Notes on La Huerta Diegueño Ethnobotany

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In 1969, while working in Baja California on Tipai (the Diegueño dialect of La Huerta), I made a collection of local plants and discussed their Mexican and Tipai names and uses with my two main consultants, María Aldama and Alejandrina Murillo de Melendres (referred to below as MA and AM respectively), and a third woman, Anfelina Merchado, with whom I consulted less frequently. The purpose here is simply to reproduce these notes, scanty as they are, for the use of other people doing ethnobotanical studies. This collection makes no pretense of being complete. Various plants that are surely well-known to the La Huerta community (such as mescal and yucca) were left out because they were not encountered during my stay there. No attempt was made to do an exhaustive analysis of La Huerta ethnobotany.

La Huertans do not eat many wild foods today, and it will be noted that the food use of several plants once used as staples throughout Alta and Baja California are not ever mentioned in these notes as edible. On the other hand, the La Huerta Diegueños today use many wild plants medicinally, and it will be seen that the medicinal uses predominate in the notes. In this concentration on medicinal herbs, La Huerta typifies Baja California and, in fact, Mexico in general. In contrast to the situation north of the border, the La Huerta Diegueños are well-integrated culturally with the rest of rural Baja California; marriage between Indians and non-Indians is commonplace (in fact, the distinction between the two groups is much less well-defined than it is north of the border), and much of the La Huerta life-style and folklore is held in common with the non-Indian communities of the region. There are many similarities to be found between La Huerta herbal knowledge and the Mexican medicinal lore discussed in texts on the topic (e.g., Martinez 1969). It will be seen that a fair number of Tipai plant names are literal translations from the Spanish, another indication of the interaction between La Huerta and general Mexican herbal knowledge. And at least one plant (*Ruta graveolens* L.) for which medicinal uses were described is of European origin. On the other hand, there are seven species in the list below where my consultants knew only the Tipai name for a plant, and not the Spanish. But only two of these seven had medicinal uses—so again, the disparity between Tipai and Mexican botanical knowledge seems to lie primarily in the realm of non-medicinal plants. La Huerta Diegueños still retain quite a bit of active botanical knowledge, considerably more, I would say, than the Diegueño communities north of the border. This fact can be seen in part as a reflection of the overall Mexican interest in the uses of wild plants as medicine and the integration of La Huerta interests with this interest of the general populace.

Basket-making materials were not known by María Aldama or Alejandrina Murillo de Melendres. I asked them about poisonous plants, plants for contraception, for increasing

fertility, for abortions, for acquiring good looks, and for casting spells. They said they knew nothing about any of these. (Given the fact that many of these functions are handled by witches, and given the general fearfulness that notions of witchcraft carry with them, it must be noted that in some cases people will claim lack of knowledge about plants with some of the above uses regardless of whether or not they in fact know something about them.) María Aldama says she heard that in the nearby village of Santa Catarina the daughter of one of her relatives tried to give herself an abortion through some special plant preparation and died. Certain of the plants listed here are said in other sources to be used for abortion. I have indicated it below when I have found such references.

All the plants were collected either in La Huerta or in the logging village of Sierra Juárez where some La Huertans live and work. (I have noted it below when the plant comes from the latter locality.) When a plant was shown to one of my consultants, she would look at it closely, then feel the texture of the leaves, and finally crumble a leaf and smell it before making her identification. Bean and Saubel (1972:17) also reported that texture and smell are criteria for plant identification among Cahuilla informants.

The list of plants is organized according to the Latin names. The numbers after the Latin name refer to the code numbers of plant samples. This is followed by the common American name, the common Mexican name, the Tipai name, and finally the description of usage. Many plants were not known by my consultants to have any use, and they did not even know the names of some others. I have included them in these notes anyway, since the *lack* of knowledge about these species may be of interest to some ethnobotanists. Readers are referred to Shreve and Wiggins (1964) for thorough plant descriptions.

POLYPODIACEAE — FERN FAMILY

Pellaea mucronata (D.C. Eaton) D.C. Eat.(28)
American name: bird's-foot fern
Mexican name:[1] *calahuala*
Tipai name:[2] *awíi tepesháw* (*awíi* = rattlesnake; *tepesháw* = rib; lit. 'rattlesnake's rib')
Use: The fern makes an excellent tea. No medicinal value—it is drunk only for its taste.

PINACEAE — PINE FAMILY

Pinus coulteri Don. (rare and local)
American name: Coulter pine
Mexican name: *pino*
Tipai name: *haaésh*
Use: Not mentioned. Balls (1962:28) says that the seeds of this species were an important food item in California.

