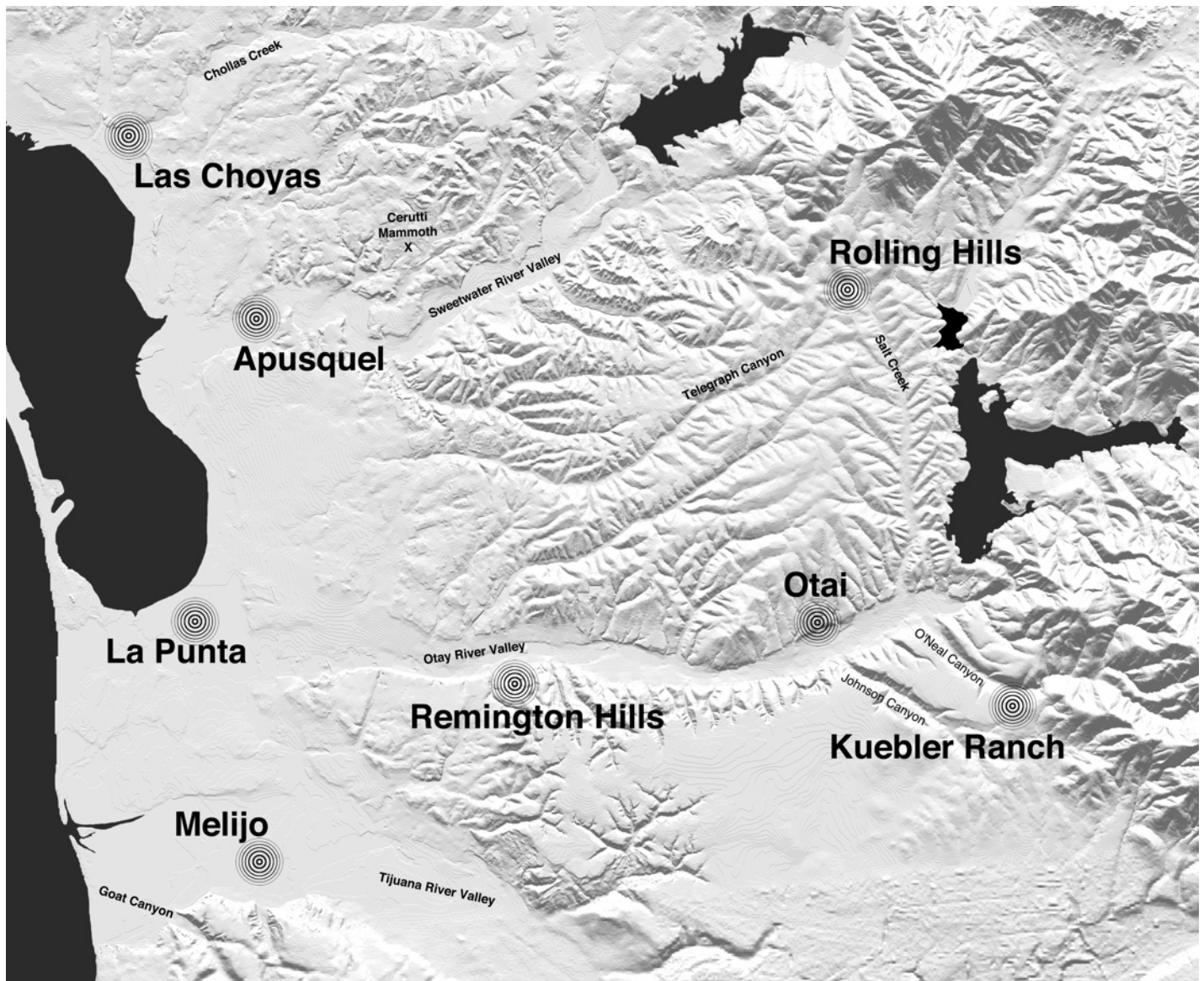
good fresh water. The stream flows at the foot of a range that we have borne upon our right hand during the whole day's march and that draws back for a bit over a league here, the country making a great plain of good soil, everything carpeted with green grasses. Immediately upon our arrival, many, many heathens—men, women, and children in large numbers—came over both from this rancheria as well as from other rancherias that seemingly are nearby, almost all of them of both sexes being heavily painted in red, white, and black, the men having on large feather headdresses and having their usual good-sized quivers upon their shoulders and bow and arrows in their hands. All are very sharp Indians, great bargainers, very covetous of anything they see that pleases them, and, by what was observed of them, great thieves. Their manner is to be clamorous; they speak whatever they are saying at a shout as though very angry. The heathens here would bring mussels but would not part with a single one unless given the item they wished or had taken a liking to. This spot lies about half a league from an inlet that is close to the harbor. There is no fire wood or trees at the spot, but there are some in the mountains not far off. This afternoon the weather turned to heavy rain and we were all soaked through."¹⁴

