

Tejon Ranch Development and the Fort Tejon State Park Displays

Developments Projects Offer Opportunity To Upgrade the State Park's Native American Component

Dr. John Anderson

2001 Commentary

The Tejon State Park is located on interstate highway 5, in the mountains overlooking Bakersfield, California. My criticism of the park's public history program dates back many years. Unfortunately, from everything I can learn, the park still neglects its Tejon Indian programming.

Readers of my web pages ask me how they as state taxpayers can expect improvement in the Fort Tejon State Park public displays, when California is undergoing economic stress due in large part to its desperate electricity problems that include blackouts and soaring utility bills?

I answer them that the ideal time to address the neglect of native California history by public agencies, even in times of energy crisis, is when new development projects are proposed for nearby Native California sites.

American laws mandates careful monitoring of native sites designated for negative impact or even destruction. As a result, a great deal of old and new information is routinely collected and

studied, new digs are undertaken, and contemporary native communities are consulted with new ethnographic data collected.

So much is learned during this process, yet too often existing road signs remain as they were written decades ago, historic markers are unchanged, state park information is not undated, reports are not made available in local public libraries, booklets are not sold to the public through parks and museums, etc. What this means is that a closed system of information is perpetuated, excluding meaningful public participation. Too often information on the native sites are censored from books and newspaper articles in the name of protecting them from vandals. Yet, how can the public fairly judge the importance of destroying a native historic or archaeological site if they have never before had adequate knowledge of its existence, of the drama of events that led to the natives' absence from such sites, and of the ongoing efforts of native California groups to preserve their heritage from the obvious negative impacts of development?

Development projects on the Tejon Ranch particularly interest me at this time, as someone studying the historic impact of Fort Tejon and the Tejon Ranch on the Chumash Indians. New projects include the construction of the Pastoria power plant in *Tsipowhi* canyon [on the 1851 Tejon Treaty lands, and still on the 'reduced' 50,000 acre Sebastian Indian Reservation], potential plans for developing historic Castac lake [oddly stripped of its Chumash name and renamed *Tejon*], and plans for a business district near *Matapkwelkwel* at the foot of the Grapevine Grade [interstate 5].

It would be appropriate if each of these large development projects contributed adequate funds for revamping the Fort Tejon park displays, associated freeway and roadside public displays, and state historic markers, so that the vast amount of information made available through legally mandated impact reports on these sites could fully benefit the public. The amounts of money involved would be trivial, compared to the vast sums expended for development.

To continue to fail to make such information available to the general public, is to leave the Park Service open to criticism that it is catering to big business interests and neglecting its duty to faithfully document the native history of Tejon region.

[John Anderson, June 6, 2001].

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Ongoing Problems With the Fort Tejon Public History Program

Background commentary from the year 2000

A selection of emails about Fort Tejon is found below. They may be of interest to people trying to get the Fort Tejon program to bolster its Native American information program as well as those interested in bolstering Tejon Indian participation in planning development projects on the nearby Tejon Ranch whose historic ties to Fort Tejon are well documented but neglected in the public displays at the fort.

The background for this discussion is the continuing neglect of native content in public history programs in the state of California. Hundreds of millions will be spent on a development project, native monitors are brought in to supervise the construction, and academics are hired to write reports on archeology and history. Yet too often, these reports are filed away where no one will read them and no real improvement is made in the *public* history component of the state's programming.

[John Anderson, November 14, '2000]

The State Park's Web Pages Need Revision

The letter below presents my response to an email sent to me from a staff person working at Fort Tejon Park. He works in the park's public history program. The focus of our disagreements were web pages which I placed on the internet, criticizing the Park Service's web pages (on the history of Fort Tejon and the nearby Indian communities).

"Pleased to hear from you. Yes, I maintain quite a number of web pages on Fort Tejon and the Tejon Indians and they are being read by a growing number of readers.

Thank you for the invitation to volunteer at the Fort Tejon facility. I live in north Idaho and work full-time, so I unfortunately cannot serve as a volunteer at the fort. But I hope my web pages are of some help to internet readers, seeking to learn more about the history of the garrison and the Tejon Indian Reservation [Sebastian]. And I would be delighted to volunteer some time in consulting with you for free on my criticisms of the Park Service's web page(s), as well as my research finding on the fort and the Tejon Indians.

