

# Kumeyaay Cultural Landscapes of Baja California's Tijuana River Watershed

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*The cultural landscape of the Kumeyaay living in the Tijuana River Watershed of Baja California embodies the sacred, symbolic, economic, and mythological views of a people who have lived in the region for centuries. Recent research on this region that integrates ethnographic, ethnohistorical, and (to a lesser degree) archaeological information reveals a landscape that is alive and imbued with power, sustenance, and legend — a dynamic construct that reflects both changing Kumeyaay relationships with the land and the group's continuity with the past. Sacred sites, peaks, transformed rocks, magic boulders, and other geographic features associated with oral traditions populate the landscape. Ecosystems and areas of historic significance represent direct links with generations of ancestors and are still layered with meaning in the minds of descendants.*

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*For us the mountains, the rocks, the trees: all this is something important.  
As my grandfather used to say, this ground is the floor for your feet, the  
rocks and hills are your walls, the sky is your roof and the sun your light<sup>1</sup>  
[Josefina López Meza, personal communication 2004].*

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES ARE AN ELUSIVE TOPIC for archaeologists, especially those who work in regions of the Californias and the Great Basin where monumental architecture is rare or non-existent. Adding to these challenges is the fact that most indigenous groups in southern California and northern Baja California traditionally did not construct permanent ceremonial structures, but instead used sites that consisted of cleared flat areas surrounded by wind breaks and shades (Luomala 1978:597), which tend to be archaeologically invisible. Dwellings also tended to be temporary brush structures or were adapted from natural features of the landscape, such as rock shelters. As Kumeyaay cultural authority Josefina López Meza eloquently points out, her people have literally made their homes and constructed their lives from the landscapes in which they lived. Indeed, the light footprint of hunter-gatherer groups in southern California often leaves little or no trace in the archaeological record of their world view, symbolic beliefs, or ceremonial practices.

All individuals and communities, not just the Kumeyaay, give symbolic meanings to the places they inhabit:

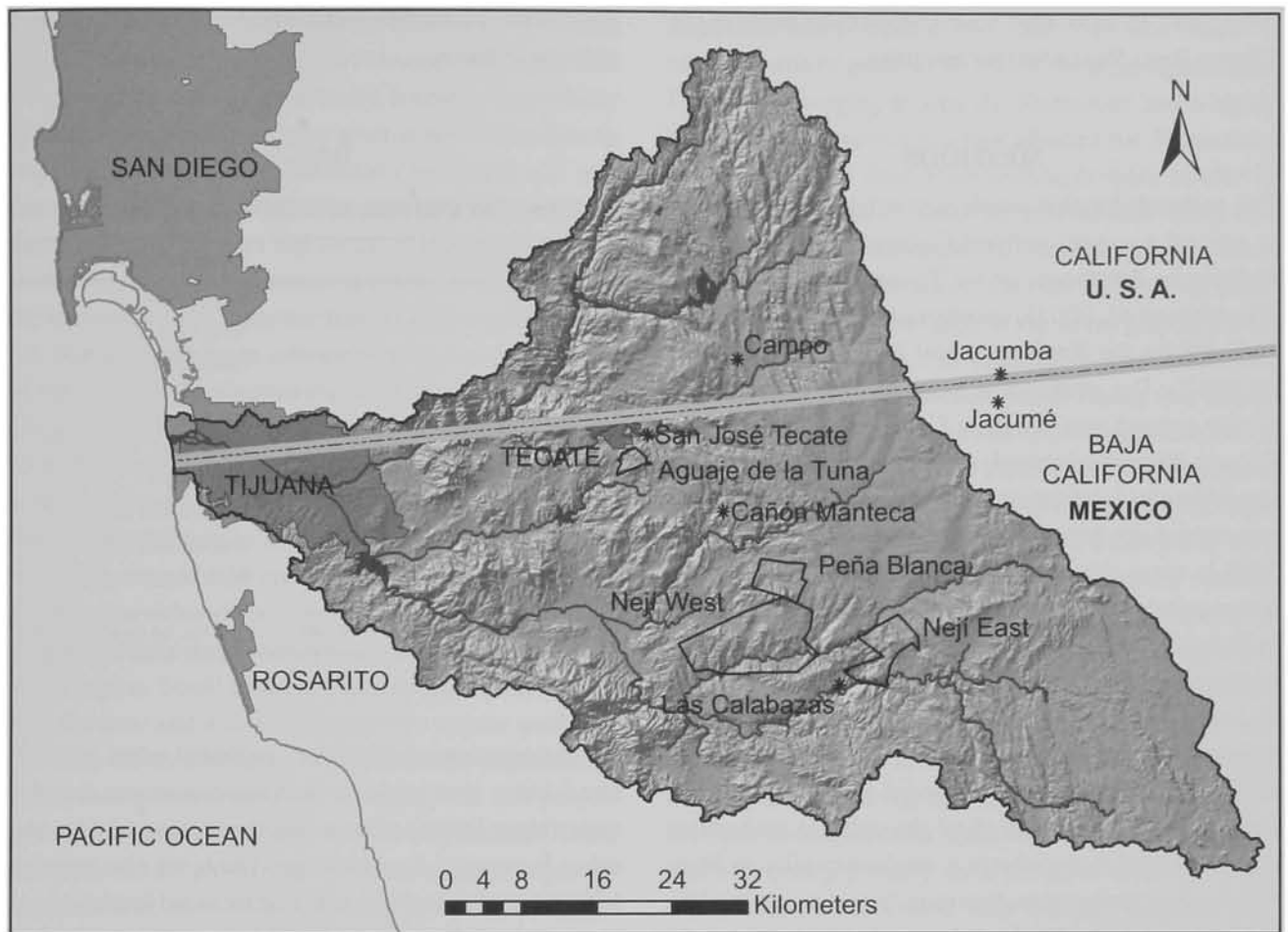
...[P]laces possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings of who one might become. And that is not all. Place-based thoughts about the self lead commonly to thoughts of other things—other places, other people, other times, whole networks of associations that ramify unaccountably within the expanding spheres of awareness that they themselves engender [Basso 1996:55].

Even though concepts of place are of such importance to humanity, and human existence is inextricably situated in time and space, anthropologists in the past have not routinely reported on the symbolic significance of the natural surroundings of a region (Basso 1996:53). However, archaeologists and anthropologists recently have paid more attention to the meaning imbued in

landscapes, although prominent concepts in the study of landscapes have often focused on the notion of sacred landscapes (e.g., Carmichael et al. 1994; Kelley and Francis 1994; Moore 2004; Stein and Lekson 1992). A. Bernard Knapp and Wendy Ashmore (1999) suggest moving beyond the view of sacred places to the more encompassing concept of “ideational landscapes” or “landscapes of the mind.” The ideational embraces the symbolic and sacred meaning of landscape, in addition to mythical histories, moral messages, and genealogical pasts (Knapp and Ashmore 1999). Ideational landscapes may be natural or constructed, and encompass a broader realm of understanding than sacred landscapes. Jerry Moore, in his recent book entitled *Cultural Landscapes in the Ancient Andes* (2005), has added an innovative approach to the subject by his consideration of “soundscapes” and “sights” among groups in the Andes. Although he focuses on societies with monumental architecture, he extends this approach to consider the rock art of central Baja California, and reminds us that places such as these were once filled with the voices of human people: “The rasp of the wind and burble of running water were joined by murmurs, shouts, corrections, and declarations as people retold tales of war, the hunt, the cure, and the race” (Moore 2005:214). In this paper, we address the ideational landscapes of the Kumeyaay.<sup>2</sup> We use the term ideational in a broad sense to include the sacred and symbolic features of the landscape, as well as more economic aspects. Knapp and Ashmore suggest that the term is intended to elicit an insider’s perspective. Related to the concept of ideational landscapes are two themes that are of particular relevance to our work. The first is the idea of landscape as memory (Knapp and Ashmore 1999:13–14). This concept relies on assumptions from cognitive science that suggest that human memory is socially constituted, resulting in a process that maps mythical principles of a society, “reminders of triumphs and catastrophes in the social past” (Knapp and Ashmore 1999:13). Ingold speaks of a landscape as an enduring record of the lives of past people who have lived in the environment: “To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past” (Ingold 1993:152–153). Through memory of a place and the

reuse and reinterpretation of it, landscape is connected to the identity of its inhabitants. This brings us to the second theme, landscape as identity. This has to do with the collective recognition of places or regions, often in association with symbolic, ritual, or ceremonial practices. People interact with the world and create and maintain a sense of social identity with a focus on the landscape (Knapp and Ashmore 1999:15). Among the Australian aboriginal people, places are socialized through stories, or dreamtime sagas of landscape adventure and creation, and include changes in the land over the millennia (Taçon 1999:50).

