

Part 2

Native Americans

around

the lagoons

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Archeology

In the lagoon area, archaeologists have discovered human artifacts, such as stone flakes, bone tools and broken shells. **Middens** are trash heaps of broken clam and scallop shells along with other debris left by early inhabitants. You may pass shell middens along many lagoon trails; please do not disturb them. These remains provide clues to the life and diet of early peoples living in this region.



Using radiocarbon dating, archeologists determined that early campsites are over 8000 years old, left by the La Jolla culture. The La Jolla lived near the lagoons, and may have continued living in this region until 1000 years ago, when Kumeyaay occupied the area, arriving from the Colorado River.

Kumeyaay Culture


Tribes of Kumeyaay lived in small villages of extended families. Villages were located near a source of fresh water, such as the lagoons. The Kumeyaay used all the resources of the lagoon area. Native plants were gathered for shelter, weapons, food, medicines, clothes and as weaving material for baskets.

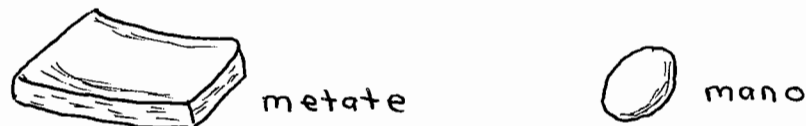
Kumeyaay women and children collected roots, seeds, nuts and berries. Insects were also a part of their diet. Seeds were ground for food and herbal medicines. A few seeds may have been cultivated for agriculture, and sown onto ground cleared by controlled burning.

However, the ocean and lagoons were the primary sources of food. The Kumeyaay gathered shellfish (clams, scallops and crabs), and fished the coastal waters, using abalone fish hooks and nets. Food was cooked outdoors in fire pits.

Hunters made bows and arrows from willow and chamise branches, for hunting deer and antelope. Wood rats and rabbits were caught with traps, nets and throwing sticks (atlatl). Rabbit pelts made excellent blankets.

Acorns

In autumn, tribes would migrate to inland mountains where oak trees grew abundantly, to gather acorns. First,  acorns were dried in the sun, then the shells were cracked to extract the meat. Women ground the acorns on a concave stone surface called a **metate**, holding in their hand a rounded tool called a **mano**.

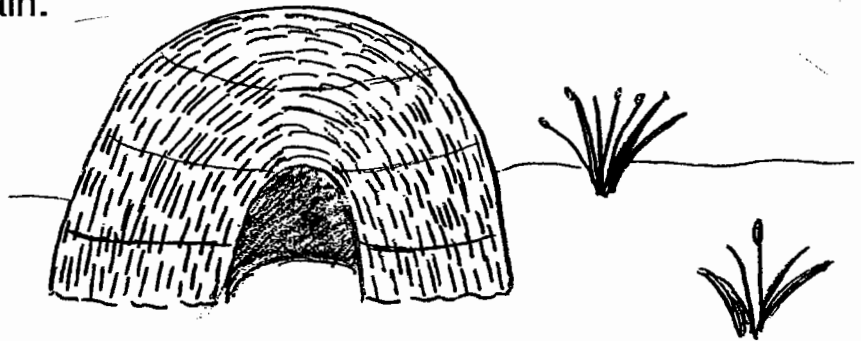


Acorns are high in tannic acid, and taste extremely bitter. To remove the tannic acid, acorn meal was placed in a basket, and warm water was repeatedly poured over it. At first, the water appears brownish. This **leaching** was repeated until the water ran clear. The acorn meal can be cooked like oatmeal, to make a mush called **shawii**. Kumeyaay made some pottery, storing food in jars called **ollas**.

Shelter

Kumeyaay constructed dome-shaped shelters, using branches from cottonwood and willow trees. These were called *ewaa*. To build a house, they would first stand long flexible poles in a circular arrangement. These vertical poles were bent until they met at the top, where they were fastened together. Horizontal branches were woven in for support. Then the entire structure was covered with brush to keep out the rain.

Shade structures called ramadas, were also used.



Life Cycles

Babies were bound to wooden cradleboards, strapped to their mother's backs, and carried throughout the day, as the women worked. Cattail fluff was used as a natural diaper, and changed when soiled. Older children played nearby, watching their parents, learning the many tasks that would soon be expected of them.

Upon entering adolescence, boys and girls went through a **rite of passage**. A holy man or **shaman** would oversee ceremonies marking this transition to becoming an adult. Girls had their chins tattooed with cactus spines, colored with ash. Boys painted their bodies and faces. In the Luiseno tradition, a young man had to lie in a pit, where he was bitten by ants. If he did not show pain, it was believed that he could not be harmed by arrows.

Children played games with string, marbles and dice. In one

popular game, players would try to toss a stick through a rolling hoop. The people found entertainment in story-telling, dancing, singing and music. Some artwork remains as **petroglyphs**, rock carvings.

