Stone Alignments of the
Sierra de la Laguna, Baja California Sur

Fermin Reygadas Dahl, Matthew A. Boxt, and
Guillermo Velazquez Ramirez

Abstract

In 1977 a team of analysts from the Centro de Investigaciones Biologicas de Baja California Sur, A.C. initiated a program of archaeological reconnaissance and excavation in the Sierra de la Laguna. The research had as its core objective the correlation between prehistoric human settlement and the natural environment. Accompanied by Guillermo Velazquez Ramirez, Fermin Reygadas Dahl surveyed the San Dionisio, San Pablo, and La Zorra canyons within the rugged Sierra de la Laguna, identifying and recording scores of archaeological sites, water sources, edible foodstuffs, and commodities. The unanticipated discovery of abandoned ranches, corrals, and three stone alignments expands the region’s archaeological database, suggesting a continuity of cultural traditions from Prehispanic to historic times. The discussion presented herein marshals archaeological, ethnographic, and historical data to assess the age and function of the three constructed stone alignments.

Introduction

Between July 1977 and April 1982 two of the authors (FRD and GVR) conducted archaeological research in the Sierra de la Laguna, which constitutes the mountainous end of the Baja Peninsula south of the broad gap west of La Paz Bay (Figure 1), paralleling the coastline (see Massey 1947:346). The inquiry was designed to establish linkages between archaeological sites, natural resources, and the region’s complex biotic communities. Over a period of six years, the Centro de Investigaciones Biologicas de Baja California Sur, A.C. (CIBBCS) team identified and inventoried rivers, ephemeral streams (known locally as arroyos), fresh water springs, seasonal pools of potable water, lithic resources, plants, animals, insects, and a fraction of the region’s myriad archaeological sites. The project area, some 587.5 km², was bounded to the north by the San Dionisio Canyon; to the south by San Jorge Canyon; to the east by the Gulf of California; and to the west by small isolated valleys and rugged mountainous terrain, which can reach elevations of 2,000 m asl. The survey zone encompassed roughly 11 percent of the entire historic Pericu territory, excluding offshore islands.

Information was collected from local landowners and ranch hands about archaeological sites, following up with systematic ground checks. The canyons were explored by walking carefully laid out transects to find tangible evidence of ancient and historic settlement. When sites were found, they were described, photographed, mapped, and in some cases test excavated. Diagnostic artifacts were collected from selected sites in the survey zone. The initial phases of this long-term regional study served to help determine which sites would be chosen for future excavation in order to answer questions about regional chronology and cultural history.

Follow-up work in 1997 focused on the dendritic San Jose River system, lying south and east of the original survey area. Portions of the study areas constitute the Sierra de la Laguna Biosphere Reserve, which was
established by a Mexican presidential decree in 1994. Roughly 11,600 hectares of the Sierra de la Laguna are protected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere program; 10 percent of the Sierra de la Laguna Biosphere Reserve was surveyed for cultural resources.

The interior of Baja California Sur is isolated, sparsely populated, and lacks infrastructure. Between 1977 and 1982 fewer than 40 families, totaling 300 to 500 people, inhabited the Sierra de la Laguna foothills at elevations of about 500 m asl. Although the overall population of Baja California Sur has quadrupled from 128,019 in 1970 (Kiy et al. 2006:19-20) to 512,170 in 2005 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geográfica e Informática [INEGI] 2006), the number of residents in the Sierra de la Laguna has steadily declined. The promise of higher education, employment opportunities in the tourist sector, and a long and healthy urban-oriented life have created a desire in youngsters to emigrate from the Sierra de la Laguna to Cabo San Lucas, La Paz, and beyond, leaving behind their homes, families, and the traditional ranchero lifestyle that has defined regional culture since 1750. Currently, fewer than...
100 people inhabit the territory surveyed in the years 1977-1982.

There is no direct evidence of Early Holocene (ca. 10,000 B.P. to 6,600 B.P.) use within the study area. A handful of hallmark artifacts, such as Elko-like projectile points and small Comondú triangular and serrated arrowheads, suggest that the Sierra de la Laguna was occupied at least from ca. 3,000 B.P. to the Historic period (Ritter 2006:110-111). There are insufficient data to estimate the ancient population of the Cape region; however, W. Michael Mathes, doyen of Baja California anthropology and history, estimates that not more than 3,000 to 3,500 Pericúes occupied the territory from Santiago to Todos Santos to Cabo San Lucas at the start of the Historic period, and an additional 2,000 to 2,500 people lived around modern-day La Paz and on San José and Espíritu Santo islands (Mathes, personal communication 2007). Based on these figures, we surmise that at any given time, only a small percentage of the Pericú population would have occupied or utilized the Sierra de la Laguna. The Sierra de la Laguna has never supported a large resident population. Even today, the Sierra de la Laguna represents one of the least populated regions of the least populated state in Mexico, both in population size and population density. Clearly, earning a living in the Sierra de la Laguna has never been easy (Figure 2).

In terms of archaeological research, this territory remains among the most neglected regions in Baja California Sur, if not all Mexico. Dutch anthropologist Herman Frederik Carel ten Kate and American ornithologist Lyman Belding trekked the Sierra de la Laguna in 1883 and 1884. Ten Kate’s mission was “to find out whether the now extinct Indians of the lonely sierra had perhaps left some traces” (ten Kate 1977:67). Ten Kate’s discoveries were meager, as Prehispanic archaeological sites in the Sierra de la Laguna eluded him. The only cultural features of consequence that he identified were a pictograph boulder, which rested at the mouth of San Pedro Canyon near Miraflores, and the active silver mine at El Triunfo, which closed down in 1926 (Figure 3). Paltry archaeological evidence puzzled ten Kate; he wondered if Indians of the Sierra de la Laguna, “seldom entered this wilderness and that they were afraid, like the Apaches, of wooded mountains and the thunderstorms which often rage there” (ten Kate, personal communication 2007)
Kate 1977:70). The disappointment he undoubtedly felt in traveling so far only to find so little must have been tempered by the natural beauty that surrounded him:

The terrain was extremely difficult for a horseman, the rough mountain road was often so steep that we could not remain in the saddle. At first, the vegetation consisted of *Cereus* species, which disappeared at higher elevation and were replaced by a gorgeous park-like forest of oak trees, the crowns of which were shaking in the northern wind. At places where a brook descended from rock to rock, there were groups of *taco* palms standing in the fresh coves whose ground was covered with grass. As we came higher, we had gorgeous views of the mountains; plains and *cañadas* stretched like an immense relief map bordered by the ocean [ten Kate 1977:67-68].