Crespi's diary continued on the next day, May 14: "Sunday, that solemn day, the Feast of Espiritu Santo. In addition to its having rained a lot last night and gotten us all wet, at dawn today it was heavily overcast and, after the dawning, it at once returned to raining hard on us again. Putting on my cape and my hat, I sat through it until, after about an hour and a half, the weather cleared; but our commander, owing to the rain and to there being so many armed heathens so close by, was of the opinion that no Mass should be said, so I said none and nobody heard it, which I did not fail to take grievously to heart. Since to get to the harbor was everyone's great wish, and it was represented to us that we might do so in a single day's journey even though a long one, we prepared ourselves to leave with everything still wet, as soon as the

weather looked to be clearing up. And so we set out a little before ten o'clock in the forenoon, course due northward across this far-reaching plain, keeping a bit apart from the aforesaid inlet because of whatever mires might be there. At around three leagues beyond the rancheria from which we set out, three other heathen rancherias were encountered, lying a little distance off from where we were traveling. Along the way, there were many weapon-bearing heathens belonging to the aforesaid rancherias. It was a bit over six and a half hours' march over level, grass-covered ground, in which we must have made a good six leagues; and, with all good fortune and happiness, we gained the sight of our long-wished-for, splendid Harbor of San Diego."

Father Junípero Serra and the Gaspar de Portola expedition followed the route of Crespi a month later, and entered the Tijuana River Valley on June 30. Serra wrote in his diary: "After traveling for about an hour we found a beautiful creek of good water flowing through the verdant pasture land. We stopped there instead of going on to the next ranchería. This was the third time the sergeant had traveled this route. But neither he nor the others who, counting this trip, had passed by here five times had ever seen this spot. We felt this would be a wonderful place for a good-sized mission that we would call San Pablo. It is a very large plain. It seems to me that it is about one league, more or less, from the ocean. The animals were able to travel easily through the area. And we had no other care in the world than our strong desires to arrive at the port of San Diego and embrace everyone who was waiting there for us with open arms. All that was left was this last day's journey."¹⁵

Serra's diary entry refers to Melijo where the "gentiles" were "insolent" and he passed them by, planning to stop at "another ranchería a few leagues away" that would be La Punta /Chiapp. He did not stay at La Punta because the water was "very inferior" which may be a reference to the salt springs noted on the Pantoja map of