The Kumeyaay were originally a hunter-gatherer group whose territory comprised southern San Diego and Imperial counties, and northern Baja California. Some researchers refer to this indigenous group and its language varieties by the term Diegueño, due to historic associations with the mission at San Diego, while others divide the group into northern “Ipai” and southern “Tipai.” Others include the Kumeyaay as a middle group between these last two (Langdon 1990). This paper focuses specifically on the Kumeyaay of the Tijuana River Watershed (TRW) in Baja California. These people are part of the approximately 1,800 Native Baja Californians still living in a handful of indigenous communities and traditional settlements in the northern Peninsula (Fig. 1). The remaining descendents of the region’s original inhabitants, like indigenous peoples around the world, have seen their lands, cultures, and populations decimated, and face overwhelming pressures to assimilate into the new political, cultural, and economic systems in which they now find themselves. In spite of these challenges, some Native Baja Californians continue to speak their indigenous languages, gather traditional foods and medicines, visit sites of spiritual importance, and conceptualize their landscapes in ways that are informed by their heritage. Although the focus of this study is on the Kumeyaay in Baja California, and more specifically on the Kumeyaay living in the TRW, we also refer to ethnographic sources and other accounts that provide descriptions of the Kumeyaay that lived on both sides of the border and outside the TRW. We include this information because of its relevance; however, the data that we collected and that constitute the primary focus here are from the TRW south of the U.S./Mexico International border.



**Figure 1.** Tijuana River watershed (TRW) with Kumeyaay communities in Baja California.

The Kumeyaay communities and settlements that have survived tend to be located in remote regions that often lack amenities such as running water and electricity. They have adapted to the harsh environment of the region, and—in part because of limited federal or local support—have maintained many of their traditions. Survival has long depended on an intimate and highly pragmatic knowledge of the environment; even today, some Kumeyaay continue to supplement their marginal subsistence through hunting and gathering. Medicinal herbs remain an important source of cures for numerous ailments. Kumeyaay cultural authorities still recognize a number of natural features as sacred; some of these have mythical significance or mark places that ancestors often repeatedly visited for both ritual and non-ritual reasons. Through the process of making offerings or other modifications in the environment, some of these places have become archaeological sites, although most traces

of such activities are ephemeral in nature. The Kumeyaay cultural authorities are proud of their heritage, are interested in its preservation, and hope to disseminate their knowledge to their descendants.

This paper is intended to further the field of landscape archaeology through an integration of data from various disciplines. Ferguson (1995) has suggested that there is a lack of middle-range theory that links ethnographic data with the archaeological record when considering cultural landscapes. However, the unique situation among the indigenous communities in northern Baja California has to some extent allowed us to bridge the gap between these two subdisciplines of anthropology. Snead and Preucel (1999) found that there can be strong continuities in ideological landscapes, lasting in some regions for over 500 years. Through the integration of ethnographic, ethnohistorical, and archaeological information, we present a picture of the ideational landscape of the

Kumeyaay Indians who have successfully lived in the Tijuana River Watershed for centuries.

## METHODS

The research for this article was originally conducted as part of a project entitled *Cultural Ecology and the Indigenous Landscape of the Tijuana River Watershed* (Gamble et al. 2005), sponsored by the Southwest Consortium for Environmental Research and Policy (SCERP). The geographic focus of that project (and of this article) was the Baja California section of the Tijuana River Watershed, a binational watershed that straddles the international border (Fig. 1). Fieldwork was carried out between June 1, 2004 and December 31, 2005 in areas that are associated with five indigenous communities or settlements (Table 1). The team, which included the authors, San Diego State University (SDSU) graduate students, an archaeologist from the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), and other regional specialists, met with ten cultural authorities, elders known for their traditional knowledge of the landscape. The fact that all of the cultural authorities cited were women reflects a modern reality in Baja California's indigenous communities; women tend to maintain traditional culture in the domestic sphere, in contrast to men, who are inclined to undergo a greater degree of assimilation into the non-Indian world. Most of the cultural authorities were associated with distinct indigenous communities or traditional settlements and shared close ties of kinship as cousins, aunts, nieces, or affinals. This is not surprising, given that the families are descended from localized *shimuls* or clans, such as the *Mishkwish* (transformed into the Spanish surnames Meza and Mata), *Kuaja* (Calles), *Kwatl* (Cuero), and *Es'un* (Osuna). Although a number of anthropologists and others have published ethnographic accounts of the Kumeyaay (e.g., Hohenthal 2001; Shipek 1982; Spier 1923), none of these accounts have been translated into Spanish. The Kumeyaay that were interviewed for this project did not speak English and were probably not influenced by published ethnographies or early historic accounts. Interviews occurred primarily outdoors in the landscape, near their homes, or near historic village sites, many of which had only remnants of foundations marking their locations. During these field trips, interviews with

the cultural authorities were tape-recorded and detailed notes were taken.

Table 1

### KUMEYAAY CULTURAL AUTHORITIES BY COMMUNITY

Kumeyaay Communities	Cultural Authorities
San José Tecate	Julia Meza Thing Telma Meza
Aguaje de la Tuna	Estefana Perez
Nejí West	Benita Meza Aurora Meza Norma Meza Yolanda Meza
Nejí East	Enriqueta Mata Meza
Peña Blanca	Josefina López Meza
La Huerta	Teodora Cuero <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Teodora Cuero accompanied the authors on many of the field trips, but she is not considered one of the nine Kumeyaay cultural authorities that lives in the TRW. Teodora lives in La Huerta, which is south of the TRW.

Archaeological sites were recorded when encountered, but a systematic surface reconnaissance was not undertaken. Special visits were taken to sacred sites and other features of the landscape. The team also traveled to traditional collecting areas that included locales where medicinal, technological, and food plants are gathered, as well as clays for the making of pottery.

All the collection areas, sacred areas, archaeological sites, historic settlements, and other culturally significant features of the landscape were recorded using a Geographic Positioning System (GPS) device. These data were entered into a Geographic Information System (GIS) database, with detailed notes for each place recorded. In addition, some of the indigenous communities' boundaries were recorded, data that is particularly significant for the Kumeyaay today as they struggle to retain or regain rights to their land. In all, over 1,000 photographs were taken and more than 100 locations were recorded.

## INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPES: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Kumeyaay people speak dialects that belong to the larger Yuman family of languages, which includes other groups in California (Tipai, Ipai), Baja California (Paipai, Kiliwa,

Cucapá), and Arizona (Cocopah, Maricopa, Quechan, Mojave, Yavapai, Hualapai, and Havasupai) (Hinton and Watahomigie 1984). Historically, Kumeyaay territory originally extended from near what is now Santo Tomás, Baja California, up to Escondido in California, and eastward over the mountains toward the Colorado River. The TRW (Fig. 1) is in the heart of the southern part of this territory, where Kumeyaay people often refer to themselves as Tipai, meaning Indians or the people.

Humans have been interacting with the environment of northern Baja California for thousands of years (Hicks 1963; Laylander 1987, 1992; Laylander and Moore 2006; Porcayo Micheline 2007). Throughout this time, indigenous societies successfully adapted to meet the challenges of living in a relatively harsh environment. Beginning around 1,300 years ago, changes in technology indicate that either demographic changes or the diffusion of new cultural complexes impacted native peoples of the wider region. Small projectile points (presumably used with the bow and arrow) and ceramics appear, probably from the eastern deserts. More intensive exploitation of the area's many resources, including oak and pinyon groves, apparently led to increases in population. During this period, the pattern of material culture began to resemble that of the Kumeyaay as documented in the early historic accounts for the region (Gallegos et al. 2002:1–21).

Archaeological, ethnohistoric, and ethnographic records describe the Kumeyaay as relatively mobile hunters and gatherers, exploiting a wide variety of resources in seasonal cycles of movement from the coast to the mountains and desert. The region contains two of the most important resources in this seasonal round—oak and pinyon groves. Although detailed excavations have not been undertaken, many archaeological sites have been identified in relationship to these vital resources, and some have been officially registered (Serrano González 2002). Many of these consist of bedrock milling sites in association with springs and seasonal campsites. In general, wherever important plant resources are found in association with sources of water and specific geologic formations, such as granite outcroppings, there is a high probability of finding archaeological sites.

For the Kumeyaay and neighboring groups such as the Paipai, the pinyon groves of the Sierra Juárez were a significant shared resource that not only provided an

important component of their diet, but also played a role in a time of great social and ceremonial significance. Like many foraging groups, the Kumeyaay had a highly flexible band organization that allowed for fluctuations in group size, so that when resources were relatively scarce, groups could break up into smaller units and spread out across the landscape. However, during times of abundance, such as during the pine nut harvest, many bands gathered in areas such as the sierra pinyon groves for times of feasting, the seeking of mates, and the performance of a ceremonial cycle of rituals that helped to insure a successful adaptation to the ecosystems of the region (DuBois 1908; Shipek 1982; Spier 1923; Waterman 1910). Historic documents (Rojo 1972) describe such gatherings in the pine nut groves during the late summer when the *gran lloro* or *wakeruk*, a festival commemorating the dead, was celebrated. Aspects of traditional knowledge and environmental management strategies probably were also communicated during these gatherings. Even today some Kumeyaay and Paipai still head up to the pinyon groves of the sierra for the pine nut harvest in late summer (Teodora Cuero, personal communication 2008; Wilken-Robertson 1981). Not surprisingly, many rock art sites in or near the watershed are associated with the pinyon habitat or other areas where there are concentrations of natural resources (Serrano González 2001).

For pre-contact Kumeyaay people in this area, the watershed probably represented an important nexus between four directions. To the north, closely related bands or *shimuls* (with whom they shared a common language) linked them with the rest of native California. To the east, related desert peoples, such as the Cocopah, were important trade partners who often joined the Kumeyaay for the pine nut harvest gatherings and who linked them to the vibrant agricultural cultures of the Colorado River region and the greater southwest. To the south were the Kumeyaay, Paipai, Kiliwa, and other peninsular groups, with whom they also had frequent contacts that included intermarriage (Michelsen 1991; Owen 1962). To the west, the watershed flowed into the Pacific Ocean, with its abundant marine resources and milder winter temperatures. As Kumeyaay bands traveled from coast to mountains to desert, they moved through and beyond the boundaries of the watershed, probably choosing routes based on ease of access, relations with

neighboring groups, visits to spiritually significant locales, and the changing availability of resources (Wilken-Robertson and Laylander 2006).

