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The Original Settlers of Camp Pendleton

Camp Pendleton has been an important part of our community since it was founded in 1942. Its economic impact alone has made it irreplaceable by providing jobs for tens of thousands of people. Not only is it an important institution now, but its land has a rich history that should be remembered even today, so many years later.



Long before anyone else had stepped foot in modern day Camp Pendleton, the Payómkawichum tribe had lived there for thousands of years. They lived off the land, surviving as hunter-gatherers. Their homes consisted of dome shaped rooms that were partially subterranean, called kiicha, as portrayed in the image to the left. They were not necessarily a peaceful tribe and would occasionally quarrel with other tribes over land, though they kept good enough relations to engage in trading now and then. They spoke an Uto-Aztecan language and worshiped Chingichnish, a single, mighty god. Their religious beliefs were uncommon for native americans of the time, as most believed in a pantheon of deities that controlled all different aspects of the world. While their eventual colonization was still devastating, the fact that they already believed in one sole god could have likely made it easier for them to adapt to the christian beliefs of their conquerors.

Their first contact with the western world was in 1797 when Father Juan Norberto de Santiago explored the land. He was scouting out areas to build missions in the future. Looking for a cheap labor force to build these missions, he and other missionaries practically enslaved the Payómakawichum tribe and forced them to work and eventually live in their newly built mission, San Luis Rey de Francia. From this point on, the Payómakawichum became known as Luiseños.

Furthermore, the Europeans had brought more than just forced servitude; they'd brought a plethora of diseases to the new world, leading to the deaths of thousands of Luiseños who already had a weakened immune system from the conditions they had been enduring.

Unfortunately, much of their culture vanished as a result of the reduction of their population. In the modern day, the Luiseño people are alive and well, but what they lost was irreplaceable.

The missions all along the coast were very successful, built upon the foundation of the native people. This kept on for decades until the newly formed Mexico ended the missions in 1834. The land that had formerly belonged to the missions was distributed to Mexican settlers, which began the rancho era. The vast majority of natives who resided on this land were not granted territory to begin their own ranchos, causing many of them to flee north to friendly tribes instead of continuing to work for little to no pay. That being said, many did choose to stay and they became the backbone of this society. The most important people on a rancho were the vaqueros, the cowboys. They tended to the cattle and protected them from harm. Even now, they are remembered for their spectacular skills on horseback.

These ranchos produced all sorts of bovine products, as meat, hide, and fat were necessary to produce items that were essential for the time, ranging from soap to shoes. Naturally, with their products in such high demand, the owners of the ranchos accumulated a considerable amount of wealth. With this wealth, of course, came luxuries. As shown in the image to the right, rancheros' houses were large, usually one story buildings made of adobe,



traditionally with a patio on the inside, surrounded by the exterior walls.

To entertain themselves, people would often participate in events like fandangos, parties where guests would dance, sometimes even until dawn. On top of that, no rancho lifestyle would be complete without the occasional bullfight, a common passtime originating in Spain. These traditions would continue for sixty years, until 1846, when the Mexican-American war began. Mexico eventually seceded, and California was given to the United states.

The California gold rush brought many people to the new state and many settled in modern day Rancho Santa Margarita, San Diego, and Oceanside. Eventually, in 1942, the land was bought by the Marine Corps, to whom it still belongs to to this day. They have constructed a base that rests upon land which has experienced hundreds of thousands of feet upon it and seen just as many lives. It is a land with history as rich as the country's. It is a jewel of California's culture.

Sources:

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