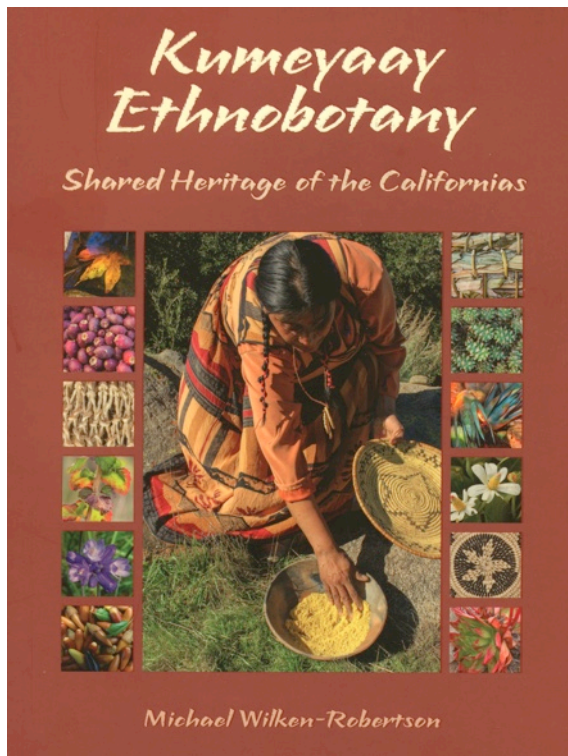


1782. Serra's diary entry continues with a reference to "a beautiful creek" that would be the Tijuana River where Serra camped before going on to the next *ranchería* of La Punta. At the end of his diary entry for the next day, July 1, he mentions coming upon "three gentile *rancherías*." The first was La Punta, and another was at Chollas Creek. The third could be Apusquel, mentioned by missionaries as being located near the mouth of the Sweetwater River.¹⁶

"We began our last day's journey (July 1) very early in the morning. We can already see where the port we were looking for begins. Because our guides had already informed us about the

entrance to the port and its boundaries, our journey along this road, which was totally flat, was much easier than what we were accustomed to. Along the way we came upon three gentile *rancherías*, but we only interacted with those from the first one, which is where we had intended on stopping yesterday."¹⁷

Author Michael Wilken-Robertson of *Kumeyaay Ethnobotany* notes that "The accounts from Crespi and Serra depict hunting, gathering, and fishing peoples as they interact with the coastal landscapes of the Kumeyaay region; employing material culture such as fiber cordage, bows and arrows, stone, bone, and shell tools, tule rafts, nets, and spears; as well as ceramic and



The new book *Kumeyaay Ethnobotany* examines the importance of plants in Alta and Baja California.

lithic technologies associated with the storage or processing of plant materials. Many of these items suggest continuity with materials found in the archaeological record of the Kumeyaay region. The chroniclers describe many villages of native people along their coastal route, especially where arroyos meet the ocean, suggesting that the plentiful terrestrial and marine resources along the Pacific coastal terraces of the Kumeyaay region supported large native populations.”¹⁸

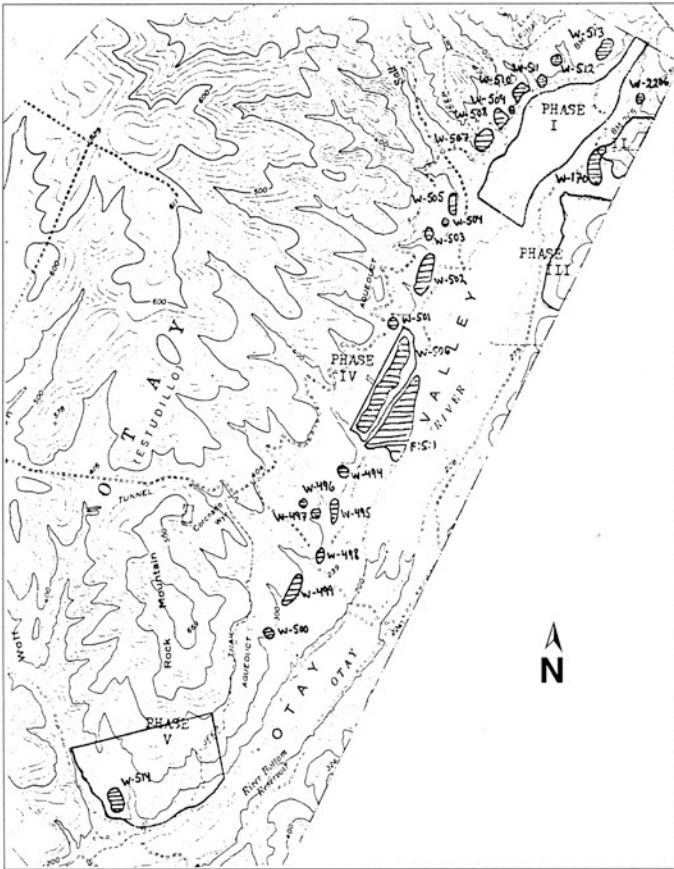


Toyon berries used for food and medicine
(*Kumeyaay Ethnobotany* p. 144)

