

# **Native American Display**

## **Transcript of Audio Tour Visitor Tape**

In 1769, Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portolá and his expedition arrived to claim California for the king of Spain. Historians tell us that for some 10 to 15,000 years before Portolá's arrival, a long line of ancestors of today's Native Americans were living successfully on this land. Before this European contact and subsequent colonization, it is estimated that there were 130,000 Native Americans living in California. The population was 3 or 4 times greater than anywhere else in the country.

Villages of from 50 to 100 people were concentrated all over the state along main waterways, in canyons and valleys. In what we now call Orange County, as many as 4,000 people were living in some 50 villages when Portolá and his men came face to face with them.

The village was the center of their society and the family the core of their lives. Each family member had work responsibilities. Men hunted deer, rabbits, and other animals, made nets, fished, traded, made structures, weapons and tools, knocked acorns from trees and did many other jobs. Women gathered food, collected materials, made many basket containers, fashioned rabbit skin robes and blankets for winter use, prepared acorns, cooked and did many other chores. Children helped parents. Grandparents, aunts and uncles taught the children, cared for them, and helped fathers and mothers.

The environment provided a clean water supply and ample animal and plant life. Through the centuries, these early families learned to understand, respect and successfully use nature's bounty for their very survival. As a result, the people did not develop agriculture, but flourished as a hunting/gathering/trading society. They had a broad knowledge of over 350 plants, which they used for their basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, tools and medicine.

While animals and seeds, berries and other plants were very important to their well being, the most important sources of nourishment were the plentiful oak trees. The acorn, the tiny fruit of the mighty oak, provided half of their nutritional needs. It has been estimated that each person consumed 500 pounds of acorns per year.

After women gathered acorns in baskets with the help of men and boys, the acorns were sun dried and stored until needed in simple granaries placed above the ground. The women shelled the acorns, pounded them into flour with mortars and pestles, and poured large quantities of water through the flour to leach, or remove, bitter tannic acid. Once leached, the flour was ready to be cooked in baskets into mush or soup or baked into bread or cake. Cooking in baskets was done by dropping hot stones into the mush or soup.

The people were grateful for the bounty they enjoyed. It has been said that they were the first environmentalists, who took from nature only what they needed. They believed they were spiritually connected to everything in their world. Nature, therefore, shaped every aspect of their way of life. It determined where they lived, their work, food, tools, clothing, social structure, games and music, medicine, folklore, traditions, religion - all of it stemmed from their harmonious relationship with their world, the land upon which they lived.

For this Native American display, we have created structures in the manner of the early people, by using branches, twigs, grasses and other materials found in nature. And, in the diorama scene, we have highlighted the importance of the oak tree and the essential activities of the family, the obtaining and preparing of food. We have depicted the daily life of the resourceful, remarkable people of the land.

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