After ten Kate’s sojourn, the Frenchman Léon Diguet made three investigative forays into Baja California Sur between the years 1893 and 1913, excavating a cave in the vicinity of Santiago (Diguet 1905:333). No more archaeological work occurred in the Sierra de la Laguna until William C. Massey’s (1955:256) brief visit in 1948, when he attempted to identify the source of a scavenged collection of artifacts given to him by Dón Julio Verdugo. After that, the region was completely overlooked by historic and prehistoric archaeologists until 1977. Six seasons (1977-1982) of intensive CIBBCS fieldwork in the La Zorra, San Pablo, and San Dionisio canyons invalidated ten Kate’s premature archaeological assessment with the discovery of rock shelters, coastal middens, habitation caves, open-air encampments, lithic scatters, pictograph boulders, foot-trails, and lithic workshops (Figures 4-6). The identification of scores of prehistoric archaeological sites and an extensive inventory of edible flora and fauna and viable economic resources provided irrefutable proof that the Sierra de la Laguna was inhabited by Pericú Indians and their predecessors (Reygadas Dahl and Velázquez Ramírez 1983, 2004; Reygadas Dahl 1990; Carmean 1994; Breceda et al. 1997).

Figure 3. The El Triunfo mine. Photo by Fermín Reygadas Dahl, 2003.
Figure 4. Base camp for the 1977-1982 archaeological surveys, Rancho Las Casas Viejas located in La Zorra Canyon. Franco Cota, Guillermo Velázquez Ramírez, and Carlos Cota leaving for the field in July 1977. Photo by Fermín Reygadas Dahl.

Figure 5. Franco Cota, Fermín Reygadas, Guillermo Velázquez, and Carlos Cota (left to right) making camp at the Palo Extraño archaeological site in La Zorra Canyon in July 1977. Photo by Fermín Reygadas Dahl.

Figure 6. Preparing breakfast in February 1979 at the mouth of San Pablo Canyon, facing west. Left to right: Amado Cota (cook), Carlos Cota (muleteer), and Fermín Reygadas Dahl (principal investigator). Photo by Guillermo Velázquez Ramírez.
In addition to providing extensive data on the prehistoric settlement pattern and cultural ecology of the Sierra de la Laguna, the CIBBCS study generated a wealth of material relevant to historical sites. The 1977 survey was the first to take notice of historical properties within the Sierra de la Laguna. During this investigation, two stone alignments; several stone corrals; five previously unreported cattle ranches; an open-air oven; untended orchards of historically introduced exotic mango, avocado, orange, and guayabera trees; the foundations of an abandoned house; and a modest assemblage of ceramic and metal artifacts were recorded. One stone alignment, several abandoned cattle and agricultural ranches, and at least three archaeological sites with historic components have since been identified. The primary purpose of this paper is to examine three stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna and to determine who made them.

Each configuration represents a simple construction of carefully chinked walls of dry-laid rocks that are stacked to a maximum height of 1.5 m. The Las Casitas stone feature is asymmetrical, and the stone configurations at Boca de la Sierra and La Laguna are rectangular in shape, displaying at least three straight wall segments that intersect at right angles. However, only the La Laguna stone feature is fully enclosed. To the best of our knowledge, the stone features recorded at Las Casitas, Boca de la Sierra, and La Laguna are the first of their kind to be reported on mainland Baja California Sur. INAH archaeologist Harumi Fujita (personal communication 2007) observed a 10 m long x 8 m wide x 50 cm tall rectangular stone feature on Espiritu Santo Island, which may be a remnant of the historic pearling concession of successful entrepreneur Gastón Vivès, operator of the world’s first commercial cultured pearl oyster farm in 1893 (Vivès and Cariño 1998).

Based on the proximity of the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna to known archaeological sites and by sundry associated artifacts, they originally were assumed to be Prehispanic constructs. However, a reexamination of the stone features and their related artifacts suggests other interpretations. Although the precise ages of the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna are unknown, we suspect that they were built sometime between the Pericú uprising of A.D. 1734 and the early nineteenth century, when a cohesive Pericú society ceased to exist. These stone features either were utilized by Indians after they were assembled and later abandoned by Mexican miners, cowboys, or goatherds, or they represent Indian house foundations that were reused by historic peoples. In order to understand the nature of these stone features, we reconcile disparate data, such as rectangular structures and historic earthenware pottery found in direct association with projectile points, biface tools, and lithic debitage (Reygadas Dahl and Velázquez Ramírez 1983). Since excavations associated with the rock features produced no materials for radiocarbon analysis, we rely on chronologically sensitive artifacts and historical writings to assess age.

These unassuming relics may represent vestiges of an era when European and Mexican entrepreneurs, miners, cattlemen, and colonists first arrived in this remote frontier from the mainland, signaling not only the final days of Indian autonomy but eventually their demise. Around this time, Jesuit missionary Wenceslaus Linck explored Lower California and wrote “… in 1767 there remained no unbaptized Indian south of the 31st Parallel” (Sauer and Meigs 1927:297). A similar comment was made in 1792 by Spanish naturalist José Longinos Martínez (1938:14, 1961:30-31), observing that “From Lat. 23 (Cape San Lucas) to Lat. 28 (San Ignacio), there are hardly any Indians left, as I have said, and the few who remain have kept none of their ancient customs except only their language.” Indeed, three ordinary stone features of the Sierra de la Laguna may relate to an era when Mexican and Indian traditions overlapped for the last time in Baja California Sur.
What follows are historic observations of indigenous houses, descriptions of the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna, and speculative comments. Information discussed in this paper should fill a void in our knowledge about Pericú and subsequent historic settlement patterns in Baja California Sur.

**Historic Reports of Native Dwellings and Stone Enclosures in Baja California**

Baja California is without parallel on the continent for ethnographic reconstruction. From first Spanish contact with the natives in 1534 to the end of the 18th century documentation of the native cultures is unbroken [Massey 1966a:53].

The Spaniards’ obligation to keep detailed administrative records and the propensity of erudite Jesuit missionaries to describe, sometimes harshly, aspects of Native life have produced a rich body of literature available for study (Mathes 1965, 1971, 1974a, 1974b). The list of writers who provide ethnographic information of interest to archaeologists is diverse, ranging from English corsairs (e.g., Edward Cooke [Andrews 1979:13], Woodes Rogers [Andrews 1979:65-66], and George Shelvocke [Andrews 1979:97]) and Spanish explorers (e.g., Francisco de Ortega [León-Fortilla 1973], Francisco de Lucenilla [Mathes 1971:967], and Diego de Nava [Mathes 1971:274]) to the comprehensive writings of Jesuit missionaries, such as Miguel del Barco (1980, 1981, 1988), Johann Jakob Baegert (1952, 1982), Wenceslaus Linck (1966, 1967), and Sigismundo Taraval (1931), whose works are essential for the study of Cochimi, Guaycura, and Pericú peoples (ten Kate 1977; van der Pas 1977; Mathes 1981:44; Burrus 1984; Mathes 2006; Sáenz-Arroyo et al. 2006).