*Ethnohistory: Indigenous Landscapes  
in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*

How did the tumultuous events of the mission, ranch, and mining periods impact the cultural landscapes of the Kumeyaay? In less than two centuries, the once expansive territories of the Kumeyaay were systematically reduced as non-Indians appropriated the land for their own uses. Access to the natural and symbolic resources that had sustained native lifeways for generations was increasingly limited and indigenous populations were decimated, resulting in major demographic shifts. In this section, we examine some of the ethnohistoric documents of the period that provide a vivid picture of the changing nature of Kumeyaay physical and ideational landscapes.

The diaries of the 1769 expedition of Franciscan missionaries and Spanish soldiers as they moved northward from Baja California to San Diego are the earliest known written accounts of native peoples of the watershed area. Fray Juan Crespi's vivid descriptions of Kumeyaay people provide a rare view of indigenous lifeways before widespread contact with European cultures. Although the expedition spent only one or two days within the actual watershed boundaries, they spent several days along the Pacific coast just west of the TRW, where they encountered Kumeyaay people whose territories included the watershed. On May 10, 1769, at their camp in the area now known as Rosarito—due west of the watershed—Crespi described an encounter with local Kumeyaay people:

All of them came to the camp at once, men, women, and children, so that we could not count them all, every one of them well pleased, happy, and friendly, having their quivers, bows and arrows in their hands. Their chiefs on coming up to us gave us long speeches, and then, along with the nine men who had accompanied us from the previous spot, sat down with us. Men, women and children, they all of them were very much painted in red, black, yellow, and white, all of the men being naked, wearing only feather headdresses, the women decently covered by bunched strings in front and either a deer or a sea lion hide in back. Some of the men carried the usual bow and arrows, others war clubs, still others very long fish gigs, these last being very sharp in the point, which is made of bone or shell. They all carry a great many very neatly and

well-made fishing nets of all colors that they wear tied at their waists. Our commander made all of them a present of beads, ribbons, and other items, with which they were all very well pleased. Some of them presented barbequed sardines and mussels to the commander, who gave them very good presents, which they returned one more time by presenting him with one or two nets that they took from their waists and four or five arrows, from their quivers, that were very much painted and had very fine flints of all hues... [Crespi 2001:243].

This, and other passages from Crespi that describe hunting, gathering, and fishing peoples living in the coastal landscapes west of the TRW, bring to life much of the evidence from the archaeological record of the region: the use of fiber cordage, clubs, bows, and arrows; the manufacturing of stone, bone, and shell tools; the hunting of terrestrial and marine mammals; fishing technology, including nets and spears; the consumption of fish and shellfish; and traditions of trade and aesthetics. Meigs (1935:18) reports that California Indians were particularly numerous along the coastal terraces between Ensenada and San Diego due to the availability of abundant marine and terrestrial resources.

Unfortunately, the nature of the encounters would change dramatically as the invading cultures with superior arms technology began the conquest of souls and lands. Free movement through coastal landscapes by hunters and gatherers virtually ceased with the establishment of the Dominican mission system along the Pacific slope of the peninsula. Historic evidence of Kumeyaay people's yearly cycle of travel from the mountains to the ocean—and the sudden disruption of this cycle—is found in a mid-nineteenth century document quoting Janitin, a Kumeyaay from Neji:

I and two relatives of mine came down from the Neji Mountains to Rosarito Beach to catch clams, to eat and take back to the mountain as we were accustomed to doing every year; we did no harm to anyone on the way, and on the beach we thought only of catching and drying clams to take to our settlement.

While we were doing this, we saw two men on horses racing toward where we were; my relatives, of course, were afraid and began to run away as fast as they could, hiding in the thick willow grove which existed at that time in the gully of Rosarito Rancho.

When I saw that I was alone, I became afraid of those men too, and I ran toward the forest to join my companions, but it was too late, because just then they caught me and lassoed me and dragged me a long

ways, banging me around a great deal on the branches over which they dragged me, pulling me, lassoed as I was, as fast as their horses would go; after this they tied me up with my arms behind me and took me on to the mission of San Miguel, making me go almost full speed to keep up with the trot of their horses, and when I would stop a little to catch my breath, they whipped me with the straps that they had with them, making me understand by signs that I had to move quickly; after going a long ways in this fashion, they slowed down and whipped me so that I would always keep pace with their horses [Rojo 1972:30].

Clearly the Kumeyaay people who inhabited the region were deeply impacted by the founding of the nearby Franciscan mission of San Diego de Alcalá (1769), and the Dominican missions of San Miguel (1787), Descanso (1817), and Guadalupe (1834). Some Kumeyaay kept their distance from the missions, preferring to adjust their hunting and gathering cycles to completely avoid the new intruders. Some may have added occasional mission visits to their annual rounds, arriving at times when mission resources were plentiful and then continuing with their semi-nomadic economy (Magaña Mancillas 1997:35), while others settled permanently within the sphere of the missions (Meigs 1935). The imposition of the mission system not only changed the economic landscape of the Kumeyaay drastically, it also altered their ability to maintain traditional practices, such as visits to spiritual areas and other important features of the landscape. Some Kumeyaay eventually became “missionized” Indians, giving up their indigenous lifeways to take on the agricultural and ranching life espoused by the mission fathers. Unfortunately, these new ways of extracting a living from the land were just the beginning of a new pattern of exploitation that would cause great damage to the very landscapes and natural resources that had sustained the Kumeyaay for so long:

For indigenous people linked to the mission, this meant not only the substitution of part of their traditional economic practices, but also that their ecosystem would undergo transformations and deterioration due to the cultivation of grains, the grazing of animals and the cutting down of trees, especially of oaks [Santiago Guerrero 2005:57].

Although the missions were established outside of the immediate study area, native people were soon drawn into their sphere of influence. Jatiñil, a famous nineteenth century leader of the Nejí tribe who has

become a legendary figure for the Kumeyaay, described to Manuel Clemente Rojo his changing relationship with the mission:

My name is Jatiñil, and I have been the chief of this tribe since the year in which Lieutenant Ruiz left here for the South (1822); my father was chief before me, and before my father, my grandfather; so that the command of our tribe was always in the hands of my family, and that's why the tribe bears my own name.... I came to help Father Felix raise Mission Guadalupe from its foundations to the end, and I also helped him to sow every year and to harvest his crops; and the father used to give us what he wanted to—corn, barley, and wheat, from that which we ourselves had sowed and harvested but, not content with this, he tried to get us to be baptized several times in order to shut us up in the mission and handle us like the rest of the Indians.... [T]his made me very angry and for that reason I went to look for him in Guadalupe with the intention of killing him.... After that, I returned to this settlement [Nejí] and I haven't gone anywhere. Look, I can't even see from old age; most of my people died in the war; others became excited and went to Upper California at the time of the placer mines and haven't returned; so, you see, I only have a few families left and we all work without stealing from anyone [Rojo 1972:45–46].

As a result of changes in Mexican federal laws, the missions were secularized beginning in 1833, slowly bringing the mission period to an end by 1849 (Meigs 1935). Although the law called for returning part of the former mission holdings to the Indians, in Baja California the lands were considered national property since native groups had not established permanent, sedentary settlements. From 1820 to 1870, in the course of a few generations, the Kumeyaay saw their traditional lands drastically reduced and assigned to newcomers:

The missionaries and soldiers considered the Tecate region a land of wild Indians, a frontier land, since in that territory missions had never been founded. The non-Indian population began to move in to this space, as ranches were extended into this “virgin territory.” During this period, the ranches of Nejí, Las Juntas, and Jacum were created; these coexisted with the indigenous settlements [Santiago Guerrero 2005:63].

Each new administration gave away Indian lands to soldiers and bureaucrats as a way of paying off debts for services rendered, leading to the loss of large areas of indigenous territory. Native people often became employees on the new ranches, learning to raise crops, cattle, and even fences to partition off what had once

been their own territory. However, much of the area continued to be fairly remote, providing a refuge for non-Christianized Indians and others who were displaced by demographic pressures from San Diego and other coastal areas. In 1848, the Kumeyaay cultural region and the natural habitats that comprised it were divided between two separate countries as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Nonetheless, limited contact continued between the groups on both sides of the border, and some California Kumeyaay migrated to Kumeyaay settlements in Baja California as a safe haven from the persecution suffered in the U.S. One example was made famous by anthropologist Florence Shippek (1991), who recorded the autobiography of Delfina Cuero, a Kumeyaay woman from San Diego who at times lived at El Alamo or *Ha'a*, a remote canyon of Nejí.