“Generally, the most important resources available to the Kumeyaay in the course of a year would include annual greens in the coastal regions in late winter-and early spring (supplemented by fish, shellfish, and acorns left from fall harvest); Desert Agave and Chaparral Yucca in foothill areas in late spring; sage and chia seeds, barrel cactus buds, and manzanita in summer, with prickly-pears and Mohave Yucca fruits ripening after midsummer; by late summer, pinyon and sweet acorns in the Sierra Juarez; in early fall Holly-Leaf Cherries; and by late fall-early winter, the harvest of the all-important bitter acorns of the Coast Live Oak, which the Kumeyaay stored for use throughout winter-early spring.”¹⁹



Chaparral Yucca is a member of the agave family that grows throughout the California Floristic Province, along the Pacific slope of southern California and northern Baja California at elevations from 150 to 1200 meters. Native peoples have long used three parts of the Chaparral Yucca—base, stalk, and flowers—as food. (*Kumeyaay Ethnobotany* p. 138)



Early Otay sites from McGowan p. 12. Malcolm Rogers' site W-170 was at the mouth of Johnson Canyon (Phase I).

Otay was the third major village in South Bay inhabited by Paleo-Indians. Malcolm Rogers was the first archaeologist to find evidence in the upper Otay River Valley of "Scraper-Makers" in the Archaic era. Charlotte McGowan spent several years uncovering the village of Otai on the north bank of the river. With the help of students from Southwestern College, she published her findings in 1997 of continual habitation from 7980 years ago until the Spanish Mission era.

With supporting evidence from Florence Shippek, she found the Otai people more advanced than previously believed. The Kumeyaay of the Later Archaic era had "a religious organization which was composed of specialists who acquired and maintained environmental knowledge and who directed the people to perform appropriate actions and through proper timing, through ritual and ceremony, directed this specialized knowledge toward maximization of the food

supply. Knowledge also included the planting of seeds and cuttings, transplanting, and also maximizing the numbers of rabbits, deer and antelope. It also included the harvesting of the seeds of grasses by cutting the grass and gathering it into sheaves, regularly burning the harvested fields, and the broadcasting of seeds over the prepared fields so that a plentiful crop could be gathered again the next year."²⁰



This dome scraper was found at site W-170, dated from 8,600 years ago (from Museum of Man).

The Otai people began as hunter-gatherers using stone scraping tools, but progressed to farming. A native grass once plentiful in the Otay Valley but now extinct was more important than acorns. "The edible seed was larger than that of the wild oats [which replaced it] ... and about half the size of a grain of wheat. To collect the seed, the Indians grasped a handful of stalks and either broke off the seed heads or stripped them off." The farmers harvested the grain in the summer, burned the stubbled fields and planted seeds for the next crop. At her dig site, McGowan and her students found many more metates and manos which were used primarily to process grass seeds, than mortars and pestles usually used to crush acorns.²¹

Otai women planted gardens and grew tobacco and wild onions. Men would smoke the tobacco in clay pipes made after the Kumeyaay acquired the ability to make ceramics and pottery around 1200 years ago, most likely from the Yuman-speaking peoples along the Colorado River. Women also gathered fibers to make baskets

and fishing nets that were used in the gathering of food. Stone hearths used for cooking were found by McGowan at Otai.

The village of Otai shows the advancement made by the people who came to South Bay thousands of years earlier and lived in early settlements such as Remington Hills. There were perhaps 20,000 Kumeyaay living in the South Bay at the time the Spanish arrived in 1769, but tragically this number was reduced to the hundreds by 1850 and the once-teeming villages disappeared.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Rogers, Malcolm J. *Ancient Hunters of the Far West*. San Diego, CA: Union-Tribune Pub. Co., 1966.

