



The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band: Reflections on Collaborative Archaeology

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Abstract This paper briefly describes the history of landscape management practices among the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and the devastating impact that European contact had on these practices. As part of the revitalization of ancient ways, the Tribe is working with members of the research team to understand better some of these past management practices that may be employed today to assist in the restoration of local habitats and the health and vitality of indigenous plants and animals.

Resumen Este artículo describe brevemente la historia de los prácticos de gestiones recursos con el grupo tribal, Amah Mutsun, y el impacto devastado que el contacto europeo tenía en estos prácticos. En parte con la re-vitalización de costumbres ancianas, el tribu está trabajando con miembros del grupo de investigación para entender mejor algunos de los prácticos de gestiones recursos que pueden ser empleados hoy en día para asistir en la restauración de hábitats locales y en la salud y vitalidad de plantas y animales indígenas.

The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band comprises the documented descendants of the Mutsun speakers of San Juan Bautista and the Awaswas speakers of Santa Cruz. The Amah Mutsun are a previously recognized Tribe and our core lineages have existed as a continuous Tribe since before mission times. Our creation stories and our oral history tell us that from the beginning of time we are from these territories. It is our belief that the Creator placed us within our traditional tribal territory for the purpose of protecting and conserving Mother Earth and all creatures and plant life. With this mandate, our people began a pursuit of knowledge to learn how to best fulfill our obligation. We established many clans such as the bird clans, who for many, many generations, and probably thousands of years, recognized that their directive from the creator was to

learn how to protect, provide for, and communicate with our winged brothers. Their accumulated knowledge was regularly shared with other tribes.

Through their efforts, our ancestors discovered that fire was a tool that could be used to manage landscapes and increase seed and plant production. These plants then provided foods, medicines, basketry materials, cordage, and much more. They learned how to rotate burn areas to ensure varying growth patterns that provided shelter for birds and soft grasses for deer and elk, and prevented catastrophic burns that could scar the earth for generations.

Our ancestors were very prayerful. They prayed that their efforts to protect Mother Earth would be successful and would please the Creator. It is our belief that our prayers, our songs, and our ceremonies were given us by the Creator and have always been an integral part of our stewardship responsibility.

In the late 1700s, our path of learning and stewardship was violently interrupted. The Spanish passed a law that banned the burning of all landscapes. Natives who were taken to the missions became the property of the mission and were not allowed to return to their traditional territories. They could not conduct their ceremonies, sing their prayer songs, or steward the land. The Mexican era saw the destruction of much of their landscape as it was replaced with European grazing grasses. Both the Mexican and early Americans parceled out our territories to newcomers who established ranches and farms on the land. During all three of these horrific eras, the Natives' main concern was survival. Most California tribes, including the Amah Mutsun, were unable to continue the vital tradition of passing on their indigenous knowledge regarding stewardship and how to maintain balance in their world.

After years of living in isolation, the Amah Mutsun are now working to restore the indigenous knowledge that was lost. Once this knowledge is restored, we believe it remains our obligation to continue on the path of our ancestors. That is to protect Mother Earth and all the creatures and plant life and to continue in the pursuit of knowledge that honors our stewardship responsibility and provides balance in our universe.

Today we believe that our quest to restore our indigenous knowledge is what the Creator is asking us to do. We further believe that after centuries of neglect and mistreatment, Mother Earth needs healing. We have no doubt that our indigenous knowledge will be an important contributor to this healing.

The Amah Mutsun realize that science and archaeology play an important role in helping us restore our indigenous knowledge. For this reason, we were happy to participate in the Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve and Pinnacles National Park studies. We already had a very good relationship with the California State Parks Anthropologist, Mark Hylkema. Also, Mutsun member

Chuck Striplen was a Ph.D. candidate at UC Berkeley and studying with Dr. Kent Lightfoot. When the idea of our Tribe participating in this study first came to us, we were dubious. We could not understand why we would ever agree to participate in a project that could potentially disturb our ancestors. However, because we wanted to support member Striplen's academic goals, our Tribal Council agreed to meet with members of the proposed Quiroste research team.

At this meeting there was a lot of discussion and a lot of questions. As the discussion progressed, we realized that the project could reveal much of the indigenous knowledge that we hoped to restore. To address our main concern of disturbing the remains of our ancestors, project member Rob Cuthrell explained how the team wanted to use new geophysical techniques like three-dimensional resistivity to try to identify and avoid burials. Together we agreed that if any image suggested burials that these features would not be disturbed. It was further agreed that all culturally sensitive artifacts would be reburied and that our Tribal members would be used throughout the study wherever possible.

The Amah Mutsun believe that to heal Mother Earth we must restore the ethnobotany that existed before first contact. This habitat will allow our four-legged, finned, and winged brothers and sisters to once again thrive in these territories and for those that have left to return home. We would like to make our rivers, streams, and creeks healthy so they can once again support eel, sturgeon, salmon, and other species of fish. Archaeological studies, such as those at Quiroste, provide us with the understanding of what existed before and what we must restore.

In conclusion, as we look at the work that is being done at Quiroste Valley and Pinnacles National Park, we realize that these studies are not only about our past, but they are about our future as well. We hope to continue to work with the team that was assembled for Quiroste on future archaeological projects within our traditional tribal territory. The Amah Mutsun are once again working to meet our obligation to the Creator and to be the stewards of lands of our traditional tribal territory.