

ARCHAEOLOGY ALONG AN IMPOSED BOUNDARY: RESEARCH IN THE TIJUANA-SAN DIEGO REGION

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The present work is focused on current problems concerning the archaeological sites located in the vicinity of the city of Tijuana, based on analysis of a number of circumstances and on reflections concerning the sociocultural dynamics that confront these heritage sites. The social issue and its spatial dimension are addressed as well, since the sites are found at one of the most controversial borders in the contemporary world. In addition, the archaeological tasks and topics of investigation concerning this cultural inheritance are shared with the neighboring country to the north, presenting us with a past reflecting cultural equity.

The official history of Tijuana is dated from the years of its foundation around 1889, but in reality, history or prehistory covers a much longer time span than the one indicated, extending thousands of years before the period of Spanish contact. These were the uninterrupted centuries during which people inhabited the Tijuana River Basin, with its geographical and ecological characteristics suited to human settlements. For this reason, this paper attempts to take some first steps in order to:

- (1) identify and understand evidence concerning the lifeways of the first native groups, through their traces;
- (2) discuss the ominous present that confronts archaeological sites in the urban sprawl of the Tijuana-San Diego region;
- (3) introduce the work that INAH is doing on the Mexican side for the sites' protection, with the advice of governmental agencies in southern California, in particular the BLM and authorities in San Diego County.

DEVELOPMENT

The prehistory of Baja California has attracted the attention of investigators from both sides of the frontier. The mysterious land of "California" supports an extensive history, extending from the beginnings of humans in America and their adaptation to its ecosystems during approximately 10,000 years.

The arrival of new groups and the succession of communities have left evidence of the lifeways by which they adapted to the ecosystem that confronted them.

The human groups that established themselves in these lands, in particular in the region between Tijuana and San Diego, chose the specific setting that offered them the resources necessary for their development. Familiarity was acquired with the passage of the years. Adaptations grew, thanks to the knowledge generated through experience transmitted from generation to generation, and which today has continued to be expressed in the material culture that we share between both countries, divided physically by the present border and sadly being destroyed by our cities.

In the past, in the valley of Tijuana it was possible to see a wide range of natural resources, arising from the constant source of water that flowed through the Tijuana River and offered an excellent option for settlement. In the vicinity of this source of vital liquid, as a consequence, there arose vegetation that was optimal for the collection of seeds and the exploitation of a varied terrestrial and riverine fauna.

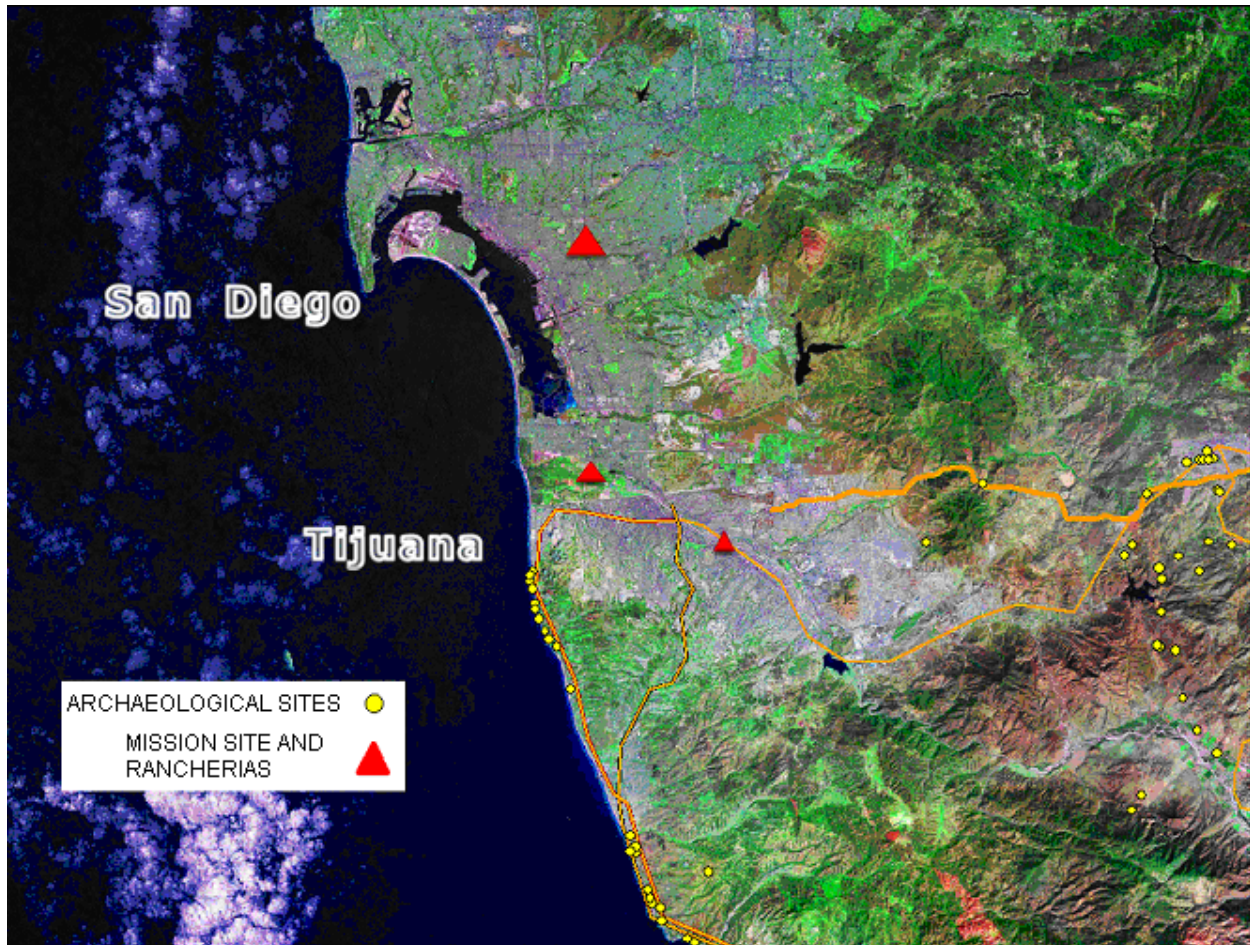


Figure 1. Map of the Tijuana-San Diego Area.