Descriptions of the geographical and physiographical characteristics of the peninsula and the most exotic aspects of Native life commanded the attention of the first Europeans who described California and its people. For example, early observers noted lascivious behavior and that most Indian men preferred to do without clothing (Baegert 1952:xvi; Clavijero 1971:95-96). In general, descriptions of Indian settlements (*rancherías*) were brief and/or nondescript (cf., Fernando Alarcón in Hakluyt [1992:95, 113]; Antonio de la Ascensión in Wagner [1992:195]; Nicolás de Cardona in Mathes [1992a:224]). Pericú *rancherías* of huts were reported by Vizcaíno, Nava, Ortega, and Lucinella (Mathes 2006:60); to the north, Ulloa and Vizcaíno reported rancherías of brush and pole houses at Bahía Tortugas, Isla Cedros, and Bahía Blanco (Mathes 2006:56). The following quote from Father Carranco’s description of the Lucinella pearlaring expedition to the southern peninsula in 1668 typifies historic accounts of Native communities, offering no appreciable detail about Indian settlement: “We went from rancheria to rancheria searching for pearls and a port in which to anchor, but we could not find an appropriate port and the pearls were poor and few” (Carranco 1966:53). Compared to the great urban centers of Mesoamerica, ephemeral settlements in Baja California were hardly worth mentioning. Lemon (1979:288) pointed out that “Baja California was a great distance geographically from the splendor of México-Tenochtitlán; but it was an even greater distance culturally.” By emphasizing the desolateness of the natural setting or the primitiveness of indigenous people, European writers underscored the civilizing capacity of their religion and their own sacrifices and privations. The following passage in a letter written by Reverend Father Lambert Hostell, missionary at Dolores and San Luis Gonzaga, to Father Josef Burscheld supports this claim:

> As pagans, these barbarians lived without any religion, without laws, without any government, without any knowledge of the divinity, without houses or villages, in mountain huts or in the wilderness in the shadow of some shrub; each in accordance with the inclination
of corrupt and sensuous nature, completely naked [Ducrue 1967:166].

Nevertheless, taken together, the rich corpus of historic documents provides an excellent starting point to examine Indian settlement, including their dwellings and the enigmatic stone features of the Sierra de Laguna.

The first historic account of a stone feature in Baja California Sur appears to have been made by Francisco de Ortega, less than 100 years after Fernando Cortés arrived at Bahía de La Paz in 1535. In 1633 and 1636, Francisco de Ortega commanded pearl fishing expeditions to Baja California, settling for brief periods on the shore of the Ensenada de los Aripes on the Bahía de La Paz. At that time he observed and recorded a stone structure in the mountains north of Cabo San Lucas, which may have been situated in the Sierra de Laguna:

The woman took him to the stone corral that was her home. There the exhausted seaman remained, resting, until another Indian arrived and wiped the sweat from his face. Forced to spend the night, they gave him fish to eat and brought him a straw mat and some deerskins to cover himself, for it was cold … [León-Portilla 1973:35-36].

Over three decades after Ortega’s visit to southern Baja California, Fray Juan Caballero Carranco, chaplain to Francisco de Lucenilla’s 1668 pearl fishing expedition to the Cape Region, chronicled his experiences, making no mention of native habitations. According to the Relation of Francisco de Lucenilla:

… we went on to Cabo San Lucas and San Bernabé Bay, where we found over four hundred people, all as naked as the others that we had seen and without houses or means of sustenance other than eating what they fish and hunt [Mathes 1992b:266].

How should the reader interpret Caballero Carranco’s terse statement, which gives no information on Prehispanic houses? He is obviously literate, yet negligent in his reporting. Does it reflect his contempt for Indian people or, suffering from culture shock, did he simply fail to recognize indigenous domiciles because they did not resemble those from his homeland? Many Spaniards who made the trip to California in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were both disappointed and disheartened by what they saw. In light of what some of them witnessed during the “Conquest of Mexico,” coupled with their desire for wealth, it is easy to understand why they ignored, overlooked, or failed to describe in any significant detail the relatively simple structures of California Indians, such as chozas (huts), jacales (huts), and ramadas (flat-roofed structures that are thatched with native palm trees and open on all four sides [cf., Michelsen 1977:21]).

In the late 1720s the Mexican Jesuit Miguel Venegas was assigned the task of writing a general history of California, where for fifty years his order had been involved in opening the land and Christianizing Native peoples (Crosby 1985:66). Although Venegas corresponded with Jesuits who had had direct experience in his pursuit of accurate historical data, he never visited California (Crosby 1985). The following passage is drawn from the manuscript, Empresas Apostolicas, which he completed in 1739:

The houses of the Californians make no better appearance than their habits. Those of every rancheria are only wretched huts, near the few waters found in this country. And as there is a necessity of removing to other places in quest of subsistence, they easily shift their station. Where-ever they stop, they shelter themselves under the trees, from the scorching heat of the sun in the day time, and in some measure from the coldness of the night, and the inclemency of the
weather. In the severity of the winter, they live in subterranean caverns, which they either made themselves, or found in the sides of mountains. The people near Cape San Lucas, make huts of the branches of trees, like those of shepherds, which they have doubtless learned from seamen, who have been obliged to lie at anchor for some time off the cape. In the other parts of the country their houses are only a little space, inclosed with stones laid upon one another, half a yard high, one square, and without any covering but the heavens: dwellings indeed so scanty and mean, that an European tomb would here be reckoned a palace. For within this small precinct, they have not room to lie at full length; so that they sleep in a sitting posture. In the cabeceras, indeed, some, to please the fathers, have made themselves houses, if they may be called such, of adobe or unburnt bricks, covered with sedge; but few live in them, nor is there a possibility of bringing them to it; for they show the greatest uneasiness, when obliged to live under any covering: an evident proof that the greatest part of what are called the necessities of life, arise purely from fancy, example, and custom.

It is true, they stand in no need of large rooms for depositing their furniture, and the various implements of a wardrobe, for which the greatest part of the houses among us is taken up … [Venegas 1966:1:76-78].

Shortly after the Jesuits were expelled from Spanish territory, two of California’s exiled missionaries, Miguel del Barco and Johann Jakob Baegert, prepared lengthy discourses on Native culture and the natural environment. Unlike Venegas, these men wrote from firsthand experiences. Miguel del Barco spent 30 years (1738-1768) in California as a priest stationed at the Mission San Javier in the Sierra la Giganta near Loreto, writing perhaps the most important Spanish source of information on the Cochimí and Guaycura Indians, a text correcting and adding to that of Venegas. In Historia Natural y Crónica de la Antigua California (Adiciones y correcciones de la Noticia de Miguel Venegas), Miguel del Barco devoted several chapters to the Indians of Baja California, which is punctuated by references to native settlement and dwellings. Because Barco’s writings were to correct or augment those of Venegas, when he was in accord with the latter, he quoted him freely, adding corrections or comments when necessary. According to Barco, “None of the tribes used or had houses, but in the place of houses they used piles of brush or rock shelters, and in the winter time wherever there were caves they sheltered themselves in them” (Aschmann 1966:64).

Father Johann Jakob Baegert wrote the main work on the Guaycura, which appeared in 1771. In Observations in Lower California, as well as in five letters written to his brother, the ex-missionary of Mission San Luis Gonzaga provided extensive ethnographic and linguistic details, including firsthand observations about native dwellings:

I say—there is nothing to be seen in California which bears a resemblance to a town, a village, a human dwelling, a shack or a doghouse … The Indians therefore dwell, eat, sleep, and live all the time under the free sky, in open fields, and on the bare ground. Yet, by using brushwood, they construct in winter, when the wind blows somewhat sharply, a wall in the shape of a half-moon, two spans high. They erect it only toward the side whence the cold is coming, revealing thus, in contrast to their usual stupidity, that they understand, how to trim one’s sails to the wind. … many of them change their sleeping quarters more than a hundred times a year … They lie down wherever night
Reygadas Dahl, Boxt, and Velázquez Ramírez

... overtakes them … The Indians do not live under the shade of trees (as some authors state, who do not credit them with towns and villages) because there are no trees in California which would serve that purpose. Nor do they live in holes dug in the ground (as other writers would make us believe), but rather in cleft rocks and caves, and that only when it actually rains and if such places are close at hand. However, there are not many of these caves, and they cannot be found everywhere.