Actually, I wrote the web page proposing that the Tejon Indians be given the facility for a cultural center, a number of years ago. My reference in this web page to the 'official' State Park webpage was correct.¹

I just looked again at this State Park site (more than one web page) on Fort Tejon, and unfortunately my commentary about needing to correct and expand the Park Service's web page remains current. The term Emigdiano does not refer to all of the Chumash living in the region of the fort. The Emigdiano were not "an inland group of the Chumash people, but a coastal people who came to the *Tashlipun* canyon. My research shows that the Emigdiano were sent by the Catholic Church to dig and process gold, which was smuggled by the Church from California by sea and over the Colorado River.

1 The Fort Tejon web page is at parks.ca.gov/central/sanjoaquin/ft351a.htm

Whether the gold smuggling was correct or not, the State Park's web page is incorrect when it states that "the Emigdiano avoided contact with European explorers and settlers, and were never brought into one of the missions or even incorporated into the Sebastain Indian Reservation." My book called *The Yokut Shield* explains that the *Tashlipun* and the other Mountain Chumash bands did sign the Tejon treaty of 1851 and did indeed integrate into the early reservation life at Tejon. It also explains that they did NOT avoid contact with European explorers and settlers but actually were in open warfare with them decades before the American invasion. This is acknowledged openly by the American army and diplomats who signed the Tejon Treaty of 1851.

But these are only cursory criticisms of the Park Service web pages, touching on a larger and complex topic.

My commentary on the Tejon Indians is spread over a number of Tejon related webpages, which you may find of interest. I am in frequent touch with non federally recognized Chumash councils from Bakersfield, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara. I am sure they would also be interested in working with the Park Service in revising and expanding its web information and the information made available to the public at the fort.

[Fort Tejon](#)

[The Tejon Reservation](#)

[More Info on the Tejon Reservation](#)

[The Last Tejon Indian Community](#)

These beginning web pages are only a place to start. They contain links to over a hundred web pages documenting Chumash and Tejon Indian history and contemporary life. My main Chumash web page, for example, is approaching 40,000 hits. It is at:

[Info on Contemporary Chumash Bands](#)

I will try to contact the above mentioned Chumash and see if they would be interested in further dialogue with you and other staff working on the Fort Tejon public history programs.

It is my understanding that many members of these councils consider the State Park's program at Fort Tejon inappropriately influenced by American military buffs and the nearby Tejon Ranch Corporation. And they are convinced that the State Park interpretive programs remain unwilling to clearly document the genocidal policies of the early decades of the American era when the army served as an instrument of oppression of native California natives.

These are painful topics to discuss. I am sorry if I have offended you in any way, but unless California public history programs take on the hard task of frankly acknowledging the genocide and correcting the

European bias of public history displays [including web sites], then both Native Californians and non-natives are unjustly deprived of their heritage.

You mentioned that the State Park web page on Fort Tejon is limited in space, and you explain that it can't cover everything. One of the main purposes of my commentary is to try to convince the public that when space is limited, less needs to be said about the military and the glory of the economic boom for white immigrants and more about the native peoples of California and how they struggled heroically against seemingly impossible odds to preserve their families, communities, and heritage.

Put simply, the struggles of the Tejon Indians to preserve their heritage should be a primary theme of the Fort Tejon State Park museum presentations (publications and displays) and a primary theme of its web page(s). Lets stay in touch, I am convinced much more dialogue is needed between the staff at Fort Tejon and the Tejon Indians. Perhaps I can help in some way."

[J Anderson, November 6, '2000, AmDes Research.

CHUMASH COMMENTARY

I sent a copy of my email to a number of Chumash Indian colleagues, with whom I routinely discuss current issues of importance to native Californians. Below are related emails, addressing some of the issues I brought up in my correspondence with the staff at Fort Tejon.

Show Us More Than Lip Service

[Commentary by Chumash Historian Mike Khus]

"I sent written input to the state park staff at Ft. Tejon before the current displays were constructed, YEARS ago. I begged staff to highlight the native theme at Ft. Tejon because it was the focus for the embryonic federal relations with California Indians for both the central valley and adjoining coastal areas. The very purpose of the fort was to pacify damaging "marauding" natives who had decimated Spanish and Mexican ranches. Later, the facility served a crucial role in the disposition - if I dare use a neutral term - for our California Indian peoples in south-central California.

My comments and input were largely ignored.

