



The Island Chumash



An Introduction

Traditionally the Chumash people lived in an area extending from San Luis Obispo to Malibu, including the four Northern Channel Islands. Today, with the exception of the Islands, Chumash people live in these territories and areas far beyond. Approximately 148 village sites have been identified, including 11 on Santa Cruz Island, eight on Santa Rosa Island, and two on San Miguel Island. Due to the lack of a consistent water source, Anacapa Island was likely inhabited on a seasonal basis. A true maritime culture, the Chumash hunted and gathered natural resources from both the ocean and the coastal mountains to maintain a highly developed way of life. Today we have evidence of more than 13,000 years of Native American occupation of the islands, highlighted by the discovery of Arlington Springs Woman. Among the oldest dated human remains in North America, radio- carbon dating indicates she lived approximately 13,000 years ago. This rich, continuing history is a testament to the Chumash people and their island home.

What's in a Name

Michumash is the word from which the name Chumash is derived. Roughly translated, *Michumash* means “makers of shell bead money” and is the term mainland Chumash used to refer to those inhabiting the islands.

Achum, or shell bead money was “minted” by the island Chumash using small discs shaped from olivella shells and drills manufactured from Santa Cruz Island chert. The shell bead money was exchanged with mainland villages for resources and manufactured goods that were otherwise unavailable on the islands.

Over time, many Chumash place names have been altered to reflect the uses or perceptions of various other cultures. Anacapa Island, however, retains a name closest to the Chumash *Anyapakh*, meaning “mirage.”

Santa Cruz Island, known by the Chumash people as *Limuw*, translates to “in the sea,” while Santa Rosa Island, or *Wi'ma*, means “redwood driftwood.”

Though no translation to modern English is known, San Miguel Island was referred to as *Tuqan*.

Limuw: A Story of Place

Hutash, the Earth Mother, created the first Chumash people on the island of *Limuw*, now known as Santa Cruz. They were made from the seeds of a Magic Plant.

Hutash was married to the *Alchupo'osh*, Sky Snake, the Milky Way, who could make lightning bolts with his tongue. One day, he decided to make a gift to the Chumash people. He sent down a bolt of lightning, and this started a fire. After this, people kept fires burning so that they could keep warm and cook their food.

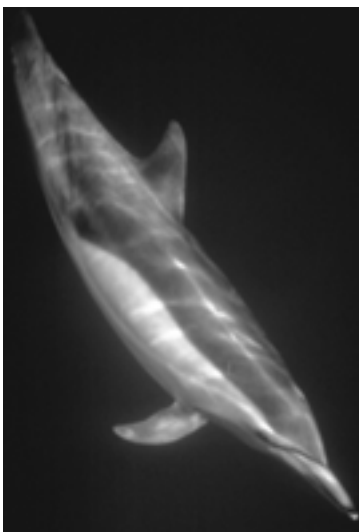
In those days, the Condor was a white bird. But the Condor was very curious about the fire he saw burning in the Chumash village. He wanted to find out what it was. So he flew very low over the fire to get a better look. But he flew too close; he got his feathers scorched, and they turned black. So now the Condor is a black bird, with just a little white left under the wings where they did not get burned.

After *Alchupo'osh* gave them fire, the Chumash people lived more comfortably. More people were born each year, and their villages got bigger and bigger. *Limuw* was getting crowded. And the noise people made was starting to annoy *Hutash*. It kept her awake at night. So, finally, she decided

that some of the Chumash people had to move off the island. They would have to go to the mainland, where there weren't any people living in those days.

But how were the people going to get across the water to the mainland? Finally, *Hutash* had the idea of making a bridge out of a *wishtoyo* (rainbow). She made a very long, very high rainbow that stretched from the tallest mountain on *Limuw* all the way to *Tzchimoos*, the tall mountain near *Mishopshno* (Carpinteria).

Hutash told the people to go across the rainbow bridge, and fill the whole world with people. So the Chumash people started to go across the bridge. Some of them got across safely, but some people made the mistake of looking down. It was a long way down to the water, and the fog was swirling around. They became so dizzy that some of them fell off the rainbow bridge, down through the fog, into the ocean. *Hutash* felt very badly about this, because she told them to cross the bridge. She did not want them to drown. So, to save them, she turned them into dolphins. Now the Chumash call the dolphins their brothers and sisters.



