



Indigenous Archaeology: An Early Example from Southern California's Chumash Tribe

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Abstract

Indigenous Archaeology has received a lot of attention recently, as it provides meaningful opportunities for archaeologists to help address current issues of concern to Indigenous groups. Here we explore the roots of Indigenous Archaeology along the Pacific Coast of North America. We summarize the 1977-78 Cultural Resources Inventory and Management Project in California's Santa Barbara County, which saw Chumash Tribal members work together with archaeologists to help protect endangered archaeological sites and other cultural heritage resources.

Indigenous archaeology—the integration of Indigenous knowledge into archaeological research—has been integral to rebuilding trust and relationships between Indigenous groups and archaeologists and has resulted in new perspectives of the past [1].

Introduction

As Indigenous cultural revival, sovereignty, and social justice movements have evolved over the past 50 years—and intensified recently—Indigenous Archaeology has increasingly been in the spotlight as a mechanism and opportunity for archaeologists to use scientific methods to help address current issues of concern to Indigenous communities [2]. These issues are diverse, but include:

- a. The preservation of Indigenous archaeological sites.
- b. Training Tribal members for employment in archaeological field, laboratory, and museum work.
- c. Documentation of traditional fishing and other subsistence practices to protect treaty rights.
- d. Salvage of threatened archaeological sites to document traditional technologies (i.e. boats, ornaments, etc.) and practices (traditional food gathering and preparation) to help revive or revitalize modern Tribal community knowledge.
- e. Reconstructing pre-European ecosystems to provide baselines for restoration and conservation of natural habitats; and more.

Notably, Indigenous Archaeology often combines data from archaeological, ethnohistorical, oral historical, and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) sources.

In western North America there are many examples of Indigenous Archaeology projects developed primarily at the behest of Native American tribes to serve tribal interests. The efforts

of Kent Lightfoot and his graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley are especially notable [3-6]. Faculty and graduate students at the University of Oregon have also worked closely with Oregon Coast tribes since the early 1990s [7]. An even earlier case of Indigenous Archaeology occurred in the 1970s when Washington State University archaeologists under Richard Dougherty collaborated with the Makah Indian Tribe on the salvage excavations of Ozette Village, which led to the creation of the amazing tribally-run Makah Museum in Neah Bay, Washington.

Another early example of Indigenous Archaeology from the 1970s was the Cultural Resources Inventory and Management Project (CRIMP) [8] in southern California, created after the County of Santa Barbara (CSB) inadvertently bulldozed a Chumash village site during construction at the County Jail facility, disturbing human burials and ceremonial objects. Chumash tribal members learned of the disturbance, protested, and demanded that the County take concrete steps to avoid such incidents in the future. Not until Ruiz learned that one of the CSB bulldozers was purchased with federal funds and filed suit—through the Quabajai Chumash Indian Association, Santa Barbara Indian Center, and Environmental Defense Center—against the County for violating the federal Antiquities Act, however, was action taken. The CSB agreed to conduct a comprehensive survey of cultural resources located on County lands and successfully applied for federal funding through the 1973 Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA; public law 93-203). In 1977, the CSB hired a team of six people to

survey all properties owned or administered by the County. The team included: two archaeologists, Erlandson and Larry Heinzen (both from the University of California, Santa Barbara); two Native American surveyors, Kote Lotah (Chumash) and Larry Garnica Sr. (Cheyenne married into the Chumash Tribe), a photographer, Joe Gomez (Maya, married into the Chumash Tribe) and later Nila Northsun Robertson (Shoshone), and an administrative assistant, Flora Lopez (Chumash). Thus, the team was numerically dominated by Native Americans and the archaeologists had no greater authority than other team members. The team was housed at the CSB's County Hospital Complex but worked through the Planning Department under its assistant director, Paul Wack.

Background

The Chumash are well known as a complex hunter-gatherer-fisher people who attained some of the highest pre-contact population densities recorded for non-agriculturalists anywhere in the world, as well as their elaborate socio-political, economic, technological, and cosmological systems [9-12]. They occupied the Northern Channel Islands, the mainland coast from the Malibu to Morro Bay areas, and the interior valleys of the adjacent Transverse Ranges for millennia. Chumash traditions state that they have lived in this area since time began [11], with archaeological evidence extending back at least 13,000 years and probably more than 18,000 years.