However, we should not forget the proximity of the ocean, with a wide estuary at the mouth of the Tijuana River, extensive sandy beaches, and areas of cliffs to the south of Playas de Tijuana, which offered a great variety of marine products for the people of the region to consume. It is specifically in the cliff zone that the greatest number of archaeological sites have been recorded by INAH (Figure 1).

Other non-food resources that have been available in the basin included raw materials for the production of stone tools, as in the case of Padre Canyon with its metavolcanic rock (Serrano 2004). There was also raw material for making ceramics in the clays of the Tijuana River itself. These characteristics are important for understanding the settlement pattern and the internal and external dynamics of what may be called the prehistoric system.

From 1998 to 2002, Dennis R. Gallegos carried out archaeological work on Otay Mesa, just across the border from Tijuana in the region of mesas, where his studies have produced substantial information for understanding human behavior on this border (Gallegos et al. 1998, 2002). He found indications of settlements from the Paleoindian and Archaic up to the Late Prehistoric period. His main sources of evidence were site records and the identification of the lithic artifacts representative of each period.

Closer to the present time, we continued to share a single culture in the absence of the present border between Tijuana and San Diego. This was the case during the mission period, which reminds us that the Tijuana valley with its rancherias was attached to Mission San Diego de Alcalá. The written

accounts of the missions show us that the native rancherías of the valley were served by the Franciscans -- one more link reflecting the common past shared by the two cities. To cite examples representative of the period, there are the neighboring rancherías of Tijuana or Tijuán, investigated historically by Martínez (2005) based on mission-period writings, and Milejo or Milijó ranchería, which in recent years has been studied and sought by the archaeologists Hunt and Wesson (2005).

As we can see, the prehistory and history of the Tijuana-San Diego region reminds us that the division that separates the two countries today is a boundary created by our present lifeways, dividing a past that was shared in common.

Regrettably, the particular requirements of our cities are the main causes for the disappearance of this past. In our case, in Mexico, the city of Tijuana has one of the highest rates of population increase in the country, a situation that we also share with our neighbor to the north. To make a general comparison, there are only about 10 recorded archaeological sites in the municipio of Tijuana, whereas in San Diego at least 100 recorded sites could be noted. This difference is primarily due to the different preservation policies that are implemented at different levels of government in the two countries.

The same technological progress, which again is different on the two sides of the border, offers us tools both to move forward with the destruction of our heritage and to be able to protect it. A case in point is GIS. Thanks to the recent availability of this system, we are beginning new courses of action to protect our heritage on the Mexican side.

Centro INAH-BC's first experience with GIS came in 2005, through collaborative work with San Diego State University in the "Cultural Ecology and the Indigenous Landscape of the Tijuana River Watershed" project of archaeologist Lynn Gamble and anthropologist Miguel Wilken. The geographical watershed is shared by the U.S. and Mexico. The work consisted of developing a geographical information system with the archaeological sites recorded in the northern part of the state of Baja California, from the municipios of Tijuana and Tecate to their boundaries with Mexicali and Ensenada. Site distribution maps were prepared, together with information on geomorphology, hydrology, geology, vegetation, and urban and rural patterns within the watershed. The objective of this work was to display areas with sites in order to analyze their distribution and the patterns presented by the hunter-gatherer cultures of this part of the country, and to forecast the diverse factors that are leading to their disappearance.

From this work, Centro INAH-BC instigated the creation of a State Geographic Information System, covering the entire area of the state of Baja California and its islands. Accordingly, work on the GIS was formally begun in 2007.

At present, the regions most affected are located between the cities of Tijuana and Tecate and on the coasts of Rosarito and Ensenada. This is an area where the pressure for urban and rural construction is much greater than in other parts of the state. However, monitoring is being done to the extent possible, since no region is exempt from tourist development that is determined to establish itself, above all because of the attractions that are offered by the state's two coastlines on the Pacific and the Gulf of California.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

On the west coast of Baja California, particularly between the northern part of the municipio of Ensenada and the coast at Rosarito and Tijuana, rescue work has increased substantially during the last four years. This is attributable to several factors, including:

- citizen reports and complaints, owing to the increase in the population currently coming into areas that were untouched only 10 years ago;
- increase in construction in northern Baja California, leading to increases in the number of reports and complaints by the population and by academics;

- a considerable increase during the last three years in requests for judgments and property settlements on the part of construction companies.

One of the objectives that we want to accomplish as a Regional Center is to coordinate with the municipios, the state government, and the local universities in order to work together on this difficult task of conserving the archaeological heritage. There is an attempt to make it obligatory to go through INAH to get construction permits at the level of the municipio. We are in the process of creating awareness in the different governmental agencies, with significant advances and high hopes for teamwork with the local authorities.

GIS is one more tool in the struggle for the conservation of our heritage. That system is helping us to detect areas that are endangered by urban growth and thus to give priority to specific areas that will be affected during the next two years.

During the last three years, INAH has developed rescue projects that have recovered additional archaeological information, feeding data into the GIS and helping to give direction in priorities for specific areas that are endangered, and to work proactively before their impending destruction. We hope soon to get information that will contribute to the advancement of archaeology in the Tijuana region, which up to now has been rare.

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