The discovery of gold in the 1870s in Real del Castillo and other areas of northern Baja California (including the Tecate region) brought with it a migration of prospectors from California, Sonora, and Europe. Once again, the Kumeyaay were displaced as the government granted mining claims. Some Kumeyaay became workers in the mining areas. By the late nineteenth century, most of the Kumeyaay people within the TRW lived on remote ranches and settlements, surviving through a combination of hunting and gathering activities, ranching, horticulture, mining, and working as wage laborers (primarily as cowboys, shepherds, or farmhands). As the remaining Kumeyaay became more sedentary and their territorial extension was reduced, their perception of the landscape must have become more localized and been influenced by the new economic, social, and cultural systems in which they found themselves embedded. Many eventually left their lands to work in Tecate, Tijuana, or San Diego, or in other urban areas where many lost their identification with their Kumeyaay ancestry and territory. Even as the incursion of non-native people into Kumeyaay territory drastically changed Kumeyaay relationships with the land, the Kumeyaay were able to take refuge in the more remote landscapes and use their knowledge of the land and its resources to survive.

#### *Indigenous Landscapes of the Twentieth Century to the Present*

Twentieth-century ethnographic accounts of the Kumeyaay in the study area, while not focused specifically

on ideational landscapes, provide detailed, scientific information about Kumeyaay culture and interactions with the land. Leslie Spier (1923), Edward Gifford (1931), Philip Drucker (1941), Constance DuBois (1908), and T.T. Waterman (1910) all made significant contributions to our understanding of the closely related southern California Kumeyaay and their neighbors. One of the most detailed sources of information on the Kumeyaay in Baja California is the work of Peveril Meigs III, who carried out interviews in 1929 and 1936. His "Creation Myth and Other Recollections of the Nijí Mishkwish" (Meigs 1971) includes examples of oral traditions, maps of settlements and placenames, and historical information regarding Jatiñil, while "Field Notes on the Sh'un and Jat'am, Manteca, Baja California" (Meigs 1974) features interviews with Kumeyaay living in Cañón de Manteca and includes rare photographs of a potter, various Kumeyaay residents of the area, a bedrock mortar with a brush shade, and an acorn granary.

William D. Hohenthal Jr.'s *Tipai Ethnographic Notes: a Baja California Indian Community at Mid-century* (2001) is based on field work from 1948, 1949, and 1951, and is the most complete ethnographic work related to the study area. Hohenthal visited many of the indigenous settlements that would cease to exist or become mestizados by the end of the century, including Manteca, Los Coches, Tanamá, Las Calabazas, Jamatay, El Compadre, Jasai, and Jacume, as well as those that have survived to the present, including Nejí, Peña Blanca, and San José Tecate. Valuable information was collected on a variety of subjects, including local and regional history, archaeological sites, tribes, and Kumeyaay placenames. Of particular interest are observations on wild plants and material culture, including basketry, pottery, cordage, milling implements, leatherworking, and structures. In many cases, Hohenthal drew maps showing the layout of traditional settlements. Information was gathered on social life, traditional games, clothing, adornments, law, government, religious beliefs, ceremonies, oral traditions, healing, and ethnosience that reflected both indigenous and Mexican lifeways, and that may be useful in helping indigenous communities recreate or reconstruct aspects of their culture.

A few years after Hohenthal's field work in the area, Frederic Noble Hicks carried out research in northern Baja California and synthesized information on aboriginal

subsistence and sociopolitical organization in his 1963 dissertation, *Ecological Aspects of Aboriginal Culture in the Western Yuman Area*. Although the work addressed a much larger area than that encompassed by the TRW, his ecological approach, as well as the specific information he collected on the Tipai (Kumeyaay), provides useful data for understanding human adaptations to the TRW environment.

After the first half of the twentieth century, only limited field work was conducted in the study area. However, the work of L. Bibiana Santiago Guerrero of the Historical Research Institute (Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas) of the Autonomous University of Baja California, Tijuana, who carried out interviews with members of the Tecate Kumeyaay communities as part of the Institute's Tecate Oral History Project (Santiago Guerrero 2001), is a notable exception. In the following section, we build on the important information collected by these researchers—by working with the descendants of their consultants—and touch upon the current threats to native peoples and cultural resources in today's U.S.-Mexico border region as a consequence of economic pressures.

### THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE TIJUANA RIVER WATERSHED TODAY

Currently, only a handful of Kumeyaay communities remain in the TRW (Fig. 1). Juntas de Nejí (Nejí East and Nejí West) is the only community with title to the land, while the other traditional settlements—Peña Blanca, San José Tecate, and Aguaje de la Tuna—struggle to regain the land against the encroachment of *ejidos* and other powerful interests. Many of the members of these communities live only part time in their settlements, residing most of the time in Tecate, Tanamá, Valle de las Palmas, El Testero, or other neighboring towns where they find easier access to employment, schools, and services. For all of these communities, census data are unavailable, incomplete, or questionable.

Perhaps one of the most evident outward signs of both the changes and continuity in the cultural landscapes of the TRW is the use of Kumeyaay place names. Dozens of indigenous place names, many of which—e.g., Tecate, Tanamá, Nejí, *Kuuchumaa*, Jacumé—are still in use today, were recorded by ethnographers and others (Hohenthal

2001:64-67; Santiago Guerrero 2001:41). Our fieldwork confirmed the existence of these place names, as well as added some that had never been recorded. Many place names have also been hispanicized, as in the case of *Ha'a*, which is now better known by non-Indians as *El Alamo* (the Cottonwood). In addition, some places have been given altogether different names in Spanish, as exemplified in one of Julia Meza's comments about the place name San José Tecate:

This ranch didn't used to have a name in Spanish. In our language it's called *Mat kutná*, which means sunken earth. The old man, the owner for many years, was named José La Chappa. He would say, "If a Mexican asks you the name, are you going to say *Mat kutná*? We should give it my name, José, San José;" and it stuck [Julia Meza, personal communication 2004].

Not surprisingly, the landscapes with the strongest indigenous place name associations for the Kumeyaay cultural authorities are the more remote areas where they have continued to live and carry out traditional economic and ritual activities.

*Juntas de Nejí*. The community of Juntas de Nejí is the northernmost of the four federally recognized Kumeyaay indigenous communities of Baja California and is located within the municipality of Tecate (Fig. 2). Juntas de Nejí, with a combined total of 11,590 hectares, is divided geographically into two separate parcels, both of which lie relatively close to the international border and within the Tijuana River Watershed. The clans of Nejí have historically shared close familial ties with the Kumeyaay groups of southern San Diego County, such as those at Campo, Manzanita, La Posta, and Jamul, as evidenced by many shared surnames such as Meza, Cuero, Quaja, and Osuna (Shipek 1991). Linguistic ties are also strong: a recent survey by linguist Margaret Field (2007) found strong similarities between the Kumeyaay spoken in some southern San Diego speech communities and that spoken in the northern Baja California communities.

The community's mountainous terrain includes wide areas of high chaparral, oak woodland, granitic outcroppings, and in some areas pine, Tecate cypress, as well as other flora indicative of the transition to the higher altitudes of the adjacent sierra. For the most part, water sources are scarce, and usually consist of small springs or shallow wells that are used for both drinking

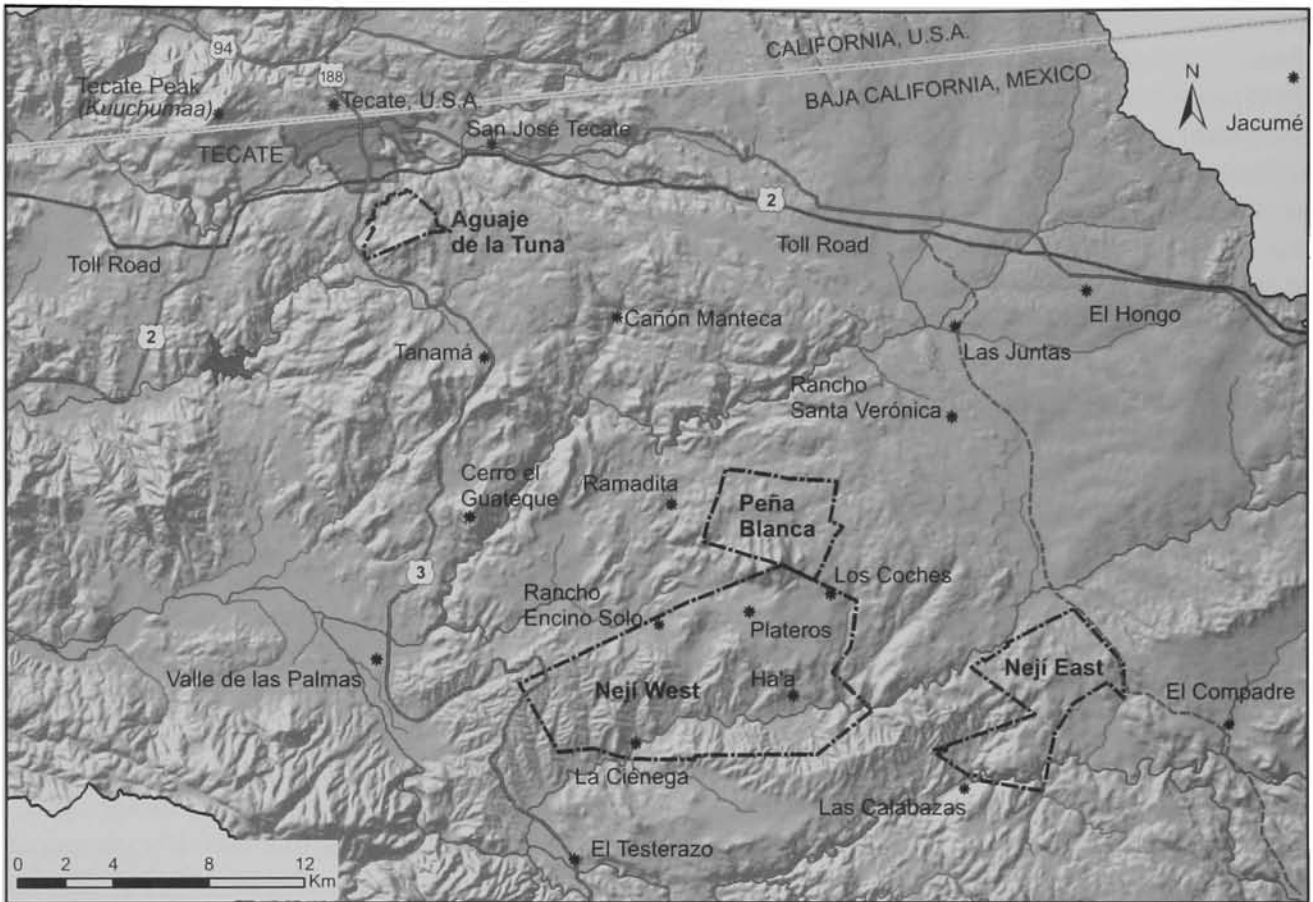


Figure 2. Kumeyaay communities in Baja California.