If the Indians make a shelter for a sick person as a protection against heat or cold, the entrance to this shelter is, as a rule, so low that it is necessary to crawl into it on hands and knees. The whole structure is so small that man can neither stand up nor find room to sit on the ground in order to hear confession or comfort the sick … They care so little about having a house or a roof overhead that I would often find a sick, old man lying out in the open when I had had a shelter made for him only the day before [Baegert 1952:59-60].

Elsewhere, Baegert (1982:142, 156) observed that “Their living place is the open, bare earth; their roof the blue firmament … If one needs to sleep, one lies down, like the Indians, on the ground …” Baegert (1952:60) also speaks of sleeping circles, although he uses “caves in the ground” from the context used by Venegas thirty years earlier. In this context, the term “cave” probably means a man-made shelter.

Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavijero wrote an important survey of the history of California, which was compiled from published sources and the testimony of ex-missionaries. Clavijero, regarded as a tertiary source of ethnographic information for indigenous Baja Californians, borrowed freely from the Barco manuscript and the Venegas/Buriel publication, Noticias de la California. Nevertheless, the scope of Clavijero’s work includes reference to indigenous settlements and shelters:

Each tribe, composed of several consanguineous families, usually lives near some spring, but with only the sky for a roof and the bare ground for a bed. When the sun is too hot, they take shelter under the trees; and on cold nights they retire to caves in the mountains. Some few build bowers in the shape of hovels for sleeping; others make holes or pits about two feet in depth. But the most usual little abodes are certain circular fences of loose stone piled up, which are five feet in diameter and less than two in height. Within each one of them a family sleeps under the open sky, and they are so accustomed to it that the missionaries have used much effort to make them sleep in those little houses or huts that they have had built for their homes, since they suffer anxieties when they begin to sleep under roofs and it seems to them that they are to smother; but afterward they become very willing [Clavijero 1971:95].

In his description of the Kiliwa or Kumeyaay territory, stretching roughly from the Santo Domingo River northward through the sierra (mountain range) and Pacific slope foothills of Baja California Norte, José Longinos Martínez noted:

Their dwellings are nothing but small inclosures of stones placed one upon the other, without clay or mortar of any kind, being hardly more than shelters made of branches. Farther north very small houses are erected against the winter, half buried in the ground, the roof covered with branches, straw and earth [Longinos Martínez 1938:19, 1961:35].

PCAS Quarterly, 42(1)
Regarding the northwest, the region between Ensenada and San Diego eastward through the sierra before it drops off to the Colorado, Luis Sales stated:

… rancherías were composed of two or three low houses, 12 to 15 meters long, covered with branches and earth, with a door like a rat hole, no ventilation, and full of smoke. At times, some people lived in small brush shelters [Sales 1956:29-30].

It is important to note that none of the abovementioned historic descriptions of indigenous houses correspond to the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna. Thus, in all likelihood, the stone structures from the Sierra de la Laguna are not vestiges of ancient society. It is more likely that they served some other function, dating to the historic era (see below).

**Rock Features in the Archaeological Record**

Rock features of diverse size, shape, and function are widely distributed throughout Peninsular California and its offshore islands (Meigs 1939:105; Aschmann 1959; Rozaire 1964; Banks 1972; Begole 1974; Bowen 1976, 2000; Ritter 1981, 2001:56-57; Tuohy 1984; Fujita and Poyatos de Paz 1998; Fujita 2002:40-41; Gutiérrez Martínez and Hyland 2002:76-87). Referred to variously as sleeping circles, house circles, vision circles, vision quest rings, boulder-rimmed sleeping circles, cleared circles, rock semicircles, stone hillside structures, rock enclosures, rock rings, stone circles, windbreaks, crescentic windbreaks, or crescent-shaped windbreaks, similar phenomena are identified in adjacent territories of the United States and mainland Mexico (Rogers 1939, 1966:43-48; Carter 1964; Minor 1975; Oxendine 1981; Felger and Moser 1985:103; Van Wormer and Carrico 1993; Blair and Fuller-Murillo 1997). See Figure 7. In his consideration of the various rock features that pervade peninsular California, Ritter stated:

… rock structures and features are an integral part of the archaeological record of south-central Baja California. This record must be examined in greater depth and with more sophisticated methods in order to better understand the behavior of the prehistoric and historic peoples of Baja California. [Ritter 1981:41]

To date, none of the abovementioned stone enclosures have been recorded in the Sierra de la Laguna. Since they are relatively low-lying and often obscured by vegetative cover in remote mountainous settings, it is easy to see how these features could have gone unnoticed. Thirty years ago, workers at the Rancho La Burrera in the western foothills of the Sierra de la Laguna informed Velázquez Ramírez that they had observed stone enclosures in the region, claiming direct knowledge of their existence. This assertion was not verified archaeologically. Thus, the three features described herein are the first solitary stone configurations to be scientifically known for this region. It is entirely possible that prehistoric and/or historic stone features remain to be identified by intrepid archaeologists working in the Sierra de la Laguna.

**Rock Features of the Sierra de la Laguna**

**Las Casitas**

Las Casitas (= 1,000 m asl) is located in San Dionisio Canyon, 30 km northwest of Santiago. The archaeological site’s most notable feature is an asymmetrical-shaped stone alignment, measuring 6 m long by 5 m wide (Figure 8). The Las Casitas structure consists of free standing walls dry-stacked with granite rubble, ranging in size from 4 cm to 40 cm; the larger stones are at the base, tapering in as the height of the wall increases. No cut or shaped stones were employed. The walls range in height from about 40 cm to 1 m, depending on preservation, and are between 50 cm and 75 cm.
thick (Figure 9). Gravity and pressure are the glue that keeps the walls intact. The walls are held up by this construction method and by their own weight, so the stones must have been selected by shape to ensure that they had sufficient contact surface area with their neighbors in order to avoid slippage. We conjecture that the 1 m opening on the north wall might have been a gate. In the vicinity of the stone alignment, there were collected a core, a biface, three projectile point preforms, lithic debitage, and the remains of a recent campfire. Charred deer bones and the phalange of a domesticated pig suggest the site was known to local hunters, which may account for the moderate amount of disturbance and destruction to the structure’s eastern wall.