Pinus jeffreyi Grev. & Balf. (common tree)
American name: Jeffrey pine
Mexican name: *pino colorado*
Tipai name: *haaésh hwát* (*haaésh* = pine; *hwát* = red; lit. 'red pine'; could be translated from Spanish)
Use: Not mentioned.

Pinus monophylla Torr. & Frem. (the most common piñon of the area)
American name: (generic) piñon pine
Mexican name: (generic) *piñon*
Tipai name: *hwíiw*
Use: The seeds are collected and eaten. AM and MA say that this type of piñon has large seeds with coats fairly easy to crack.

Pinus quadrifolia Parl. (not as common as other species of piñon)
American name: (generic) piñon pine
Mexican name: (generic) *piñon*
Tipai name: *hwíiw kháw* (descriptive term: 'tough piñon')
Use: The seeds are collected and eaten. This type of piñon has smaller seeds with tough

coats. Not eaten as frequently as *Pinus monophylla*.

CUPRESSACEAE — CYPRESS FAMILY

Juniperus californica Carr. (31, 60)
American name: Juniper
Mexican name: *ihuata*
Tipai name: *shá*
Use: The fruit is eaten, informally only, or in times of starvation. The leaves and bark can be made into a tea that is good for high blood pressure and also for hangover.

EPHEDRACEAE — MORMON TEA FAMILY

Ephedra californica S. Wats. (17)
American name: (generic) Mormon tea
Mexican name: *gantillo*
Tipai name: *hpíip*
Use: A tea made from this plant can cure a stomach ache caused by eating too much food or by eating bad food. Martinez (1969:306) says it is used against venereal disease.

GRAMINEAE — GRASS FAMILY

Bromus rubens L. (1)
American name: fox tail; red brome
Mexican name: *cola de zorra*
Tipai name: *pereháw syúll* (*pereháw* = fox; *syúll* = tail; lit. 'fox tail'; could be translated from Spanish)
Use: None. (European weed, introduced.)

SALICACEAE — WILLOW FAMILY

Populus fremontii S. Wats. (37, 50)
American name: cottonwood
Mexican name: *álamo*
Tipai name: *h'á*
Use: For a bruise, wound, or insect sting, put the leaves directly on the afflicted area. Or make a tea to wash the wound. (It is never drunk.) When making a direct application of the leaves, first cook the leaves and then apply them to the wound while they are still hot. Also makes good firewood.

FAGACEAE — BEECH FAMILY

Quercus palmeri Engelm. (34)
American name: scrub oak
Mexican name: *encinillo*
Tipai name: *hwáp*
Use: Fruit formerly eaten; now not used.

Quercus peninsularis Trel. (56, 58) (collected in Sierra Juárez)
American name: (generic) oak
Mexican name: *bellota dulce*
Tipai name: *hw'ílly*
Use: The seeds are eaten. These are not the kind of acorns eaten most regularly by La Huertans (the common kind was not collected in this study); these are smaller and sweeter than the "regular" kind, and do not require as much leaching. Acorns used to be one of the main staples and are still commonly eaten. After being collected, the acorns are pounded and then spread out in the sun to dry. When dry, they are ground and then leached.

POLYGONACEAE — BUCKWHEAT FAMILY

Eriogonum fasciculatum Benth. (7)
American name: flat-topped buckwheat
Mexican name: *baleriana*
Tipai name: *hm'ílly*
Use: A tea made of the dried flowers or the dried root is drunk for a healthy heart. To combat heart trouble, take about one teaspoonful in a cup of water; boil the mixture for about ten minutes, until the water turns red. Drink it hot, three times a day. Barrows (1900:78) says the Cahuilla used tea made of the leaves for stomach ache or headache and steeped the flowers to make an eyewash.

Eriogonum parishii S. Wats. (59) (collected in Sierra Juárez)

Mexican name: not known

Tipai name: not known

Use: Not known.

CHENOPODIACEAE — GOOSEFOOT FAMILY

Atriplex canescens (Pursh) Nutt. (3)

American name: shad-scale; salt bush

Mexican name: *chamiso*

Tipai name: *ti'llyíll*

Use: Years ago the leaves were used as soap. No use now. Martinez (1969:394) confirms no medicinal use of this plant reported in Baja California. Balls (1962:74-75) says it was the root that was used for soap.