Stories

Storytellers of the Kumeyaay often begin, "A long time ago, when all people were animals..." This phrase recognizes an intimate and ancient link between the people and nature. Their lives were ruled by the rhythms of nature.

The next few pages are fiction. These stories tell how young Kumeyaay may have utilized the many natural resources around the lagoon. They used their ingenuity to craft all that they needed to survive. Their lives were full of struggles. Notice that many of the stories tell of hard times, failures, or obstacles to be overcome.

For you to think about:

1. What natural resources do you use in your daily life?

Where do these resources come from?

2. What rites of passage or 'coming of age' ceremonies occur in our society, to mark the passage of children to teens, of teens to adults?

3. Write your own story about Native Americans using the resources of the lagoon area to solve problems.

A Day of Gathering

The young woman's eyes studied each shrub she passed, always searching, ever seeking. She had been well-trained by the medicine man, and knew her role, to unlock the power of each plant, using their properties to heal her people. Her teacher had known each plant and herb as a friend. Their names, their uses, their healing force. But even his knowledge had not cured him of the lowly bite of the rattlesnake.

Had she learned enough to become the next healer? Her mind and eyes were sharp; as she had been chosen to follow this path. Would she remember all that had been entrusted to her? If she forgot, if she failed, wisdom might be lost to her people. Even a child could gather the abundant sage, but a child could not release healing of the plant.

Now particularly, the need was great. Her young brother lay, feverish, suffering. Yet vegetation was sparse; there had been little rain.

She wandered far from the lagoon, yet she was unafraid. She knew each trail and tree, for this was her home. Yet, she carried a bow and arrow, because she understood the ways of the mountain lion, and his hunger was also great.

She kept in mind the many needs of her people. She recognized the bright red berries of toyon, but gathered only leaves, which she would mash, and apply to wounds.

Resting in the shade of a willow, she took several branches to weave a new basket for carrying herbs. Then, she stripped bark, taking care not to hurt the tree. This she would boil in water to make a brew to ease pain and fever.

Along the creek, grew an elderberry shrub. She nibbled a few berries to quench her hunger, but gathered only flowers. In her mind, she envisioned boiling these to treat her brother's fever. She smiled, knowing it would cure. Knowing that she would succeed in her task, and that her people would thrive.

A Day with the Sea

The boy's focus was so intense, that he noticed nothing of the young children playing around him. Nor of the women nearby grinding acorn flour in their stone metates.

From the pad of a prickly pear cactus, the boy selected spines that were long and straight. These he carefully bound to a pole for a fish spear. A drop of blood fell as he pricked his finger. A few spines he set aside to soak; he would bend these to form fishing hooks.

He envied the older boys hunting rabbits or deer; they would surely return to boast of a pelt. Yet, his people's survival had always been linked with the sea. The boy set off for the shore, to try his luck.

He nodded toward the young women weaving cattails and reeds into carrying baskets. He passed children searching in the muck for clams and crabs. These would be in the dinner stew, along with the prickly pear pads he had contributed.

The boy found a sheltered spot with shallow water, where the tide had just retreated, leaving a pool with no escape outlet to the sea. Now he must wait. He spotted a silvery fish sliding by, and struck with his new spear, without success. Again a glint, yet he missed. A third strike hit and he pulled a glittering fish, a prize for his family. As time passed, he tired of the task. But the wise elders taught patience, the greatest tool for any hunter, so he kept still for another chance. A shimmering caught his eye, and he reached, reached....and slipped! His nearly bare skin met cold water.

Pulling himself out, dripping, he looked around to see if anyone had seen. The children had abandoned the mudflats, leaving him alone. He sat, shivering, to dry in the sun. Herons and egrets waded in the distance, no doubt having better luck than he.

Yet, he had pride in his tools, and felt sure that tomorrow his skills would yield better fortune. His clever mind recalled other tricks used by his people. He knew how to gather the root of the wild cucumber vine. When mashed, and thrown in water, it would stun fish.

With a sigh, he took his one fish, and headed back for the shelter of the lagoon, his home.

A Day of the Hunt

Chipping carefully, the young man struggled to shape a stone blade for his arrow, tapping ever so slightly on one side, rotating, then taking a nick off the other. One error, and it would be ruined. Better to go slowly, than to start all over again. He had been taught well.

He sat alone, though within earshot of others. He heard the young women beating yucca leaves they had laid on rocks. This would form a strong cord he could use to attach blades to arrows. He had selected the straightest sticks from the warty stemmed ceanothus bush, then had rubbed and polished them smooth.

Finally he was satisfied with his arrows, even proud, though he would not admit it. Shiny blades, tied carefully to straight shafts, with vanes made from sea bird feathers, glued on with natural tar. He hurriedly gathered provisions so he could set off from camp.