**Boca de la Sierra**

The Boca de la Sierra archaeological site was discovered in 1997 by a joint team of researchers from Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS) and California State University, Northridge (CSUN), working under the auspices of the Proyecto Registro de Yacimientos de Fósiles y Sitios Arqueológicos de La Cuenca Buena Vista-San José del Cabo, Baja California Sur, which was co-directed by Alfonso Rosales López (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia [INAH], Centro La Paz), Fermín Reygadas Dahl (UABCS), Luis Herrera Gil (UABCS), and Gerardo González Barba (UABCS). Boca de la Sierra is situated at the mouth of

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**Figure 7. Sketches of “First Phase San Diego Sleep Circles,” originally drawn by M.J. Rogers (1966:44).**
Figure 8. Plan view of the Las Casitas stone alignment. Illustration by Rusty van Rossmann.

Figure 9. Las Casitas stone enclosure, facing east. Illustration by Rusty van Rossmann.
San Bernardo Canyon near the modern town of Mira-flores. Situated on a relatively flat fluvial bench (ancón), the archaeological site is about 30 m away from a perennial supply of potable water. Boca de la Sierra was identified by an extremely light surface scattering of artifacts and debitage, including a mano fragment, a basalt core, chert and basalt flakes, and a white quartz Type IIIB3a3 Elko-like projectile point (Massey 1966b:23,40, 53); Figure 10a illustrates this artifact. Also scattered about the Boca de la Sierra stone alignment were a handful of Rancho period (1860-1880) potsherds, representing an earthenware bowl, or cazuela (casserole) (Figure 11). The 1997 survey crew did not detect bone, shell, or other midden remains (Rosales López et al. 2003).

The Boca de la Sierra structure is made from locally harvested granite and andesite boulders and cobbles. The walls represent piles of stacked rubble stone that are held together by gravity, friction, and earthen mortar. Much of the structure is degraded; small amounts of the north and west walls remain. The structure is roughly rectangular-shaped, measuring 4.5 m long, 4 m wide and 80 cm tall (Figure 12); some of the collapse of the stone structure could have resulted from mules or cows kicking their way out.

La Laguna

The La Laguna archaeological site (≈ 1,960 m asl) is nestled in an intermontane meadow near the crest of San Dionisio Canyon (Figure 13). Twenty-two prehistoric archaeological sites have been recorded within a 2 km radius of La Laguna, including a lithic quarry and a tool processing site (Carmean 1994). Two 2 x 2 m test units were opened within and adjacent to the stone feature, producing chert debitage and a porphyritic granite

Figure 10. Bifaces from the Sierra de la Laguna. a) Type IIB3a3 white quartz Elko-like projectile point, Palo Extraño; b) porphyritic granite biface midsection, La Laguna; c) Type IC3 chert projectile point, San Francisquito; d) Piedra Pintada Type IC3 chert projectile point; e) white quartz projectile point fragment, Punta Cañón de la Zorra. Illustrations by Rusty van Rossmann.
Figure 11. Earthenware sherds at Boca de la Sierra date to the Historic period. Photo by Fermín Reygadas Dahl.

Figure 12. Plan view of the Boca de la Sierra stone enclosure. Illustration by Rusty van Rossmann.
biface fragment (Figure 10b). The La Laguna stone enclosure consists of four dry-stacked walls of granite rubble (Figures 14 and 15). The base of each wall constitutes larger flattish stones upon which smaller stones were stacked. As shown in Figure 15, the low-walled rectangular-shaped structure was formed by laying fairly leveled courses of unshaped stones, measuring 4 cm to 40 cm; the walls are 4 m long, 3 m wide, and 50 cm high. The stones appear to have been harvested from local sources. Part of one end is open and has no scattered stones, and so we conjecture that it could have been an historic stock enclosure with a squeeze gate of barbed wire or the like at the opening (Figure 16).

**Interpretations**

Turning from physical descriptions of the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna, we shall now consider six possible interpretations, regarding the age and function of these enigmatic features.

**Modern Corrals?**

We first consider the possibility that the stone features of the Sierra de la Laguna are less than 100 years old, representing modern holding pens for livestock (see Berryman [1995] and Des Lauriers [2003:19, 20, 32] regarding historic structures on San Clemente Island and Cedros Island, respectively). This suggestion finds no support given the artifact inventories associated with the features.

Artifacts from both the historic and prehistoric periods were recovered from each stone alignment; however, the assemblages were dominated by projectile points, expended cores, scrapers, hammerstones, biface tool fragments, primary flakes, and debitage. The absence of modern debris strongly supports the notion that these features were not recently fabricated. Contemporary ranchers of the Sierra de la Laguna, whose families have deep roots in Baja California Sur, do not use stone to pen their livestock, preferring to assemble corrals of brush, skunk wood (*Cassia emarginata*), and wire. Further north, however, expansive stone corrals are used to secure and manage teams of pack mules (Figure 17).

**Prehistoric Structures?**

Based on the occurrence of projectile points, tool fragments, and lithic flakes, it was originally surmised that

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**Figure 13.** Panorama view of San Pablo Canyon, facing west. Here, one sees the Sierra de la Laguna in all directions. Photo by Guillermo Velázquez Ramírez.
the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna were built by indigenous peoples and functioned as windbreaks or lodging that offered protection from harsh winter winds (≈ 0° Celsius) that blast the canyons after dark. As regards Las Casitas, the structure's walls face the prevailing winds, affording some protection for Indians unaccustomed to wearing warm clothes.

We applied the tentative regional chronologies presented by Hyland (2006) for the Central Sierras, Massey (1966a) for the Central Peninsula, and Ritter (1979, 2006) for south-central Baja California to assist us in identifying and cross-dating the Sierra de la Laguna projectile points. Of particular note was a specimen found at San Francisquito, an open-air encampment, just 2 km west of La Laguna. This small, well-made Type IC3 (Massey 1955:260-262, 1966a:11-12, 40, 43) chipped stone, chert projectile point (Figure 10c) resembles Comondú Triangular projectile points, which are the “peninsular extension of the late
Figure 16. Plan and profile views of the La Laguna stone enclosure. Illustration by Rusty van Rossmann.

Figure 17. Mules in stone corral at Rancho de Vivelejos, Baja California Sur, 1980. Copyright, Harry Crosby. Photo courtesy of the UCSD Mandeville Special Collections Library.
prehistoric and historic Cottonwood triangular point type that is widespread throughout the Desert West … They have a wide distribution in the central peninsula” (Hyland 2006:124). Based on comparing this artifact with those described by Massey (1966a:48-50), Ritter (1979:403), and Hyland (2006:124), it was assumed that La Laguna ranged in age from roughly A.D. 1000 to the Historic period; as well, it was conjectured that the Piedra Pintada Type IC3 (Massey 1955:260-262; 1966a:11-12, 40, 43) chert projectile point (Figure 10d), and the Punta Cañon de la Zorra quartz projectile point (Figure 10e) were contemporaneous with the Boca de la Sierra and Las Casitas alignments. Figure 18 shows a variety of Native artifacts and materials recovered from sites within the immediate vicinity of Las Casitas and La Laguna.

This second interpretation is somewhat problematic since the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna are larger and shaped differently than structures identified in the Pericú region and beyond. Miguel del Barco provided the following information:

The house and habitations of the Californios are no better or more comfortable than their attire and clothes … Toward Cabo San Lucas they used to make some huts out of branches. These huts resembled the huts of shepherds, and the Indians might have learned to make them by seeing those which the sailors erected on land, when by some necessity they anchored near the Cape [Barco 1981:45-46].

