



CACHUMA FLYER

ISSUE NUMBER 49

FEBRUARY 2001

CHUMASH HEALING PRACTICES : AN INTRODUCTION

By Linda Taylor

This is the "educational minute" Linda presented at the last monthly Docent meeting.

Our basic understanding of Chumash medical treatments is well stated by Jan Timbrook, an anthropologist and ethnobotanist from Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History in an article in 1989, "It is difficult to separate spiritual healing from medicinal treatment . . . , the Chumash made no distinction."

In the Chumash world, disease and death were caused by supernatural beings. To defend against them, the Chumash called upon these powers themselves. Performing rituals and owning ritual paraphernalia were means to acquiring the powers, but were known and owned only by members of the elite class called *antap*, and were passed from father to son, leaving other members of the tribe naive to healing secrets. *Antap* membership and initiation into the healing cult began in childhood.

Assisting the Shaman were his dream helpers or guardian spirits, such as a bear, owl, hawk, crow, eagle, or mountain lion, which was revealed to each individual in visions induced during *Datura*-using rites.

Knowledge held by the *antap* included how to use sacred objects — crystals, pipes, plants, and sacred songs; to perform dances, mythology, and poetry; to use esoteric language, including chants; to recall tribal history of healing; and probably to create rock paintings.

The most important treatments or prescriptions were:

- Jimson Weed (*Datura wrightii*), traditionally called toloache,
- Chuchupate (*Lomatium californicum*),
- Sea water,
- Tobacco (*Nicotiana attenuata*),

- Red ants (*Pogonomyrmex californicus*),
- "Ayip" (described below),
- Cauterization.

Datura, a common plant of sandy areas and widely spread throughout the Cachuma Lake watershed, is considered to be the most important medicinal plant, used for the following reasons:



1. To enable a person to contact his supernatural guardian to acquire special protection, a special skill, or a personal talisman, e.g., bear, eagle, etc.

2. To contact the dead, to see into the future, to see the "true nature" of a person, to find lost objects.

3. To cure injuries, to overcome evil omens, to provide immunity from danger, e.g., snake bites, arrows.

Leaves and roots were brewed into a tea and used (probably as an anesthetic) while setting bones, during toothaches, and for other aches and pains. A poultice of leaves might be placed directly on wounds or sores. Powdered leaves were made into a paste and applied as an antidote to snake and spider bites.

However, the most significant use of *Datura* was to induce visions. Smoked like tobacco, it was the foundation for initiation rites of boys into manhood and in other rituals during which talismans and omens were revealed. The painted cave on San Marcos pass was probably painted during periods of ritual *Datura* use.

Cauterization was performed using Mugwort *Artemisia douglasiana* leaves rolled into a small cone which was lighted and held to the sore or rheumatic joint. (Early European visitors to the

Cont. p.2
February 2001

CHUMASH MEDICINE (Cont.)

area commented on the many scars people had.)



Mugwort *Artemisia douglasiana*

A stone pipe — approximately 4-7 inches long and shaped like a cigar — was heated and placed over a sore where it raised a blister. Only a “Smoke Doctor” or a “Sucking Doctor” could perform this treatment.

Poison Oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*) had other uses, however, it does fit into this grouping. Using a cut of an early spring stem, Chumash allowed the sap to drip onto warts, skin cancers, calluses, corns, and other persistent sores, which essentially burned them.

Tobacco was certainly used as a recreational drug as well as medicinally. To clarify a minor discussion that has been tossed around among docents for years, the so called Indian Tobacco (*N. glauca*), which is seen growing profusely all along



Nicotiana attenuata

local streets and highways is native to South America and was introduced after exploration; however, another species, *N. attenuata*, which grows on a bush and bears pink-tinged white blossoms, is native to the Cachuma watershed. The “Pipe Doctor” or “Smoking Doctor” blew smoke over the sick person from a pipe burning crushed leaves. *Pespibata*, a mixture of lime from burned shells, water, and crushed tobacco leaves was drunk to promote good overall health and for stomach pains. (Current thought is that the tobacco-lime mixture caused vomiting to purge parasites from undercooked fish.) A poultice of tobacco leaves was applied on sores and wounds and probably served as an anesthetic.

Red ants were used only by the “Ant Doctor,” usually in a place remote from the village and was Cachuma Lake Nature Center Flyer

considered to be a powerful treatment. Balls, formed from a cluster of ants, were swallowed by the patient (on one account as many as ninety



balls), which caused vomiting. The treatment was sometimes repeated over many days while the patient

fasted. Hallucinogenic properties are known to exist in some ant toxins. No specific disease was cited for which this treatment was prescribed. Live ants were also placed on external wounds. Perhaps their bites were anesthetizing.

Ayip was a paste made from alum obtained from the Central Valley and ground bodies of Sidewinder Rattlesnakes *Crotalus cerastes*. (This desert snake must have been a trade item; it is not indigenous to this area.) *Ayip* was applied as body paint to increase fertility and luck in gaming.

Chuchupate *Lomatium californicum* was a panacea. The root was chewed for headaches, neuralgia, and flatulence, and rubbed on other areas for pain relief. A decoction was drunk for stomach troubles, colds, and rheumatism; a poultice of leaves was applied to sores. The root was chewed for a sore throat or ground and smoked for very bad colds. Many Chumash carried or wore a piece of the root routinely. It was said to repel rattlesnakes, among other beneficial affects.

The Chumash believed that most diseases were caused by “bad blood.” Sea water was drunk to cleanse the blood. Soaking in warmed sea water with seaweed added was a treatment for paralysis.