² "The View From Otay Mesa: Cultural Landscapes Through Time," San Diego Archaeology Center exhibit, <http://sandiegoarchaeology.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Otay-Mesa-Exhibit.pdf>

³ "Coastal Fossil Find Excites Scientists," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Nov 26, 1992; "A 130,000-year-old archaeological site in southern California, USA," *Nature*, Apr. 26, 2017.

⁴ Carter, George F. *Pleistocene Man at San Diego*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957. Minshall, Herbert L. *Buchanan Canyon: Ancient Human Presence in the Americas*. San Marcos, CA: Slawson Communications, 1989. "Pleistocene Occupation," <http://www.sandiegoarchaeology.org/Laylander/Issues/chron.pleistocene.htm>

⁵ Whitney, Josiah Dwight, "Ancient Humans of California," *American Geology*, Vol. 1, Of The Museum Of Comparative Zoology At Cambridge, University Press, 1880.

⁶ Cremo, Michael A. and Richard L. Thompson. *Forbidden Archeology*. San Diego: CA: Bhaktivedanta Institute, 1993.

⁷ "A World Map of Neanderthal and Denisovan Ancestry in Modern Humans," *Science Daily*, March 28, 2016. Pringle, Heather, "Did Humans Colonize the World by Boat?" *Discover Magazine*, May 20, 2008. "Homo Erectus," Australian Museum, <https://australianmuseum.net.au/homo-erectus>

⁸ Gallegos, Dennis R. *First People: A Revised Chronology for San Diego County*. San Diego CA: StorySeekers, 2017, p. 3.

⁹ Rogers, Malcolm, "The Stone Art of the San Dieguito Plateau." *American Anthropologist* 31, 1929. Carrico, Richard L. *Strangers in a Stolen Land*. San Diego, CA: Department of American Indian Studies, San Diego State University, 1986.

¹⁰ Rogers, Malcolm, "The Stone Art of the San Dieguito Plateau." *American Anthropologist* 31, 1929.

Carrico, Richard L. *Strangers in a Stolen Land*. San Diego, CA: Department of American Indian Studies, San Diego State University, 1986.

¹¹ The View From Otay Mesa: Cultural Landscapes Through Time, San Diego Archaeology Center exhibit, <http://sandiegoarchaeology.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Otay-Mesa-Exhibit.pdf>

¹² Smith, Brian F. and Associates, "Archaeological Data Recovery of Sites Within the Rolling Hills Ranch Development Project, San Diego County, City of Chula Vista," prepared for McMillan Company, Dec. 28, 2004.

¹³ Shipek, Florence, Archaeological Site Record Sheet, Nov. 2, 1976. Roeder, M., Archaeological Site Record Sheet, Jan. 22, 1980. Hector, Susan M. "Cultural Resources Survey for the Otay Valley Regional Park Trails Project West of Interstate 5 to Interstate 805, San Diego. California," San Diego, CA: Richard Barrett Wallace Roberts & Todd, February 2006.

¹⁴ Crespi diary translation from Harry Crosby, *Gateway to Alta California: the Expedition to San Diego, 1769*. San Diego: Sunbelt Publications, 2003, p. 101.

¹⁵ Serra diary translation from Rose Marie Beebe, and Robert M. Senkewicz. *Junípero Serra: California, Indians, and the Transformation of a Missionary*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015.

¹⁶ McGowan, Charlotte. Final Report of the Excavation of Cal. F:5:1 (CA-SDI-12,809). Chula Vista, CA : The Author, 1997. Map 10 on page 28 shows the rancherias from which neophytes were taken to Mission San Diego de Alacala 1769-1790. A similar map is on page 12 of Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land*, 1986.