In the following passage, Barco describes Indian huts of the north:

In the rest of the land, Indians’ houses reduce themselves to a crude little fence of rocks piled upon rocks. In some areas this rock fence is half a vara high, and one vara square, and no other roof except the sky. These houses are truly so small and poor, that in comparison to them graves could be called palaces. The Indians cannot fit inside such a house if they stretch out, and so they are forced to sleep sitting down in that tiny abode. Moreover, this must be understood to apply to an isolated rancheria or another, or maybe to just an individual or another, who would use such houses. Commonly these brief rock fences were more than two varas in diameter, and such that they could accommodate at least the man, woman, and the small children inside. They were round, and at least three hands in height. It is true that in the mission centers the Indians have erected some houses in order to please the priests. … Furthermore, there seemed to be no way to convert the Indians to the use of these houses, as they were extremely unhappy under a roof [Barco 1981:46-47].

Geographer Homer Aschmann noted:

At El Coyote there is an extensive row of crescent-shaped piles of stone which conform perfectly with Clavijero’s description of the shelters. They are casually piled. Some are in reasonably good condition, but most of them are barely recognizable. These are the only known remnants of native houses within the Central Desert [Aschmann 1959:110].

Over half a century ago, Massey evaluated the region’s extant ethnohistorical and archaeological databases, concluding that:

In the [Baja California] Cape Region there seem to have been only two types of habitation. One of these was a low hut of branches with reeds and with a central fire-pit for which there was no smoke-hole; these huts were insufficiently covered to keep out the rain. This is apparently the type of hut
Figure 18. Selected artifacts from El Valle de la Laguna. (a,b) porphyritic andesite cores; (c) microdiorite core; (d) porphyritic granite flake; (e) aplite flake; (f) diorite flake; (g) base of small, Type IC3, white quartz Comondú serrated projectile point; (h) white quartz preform; (i) gabbro flake scraper; (j,k) diorite flakes; (l) porphyritic andesite hammerstone; and (m-o) porphyritic andesite flake scrapers. Photo by Fermin Reygadas Dahl.
mentioned by Venegas for Cape San Lucas with the notation that it might have been adopted for temporary shelters built ashore by passing voyagers. Similar houses of branches were recorded by Admiral Atondo on the Gulf island outside of La Paz Bay.

Secondly, caves were evidently used as regular habitations in some places. They were probably used as temporary shelters in traveling as elsewhere on the peninsula [Massey 1955:28-29].

It is clear from Massey’s statement that caves and chozas are the two most common types of shelter for the Pericú of Baja California Sur. Historic descriptions of indigenous houses corroborate this observation, indicating they were roughly two varas in diameter and three hands or roughly one-half vara tall, round, and enclosed (Figure 19). Curiously, round-shaped structures among the Kiliwa of Baja California Norte (Figure 20) persisted into modern times (Meigs 1939:104; Michelsen 1977). The Kiliwa house, or wa’, brings to mind scores of sleeping circles that suffuse the archaeological landscape of Baja California and beyond.

The stone features from the Sierra de la Laguna differ from Native houses in five basic ways: 1) size; the stone features from the Sierra de la Laguna are about three-to-four times larger than anything described by Barco (1981) or Venegas (1966); 2) shape; excluding Las Casitas, which is elliptical, the Sierra de la Laguna features are rectangular; 3) design; only the La Laguna construction is fully enclosed; 4) construction; the Sierra de la Laguna features do not appear to have been casually constructed, but rather they reflect something more permanent. In contrast, many of the extant stone sleeping circles in Baja California Sur do not seem to have been so well built or have the appearance of permanence; and 5) isolation; the Sierra de la Laguna features are isolated. In general, Native houses in Baja California Sur are round, enclosed, cluster in groups of three or as many as 45 (Gutiérrez Martínez and Hyland 2002:76-87), and they are associated with moderate quantities of habitation remains. The term ranchería, which is very rarely used outside of Alta and Baja California, is any collection of sleeping circles and/or domiciles, inhabited by relatives or members of an extended family or people of the same cultural-linguistic group and may be a relatively permanent village or a short-term camp (W. Michael Mathes, personal communication 2007). Based on the available evidence, it is unlikely that the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna reflect the vestiges of a prehistoric ranchería (see Figure 21).

Prehistoric Structures with Secondary Use by Historic Peoples?

Decades ago, two of the authors (FRD and GVR) were often told by ranchers of the Sierra de la Laguna that dormitorios de indios (Indian dormitories or sleeping places) were commonplace. In 1977 workers from Rancho La Burrera insisted that dormitorios de indios existed on their property, describing circles of stone. They explained that these circular enclosures were dismantled and modified to meet the needs of the ranch; one enclosure became a pigpen and another was expanded, covered with a roof of thatched palm fronds, and transformed into domestic living space for ranch workers. The important point here is that stone enclosures once existed in the Sierra de la Laguna. Over time, they were disassembled and/or modified by historic peoples, which may explain their scarcity in the archaeological record.

Although the purpose of the Sierra de la Laguna survey was a 100 percent assessment of the region’s cultural resources, the nature of the terrain made this impossible. The varied visibility, resulting from rough terrain, heavily wooded areas, and general inaccessibility, often hampered the efforts of the survey team. Additional stone alignments may still be found in future years. That being said, we speculate that the stone alignments discussed herein could easily have been
transformed from stone circles into historic livestock pens with minimum effort.

_Eighteenth Century Indian Dwellings?

The period leading up to the establishment of the missions and European settlement was one of widespread hardship among Californian Indian groups. There were plagues of locusts, epidemic disease, and unpredictable environmental determinants (Meigs 1935:56-61; Aschmann 1959:181-190; Rowntree 1985:17; Crosby 1994:106, 212, 257, 265; Larson et al. 1994). The pattern throughout the Mission period of Alta and Baja California seems to have combined agricultural-based sedentism of the Spanish institution with the foraging practices of indigenous peoples. Indians were domiciled at the missions in times of feast and economic stability, and they fled or were released from the mission structure in times of famine, environmental stress, or epidemic disease.

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Figure 19. Native house plan (after Barco 1981:46). Illustration by Rusty van Rossmann.

![Native house plan](image)

Diameter = 2 varas
(~1.68m or 66 1/8")

Elevation = 1/2 vara or 3 hands.
(~41.9cm or 16 1/2")

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Figure 20. A Kiliwa house at Arroyo León, Baja California Norte (after Meigs 1939:105, Plate Vllla). Note that the base of the oval-shaped wa’ is anchored by a line of heavy rocks. Drawing by Rusty van Rossmann.
At the beginning of the mission era in Alta California (1769), droughts had already placed great pressure on or disrupted aboriginal subsistence systems, causing food crises that may have encouraged Indians to move to the missions and accept the Christian faith (Shipek 1981:295-312). Nonetheless, at certain times of the year, mission residents of Alta California returned to their homeland to hunt and gather seasonal food resources (Meighan 1987:191). During lean years when food and water supplies dwindled, churchmen sometimes encouraged neophytes to leave the mission premises and revert to traditional hunter-gatherer-fisher subsistence practices. On these “furloughs” Indians would go to the hills to gather seeds, acorns, piñons, gutat, islay, and chia, as well as to cultivate European-introduced foodstuffs—wheat, peas, chick peas, lentils, potatoes, watermelons, and cantaloupes (del Carmen Lugo 1950:225). In 1795, the harvest was so poor at Mission San Gabriel that it was necessary to send half the neophyte Indian population to the mountains and to place the rest on half rations until the time of the wheat harvest (National Archives n.d.:168).

