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## *Survival Skills of Native California*

Paul D. Campbell. Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1999. xv + 448 pp., hundreds of photographs and text figures, maps, bibliography.

### **Reviewed by E. N. Anderson**

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This book is quite an amazing achievement. Paul Campbell brings together an encyclopedic amount of information on how native peoples of Alta and Baja California made houses, hunted game, prepared food, created baskets, played games, formed musical instruments, and made objects necessary to their ways of life. Most of the book deals with the food quest, especially hunting and fishing.

Campbell has combed the ethnographies, especially the classic older ones that gave detailed descriptions of material culture. He has followed up unpublished sources. Notable among these are the Harrington papers, which provide invaluable accounts of processes now long lost. Campbell has listened to rare tapes and found obscure displays. His own contributions, though, are far more important. Much of his work has been done in Alta California, where he seems to have been everywhere, but the most interesting and important findings are from Baja California. He has sought out surviving Kumeyaay, Tipai, Paipai, and Kiliwa people, whose elders still remember many skills long forgotten north of the border. Thus he can provide excellent photographic documentation of making and using rabbit-sticks, collecting and cleaning cactus fruits and pine nuts, catching and preparing pack rats for food, and details involving many other activities poorly described in the old ethnographies.

This has been real participant observation. Campbell is not interested in “trait listing,” but in actually learning how to survive and live well in the wild. (He is not an anthropologist; he is simply interested in how people managed in the hunting-gathering days, and how they can manage in the wilderness today.) One result is to make him sensitive to the complexity of traditional resource management; he has kept up with the recent research on how thoroughly the California native peoples managed plant cover and animal populations.



The book briefly summarizes this information before turning to detailed, meticulous accounts of over 70 processes of manufacture, use, gathering, hunting, fishing, and preparation in general.

The social contexting of activities is well done and valuable, but necessarily brief, considering how much material has to be covered. Ethnologists will be kept busy working out the systems of social relations and social grounding—trade, religion, intergroup and intragroup dynamics, kinship, and all—in which these material units nest. A material object is the crystallized end state of a material process; a material process is part of a wider social and cultural set of rules and practices. Recall Marcel Mauss' concept of the habitus. The book under review reminds us of this, and should stimulate us to take the next steps.

The photographs are well organized to show every step in key activities, and to document implements and other useful constructions for all time. Where else will you find a sequence on how to cook and pound a pack rat for eating, or make a California fishnet? Even well-known processes like preparing acorns or making and firing Kumeyaay pottery are probably better documented photographically here than in other books. Where photographs fail, good technical drawings make up any deficiency.

The book is well written; the descriptions of hunts and other food quests are colorful and delightful. Mercifully, Campbell is under no obligation to use technical jargon, invoke famous theories, or “situate” his work in any “discourse.” On the other hand, some further anthropological sophistication would have benefited the book in places. Readers will have to make some allowances.

This book adds greatly to our knowledge of California native material culture, especially our knowledge of techniques and procedures. Archaeologists will need it at their elbows. Ethnologists will find it fascinating, if they have any concern with ethnobiology, resource management, and material culture (as I should hope they do). All Californian citizens should be interested in saving this cultural knowledge, as well as the plants and animals described. Among other values, all will prove useful in emergencies. Above all, I hope and trust, Native Californians will find this book fascinating and valuable—a way to conserve or recapture, at least in image, their rapidly disappearing heritage.

When I show slides of Californian food plants and animals, I tell my classes, “If you don't listen up in here, when civilization falls, I'll be alive and you'll be dead.” That line sounded a lot funnier before gas prices and sea levels began to rise....