The Island Chumash often traded with mainland villages to acquire necessities that were scarce on the islands. Acorns, a staple in the Chumash diet, were one such trade item. Using a mortar and pestle, acorns can be ground into meal that is then leached to remove tannic acid. Grinding stones, including the mortar and pestle, are often made from sandstone, though hopper mortars exist. These mortars are constructed of a basket fashioned from *Juncus* and fastened to a grinding stone using asphaltum.



The Tomol

Chumash society featured an upper class of chiefs, shamans, boat builders, and artisan; a middle class of workers, fishermen and hunters; and a lower class of the poor and outcast.

The brotherhood of the *tomol*, an elite group of boat builders in the upper echelons of Chumash society, constructed the plank canoe, or *tomol*, which is the oldest example of ocean watercraft in North America.

Preferably constructed of redwood, which drifted down from Northern California, the *tomol* ranged from eight to 30 feet in length and held three to 10 people.

The *tomol* was constructed of a single piece of wood for the floor, with three or four rows of planks. Milkweed, yucca, dogbane, or sinew from deer was used as cordage to tie the *tomol* together. *Yop*, a glue consisting of a mixture of

pine pitch and asphaltum was used to seal the space between boards. Sharkskin was used for sanding, red ochre for staining, and abalone for inlay and embellishment.

The use of the *tomol* allowed for an elaborate trade network between the islands and mainland, between natives and non-natives, and amongst the island communities themselves.

Today the Chumash Maritime Association, in partnership with Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and Channel Islands National Park, continues the tradition of the *tomol*. In September 2001, paddlers rowed the *tomol* 'Elye'wun (swordfish) across the Santa Barbara Channel, completing the first channel crossing in more than 125 years. Future channel crossings are planned.



Missionization

The Spanish were the first Europeans to visit the Chumash in 1542. Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was impressed by the friendliness of the Chumash people who he encountered. However, along with European contact, came European diseases and conflict.

Even relatively minor illnesses, such as the common cold, were devastating to the previously unexposed people of North America and many Chumash people succumbed to disease.

In an attempt to convert the native population to Christianity and secure the area for Spain against the Russian and Aleut fur traders, the Chumash people were removed from their traditional lands. The Mission Era

(1772—1822) was marked by the construction of five Spanish missions in Chumash territory and continued outbreaks of disease, further decimating the population.

The mission system depended on the use of native labor to propel industry and the economy. The social organization of Chumash society was restructured, leading to the erosion of previous power bases and further assimilation.

When California became part of Mexico, the government secularized the missions, and the Chumash sank into the depths of poverty. By the time of the California gold rush, the Chumash had become marginalized, and little was done to understand or help the remaining population.

i sari wa; It Will Continue Indefinitely

Today, Chumash community members continue to move forward in their efforts to revive what was becoming a forgotten way of life. Much has been lost, but Chumash community members take pride in their heritage and culture.

With a current population nearly 5,000 strong, some Chumash people can trace their ancestors to the five islands of Channel Islands National Park. The Chumash reservation in Santa Ynez represents the only federally recognized band, though it is important to note that several other Chumash groups exist.

The National Park Service invites you to visit Channel Islands National Park, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and other local areas to learn more about the Chumash and other Native American cultures. For more information please write or call:

Channel Islands National Park
1901 Spinnaker Drive
Ventura, California 93001
(805)658- 5730

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area
401 West Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, California 91360- 4223
(805)370- 2300

Chumash Indian Tribal Elders Council
Post Office Box 517
Santa Ynez, California 93460
(805)688- 8446

Candelaria American Indian Council
1650 Palma Dr.
Ventura, California 93003
(805)650- 8352

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History
2559 Puesta del Sol Road
Santa Barbara, California 93105
(805)682- 4711

Friends of Satwiwa
4126 Potrero Road
Newbury Park, California 91320
(805)499- 2837