water and limited gravity-fed irrigation. One exception is the drainage of *Ha'a*—a significant canyon that connects the separate parcels of Juntas de Nejí—and one of the few areas with a year-round flowing stream.

All of the settlements in the community are located far from the highway, accessible only by dirt roads in poor condition, although Mexico's Highway 3 between Tecate and Ensenada does cross a small part of Nejí's land at one point. One consequence of the remoteness of the settlements is that they still have a well-preserved natural resource base. Acorns are one of the most important traditional native resources utilized in the area of Nejí; residents also depend on other wild foods and medicinal plants, including occasional native game such as rabbits, as part of a diversified survival strategy. Although pottery and basketry traditions once existed in the area, there are currently only a few women occasionally producing baskets.

At least three Kumeyaay—Enriqueta Mata Meza, José Cuero, and his wife Andrea—still live at the Nejí

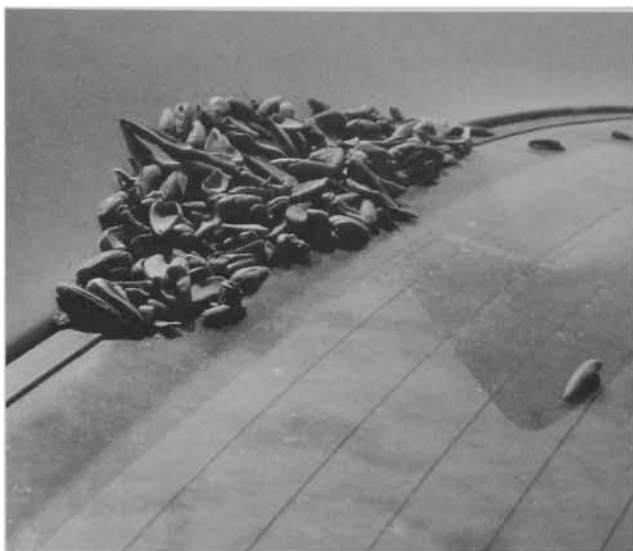
Ranchería. Enriqueta (Fig. 3) showed the project team numerous cultural resources and collecting areas in the region, including remains of an old house that belonged to her father and grandfather, as well as the adobe foundations of a home that used to belong to Paula Mata. Bedrock milling features, chipped stone, and other artifacts were observed near these house sites. Enriqueta also identified the area where pottery was fired, right in front of a house that was shown still standing in Hohenthal's 1949 photograph of the village (Fig. 4). This is particularly interesting, because according to Rogers (1936:5), pottery was made and fired away from the village, since it was believed that bad luck and failure would result if anyone observed the process. Enriqueta took the group to the source of the clay that her mother collected to make pots. This was approximately three kilometers from the place where their village was located and where the pots were fired. Except for the clay itself, no artifacts or any other cultural remains were noted. The project team that interviewed Enriqueta



Figure 3. Enriqueta Mata Meza at Nejí East showing location of house in Hohenthal photograph (photo by Lynn H. Gamble).



Figure 4. Photograph taken in circa 1949 by William D. Hohenthal, Jr. showing house at Nejí; probably house of Manuel Mesa.



**Figure 5.** Acorns drying on back windshield of an abandoned car with the trunk open at Nejí (photo by Glenn S. Russell).



**Figure 6.** Benita Meza and her daughter Aurora Meza gathering sage seeds on the way to Las Calabazas (photo by Lynn H. Gamble).

included her sister-in-law, Teodora Cuero, who spoke Kumeyaay with her as she did with the other cultural authorities that were consulted. When the team left the Nejí ranchería, Enriqueta gave Teodora a bag of unhulled acorns and another bag of processed acorn meal. The hatchback of an abandoned automobile on the property was being used to dry acorns (Fig. 5), illustrating the fact that although the Kumeyaay avail themselves of new technology, they still eat traditional native foods that require not only collecting, but often considerable processing (such as leaching), before they are edible.

According to Juan Adams, one of Hohenthal's Kumeyaay consultants from Nejí East, 30 to 40 Kumeyaay lived there in 1878 and inhabited round, earth-covered tule houses during the winter, which they then burned in the spring. At that time, the Indians did not have permanent settlements and still did a lot of gathering, sometimes traveling to the desert during the winter. Juan Adams also commented that the wetlands used to be larger and more numerous and that the sites were situated on the high ground (Hohenthal 2001:90–91).

The western parcel of Nejí includes the ranches of Rancho Encino Solo, Los Plateros, Los Coches, *Ha'a*, and La Ciénega. We visited these settlements and the surrounding landscape with Kumeyaay cultural authority Aurora Meza. Aurora, whose family is part of the *Mishquish* clan, still lives at Rancho Encino Solo for part of the year. Aurora's mother, Benita Meza (Fig. 6), joined

the group for some of the field trips in Nejí West. Benita, who died in 2007, was fluent in Kumeyaay and spoke very little Spanish.

At Los Plateros, relatively shallow oval bedrock mortars, similar to the “Cuyamaca ovals”<sup>3</sup> identified by archaeologists north of the border, were noted, as well as two springs and the remains of an old adobe house. Aurora Meza told the group that the oval-shaped mortars were used to crack open acorns, and that the grinding was then done elsewhere. A small grove of coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) was near the mortars. Aurora explained that some large holes in the ground at the site were looters' holes. According to Aurora, the previous residents at Los Plateros included Rosa Mata, Julian Cuero, as well as the famous Kumeyaay Indian Jatiñil or Black Dog. One of Hohenthal's (2001:303) consultants, Juan Mata, also lived at Los Plateros with his wife Loreta Calles.

At the abandoned settlement of Los Coches, which is situated on the eastern boundary of the Nejí West parcel, Aurora stated that the Kumeyaay occupied the



**Figure 7. Boulder at *Ha'a* with hole that served as window for house (photo by Glenn S. Russell).**

village from October to December, when they collected manzanita berries and acorns and hunted deer. When Hohenthal (2001:101) conducted his research in Los Coches, Tomás Cuero, his wife Felícita, and some of their children and grandchildren lived there. Hohenthal noted that permanent houses were built on a hill at Los Coches, but that in the summer of 1949, the family lived in temporary structures close to the crops and the creek, where it was cooler.

The large former village of *Ha'a* is an expansive historic and precontact archaeological site that currently has no standing architecture, although the remains of structures and numerous artifacts can be observed on the surface, including pottery sherds, flakes, an obsidian biface, and groundstone. There is at least one spring and a permanent stream. *Ha'a* is the Kumeyaay word for cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), or *el alamo* in Spanish, a large number of which are visible all along the riparian area. Hohenthal visited *Ha'a* in 1949 when José de Luz, a Kumeyaay, and his wife Luisa Mata were living there. The road leading down into the canyon used to continue

on to Rancho La Ciénega, a few miles downstream, but it was overgrown by the time Hohenthal visited.

In 2004 the canyon was still quite remote; the research team hiked in because the road was impassible. Aurora Meza informed the group that she had lived there with her mother when she was young; she identified many of the house locations and mentioned the former residents, most of whom were her relatives. One house had been situated next to a large boulder with a hole in it that was used as a wall for the house. Aurora told a story about an old woman named *Kishmayaay* who lived in the house. She said that the old woman was rumored to be so stingy that rather than share her food, as was the custom, she used to cook and eat inside her house, constantly peering out the hole in the boulder (Fig. 7) to see if anyone was coming. Aurora also showed us the remains of her old house, and explained that houses were often built between or on the side of rocks. One of the boulders at the site had niches carved into it, which Aurora said had been created as part of a Roman Catholic chapel (Fig. 8).



**Figure 8.** View of chapel wall at *Ha'a* with carved niches (photo by Glenn S. Russell).

*Ha'a* is mentioned as a prominent Kumeyaay village in *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero* (Shipek 1991). When Delfina Cuero's Kumeyaay grandparents left the San Diego area, traveling farther and farther in search of food and a place to live, they eventually settled at *Ha'a*. Delfina married a man from *Ha'a*, Sebastián Osuna, and their children ended up living in various communities in the area. According to Aurora, Jatiñil was said to be from *Ha'a* too, where he was buried along with his favorite black horse, so that it could accompany him on his journey into the afterlife (Meza, personal communication 2004).