The Indians living in the Jesuit and Dominican frontier of Lower California had the same symbiotic living arrangement during their years of mission contact. According to Aschmann,

… the Indians were kept at a mission for months at a time and given nothing but a small ration of grain, enough to keep them from starving but in a state of chronic hunger. If and when the grain stores failed completely they would be allowed to seek wild foods… [Aschmann (1959:233).

Sporadic shortages in mission storehouses were not uncommon. According to Crosby (1994:197), no mission consistently produced enough food to support 12 to 15 rancherías, or about 1,000 people. The absence of dependable sources of food and water further undermined a precarious mission settlement. Traditional subsistence activities could sustain Indians, but the mission could not. Native peoples contributed foodstuffs to the mission storehouses even in good years:

Figure 21. Size comparison of an ethnohistoric enclosure (A) described by Miguel del Barco (1981:46) and the Las Casitas stone alignment (B). Illustration by Rusty van Rossmann.
… parties would be sent out regularly, one party to gather pitahaya fruit or mescal, another to hunt rabbits or deer, and another to collect clams and mussels at the seashore, and all that was gathered would be carried to the mission and deposited in the courtyard for the padre to distribute or to store. Such a supplementary source of food was probably of more importance at other, less favored missions like San Fernando with its circumscribed valley [Meigs 1935:58].

Natural catastrophes, such as epidemic disease, famine, and storms, posed serious threats to the success of California’s fledgling mission system, wreaking havoc on its tenuous system of agricultural production:

At intervals of a few years, most regions suffered rampaging *chubascos* (heavy showers). Deluges struck the hard rock uplands and ran off, channeling off into steep gorges. Almost instantly, flash floods roared down onto mission sites and obliterated entire agricultural installations, carrying off crops, embankments, soil, and irrigation works. There were extended droughts, too. Plagues of locusts, sometimes year after year, ate every leaf in the land. At times, everyone was hungry—padre, soldiers, neophytes, and domestic herds—and a mission’s life came to a virtual halt while its peoples went out to forage from mountains to beaches [Crosby 1994:212].

Other calamities, such as the devastating great epidemic disease of 1777, a phenomenon that is recorded in almanacs of every mission throughout Peninsular California, also resulted in Indians fleeing to the sierra (Meigs 1935:56). Although foreigners succeeded in attracting Indians to mission compounds with food, activities, and the novelties of European technology, their presence at the mission could be desultory (Crosby 1994:201). However, the Pericú uprising of 1734-1737, which seems to have been prompted by the Jesuit proscription against polygamy, led to armed conflict and ultimately the exodus of refugees from four missions that were destroyed during the rebellion—La Paz (Nuestra Señora del Pilar de La Paz Airapi), San José del Cabo Añuití, Santiago el Apóstol Añini, andTodos Santos. Between 1734 and 1737 Indians either were lured away from the southern missions by rebel Pericú or fled to the mountains due to general unrest and to their opposition to Jesuit rule. It may have been during the Pericú uprising or an episode of drought, disease, or floggings by sadistic soldiers that Pericú or other Indians left Mission Santiago, Mission Todos Santos, Mission Nuestra Señora del Pilar de La Paz Airapi, or Mission San José del Cabo Añuití seeking refuge in the mountains. It was then and there that they could have constructed the rectangular-shaped structures described in this paper.

Based on the rectangular shape of the Boca de la Sierra and La Laguna alignments, we infer that their constructions occurred after the founding of the region’s three missions—Santiago el Apóstol Añini (Santiago) in 1724, San José del Cabo Añuití (San José) in 1730, and Todos Santos in 1733. Each structure of the Sierra de la Laguna is relatively close to one of three Jesuit missions in the Cape Region. Boca de la Sierra is about 15 km southwest of the Santiago Mission and 35 km northwest of the Mission San José del Cabo. Likewise, La Laguna and Las Casitas are roughly equidistant (30 km) from the Santiago and Todos Santos missions.

We propose the following as a possible explanation for the presence of rectangular structures in the Sierra de la Laguna: The new way of life represented by the Jesuit mission collided and meshed with traditional cultural practices. Over the course of time, eighteenth or nineteenth century acculturated Indians, rebellious neophytes, or non-evangelized Pericú, for whatever reason—famine, mistreatment, monotony, disease, or
hostility with other reduced Indians—left the mission to which they had been gathered and returned to their native homeland, where they constructed these stone features. Square-shaped structures have been identified elsewhere in Baja California. Specifically, an old Kiliwa hut near San José, a former ranchería of Guadalupe Mission (Figure 22), exhibits stone walls around the perimeter of a brush and wood building (Meigs 1935:215). According to Hohenthal et al. (2001:181), the nineteenth century structures used by the Tipai, Paipai, and Kiliwa were rectangular in floor plan with vertical walls and gabled roofs. In contrast, “the ancient houses of the Mexican Diegueño were elliptical in floor plan, the structure being rather dome-like” (Hohenthal et al. 2001:181).

Judging from their size, we offer the interpretation that the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna could represent the houses of historic people, accommodating an extended acculturated Indian family or a group of hunters and/or collectors as a temporary shelter for short periods of time. It is also plausible that the Sierra de la Laguna stone alignments could have supported some kind of roof (Figure 23), be it of sea grass, palm leaves, or hides (Michelsen 1968). The relatively low artifact yield may reflect casual utilization of the stone features, or it could be a function of limited site testing or the scavenging of artifacts by modern peoples.

**Eighteenth Century Native Ceremonial Structures?**

This section considers the possibility that the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna functioned as meeting halls or as ceremonial structures. Considering what we now know about historically documented indigenous fiestas and life cycle practices—that death and mourning ceremonies, for example, were clandestine events that incorporated special structures, occurring outside the ranchería—the stone features could have been venerated by a remnant Pericú population in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries (Meigs 1939; Venegas 1966; Mathes 1974a; Barco 1988:355). Fully understanding the limitations of analogy, particularly when studying cultures that have been substantially modified through contact, missionization, and acculturation by the early eighteenth century (Mathes 1992c:xiv), we cautiously employ comparative ethnographic data. Let us now consider ethnographic accounts of settlement and ceremony to help interpret the age and/or function of the stone features of the Sierra de la Laguna.

On November 16, 1684, Spanish naval admiral Isidro de Atondo y Antillón reported that several soldiers had witnessed a Cochimí funerary ceremony on a hill near Londó north of Loreto (Mathes 1974b). The Spaniard reported a great procession leading away from the Didio (Didiu) ranchería to a place where they built a funerary structure (Mathes 1974b:103, 285). Another Cochimí ceremony is reported by Venegas:

One of the highest festivals among the Cochines, according to father Francisco Maria Piccolo, was the day in which they annually distributed the skins to the women. All the neighboring rancherías, he tells us, met at an appointed place, and there, with branches and bushes, erected a spacious arbour, from which they cleared a road and level way for racers … None but the Casiques and chiefs were admitted into the arbour … At the entrance of the arbour, one of the sorcerers used to take his place, dressed in the habit of ceremony, and, with wild vociferations, proclaimed the prayers of the hunters [Venegas 1966:1:74-75].

