

THE ALPINE SUN SHOPPER – February 4, 2010
Tattered Tidbits: Alpine Historical Society

HISTORY OF THE KUMEYAAY IN ALPINE

More than 10,000 years ago the first people who lived in Alpine were Indians? They were called Diegueños. Today these Indians are known as the Kumeyaay.

They lived in small groups called tribes and were hunter-gatherers. Since they had to find food to eat, they moved from place to place to find the seeds and berries as they became ripe.

Acorns were the single most important food for the Kumeyaay. They provided almost 50% of their diet. Acorns fall off the oak tree when they are ripe. After the acorns were picked they were leached and dried. Then the women and children would grind them into meal for mush and bread. There are many signs of old Indian camps in Alpine. You can find them along the creeks, where the oak and willow trees grow.

The women of the tribe were famous for their basket work and pottery. The plants used to make these baskets also come from different plants and trees. Some of these are the willow tree, deer grass, basket weed, sumac, spruce, and devils' claw. The baskets were used for carrying items. They also held water for storage and cooking. These baskets are still being made today by the Kumeyaay women.

The men of the tribe had different jobs. They would catch fish and hunt for animals such as deer, mountain sheep, antelope, rabbits, ground squirrels, and other small animals. They also hunted small birds such as pigeons, doves, larks, robins and quail. Animals and birds were hunted with a bow and arrow. They also used traps, clubs, throwing sticks and nets made from the yucca fiber. Bows and arrows were also necessary for hunting and sometimes they used them for protection. They made their bows from willows, screw bean mesquite and mountain ash. The shafts of the arrows were made from arrow weed which has long straight stems. Fire hardened grease wood was also used to make arrows for hunting large animals.

To celebrate the Kumeyaay danced and sang. They taught their songs and dances to their children. They did not have a written language so they used their songs to tell stories. Each family within the tribe had their own songs. These songs connected their people to their ancestors.

Viejas Mountain is considered sacred to the Kumeyaay. They call the mountain "Song-Dance." Pilgrimages were made by the Indians to the summit to honor the Sun (In'ya) the Great ruler of All things. They would watch In'ya rise exactly over Buckman Springs Mountain at winter solstice. This marked the exact alignment with stones. They sang songs in the great dance circle at the summit.

When the Spanish came to California everything changed for the Kumeyaay. Father Junipero Serra established the missions for the Catholic Church. The Mission San Diego de Alcalá is the first mission in Alta California. It was established on July 16, 1769 and is located in Mission

Valley.

The Spanish forced the Kumeyaay to leave their land and work for the Missions. They were a peaceful tribe and to avoid being captured, many of the men and their families went into the mountains to hide. When the Spanish came to their village all they found were old women. That is why they first called the Alpine area “Valle de las Viejas” (*Valley of the Old Women*).

When the Spanish first arrived in San Diego, there were around 25,000 Indians. After 65 years of forced labor, disease and drought, only 2,500 Indians were left.

Several years later Pio Pico became the Governor of Alta California. He had the authority to give away large pieces of land to members of his family and to his friends. This was land that originally belonged to the Kumeyaay. Over 13,000 acres, almost the entire area of Alpine, was given to Ramon and Leandro Osuna in 1846. The Rancho was called “Rancho Valle de las Viejas y Mesa del Arroz” (*Ranch of the Old Women and Table of Rice*) means the rice that is from the grain of the grasslands. It was not the rice that you buy at the grocery store.

In 1846 the Osuna brothers, Ramon and Leandro were unable to keep their entire claim. In 1850 Don José Antonio Aguirre bought 8,877 acres of Mesa del Arroz. He and his wife Rosario were considered to be one of San Diego’s founding families. Don Antonio owned the property in Alpine until 1860.

From 1850 to 1890 many Treaties and Acts were established to help the Indians. However, the treaties were seldom enforced. In 1891 the Act of Relief was passed. The Kumeyaay were able to begin to regain some of their lost land.

In 1931 construction began to build the El Capitan Dam. About 150 Kumeyaay Indians who lived in the Capitan Grande area lost their land. It was submerged under water due to the new reservoir. The evicted Indians received about \$2,400 each and were moved to a new reservation. One reservation is Barona and the other is Viejas.

After more than 200 years of struggling, the Kumeyaay established a tribal government on their own land. The Viejas reservation consisted of 1,600 acres. In 1987 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that tribes had the right to engage in gaming on their land.

In 1991 they opened the Viejas Casino and Turf Club and in 1998 the Viejas Outlet Center. Today Viejas Enterprises includes, Borrego Springs Bank, Viejas Entertainment, Mar-Tar-Awa and Alpine Springs Recreational Vehicle Parks. These businesses provide thousands of jobs to local residents.

The Outlet Center features an interactive water fountain where children can play. During the cooler months there is an ice skating rink where you can rent skates. During December you can watch the spectacular performance of “The Legend of the Ice Princess”.

The tribal leaders support many local organizations and individuals in our community. They teach their children the Kumeyaay language to keep their culture and traditions alive. Every year, in the fall, Viejas holds a Pow Wow...and once again they can sing their songs.

The Alpine Historical Society is proud to have, Viejas Tribal Council member, Virginia Christman give an informative talk about the history of her family and the Kumeyaay tribe. It will be held on Sunday Feb 21st at 2pm at the Alpine Woman's Club. For further information call Carol Morrison 619-445-2544.

By Carlette Anderson



Kumeyaay milling site. Located in the Alpine Mobile Home Estates Park where Dinosaur Land was located.