Perhaps due to the name of the park, uninformed and I think, insensitive park management chose to turn it into a sort of 19th century/militaristic Disneyland. Civil War hobbyists use it for re-enacting battles that happened thousands miles away, in a different time period (to the uninitiated tourist, I think this is the source of some confusion about the fort's purpose and role in CALIFORNIA history) and most of the displays deal with the munitiae of the drab, colorless life of soldiers serving garrison duty.

John, I think your comments do not overstate the hard feelings felt by most of the California native community. Most of us regard Ft. Tejon as just another plaything for state parks and non-Indian

tourists, rather than a place where they can learn something significant about California history. Like the California Railroad Museum that glorifies the infamous Robber Barons, that part of California history that might actually ADD to the public's understanding of how the state became a US territory and subsequently a state, and what actually happened to the California Indians, is lost in the army gadgetry and physical architecture of the staff's displays at Ft. Tejon.

Are the California Indians willing to work with Ft. Tejon staff ? Frankly, so far as I am concerned, not until they show us something more than lip service; perhaps some actual sincerity ? "Show me the money" - it is all hot air, unless staff are willing to commit resources, NOW to remedy the inequities they have manufactured."

[email to J. Anderson, November 7, '2000.]

Mike Khus is a Chumash historian, with a M.A. from Stanford University. He served as a past historian of the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation. Khus' knowledge of the Mountain Chumash and their resistance to colonialism is well respected among the Chumash. For related commentary by Mr. Khus, see the web page called [Nihilism](#) found under Social/Political. Other web pages in this section, providing background information, include [Academic Nihilism](#) and [Haley/Wilcoxon Controversy](#).

Barbareno Chumash Support The Acquisition of the State Park by the Tejon Indian.

Commentary by Chumash historian Paul Pommier

"As to the Fort Tejon issues mentioned in your web page, it my experience that any time the Chumash people deal with the National Parks we need to not only look at the immediate agenda presented to us but also be prepared what's coming next,

The Chumash have to be concerned with the legal and moral issues involved in the confiscation of our lands, and we also need to take a long look at the way the process of protecting California heritage sites is administered. I am certain that the Native American Heritage Commission and the National Parks staff discuss these issues before the various federal bureaucracies begin implementation of development projects on native California sites. This dialogue goes way back. If the land is not confiscated in according to the proposals of one developer, then new proposals soon appear from another developer. And there can be another blockage for the Chumash by going to the national register,

So how do we win against the big powers? The land historically belong to the culture of the Indians, if they the national parks invite us in as to hear our grievances ,and see what can be done to work together, it is always on their terms.

And once we orally agree, the traditional Chumash leaders hear the old saying: "Well, you should have put this down on paper? So the agreement soon changes to the benefit of the federal government. The Chumash elders ask to put aside some of their ancestral land, so we may have our own culture center and build a viable community base. Well such negotiations seldom works out, because the federal and state officials complain that their budgets are short and use whatever excuse to get us off their backs.

The dollar amount is great for the tourism that the National Parks generate. It is like having a object in the way, it slows down the process of progress, to preserve historical and sacred sites, and to maintain and build culture centers so that the future generations can come to learn the knowledge and history of these great people, as even today the true descendants continue to fight to preserve their way of life.

Please don't close the final chapter on us, but allow the traditional Chumash to live in harmony with mother earth so we may share with the world. What good is it to close the door on us and then have to dig us up later on, to only prove that we once existed.

Oh those poor anthropologists, who would then would have to look for another culture to dig up. And please don't make us promises about how you will work with us. This has been repeated over and over again. Once you invite us in we are then read the crying towel act; we then become the *looky loos* as to what piece of land we are going to tread on.

Number one in our priorities is the preservation of sacred sites, so we are asking now that the various levels of American government comply with our guidelines concerning our culture sites. The traditional Chumash wish that their sacred lands be maintained by our own people, administered by an independent council of elders.

Today, the whole world watches. The descendants of the Tejon Indians ask the federal government to act in good faith and ratify the Tejon Treaty, which you have acknowledge and signed in 1851. The State of California should formally ask the federal government to abide by this treaty. In Gods name, what is the delay?"

[Email from Paul Pommier, to John Anderson, November 28, '2000]

*Pommier is a member of the Barbareno Chumash Council,
which is located in Santa Barbara.*

*This web page represents the views of the authors, and does not necessarily represent
the views of all the Chumash or Tejon Indians.*

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