CRUCIFERAE — MUSTARD FAMILY

Isomeris arborea var. ***angustata*** Parish (13)
Isomeris arborea Nutt. (45, 46)

American name: bladder pod

Mexican name: *ruda del monte* (MA); *ruda del campo* (AM)

Tipai name: *pshálll*

Use: Seeds and flowers are edible. AM says the flowers are exceedingly nourishing. Must be cooked for a long time to get out the bitter flavor. Barrows (1900:66) notes that the pods were also eaten by the Cahuilla.

PLATANACEAE — SYCAMORE FAMILY

Platanus racemosa Nutt. (40)

American name: sycamore

Mexican name: *higuera de monte* (MA); *aliso* (AM)

Tipai name: *hperch'á* (MA); *hameche'á* (AM); *pe'che'á* (Anfelina Merchado)[3]

Use: AM says the bark boiled in water makes a beautiful red tea which, when drunk, provides an excellent tonic for the blood.

ROSACEAE — ROSE FAMILY

Adenostoma fasciculatum H. & A. (25)

American name: chamise; greasewood

Mexican name: *vara prieta*

Tipai name: *iipshí*

Use: Excellent firewood, though slightly too small for some purposes. This is the wood used when it is necessary to carry fire, for it stays lit for a long time. Barrows (1900:79) notes that the Cahuillas gave a drink prepared from this plant to sick cows; Kroeber (1925: 650) notes the Luiseños made arrow foreshafts from the same species.

Adenostoma sparsifolium Torr. (24, 33)

American name: redshank; ribbonwood

Mexican name: *chamiso colorado*

Tipai name: *hpúull ~ hpu'úull*

Use: A tea from this tree is drunk for colic. For toothache, the tea is used like a mouth-wash and spit out after it is swirled around in the mouth. This species is also a favorite firewood, especially the roots, which are large and long-lasting.

Heteromeles arbutifolia M. Roem. (29)

American name: toyon

Mexican name: *toyon* (not known by AM or MA)

Tipai name: *huusík*

Use: The fruit was eaten in the past. One can also use a steeped potion of the bark and leaves to wash an infected wound. See Balls (1962:37) for details of cooking of the berries by southern California groups.

Prunus ilicifolia Walp. (30)

American name: Indian cherry; islay (Sp.) or chaparral cherry

Mexican name: *islaya*

Tipai name: *hkáy*

Use: The fruit is still eaten today and forms a staple when families are too poor to buy food. The outside part of the fruit is eaten, and then

the seeds are broken and ground up, and the inner meat is leached to make an *atole*. Barrows (1900:61) describes the same preparation by the Cahuilla. Consultants say it is a harsh food, does not taste very good, and gives them a stomach ache if they have to eat it regularly. For a cough, a hot tea is made from the leaves and drunk.

LEGUMINOSAE — PEA FAMILY

Acacia greggii A. Gray (22)
American name: cat's claw
Mexican name: *uña de gato*
Tipai name: *kwa'áq*
Use: The domesticated animals eat it. Otherwise used for nothing.

Lotus scoparius (Nutt.) Ottl. (23)
American name: deer-vetch
Mexican name: MA and AM don't know
Tipai name: *hwáte*
Use: The roots are used for soap. Domesticated animals eat the leaves.

Prosopis juliflora var. ***torreyana*** L. Benson (54, 55)
American name: mesquite (Sp.)
Mexican name: *mezquite*
Tipai name: *a'náally*
Use: A tea of the leaves makes a good eyewash; it can also be drunk for fever. The wood is excellent firewood. The medicinal uses cited here are also recommended in Martinez (1969: 222). No comment was made on the edibility of the mesquite bean, which was a staple food in southern California and undoubtedly Baja California as well in earlier days (Balls 1962: 20-22; Barrows 1900:56; Bean and Saubel 1972:107-117).

RUTACEAE — RUE FAMILY

Ruta graveolens L. (18) (European herb)
American name: rue
Mexican name: *ruda castilla*
Tipai name: *pshall hu'núup* (descriptive term; possibly direct translation from Spanish). *pshall* is generic for "*ruda*" (rue), *hu'núup* is probably related to *llupnúup*, for which see *Eriodictyon lanatum*, below.
Use: A little sprig of it may be put in the ear when one has an earache. Also, the leaves may be drunk in a tea for stomach ache. Martinez (1969:283) says this is actually a rather poisonous plant and dangerous if used in strong doses.