Near the site of *Ha'a* is a large upright rock called *Ui'ipá*, the 'Person-rock' (Fig. 9). According to Aurora, the rock was an Indian who had been fleeing from a calamity in ancient times and had been turned to stone. Aurora pointed out another boulder in the area that was used by pregnant women to determine if their baby would be male or female. Women would lie on the rock and the direction in which the rock tipped would reveal

the sex of the baby. Oak groves, prickly pear cactus, willows, watercress, and other plants growing in the area all had special meaning to Aurora, who remembered them as plants that were associated with economic and social activities in her people's daily lives.

At Rancho La Ciénega, an abandoned ranch house once lived in by the Gilbert family still stands. Aurora told us that it was abandoned because it was haunted. At the time of the abandonment, some of the people who had lived there died of smallpox and were buried in the area with their heads facing west instead of east, the latter being the traditional way. Aurora's explanation was that the local clan name *Mishquish* (later transformed to the surnames Meza or Mata) means rebellious, so the people were buried rebelliously. Aurora also said that whole metates were usually buried with women, and manos were placed on the surface. On the east side of the canyon, Meza pointed out a large boulder by a trail leading to the crest of a hill that was used as a resting spot, explaining that it was "like a park; the elders would



**Figure 9. Person rock in Nejí West (photo by Glenn S. Russell).**

sit underneath the rock and talk to the people who were gathered there.” The trail leads from *Ha’a* to Las Calabazas.

Las Calabazas (Fig. 2), which is near the southern perimeter of Nejí East, is an abandoned settlement where Benita Meza, Aurora Meza’s mother, lived as a child. It is near a drainage where a large oak grove is situated among boulders covered with bedrock milling features, including “Cuyamaca ovals,” slicks, mortars, and basin metates (Fig. 10). The remains of a house, with numerous historic artifacts and a possible storage facility, are across the creek. Also visible is an old irrigation ditch, the remnants of a dam, and other features. Scattered on the surface were flakes, cores, and grinding stones. According to Benita and Aurora, three or four families used to live at this site. Aurora lived at Las Calabazas until she was ten years old. When Hohenthal (2001) visited the settlement, Alejandro Calles and his niece Carmela Machado were living there. There was one large house, a storehouse, a cook shed, and a small henhouse made out of mulefat (*Baccharis glutinosa*) and willow (*Salix* sp.). The house that Calles lived in was abandoned and burned after his mother died (Hohenthal 2001). About two acres were planted at the time with wheat,



**Figure 10. Teodora Cuero near Las Calabazas with “Cuyamaca Oval” bedrock milling feature (photo by Glenn S. Russell).**

maize, pink beans, and squash, which were irrigated with ditches from a pool that was connected to a spring.

One symbolically significant place in the region that the Nejí Kumeyaay recognize as a sacred ceremonial site is called the Spirit of the Mountain. It is associated with New Year rituals at the winter solstice. Although the exact site location can not be disclosed here, it is situated on a unique rock formation on the side of a mountain

with a dramatic view of the Nejí landscape and beyond. Aurora Meza told us about the annual ritual to the Spirit of the Mountain:

The tradition is that a fire must be lit on top of the rock. My grandfather used to come. But when he could no longer do it, he put us in charge. We would come every year to put the burning coals up on top. They say that it will bring us a good life, all year. They say that the fire must always be lit, when the New Year arrives it must already be lit... and it looks like this year it's my turn. I hope I'm up for it. I tell my kids that I'll go up on a motorcycle and they can go up on foot! In our language it's called the Spirit of the Mountain. I think it was manmade. They bring here their first hunted catch, their first arrow, or their first song; they can also bring that. It's an altar. They say that the whole tribe would come and wait for the New Year. Someone would go up to light the fire, and the people would be sitting down here on all the rocks you see around to wait for the New Year. Who knows how they even knew that it was a New Year; they didn't even have a calendar. There are times when it's raining. But it's not a problem, it always lights. They don't have a hard time. We do have to gather firewood; look there's some that my sister gathered. The warriors used to leave many offerings; I think they would leave them here in the past. Whether it was their first hunting catch or their first song, they would offer it to the spirit [Aurora Meza, personal communication 2004].

At the time of our visit, there was no archaeological evidence indicating that the locale was used as a ceremonial area. Offerings were left at the rock, such as special plants and tobacco, but these are perishable and did not leave an archaeological signature—a situation that is probably typical of many spiritual places in the landscape.

*Peña Blanca.* Bordering on the western parcel of Nejí is the traditional Kumeyaay settlement of Peña Blanca (Fig. 2), an unofficial neighboring settlement to Nejí that is unrecognized by the Mexican government (Wilken-Robertson 2004). Land tenancy is a serious issue for Nejí with its limited population base, and even more so for Peña Blanca, due to the dearth of land-tenancy documents. Both communities are undergoing invasion by squatters and encroachment by neighboring *ejidos*. Josefina López Meza, the traditional authority of Peña Blanca, commented that members of a neighboring *ejido* interested in claiming the land for their own use have tried to destroy archaeological sites and any other cultural resources that might strengthen the Kumeyaay

families' right to their land. The community is named after the mountain of Peña Blanca, which dominates the landscape (Fig. 11). One of the most valuable resources for both Nejí and Peña Blanca is the natural beauty of their landscapes and their sense of remoteness, even though they are actually surprisingly close to the metropolitan areas of Tijuana and San Diego.

Two archaeological sites and numerous abandoned house foundations and bedrock milling features were observed at Peña Blanca. Some of these have recently been mapped and documented in detail by Heather Kwiatkowski (2008), who interviewed Josefina López Meza (Fig. 12) about the layout of the site, the types and uses of structures at the site, and the use of the immediate landscape. Josefina, who was born in the area and still maintains a house on the property, explained that about 100 people used to live in Peña Blanca, but there was no work, so eventually they moved to Tecate or Valle de las Palmas. Her grandfather, Benito Meza, registered the land in 1939. Josefina identified the remains of a structure that was her grandmother's home near some oaks, and the remains of her aunt's kitchen, which was made out of wood. Nearby she pointed out her great-grandmother's dwelling. Josefina said that each house had its own milling features outside of the kitchen (see Kwiatkowski 2008 for more details). Many indigenous potsherds were noted, especially near Josefina's great-grandmother's house, as well as flakes and other artifacts. Josefina mentioned that there were also several other abandoned structures at the site. Josefina told how her father used to dam up the creek near her grandmother's house to irrigate the land. Josefina provided a document of the traditional holdings at Peña Blanca, which was used to map their land at this location (Figure 2). Hohenthal visited Peña Blanca at the time that Benito Meza was living there; Benito had crops planted at both Peña Blanca and San José Tecate.

Josefina, like other local Kumeyaay, views Peña Blanca Mountain as a key point in the region's living sacred landscape, and one that is imbued with specific powers and ritual functions:

My great-grandmother and my grandmother took me up on Peña Blanca, preparing us and counseling us. In other words, those who lived here near Tecate, they would go up to Kuuchumaa because both mountains are sacred to us. To the east is the Guateque Mountain,



**Figure 11. Peña Blanca (photo by Lynn H. Gamble).**

they didn't use that one so much, because according to our history, that one is asleep, it isn't alive. *Kuuchumaa* and Peña Blanca are, for us they do have life. If you go up *Kuuchumaa* and you are carrying negativity, you won't be able to get up to the top. The same with Peña Blanca, you won't be able to make it, you'll get tired. One time I was sick, I had a cold and a cough; we went up but I wasn't able to climb all the way up. But I set it as a challenge for myself, so when I was feeling better (actually it was anger that I had felt, that was the negativity), after that I was able to go up easily. I got up top in a half hour from my house there in La Peña. And that proved to me that what my ancestors had told me was true [Josefina López Meza, personal communication 2004].

The perception of Peña Blanca as a place of power stems from the use of higher elevations as traditional areas for instruction during rites of passage. The amplification of one's own personal characteristics fits into the same pattern, which we will see below in relationship to the sacred site *Kuuchumaa*.

