

Chapter One

The red planked canoes swung right and proceeded up the lagoon expertly beaching on the white sandy landfall at the mouth of a beautiful canyon. A few minutes earlier the rhythmic splashings of their double-ended paddles had been flashes on the horizon alerting the villagers that their brown-skinned braves were returning from the distant channel islands. Villagers gathered at the beach to greet the returning paddlers and excitedly inventoried the contents of the large canoes.

These unique planked canoes or tomols as the Chumash called them, were often filled with swordfish, dozens of smaller fish, baskets of abalone and clams, and chunks of steatite from Catalina quarries to be made into bowls and carvings. The canoes were quickly unloaded and moved to the higher ground where the well-built, dome-shaped grass huts of the village were located. Several lean, coyote-type dogs barked and pranced about knowing there would soon be scraps on which to scavenge.

Wisps of smoke eased out of openings in the roof of each hut and circled toward the lavender purple hills. The ocean now lazily lapped the shore. Gulls and pelicans soared into the sunset and headed for their nocturnal roosting places. A group of women with pestles in hand were seated on the ground pounding and grinding acorn mush in stone bowls. A brave examined an up-ended tomol damaged on a channel island reef. High up in the canyon, the village shaman (medicine man) was putting the finishing touches on another colorful and mysterious cave painting.

This was the end of another peaceful day in Humaliwo, a Chumash Indian settlement at the foot of Malibu Canyon. The Chumash named this spot of sandy land Humaliwo-where " the surf sounds loudly." The surf still sounds loudly and perhaps more angrily today in modern Humaliwo now known as Malibu. However, time and the tides of an ever-encroaching civilization have all but erased traces of the ancient Chumash.

The Chumash lived along the coast from Malibu to San Luis Obispo. They also lived in the interior valleys, such as Santa Ynez, Cuyama, Santa Clara and Simi. The names of their most important villages are still on maps and are an interesting part of the local culture of this area, Saticoy, Somis, Sinil, Tapo, Sespe, Calleguas, Camulos, Piru, Mugu, Zuma, Cuyama, Cachuma, Ojai, and Matilija were all Chumash villages.

There is no contemporary drawing in existence of the Chumash Indians in their native state. Fortunately, however, the Spanish diarists thought the Chumash superior to any other California tribes and happily wrote many vivid descriptions of them.

Juan Paez of the Cabrillo Expedition, wrote on October 10, 1542 after observing the Chumash:

"They were dressed in skins and wore their hair very long and tied up with long strings interwoven with the hair, there being attached to the strings many gewgaws of flint, bone, and wood."

Father Pedro Font, diarist of the second expedition of Captain Juan Bautista de Anza, noted in 1776 the absence of clothing:

"The dress of the men is total nakedness. For adornment they are in the habit of wearing around the waist a string or other gewgaw which covers nothing. Some of them have the cartilage of the nose pierced, and all have the ears perforated with two large holes in which they wear little canes like two horns as thick as the little finger, in which they are accustomed to carry powder made of their wild tobacco. These Indians are well formed and of good TD although not very corpulent on account of their sweating, I judge. The women are fairly good looking."

The Chumash villages on the channel coast were usually built on high ground where a creek ran into the ocean. Thus, they had fresh water and a quick launching spot for their canoes. Friar Crespi with the Portola expedition in 1769 describes his first look at a village:

"We arrived at the shore where we saw a regular town, the most populous and best laid out of all we had seen on the journey up to the present time. It is situated on a tongue or point of land running out of the same beach."

This very well could be a description of Humaliwo, the Chumash village, located at the present day site of The Malibu Lagoon Museum.

"The houses are well constructed, round like an oven, spacious and fairly comfortable ; light enters through a hole in the roof.

Their beds are on frames and they cover themselves with skins and shawls. In the middle of the floor they make a fire for cooking seeds, fish, and other foods-for they eat everything boiled or roasted."

The finest technological achievement of the Chumash was the splendid tomol or planked canoe. It was unique in the new world. Father Font in 1775 described the tomol:

"They are very carefully made of several planks which they work with no other tools but their shells and flints. They join them at the seams by sewing them with very strong thread which they have and fit the joints with pitch. Some of the launches are decorated with little shells and all are painted red with hematite."

The Chumash were excellent craftsmen and artists, and the goods and tools which they made were always well-fashioned. Particularly attractive were the bowls and carvings of killer whales and other forms of sea life and effigies made from steatite. Sometimes the bowls were inlaid with colorful abalone shells and were beautifully made. The steatite quarries nearest to Malibu were on Santa Catalina Island. The Island Chumash traded with the Coastal Chumash supplying the latter with chunks of steatite.

Other implements were made of sandstone, a material available everywhere. Stone grinding bowls up to six or seven quart capacity and a variety of mortars- and pestles were common.

Baskets were the main household utensils and were indispensable in the gathering of seeds, bulbs, and roots. Water was stored and carried in basketry bottles ingeniously waterproofed on the inside with asphaltum. The baskets made by the Chumash were outstanding in workmanship

and design. They were prized highly by the Spaniards and collected as curios to be sent home to relatives.

Asphaltum was so indispensable to the Chumash that one might say that they had an asphaltum culture. They used it in every phase of their life. With it they caulked their canoes, sealed the water baskets, attached the shell inlay to the bowls, and fastened arrow and spear points to shafts. Asphaltum was used to plug the holes in abalone shells which then could be used as dishes.

Fish hooks were made of abalone shell. The major use for the shell, however, was for decoration. It was lavishly inlaid on stone, bone, and wood. The surface to be decorated received a coating of asphalt onto which was pressed the shell inlay. Giant Pismo clams were used for beads and money.

Bone was used by the Chumash for many of their artifacts. It was extensively used in the making of necklaces, especially as long tubular beads. Flutes and whistles were made of bone, usually of deer tibia. Whalebone was used for many things: wedges to split wooden planks, bars to pry loose abalone, and sweat sticks (tools for scraping the TD to remove the perspiration).

The Chumash made excellent string and rope from a variety of raw materials. Yucca fiber, which made a coarse but very strong cord, was plentiful and widely used. For a more pliable string, Indian hemp, nettle, or milkweed were employed. Flint, chert, and obsidian were used by the Chumash to make very fine projectile points, drills, scrapers, choppers, and knives. The countless thousands of tiny drilled shell beads that have been found, show the efficiency of the drills.

The Chumash were one of the most advanced Indian groups in California and compare favorably with non-literate peoples anywhere in the world. In spite of this, the average person knows little about them and no monuments have been erected to their memory.

So today, when you walk barefoot on the beach sands of Malibu, you might reflect back in time to simple, peaceful Humaliwo. Imagine what a paradise they had. . . "where the mountains meet the sea and the surf sounds loudly."