Europeans first contacted the Chumash in AD 1542, when Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo led three Spanish ships into the Santa Barbara Channel, where they wintered among the Island Chumash. Further contacts were limited to occasional Spanish Manila Galleon crews enroute from the Philippines to New Spain (later Mexico), until AD 1769 when Spain began a systematic colonial settlement centered on construction of a series of 21 Spanish missions and four military garrisons (presidios). Five missions and one presidio were built in Chumash territory between AD 1772 and 1804, with many Chumash people forced to abandon their traditional lifestyles and enslaved to build the missions, a presidio, their associated infrastructure, and to labor in a colonial agrarian economy. Chumash lands were initially divided between Mission Lands—supposedly held in sacred trust for the Chumash—and Pueblo Lands for the development of towns such as Santa Barbara and other private enterprises. After Mexican independence in 1824, the Catholic missions were secularized, Mission Lands were converted to large Mexican land grants, and the theft of Chumash lands was completed.

Despite the devastating effects of European colonialism—including numerous Old World disease epidemics that killed many Chumash and a California Governor after the US took control of the region in 1850 who declared that the California Indians would be exterminated [13]—the Chumash and other California tribes survived and persisted. In the early 1900s, Chumash elders worked with the eccentric anthropologist John Peabody Harrington to record detailed accounts of their traditional languages, songs, placenames, culture, and cosmology—a gift to future generations

of Chumash descendants and others interested in Chumash history. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the Chumash people—like many other Native American Tribes—have seen a continuing cultural revitalization. Today, only a fraction of the Chumash people are federally recognized through the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians (<https://chumash.gov/>), with several thousand additional descendants living within Chumash territory or elsewhere in California, the USA, and beyond. Today, there are multiple Chumash tribal organizations (see <https://channelislands.noaa.gov/maritime/chumash1.html>), including the Chumash Maritime Association, which sponsors annual voyages crossing the Santa Barbara (Chumash) Channel in traditional sewn redwood plank canoes known as tomols [14].

CRIMP Results

For a full year in 1977-78, CRIMP team members conducted reconnaissance surveys of 535 CSB land parcels covering roughly 3,500 acres. The properties included parks, open spaces, flood control, and other county facilities throughout the County. The team recorded 28 previously undocumented archaeological sites on CSB lands and visited 16 previously recorded sites to evaluate their condition. The newly documented sites—including numerous Chumash sites spanning many millennia, Spanish Mission Period sites, and an early American Period adobe—were recorded on State of California Site Record forms and submitted to the appropriate agencies. Team members were also tasked with researching and writing a draft ordinance protecting Native American cultural resources within SBC. To our knowledge this ordinance was never formally adopted, but for many years the CSB did work hard to protect its archaeological and historic sites under existing California state laws. At one point, Lotah and Erlandson also went on local TV to explain the project to the public and ask for the return of any Chumash bones or sacred objects that individuals might have in their possession. At least two Chumash skulls were returned as a result and reburied in non-archaeological areas as close as possible to their point of origin.

In 1978, several CRIMP team members also participated in protests related to the proposed construction of a liquified natural gas (LNG) terminal near Point Conception, which many Chumash descendants consider to be the sacred “Western Gate” for the departing souls of their dead. As a result of these protests, including a lengthy Native American occupation of the Point Conception area led by Chumash tribal members that contributed to cancellation of the proposed LNG project, the Chumash became a powerful force in the politics and cultural heritage management in CSB and surrounding areas. Today Chumash representatives actively negotiate with federal, state, and local agencies—as well as private non-profit organizations and for-profit corporations—about a range of issues related to the preservation of archaeological sites and cultural heritage, the repatriation of Chumash human remains and sacred objects, environmental protection and restoration, and more. In 1977-78 the restoration of Chumash sovereignty and

political influence was in its early stages, but the CRIMP and other projects contributed to their growing influence.

Finally, the CRIMP was also a highly successful example of public service and training under CEQA, with most of the individual participants remaining active in cultural preservation efforts for decades after the project was completed. After the project ended, CRIMP's confidential files, photographs, and other records were transferred in the CSB Planning Department, where they were used to help preserve and protect Chumash cultural resources located on county lands. The following year, Erlandson returned to UCSB to complete his undergraduate degree, write a summary report for the CRIMP [8], and ultimately earn Master's and PhD degrees in archaeology and work closely with Chumash descendants for decades. Although there was no subfield of Indigenous Archaeology formally defined at the time, the CRIMP was clearly an early Indigenous-inspired and led project designed and implemented to further the goals of the Chumash community, specifically the protection of their ancestral sites located on CSB lands. Finally, the CRIMP also helped lay the groundwork for future collaborations between Chumash Tribal members and archaeologists aimed at preserving and protecting Chumash archaeological sites and cultural heritage in the larger Santa Barbara Channel region [9,15-17].

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