EUPHORBIACEAE — SPURGE FAMILY

Croton californicus Muell.-Arg. (4)
Mexican name: AM and MA don't know
Tipai name: *a'wáay hetewóo* ~ *a'wáay shetewóo* (*a'wáay* = mouse, *hetewóo* ~ *shetewóo* = (probably) fingernail; lit. 'mouse claw')
Use: Used to cure a cough. The entire plant (leaves, flowers, stem) is used. Put a fair amount into a half liter or so of water, boil 5-10 minutes. Drink hot. Use about three times a day until the cough is gone. Use the plant fresh, not dried. Kroeber (1925:650) says that among the Luiseño this plant is reputed to induce abortion.

ANACARDIACEAE — CASHEW FAMILY

Rhus ovata S. Watts (20)
American name: sugar bush
Mexican name: *lentisco*
Tipai name: *hwáll*
Use: If an expectant mother drinks a tea made of the leaves just before delivery, it should help the birth be quick and easy. Barrows (1900:79) says the tea was used for cough and chest pain among the Cahuilla, and also (p. 66) that the blossoms were cooked in water and eaten.

RHAMNACEAE — BUCK-THORN FAMILY

Ceanothus leucodermis Greene (38)
Mexican name: MA and AM don't know
Tipai name: *'i wíir*
Use: None.

ERICACEAE — HEATHER FAMILY

Arctostaphylos glauca Lindl. (32)
American name: (generic) manzanita (Sp.)
Mexican name: (generic) *manzanita*
Tipai name: *hmsúr ~ hm'súr*
Use: Fruit is eaten informally. The branches can be used as a broom. Makes good firewood.

Arctostaphylos pungens HBK. (57) (collected in Sierra Juárez)
American name: (generic) manzanita (Sp.)
Mexican name: (generic) *manzanita*
Tipai name: *hw'síly*
Use: Did not say. (This has much smaller fruit than *A. glauca.*)

HYDROPHYLLACEAE — WATER-LEAF FAMILY

Eriodictyon lanatum Brand (14)
American name: yerba santa (Sp.)
Mexican name: *rama santa*
Tipai name: *sa'máll llupnúup* (*sa'máll* = herb; *llupnúup* = dive, immerse, bless [?]; therefore probably a direct translation from the Spanish name, i.e., 'blessed herb')
Use: Used to combat cough. Put the leaves in water and boil 10 minutes. Drink hot, three times a day. Or put some leaves in honey, cook briefly, and take a teaspoonful of it. Reed Moran (personal communication) notes that Al Allanson found a covered *olla* containing this plant in a cave near El Topo, Sierra Juárez. Balls (1962:63-64) notes that this herb had a widespread use in California for many different maladies.

LABIATAE — MINT FAMILY

Salvia apiana Jepson (15)
American name: white sage
Mexican name: *salvia*
Tipai name: *lltáay*
Use: A hot tea made from the leaves is drunk to combat cough; the tea also makes an excellent tonic for the blood.

SCROPHULARIACEAE — FIGWORT FAMILY

Penstemon centranthifolius Benth. (27)
American name: scarlet bugler
Mexican name: AM and MA don't know
Tipai name: *henpashóka alíiki* (lit. 'sucking flowers')
Use: The flowers, when sucked, give off a good taste. Children suck them. No other use.

Scrophularia californica var. ***floribunda*** Greene (47)
American name: bee plant
Mexican name: AM and MA don't know; nor does Anfelina Merchado
Tipai name: *anpúuy* (identified by Anfelina Merchado)
Use: A tea made from the root is drunk to combat fever.

COMPOSITAE — SUNFLOWER FAMILY

Ambrosia psilostachya DC. (19)
American name: ragweed
Mexican name: *estafiate*
Tipai name: *kwináaw shpóq*
Use: Drink a tea made from the leaves in order to soothe stomach pain.

Aplopappus propinquus Blake (8)
Mexican name: *yerba del pasmo*
Tipai name: *sa'máll páasme keów* (*páasme* is from Sp. *pasmo*; this name is taken from Spanish, lit. 'herb *pásmo* for-it')

Use: A wound may be washed in a tea made from the entire plant, either dried or fresh, boiled for 10-15 minutes. This tea may also be drunk in cold weather to combat the *pasmo*, a malady with chills as the main symptom.

Aplopappus squarrosus ssp. ***grindelioides*** (DC.) Keck (26)

Mexican name: AM and MA don't know

Tipai name: AM and MA don't know

Use: The plant may be boiled in water which is then used for bathing to cure the aches and pains of the body.

Aplopappus venetus cf. ssp. ***vernonioides*** (Nutt.) Hall (2, 6)

Mexican name: AM and MA don't know

Tipai name: *llall'áay*

Use: None.