Many plants, objects, and procedures were used by Chumash healers; a small fraction have been discussed here. Ideas were shared from tribe to tribe and into the southwest and Mexico. At the time of European exploration many new diseases descended upon the Chumash; some of their healing practices were used on these new plagues, but many were discouraged by mission fathers. European settlers, however, adopted a fair number of Chumash practices, since access to their accustomed medicines and treatments were unavailable.

An exhibit is currently in preparation at the Nature Center that will provide a more comprehensive picture of Chumash healing — both spiritual and corporal.

CACHUMA LAKE EAGLE COUNT

By Liz Mason

Saturday, January 13, we did the annual eagle count for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife. The count results were: 2 adult Bald eagles, 6 subadult Balds, 1 adult Golden.

Thanks to a great bunch of volunteers, we got our fixed points on the lake covered, and they observed and noted sightings for 3 hours. All 16 groups, except 1, had eagle sightings.

After the count, I plot all the data on a map and estimate numbers of birds for each 15-minute increment from 9 am to noon. I then send the information to the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group at U.C. Santa Cruz. They coordinate the count for the western states, with Janet Linthicum in charge. Her letter, dated December 2000 states:

"The 2000 California count total was 667 Bald; 375 adults, 274 immatures, and 18 of undetermined age. Some of the California routes are also part of a nationwide midwinter survey effort. A preliminary trend analysis of the 2000 nationwide results was compiled and can be viewed at [Http://srfs.boisestate.edu/midwinte.htm](http://srfs.boisestate.edu/midwinte.htm)."

Although eagles have been downlisted from Endangered to Threatened, the Endangered Species Act requires monitoring of populations for 5 years after the downlisting. At Cachuma, we see no reason to stop the annual count when the 5 years have passed, even if the birds were to be removed from the listing status altogether.

[Ed. note. After spending at least 4 hours in freezing weather on the lake, the volunteers had their sack lunches at the Nature Center where they were served delicious desserts (cakes, cookies, candies, etc.) donated by **Trader Joe's** of Goleta. Trader Joe's has been giving this very welcome donation for several years.]

GENEROUS GROCERS

Another generous grocer in the Solvang will contribute 1% of their earnings to deserving organizations - that's us! Nielsen Market has followed El Rancho's lead and will send us a nice check if shopper's will register to donate to the Nature Center. When you next shop at Nielsen's, ask the person at the check-out counter for a form. After that, each time you use your Frequent Shopper's Card, 1% will go to the Nature Center.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Docent's Training Class Don Wimpres will be leading a Docent training session, Saturday February 17. If you have ever thought about becoming a Docent, now is your chance! The class will begin at 9:00 am and will conclude mid-afternoon. Bring a sack lunch. Dessert and beverages will be provided.

6th Annual Trout Derby The Trout Derby days are 31 March and 1 April, but Friday (30 March) will be very busy for volunteers, signing in on-site registrants, setting up for the weigh-ins, and all those activities that precede a major event. Please start to think of the times and dates when you can be available to help.

Zoo-To-You We will again be hosting this very popular event on May 5. There will be two performances, one at 11.00 am, the second at 1:30 pm. Bring a sack lunch and enjoy the enchanting live animals and their histories.

MEMORIAL GIFTS

Please remember the Nature Center when you need to offer a memorial gift. Your tax-deductible check, made out to CLNC, Inc., will be put to use in entertaining thousands each year while educating them on the beauty, value, and history of the Cachuma Lake watershed.

CACHUMA LAKE NATURE CENTER

Board Officers

Marion Schlinger, Carol Smagala, Co-Presidents
Helen Logan, Vice-President
Lorraine LaFargue, Lynda Williams, Co-Treasurers
(Linda Taylor, Secretary to the Board)

Docent Officers

Evelyn Putnam, President
Helen Osenga, Vice-President
Becky Deutsch, Treasurer
Barbara Gutmann, Bob Runnels, Co-Secretaries

The Nature Center can be reached at 805-693-0691, or clnatctr@sbceo.org. Evelyn Putnam, editor of the Flyer, can be reached at 805-688-5829 or evputnam@silcom.com.



CACHUMA LAKE NATURE CENTER
CACHUMA HC-58
SANTA BARBARA, CA 93105

PLANT OF THE MONTH

California Buttercup (*Ranunculus californicus*)



As you are driving or hiking through the open oak woodlands of the Santa Ynez Valley in the springtime, you may notice some bright, mustard-colored flowers atop stems 12 to 18 inches high. Closer inspection will reveal that the flowers have 7 to 22 shiny yellow petals, approximately 5-13 mm long. Also, the leaves are usually very deeply lobed. This is the California Buttercup.

The buttercup family (*Ranunculaceae*) includes several of our better-known flowers: Columbine, Delphinium, Larkspur, Meadow Rue, Monkshood, and Virgins' Bower.

The genus *Ranunculus* is represented by some five different species here in the Santa Barbara area (one introduced).

All of the buttercups are more or less poisonous when raw, but some species have parts that have been used as food when properly prepared and cooked. Parts used include the leaves, roots, and seeds. Poisonings from using raw buttercup leaves in a salad have been reports. Buttercups are also poisonous to cattle, but, because of their acrid bitter taste, they are not usually eaten and, so, cattle poisonings are rather rare. Strangely, the dried plants in hay are not harmful to cattle.

Some Indians used the brightly-colored petals to make a yellow dye.