Challenging Perceptions of Island Interiors:  
A Case Study from the Central Valley of Santa Cruz Island

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Archaeological investigations on the California Channel Islands have been oriented primarily around littoral settings, marine resources, and maritime transportation. Absent from these inquiries is a comparable emphasis on interior contexts, terrestrial resources, and land-based travel routes. Citing recent data from the Central Valley of Santa Cruz Island, I challenge embedded assumptions of island interiors as being marginal, peripheral, and largely irrelevant to late Holocene developments. Instead, I argue that the Central Valley is an example of an interior space that may have been vital to intra-island subsistence, transportation, and community interaction.

If it’s island tales you want, lads and lassies  
Filled with middens and tools of your fancies  
You’re in the right place  
To learn of the trace  
Of a prehistory that will entrance thee  

On the Channel Islands not far off our coast,  
Is an arch record that is worthy of boast,  
Its stratigraphy,  
Is gopher-free,  
Leaving a timeline to which we should toast  

Much do we know ‘bout marine exploitation,  
And much has been said ‘bout boat transportation,  
But what we don’t know,  
Is far from the shore:  
The evidence of inland habitation  

To Santa Cruz Island we now turn our sights,  
Largest island of the California Bight  
Its topography  
And diversity  
Includes a Central Valley, that does invite  

In old Aught 7, I started excavations  
At different midden locations  
To find evidence  
Of their subsistence  
And of land and sea transportation  

Central Valley sites help to unravel  
Island resources, their use and travel  
The lithics attest  
That chert is the best  
The eastern quarries are truly a marvel
The trio of mammals, shellfish, and fish  
Were common to the prehistoric dish  
Ease of harvest  
And of transport  
Explain the faunal exploit, plus they’re delish!

With signs of bead-making in excavations  
And products that came from mainland locations  
Obsidian stone  
And tools of deer bone  
Say: “This ain’t no backwater destination!”

Finding these items in the Central Valley  
Suggests it was used as a central alley  
For moving resources  
And freshwater sources  
That add to the tally that’s well worth the dally

So, if you take anything from today’s tale  
It is that islands leave challenging trails  
Of both land and sea  
And, finally,  
For your two minutes, I am grateful!