Artemisia tridentata Nutt. (9, 42)

American name: sagebrush

Mexican name: *rama ceniza*

Tipai name: *hpáaw* ~ *pháaw* (MA); *ka-pháaw* (Anfelina Merchado)[4]

Use: A tea made from the leaves is drunk for a bad cold with coughing and bronchitis. Boil it for 5 minutes; by then it is very bitter. Drink hot three times a day. It may be used either fresh or dried. This herb is used very commonly in La Huerta, and people in Ensenada ask La Huertans to bring along a supply of dried *A. tridentata* with them when they come to visit, since the coastal fogs do not allow it to be dried in Ensenada. Barrows (1900:65) notes that the Cahuilla ate the seeds pounded into a *pinole*; also that the tea was used by the Cahuilla for stomach complaints.

Baccharis glutinosa Pers. (43, 49, 52)

Mexican name: *guatamote*

Tipai name: *tamwáal*

Use: Medical use is precisely the same as that for *Populus fremontii*: the leaves are cooked and applied directly to a bruise, wound, or insect sting; or the afflicted area may be washed with a tea made of the leaves. Kroeber (1925:650) notes same use of another species of *Baccharis* by the Luiseño. Barrows (1900:78) notes the use of this tea as an eyewash by the Cahuilla.

Baccharis cf. ***sarothroides*** Gray (35, 36)

Mexican name: AM and MA don't know; nor Anfelina Merchado

Tipai name: *sa'máll kwsi'yáay* (*sa'máll* = herb; *kwsi'yáay* = medicine man; lit. 'medicine man herb'. Possibly a generic name? Identified by Anfelina Merchado)

Use: It is drunk in a tea for a cough or stomach ache.

Brickellia californica (T. & G.) Gray (16)

Mexican name: *yerba la vaca*

Tipai name: *sa'máll hwák* (lit. 'herb [of] cow'; direct translation from Spanish)

Use: The leaves make a bitter tea used to combat fever.

Conyza canadensis (L.) Cronq. var. ***glabrata*** (Gray) Cronq. (10)

American name: horseweed

Mexican name: AM and MA don't know

Tipai name: AM and MA don't know

Use: Not known.

Gutierrezia sarothrae (Pursh) Britt. & Rusby (11)

American name: matchwood

Mexican name: *escobilla*

Tipai name: *churrupú*

Use: A hot tea made of the flowers of this plant may be drunk to combat diarrhea. Boil the flowers 10 minutes, drink three times a day. The flowers should be fresh, not dried. The fresh root of the plant may also be used. The tea made from the plant is very bitter.

Helianthus annuus ssp. ***lenticularis*** (Dougl.) Ckll. (12)

American name: sunflower
Mexican name: *mirasol*
Tipai name: *nya wíiw* (*nya* = sun; *wíiw* = looks-at-it; could be direct translation from Spanish)
Use: None.

Hymenoclea cf. ***monogyra*** T. & G. (29, 53)
American name: burro bush
Mexican name: *romerillo*
Tipai name: *oká*
Use: None.

Lessingia glandulifera A. Gray. (44)
Mexican name: AM and MA don't know, nor A. Merchado
Tipai name: AM and MA don't know; A. Merchado says, "It doesn't have a name."

Machaeranthera tephrodes (Gray) Greene (5)
Mexican name: AM and MA don't know
Tipai name: AM and MA don't know
Use: None.

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NOTES

1. Mexican names vary regionally a good deal. These are the names given to me by María Aldama and Alejandrina Murillo de Melendres, and can thus be assumed to be standard names at least in rural upper Baja California.

2. The orthography used here is the standard orthography for Diegueño languages, as developed and explained in Couro and Hutcheson (1973) and Couro and Langdon (1975). La Huerta Diegueño, it should be noted, is quite different from Northern Diegueño, the dialect explicated in the references cited above. Northern Diegueños who visit La Huerta report that the two languages are only partially mutually intelligible.

3. These names are quite close and may only be individual variants of the same name. Striking variance in the phonology of specific lexical items between individuals has been noted before in Diegueño dialects (Langdon 1970).

4. See Note 3. In this case, the common Diegueño process of metathesis appears at first glance to be involved. (See Langdon [1972] for a discussion of this process.) However, María Aldama's forms could actually be seen as alternative simplifications of the form given by Anfelina Merchado. Consonant-cluster simplification is a well-recognized phonological process in La Huerta, with much individual variation involved. (For a discussion of consonant-cluster reduction in La Huerta, see Hinton and Langdon [n.d.].)

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