

2009 Interpreter's View #4

A collection of interpretive ideas created on a weekly basis by the Año Nuevo docent trainee class of 2009

Ideas to apply when utilizing the interpretative materials at the Midden site
Topic: The Ohlones Presenter: Mark Hylkema

Where's the bank? It's right over there next to the hardware store. Año Nuevo was quite a shopping mall. It had all the right stuff. Need some money? You could gather it here by searching the sandy intertidal bottom for the olive snail (*Olivella biplacata*), which, like diamonds or gold, was a medium of exchange in the Bay Area Indian market place. Need some tools? Just go down to the intertidal and pick up some Monterey chert (flint) to use in creating your cutters, scrapers, projectile points, etc. No wonder the Ohlones came out here to the Point at Año Nuevo so often and that there are middens all over the place.

The Big City with its big buildings is a timeless image. Whether it's pyramids, the Acropolis, a cathedral, or the Empire State Building, big structures reflected an economically powerful society at work. *Casa Grande* or the Big House is Año Nuevo's proof positive of a rich successful trade-centered society that had the goods: Olivella, abalone, and chert, that made the Quiroste rich and prone to build what Portola called *Casa Grande*, a dance house (religious in nature) that could hold 200 people.

What's cooking? or rather, how is it being cooked. How did the Ohlones cook their favorite seafood, mussels, (the most common shell in the middens) without a pot? They heated stones and dropped them into waterproof baskets to make their seafood bouillabaisse. They also cooked their money. Olivella shells were turned a uniform white by being heated (money must be standardized). They also cooked their tools. The hardness of Monterey chert (flint) made it impossible to flake into cutting tools unless it was heated to 400 degrees for three hours. Sounds like a recipe to me..... that's why all those blackened oven rocks are found mixed in with the midden materials here at Año.

Where are the elephant seal bones??? There are plenty laying around, but they aren't 3000+ years old like all the rest of the midden material. Which might be one more proof that Año Nuevo was an age-old point and not an Island, which e-seals preferred. The midden bones included fur seal, which doesn't frequent this area anymore. Biologists have created a marine mammal historical record from what was found in the middens.

Farmers and ranchers The Ohlones were both. They cleared the land using fire as a tool and gathered a natural grain harvest of seeds from native plants. Why plow and plant wheat when seeds grew naturally? The cleared land also produced wonderful grass grazing lands for their favorite stock animal, black-tailed deer. They were orchardists as well and pruned and cared for their grove of wild fruit trees. The fruit...why it was acorns!

Grandma's favorite recipes and her hand-knitted sweaters Remember? This is our connection to the Ohlone way of life. Skills in cooking, basket making, as well as house and boat building and a hundred other abilities were passed down from generation to generation in the Ohlone culture. This was exactly the same way that Grandma's secret recipe was passed from generation to generation in our own culture.