*San José Tecate.* The community of San José Tecate (Fig. 2) is approximately two kilometers south of the U.S.-Mexican international border, just east of Tecate, and immediately adjacent to Highway 2. Julia Meza Thing and her daughter Telma Meza (Fig. 13) currently



**Figure 12. Josefina López Meza at Peña Blanca (photo by Lynn H. Gamble).**

live on the property, which is much smaller than it was when visited by Hohenthal. The houses are situated in a grove of oaks near a spring. Julia was born over 70 years ago in the original adobe room that still forms part of one of the houses. A cemetery and rock art site are currently separated from the houses by the highway and are apparently now on property that has been taken over by Mexico's state-owned petroleum company, *Petróleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX), and private parties. The rock



**Figure 13. Telma Meza, Julia Meza Thing, and Teodora Cuero in front of rock art panel at San José Tecate (photo by Lynn H. Gamble).**

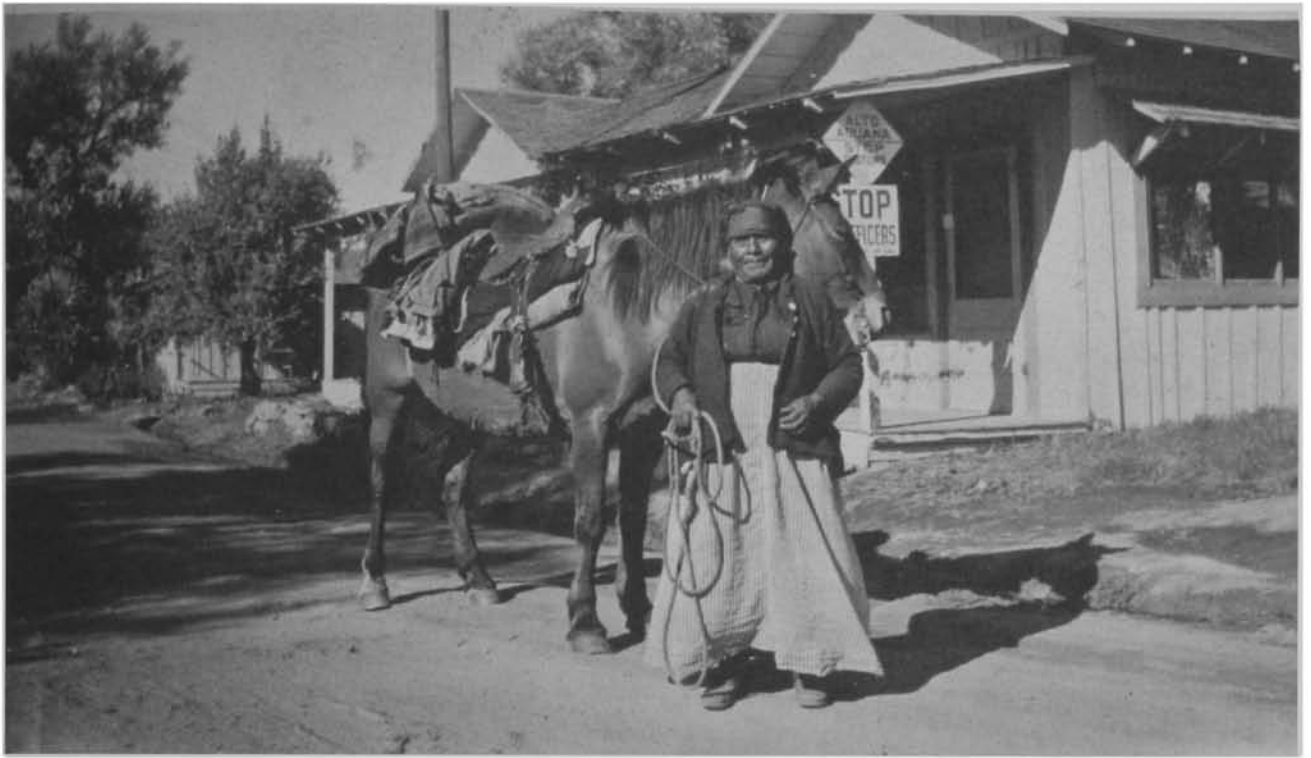
art panel is on a large face of the boulder that is not protected by an overhang. It consists of anthropomorphic figures and faded geometric designs in black with faint red outlines. There is also a painted horned figure at this site, which according to Ken Hedges (1992:72) is rare at Kumeyaay rock art sites. Hedges has identified the San José Tecate site as a ceremonial site that not only has several horned figures, but also has the largest painted figure (nearly six feet tall) in the region (Hedges 1992:72). Chipped stone was observed near the rock art site.

Julia Meza's sense of the landscape is enriched by the oral traditions passed on to her from her parents and grandparents, who told her of a time when the Kumeyaay were much more mobile and their territory included coastal areas:

Way back San José was only Indians. There were a lot of people here, they lived all over. Their brush houses were everywhere. They would get tired of that

little house and they would move on to another spot. That was the custom then. Nowadays [we live in] just one house, but it used to be that wherever they liked they would make their brush house. They would go to Rosarito to gather abalone, mussels, and they also caught fish of every size. These they gathered, dried, and split open. They would lay them out on the rock, they would dry out there. They would put it in sacks and bring it back to their house to eat it with their acorns. That was something they ate a lot, the acorn mush. When there were pine nuts they would go up to the mountains to gather them. They would bring sacks and sacks of them, to sell and to eat. They would stay a while in the mountains [Julia Meza, personal communication 2004].

Julia's paternal grandparents, Antonio Meza, Benito Meza's father, and Petra Osuna, were the first in her family to come live at San José Tecate from Peña Blanca. Julia has many stories about her ancestors that reveal a strong sense of identification with the landscape:



**Figure 14.** Petra Osuna with her horse in Jacumba, probably during the early 1900s.

My grandmother Petra was a midwife. And a good midwife! She would go all over the place and they would call her when women were expecting. She was the doctor of the ranches. My grandmother had her “four-legged car”—she rode a horse. She went all over the place, to Campo, everywhere, Manteca Canyon, Durazno, Rancho Parra, Ramadita, and Peña Blanca, and all on horseback, my grandmother. From the Peña she would come here where we live, she also came on horseback. Next day she would leave here on the trail to Campo to buy her provisions. There was a river; she would go there to harvest juncus. I still have the pictures [Fig. 14]. She would go to Jacumba to buy provisions. There’s the horse and there she is with her dress all hanging down. She would wear a dress that was long here in front. Even when she was an old, old lady she would come on horseback. I don’t know how she got up there [Julia Meza, personal communication 2004].

Julia has tremendous knowledge about folklore, plant uses, and local beliefs. Much of this knowledge was documented by Kara Johnson, who interviewed Julia and Telma on numerous occasions as part of her master’s thesis (Johnson 2007). Julia has many photographs of the communities visited for the TRW project, and of people mentioned in the Hohenthal volume. In Hohenthal’s work, the community is called Villareal de San José. In

1949, when Hohenthal conducted his research, Julia’s father, Benito Meza, had three hectares at Villareal. Benito also owned another two hectares at Peña Blanca, which Virginio González took care of for him (Hohenthal 2001:100). The whole San José Tecate area probably represents the remains of 57.31 hectares of land in the vicinity of Tecate that was deeded to the “Indians” in 1892 as part of an attempt to normalize land tenancy for the many new colonists that arrived during the late 1800s (Santiago Guerrero 2005:160–161).

*Aguaje de la Tuna.* Aguaje de la Tuna (Fig. 15) is a small, traditional Kumeyaay settlement on the outskirts of Tecate (Figure 2) that has been deeply impacted by urban sprawl. Kumeyaay Estefana Pérez Osuna (Fig. 16) and some of her family are still living at Aguaje de la Tuna, where they own 540 hectares, though they used to own 1,065 hectares. The land has a spring, creeks, and stands of oak trees. Estefana says she was born here in 1930, the daughter of Matilde Osuna Cuero of Peña Blanca and a soldier from Chiapas who had been sent with federal troops to quell the revolutionary uprising of 1911 in northern Baja California (Santiago Guerrero 2005: 421–422). When she was younger, the family sold



**Figure 15. Remains of foundation at Aguaje de la Tuna (photo by Glenn S. Russell).**



**Figure 16. Estefana Perez Osuna with pestle and bedrock mortar at Aguaje de la Tuna (photo by Glenn S. Russell).**

firewood and planted beans, corn, potatoes, and squash. They also owned a few cows and goats.

Estefana traveled all over the area when she was young, walking to other communities such as Manteca, and even went as far as Rancho San Diego, California to pick olives. Currently, Estefana and her son-in-law, Francisco Martínez, are concerned about their right to ownership of their land. The nearby city of Tecate is growing and people have been settling inside the property to build homes. The water source, or *aguaje*, is still strong, and people want to exploit the land and the groundwater supply. There are oak trees growing by the creek, and also right next to the house.

Four archaeological sites were observed at Aguaje de la Tuna. Several of these include abandoned house foundations, as well as bedrock milling features and flakes. Estefana's parents used to live in an old house on top of a hill on the property. There was a mortar near the house that her mother used. Estefana said that the house was inhabited until 1949, at which time her father became ill and moved down the hill. Another abandoned house, made of adobe and bricks, was where Guadalupe Pérez Osuna lived. He didn't have a family, and later moved down the hill. Aguaje de la Tuna is not mentioned in the Hohenthal volume.

*Kuuchumaa: Sacred Mountain.* One of the most significant places in the regional landscape of the TRW is *Kuuchumaa*, or Tecate Peak, a large mountain that is situated on the U.S.-Mexican international border. *Kuuchumaa* has long been considered a spiritual mountain by the Kumeyaay people, although the

sacredness of the mountain was kept secret for many years (Shipek 1985). The mountain was reportedly named *Kuuchumaa* by the Kumeyaay Creator God/Spirit *Maayhaay*, who identified the mountain as a sacred place, and as a location for acquiring power to be used for positive purposes such as healing or for peace (Shipek 1985:69). The linguist John P. Harrington stated that *Kuuchumaa* means "exalted place" (Welch and Foster 1982). The mountain is prominent in the Kumeyaay creation accounts, which state that the area around the peak was created as a special place for the spirit of *Kuuchumaa*. When *Kuuchumaa* became a man, he lived on the south side of Tecate Peak as a shaman, and would call shamans from the Kumeyaay and surrounding groups, including the Luiseño, Juaneño, Cahuilla, Cupeño, Quechan, Cocopa, Paipai, and Kiliwa, to the mountain, where he implored them to stop fighting and instead help each other (Shipek 1985:69). *Kuuchumaa* also instructed the shamans in ritual singing and dancing. The shamans danced so much up there that they reportedly wore a circular rut in the rock at the top. Shamans from the surrounding groups were sometimes jealous of *Kuuchumaa*'s power; it is reported that Luiseño shamans sent power over to the mountain in an attempt to destroy it. Evidence of this thwarted attempt can be seen on one side of the mountain where there is a split (Shipek 1985:70). According to Rosalie Robertson, a

Kumeyaay traditional practitioner from Campo, many groups, including the Luiseño, Juaneño, Paipai, Quechan, and Mohave, visited the mountain (Welch and Foster 1982). Only properly initiated shamans were supposed to go to the mountain (Welch and Foster 1982); Shipek (1985) mentions that herbal specialists and curers would not climb *Kuuchumaa* to gather herbs and other plants because of the power imbued in the mountain.