¹⁷ Serra diary translation from Rose Marie Beebe, and Robert M. Senkewicz. *Junípero Serra: California, Indians, and the Transformation of a Missionary*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015.

¹⁸ Wilken-Robertson, Michael. *Kumeyaay Ethnobotany: Shared Heritage of the Californias*. San Diego, CA : Sunbelt Publications, Inc., 2018, p. 21.

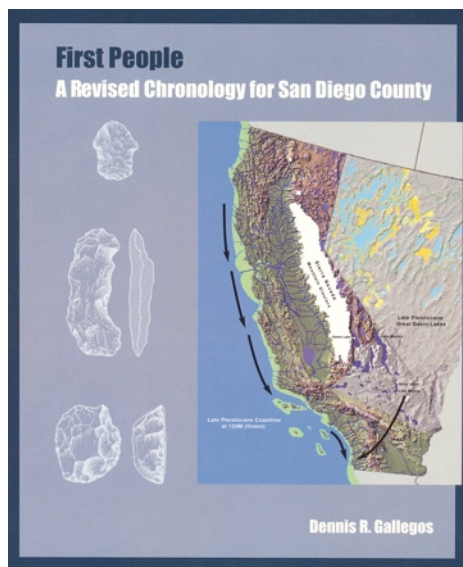
¹⁹ Wilken-Robertson, p. 43.

²⁰ quote in McGowan, Charlotte. *Final Report of the Excavation of Cal. F:5:1 (CA-SDI-12,809)*. Chula Vista, CA : The Author, 1997. Shipek, Florence, "Kumeyaay Plant Husbandry" in *Before the Wilderness: Environmental Management by Native Californians*. Menlo Park, CA : Ballena Press, 1993. Shipek, Florence. *Miscellaneous Papers, 1981-1985*. United States : F.C. Shipek, 1981-1985.

²¹ McGowan pp. 35-36.

NEXT MEETING.....

The South Bay Historical Society will meet Monday, December 11, at 6 pm in the auditorium of the Chula Vista Civic Library at 365 F Street. Our guest will be Dennis Gallegos, author of the new book *First People* that uses archaeological evidence to peel back the mysteries of prehistoric San Diego and answer the question of our origins. Native American occupation was affected by basic environmental changes such as the rise in the sea level and the formation of bays and rivers and lagoons. The earliest people came by way of the "Kelp Highway" at the end of the last Ice Age, succeeded at hunting and gathering food, made tools to build homes and villages. The hypothesis of *First People* is that environmental adaptation allowed continuous occupation of this region over a 12,000-year history.



The author began his career in archaeology in 1969 working for State Parks, then the Bureau of Land Management Desert Planning Staff, followed by work in the

private sector. Since 1990 he has been with Gallegos & Associates.

NEW EXHIBIT.....



The new exhibit on the history of the Spanish-speaking people of the South Bay will open Jan. 27 at the Heritage Museum. In the introduction to the exhibit catalog book, available for purchase on opening day, exhibit author Barbara Zaragoza writes, "This project is a general history of a community that lives along the San Diego-Tijuana border. The historical narrative relies on oral histories of residents living on the American side of the line in a region known as the South Bay, San Diego. The theme that emerges from over fifty interviews and at least 1,000 archival photographs can be summed up in two words: *mi familia*. Although *mi familia* means the closeness of family ties that support each other during challenging times and celebrate each others' achievements, for people living at the frontier, family ties also represent something far

more important: their birth right to this land. Some residents of Spanish speaking heritage in the South Bay can trace their families back eight generations to the Native Americans and ancestors who came with the Spanish colonial expeditions."

CORRECTION.....

In the last issue of the *Bulletin*, on page 4, the photo of a man in a white shirt supervising the spraying in a lemon grove was incorrectly identified as Art Spencer. His real name is Walter Binney, county inspector of the Department of Agriculture. Below is the correct photo of Art Spencer, provided by his son Thomas Spencer. Art Spencer owned the 10-acre lemon grove on the southwest corner of Broadway and J Street.



South Bay Historical Society

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