

INDIGENOUS CULTURES AND HISTORY IN CALIBAJA

FRONTERA FRIDAY ISSUE BRIEF NO. 4

Frontera Fridays are quarterly events that connect leaders from both sides of the border to UC San Diego and serve as a platform for learning, networking and discussing opportunities and challenges that make our binational region unique. They are organized by the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies (USMEX) at the School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) and the Urban Studies & Planning Program (USP) and honor the legacy of Chuck Nathanson and the San Diego Dialogue.



The Kumeyaay-Digueno people (known as Kumiai in Baja California) have inhabited the Calibaja region for more than 10,000 years. They established seasonal settlements along the coast from north of La Jolla to Ensenada, in the mountain regions from Palomar through Tecate, and into the desert regions of the Imperial/Mexicali Valleys. They fished, hunted and utilized the wide varieties of plant life found in the San Diego and Tijuana River watersheds both for food and medicine.

The arrival of the Spanish missionaries and soldiers in the late 18th century disrupted the Kumeyaay way of life. They were forced to labor on the mission properties, cultivating non-native plants and raising livestock. Although the first Baja California mission was established at Loreto in what is now Baja California Sur in 1697, there was not significant presence of Spaniards in the Kumeyaay areas until after the founding of the San Diego de Alcalá mission in 1769. After that, land grants awarding traditional lands to the foreigners, encroachment on villages by colonizing ranchers and settlers, and death from forced labor and foreign diseases followed.

After Mexico's revolution in 1810-21, jurisdiction over tribal lands passed to the new government based in Mexico City. Although the Mexican constitution granted equality under the law to all indigenous peoples of Mexico, conditions did not improve and the constitution did not recognize specific rights to any traditional lands. In 1848, the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo abruptly divided the Kumeyaay lands into two separate nations.

On the U.S. side of the border, several separate reservations of Kumeyaay clans were established by order of President Grant in 1875 and others followed over the next 50 years. In 1932, Kumeyaay living on the Capitan Grande reservation were removed from their ancestral lands to make way for construction of the El Capitan dam and reservoir on the San Diego River. In recent years, several Kumeyaay tribes in San Diego County have regained economic prosperity, following the enactment of laws permitting gaming on reservation lands.

Efforts have been made to re-build ties across the border between the Kumeyaay tribes of California and the Kumiai villages of Baja California. Many of the Kumiai in Baja have maintained their traditional language and arts such as basket weaving with native plants and pottery making with special native clays. They have also kept alive the ethno botanical knowledge of native plant properties for nutrition and healing.

Resources:

- *Kumeyaay.com and Baronamuseum.com*
- *Shipek, Florence, "Pushed into the Rocks" Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians, 1987*
- *Connolly Miskewish, Michael, "Kumeyaay: A History Textbook Volume I Precontact to 1893" Sycuan Press, 2007*
- *Gamble, Lynn & Wilken-Robertson, "Kumeyaay Cultural Landscapes of Baja California's Tijuana River Watershed" Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2008) pp. 127-151*