Rabbits he could find near home, but deer were scarce this season. So he hiked onward, ever higher. Occasionally, he stopped to nibble on seeds he carried in a pouch. His sharp eyes caught signs of deer tracks, which he followed to a creek, where he quenched his thirst. Then he waited, listening. The animal might return at sunset to drink. Patience. It was the hardest trait to master. Even harder than courage.

He recognized the call of each bird, the hum of insects, the rustle of the wind. Then....the snap of a twig. He tensed, alert. His bow at the ready, he aimed as a doe approached. But, before he could release, he heard a snarl. A mountain lion leaped past him, and took down the deer, clamping hard on its neck.

Quietly, he backed off, awed by the ferocity and speed of the attack. Alone, he would not risk angering a mountain lion.

Frustration washed over him. All his careful work, only to have his prize snatched away. Yet he knew that he should not have ventured out alone. He had wanted to show off his weapons, his skill.

As he hiked back toward the lagoon, he consoled himself, thinking about tomorrow, when he would bring his brothers. Another day, he would have better chance.

A Day of Fire

The woman could find no joy in her heart for many days. She choked on the smoky air, and avoided gazing at the sickly tinge in the sky. While fire had not reached the lagoon, it had still wounded her people. The plants upon which they depended would be scarce, and animals would move elsewhere. Even the stream, their very lifeblood, carried soot and ash from far away.

Of course, they would still find clams and crabs and fish. The sea was far too vast to care about their troubles.

Would the elders insist on moving their camp to follow the game? She preferred staying near the shore, comforted by the sounds of water.

So she went about her tasks. Children still needed to be fed, and campfires tended. As she had anticipated, each day's stew seemed weaker than ever before. Men grew sullen from poor hunting. There was no singing in the evenings.

In the days that followed, her people were joined by others, those who had been touched by the fire. Many had been lost.

Her people were happy to welcome these others, to become one with them, to share what they had. Yet she knew that more people would mean less food for all.

From stories told at campfire, she was aware that each generation of her people had known a great fire. It was as much a part of life's cycles as changes in the moon and seasons. It could not be helped.

Indeed, her people had set small fires on purpose. Ancient wisdom had taught them that many plants needed the cleansing of fire to thrive.

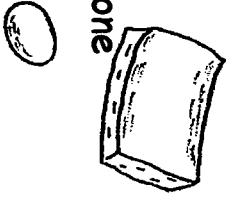
Now that shellfish and acorns and tubers were more important than ever, she spent more time gathering. Returning one day, she overheard children playing with marbles, tiny balls from the pod of a wild cucumber, and she felt a small awakening of joy.

In a deep corner of her mind, she could picture plants resprouting, life returning, as it always had after fire. In the meantime, the people would suffer. But they would endure.

Native American Vocabulary

shaman	holy man or medicine man
petroglyph	carving on rock surface
Mano	hand-held stone for grinding
metate	curved rock surface for grinding
leaching	pouring water repeatedly over acorn flour to remove bitter acids
olla	storage jar
rite of passage	ceremony to mark transition to becoming an adult
shawii	mush cooked from acorn flour

Acorns were ground on a stone surface called a **metate**, using a rounded stone called a **mano**.



Tribes travelled inland to gather acorns from oak trees. These could be stored during the winter.

For food, the Kumeyaay collected roots, seeds, nuts and berries.

Hunters made bows and arrows from willow branches for hunting deer, while rabbits were caught with traps and throwing sticks.

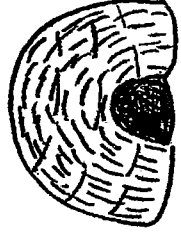
We see evidence around the lagoons in middens, where shells were dumped.



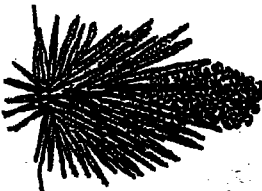
The ocean and lagoons were the main sources of food. The Kumeyaay gathered shellfish (clams, scallops and crabs), and fished the coastal waters.

For shelter, the Kumeyaay built dome-shaped structures, called **ewaa**.

These were made from willow branches, and covered with reed thatching to keep out the rain.



The Kumeyaay ate the Yucca's fruits, used its fibers to weave baskets, and made soap from its roots.



For one plant, the Kumeyaay had many uses. The Mojave Yucca has sword-like leaves with tips spiked like daggers.

Tribes of Kumeyaay lived in small groups around the lagoon.

They used plants, animals and minerals from this area to make all that they needed:

- shelter
- food
- medicines
- clothes
- weapons
- tools

Native Americans lived in this area as far back as 8000 years ago. The Kumeyaay arrived more recently, about 2000 years ago.

Why did they settle

near the lagoon? Villages must be located near a source of fresh water, such as the creeks that feed the lagoon.

How Native Americans lived around San Diego's lagoons