Very few cultural resources have been recorded in the area surrounding Tecate Peak on the U.S. side, due in part to limited systematic survey of cultural resources in the area (Hector and Garnsey 2006). A small prehistoric archaeological site, interpreted as either a temporary camp or special use site (CA-SDI-3488), was recorded in 1984 about 150 meters north of the peak (Hector and Garnsey 2006). In a more recent archaeological survey of approximately 1,500 acres of land administered by CAL Fire in the western portion of Tecate Peak, very few additional cultural resources were found (Hector and Garnsey 2006).

*Kuuchumaa* is a prominent peak in the region and one that symbolizes power for several southern California Indian groups. Concepts of power are shared by many California Indian groups, and are closely tied to cosmological beliefs (Bean 1975). Bean notes that power was often concentrated in specific places in the environment and could be dangerous to those who did not properly respect the power of a place or a being. The legends surrounding *Kuuchumaa* illustrate these concepts of power and helped to create social solidarity among groups and through time.

Today, Josefina López Meza of Peña Blanca continues to recognize the power imbued in *Kuuchumaa*, although she offers a different interpretation of the mountain:

For us it's a sacred place. First of all because in ancient times it was a place for young people; I mean children, when they were no longer going to be children. They were prepared and counseled, they were told what would happen with their life, how they should behave, how to respect their bodies, and to respect others. The elders would explain it to us in this way; that's how I was also prepared. That's how they would tell it to us; they would feed us with acorn mush. With dried deer meat, this would be our food; they would keep us up on the mountain for three days and counsel us about the changes that would be happening in our lives and how we should prepare to be women, to be

mothers, to be wives, and to have children—how we should behave around strangers, people from outside our communities—all of these things [Josefina López Meza, personal communication 2004].

When asked about the proscriptions against climbing the mountain, López Meza explained:

Because something bad might happen to you, because it's alive and powerful. It's like electricity if it goes through you; something like that, the mountain also has a life or intentions of its own. If you go with something bad, it can harm you. That's why many would say, as I have heard on occasion, that the mountain is bad. But it depends on the person, if they have good intentions, it's good. If I approach it with someone with bad intentions, it's bad. That's how its vibration is [Josefina López Meza, personal communication 2004].

Josefina's explanation of the power of *Kuuchumaa* corroborates comments made by Kumeyaay elders interviewed by Shipek: "But to come here with selfish or evil purposes would rebound on that person and make him sick or if he was bad enough, kill him" (Shipek 1985:70).

## DISCUSSION

The Kumeyaay of Baja California view the landscape as a living home—the rocks, springs, mountain peaks, plants, people, animals, and sites are all interrelated, as is the fluidity of time and space. Mountains, rock formations, and other places on the land are imbued with power and symbolic meaning. Regularly scheduled pilgrimages to mountain peaks and other places serve to preserve and map the social memory of the Kumeyaay, reinforcing traditional practices that are grounded in oral tradition. Despite the impacts of colonization and drastic changes in subsistence, religion, and freedom of movement, the Kumeyaay of the TRW have maintained an ideational landscape of identity and collective memory, where stories about the *Mishkwish* clan, Jatiñil, *Kuuchumaa*, and the 'person rock,' among many others, are still passed on to younger generations. The transmission of oral traditions that are situated in specific places in the landscape serves to preserve the social memory of the Kumeyaay. Birdsongs that were sung for centuries are still celebrated today, the sound reverberating in the places where the ancestors once danced and sang. Landscapes such as *Ha'a* and Peña Blanca represent direct links with

many generations of ancestors who were born, lived, and died there. Oak groves continue to be important areas for gathering acorns, a highly prized food for both economic and symbolic purposes. Magic boulders for divination are visited, while haunted areas such as an abandoned ranch house are avoided. Special trips are made to gathering areas for medicinal herbs. Other areas are visited to gather clays for making pottery. The location where an ancestor's home once stood, and that was burned after their passing, is still vividly preserved in the minds of descendants. These are places to be remembered and, at times, avoided. Oral traditions involving the landscape are retold, reused, and reinterpreted—incorporated into today's world, and socially reconstituted as a reminder of the past, an honor to the ancestors.

In summary, the Kumeyaay traditional cultural authorities within the TRW still recognize an ideational landscape—a landscape that is permeated with symbolic and ritual meanings that embraces mythical histories, ancestral pasts, and moral messages that overlay a landscape where economic resources, such as foods and medicines, abound. Related to this ideational landscape are the themes of landscape as memory and landscape as identity. Specific places are reminders of a social past that was filled with triumphs and disasters. The perception of the landscape thus allows descendants to listen, feel, and remember the lives of their ancestors—to engage in an environment that is “pregnant with the past” (Ingold 1993:152–153). Memory reinforces continuity with the land and with the past. By remembering a place, through reuse and reinterpretation, landscapes are memorialized by their inhabitants. The collective recognition of places is associated with symbolic, ritual, and traditional practices. Just as the Australian aborigines are socialized through their dreamtime sagas, the Kumeyaay create and express their social identity by remembering not just a boulder, but the significant events associated with the boulder. The recounting of the story of *Kishmayaay*, the old woman who lived in the house with the peep-hole in the boulder, is a reminder of the social significance of the community and the sharing of food. As we passed by the boulder with Aurora and her children, they heard the narrative of an old Kumeyaay woman who was stingy and did not share her food in a period of time when resources were scarce. The boulder serves as a process for mapping the mythic and moral principles of the past

and the present. The remnants of an abandoned ranch remind the Kumeyaay of a period in time when many of their ancestors died of smallpox. The place is now haunted. Although it is remembered, it is feared because of the tragic events of the past.

The naming of places in the Kumeyaay language further strengthens the social significance of these places. Even the gathering of plants for medicines and foods, an activity that could be viewed as primarily economic or functional, is viewed as much more than that by the Kumeyaay. When Aurora spoke of the legends of the ‘person rock’ and the rock that foretold the sex of an unborn child, she also recounted the memories of social activities organized around the gathering of plants in those places. This was echoed in her accounts of the trails. The trails themselves were not as important as the memory of the social gatherings on the trails—the resting stops along the trail where stories were retold. This social identification with the landscape was also prominent in Josephina's accounts. She spoke of the power that is imbued in Peña Blanca and *Kuuchumaa*. Her inability to ascend Peña Blanca was not because of a weakness on her part, but because of the anger and negativity that she was experiencing during her attempt. When her mind cleared, she easily reached the peak, almost effortlessly. This same type of power rests in *Kuuchumaa*, a power so dangerous that drinking the spring water and harvesting plants on the mountain must be avoided because of possible disastrous consequences. These ideas are particularly interesting in that they are incompatible with theoretical perspectives—such as optimal foraging and human behavioral ecology—that often fail to consider the symbolic and spiritual taboos that affect human behavior.

We have attempted to provide a glimpse of the ideational landscape of the Kumeyaay, fully aware that we are dealing with a very limited number of individuals who still remember and adhere to the traditions that were imparted by their ancestors. Nevertheless, we hope that others can build on this limited study. The findings reported here reflect both changing Kumeyaay relationships with the land and a social memory and continuity with the past. These “landscapes of the mind,” grounded in the natural world, overlain with multiple layers of economic, symbolic, and conceptualized meaning, provide glimpses into historic and prehistoric

indigenous interactions with the landscape and offer a perspective radically different from those underlying current land use in the region.

Just as a projectile point, a historical document, or an ethnographic description may provide specific information that can then be projected to represent part of a larger pattern, so the surviving knowledge of human interactions with remaining landscapes may allow us to look for larger patterns that have existed over time and space in the region. Clearly the information collected and synthesized here has been filtered through a complicated history of colonization, resistance, diseases, famines, demographic shifts, and the fortuitous survival of individuals who have managed to pass on their knowledge. The conceptions of ideational landscape that have somehow precariously managed to survive into the twenty-first century are all the more remarkable when we find they are part of patterns reiterated through historic and prehistoric times that also fit into a larger regional cultural context. The landscape is part of the collective identity and social memory of a people who continue to construct meaning from an environment that offers economic, symbolic, and spiritual sustenance despite having undergone a radical transformation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Texts from interviews with the cultural authorities cited in this paper have been translated into English by Wilken-Robertson.

<sup>2</sup>The Kumeyaay in Baja California are generally referred to by that name by scholars working in the United States, and we have elected to use it here as well.

<sup>3</sup>Cuyamaca ovals are shallow, oval-shaped basin metates that are relatively common in the Cuyamaca Mountains.

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