Francisco de Ortega described funerary proceedings at La Paz that involved burial platforms (Mathes 1992d:241-242; Mathes 2006:63). Another fiesta was witnessed by Luis Sales, a Dominican missionary who served in Baja California between 1773 and 1790.
Despite Sales’ (1956:42) harangue that indigenous ceremonies were “nothing more than a gathering of men and women from all around to gratify their appetites for lust and gluttony,” he astutely noted:

While the people are gathering a circle of sticks is set up in a grove or in a barranca (for these functions are always hidden). They clear a piece of road for the races and make a little hut of branches for the old man, which only he may enter. This little hut is held in such veneration, especially by the women, that no one enters it or visits it. They are persuaded that the instant they set foot within it, at that instant they will die. I have demonstrated quite the contrary by grasping the hand and thrusting them on. And they did not die, but with all this they still believe because the old man tells them so [Sales 1956:142].

Finally, Longinos Martínez (1938:21, 1961:36) described a Kiliwa or Kumeyaay marriage dance
performed with “obscene and lascivious gestures” in the mountains near the Colorado River (Mathes 2006:65).

The stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna could have been strategically hidden in the mountains by foliage and trees so that Indian peoples could engage in activities not tolerated by missionaries. The absence of midden and low artifact yield may reflect a temporary or ritual nature of the Sierra de la Laguna structures constructed in remote locations for small groups of people to assemble sporadically, engaging in comparatively simple activities that incorporated objects of wood, bone, hair, or edible foodstuffs. Historical sources suggest that Indian structures were constructed from perishable materials and do not appear to have been permanent and/or built for continued use; rather, they seem to have been no more than shelters for the attendees, giving shade or protection from the elements. The Kiliwa rectangular house, or twi’a’, is best known from the ethnographic description of Meigs (1939:51, 55). This ceremonial enclosure, which was an essential part of the ŭiwéy, or the talking with the dead ceremony, was placed at some distance from the Kiliwa living area. To the best of our knowledge, ceremonial structures have not been identified in the archaeological record of Baja California Sur. We are confident that the ceremonial structure interpretation is implausible.

*Historic Structures that Exhibit a Secondary Use by Native Peoples?*

Manuel de Ocio was a former soldier at the presidio of Loreto who saved Jesuit fathers Sigismundo Taraval and William Gordon during the Pericú revolt in 1734. Between 1747 and until his death in 1771, he was one of the New World’s most successful entrepreneurs. Along with his partner, Antonio de Mena, Ocio endeavored to “create a mining town in a wilderness” (Crosby 1994:351). According to Crosby (1994:350), Ocio was “a hard-headed, practical opportunist – a typical character on a developing frontier.” However, Baegert’s acerbic comment painted an altogether different picture of Ocio’s achievement:

One of them became so rich digging for silver that he begged for money to pay his passage to Spain (in 1767), so he could, as it was rumored, apply at the court of Madrid for a pension, because he was an offspring of the first Spanish-California captain. It is certain that he brought neither six pence nor a Spanish real from his California silver mine to Madrid [Baegert 1952:46].

Nevertheless, Manuel de Ocio’s land was the sierra and the gulf coast centered on Santa Ana and San Antonio (ten Kate 1977:62; Crosby 1994:325-327). This area Crosby (1994:354) calls “El Sur, Cradle of Private Enterprise in California.” Manuel de Ocio mined silver, ran cattle throughout the sierra, had the monopoly of pearling in the Gulf, and became extremely wealthy. He had operations from the area of El Triunfo south to Santiago and Caduaño and built storage buildings, cabins, corrals, mills, amalgamation patios, etc. throughout the area. In this last proposed interpretation the early silver miners out of Santa Ana and San Antonio, Ocio and his successors, from the middle eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, fabricated these structures when there were still some Pericú alive in Baja California Sur. Ocio’s hires also included Yaqui and Mayo peoples from Sonora who would have used the kinds of Indian utensils found at La Laguna, Sierra de la Boca, and Las Casi-tas (Crosby 1994:510). Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Baja California Sur, structures with rectangular walls appear to have been more for livestock than for human occupancy. Our sense is that the Sierra de la Laguna structures were built by miners and later used by Indians and others as camp
shelters. During the late eighteenth century, the sierra was the scene of cattle, mule, and goat grazing to supply the mines and local communities. We think that the Indians possibly came after the structures were built and used them casually, maybe for brief periods of time, which explains the paucity of habitation remains associated with each alignment. Although we have not been able to find documentation directly relating the participation of local Indians in the activities of miners, cowboys, and mule drivers in the sierra, we think it would be unusual if acculturated Indians did not work as guides, drovers, or carriers since they performed these tasks everywhere else in Baja California. Also, these Indians were part of the ongoing processes of acculturation and cross-breeding (*mestizaje*), and so many of them, some with European blood, had participated in introduced economic activities.

The study structures are small enough to have been roofed, and timber for beams was available. Unless the stock had been there recently, the corral certainly would have been habitable. Nevertheless, the absence of historic artifacts within the alignments, such as bottle glass, leatherwork, metal tools, or pottery, none of which were constituents of the Pericú tool kit, further suggests that the stone features functioned as livestock corrals or maybe just places to keep the mules while ranchers, miners, or herdsmen were camping.

**Discussion**

Over several years of seasonal archaeological inquiry, local guides who led two of us (FRD and GVR) by mule and on foot through the Sierra de la Laguna consistently and without hesitation called these stone features *dormitorios de indios*, a designation that recalls descriptions made by seventeenth and eighteenth century European explorers and clerics. Another category of data that we cautiously employ to interpret the Sierra de la Laguna stone alignments is personal interviews with local informants.

Between 1977 and 1982 two of the authors (FRD and GVR) combined archaeological survey and excavation with comprehensive oral history. Carlos Cota (El Chale) and Luz Manriquez were queried about the region’s natural history and cultural history. These cattle ranchers possessed great knowledge about their land and history, including insight into the function of these *dormitorios de indios*.

El Chale and Luz Manriquez trace their ancestry to Andrés Cota and Sebastián Manríquez, respectively, both of whom were among the region’s first European colonists, arriving ca. 1768 (Crosby 1994:416, 418). With regard to the Las Casitas site, El Chale indicated that his family referred to this feature as *dormitorios de indios*. Later, near the crest of the Sierra de la Laguna, Dón Luz used the same term to describe the La Laguna masonry structure. Families living on the western slope of the Sierra de la Laguna use the same term to describe these cultural features. The personal knowledge of Carlos Cota and Luz Manriquez derives, in part, from the *originarios de las Californias* (founders of Peninsular California), descendants of Hispanic men, women, and children who settled the region prior to the extinction of its native population.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Indian population of Baja California Sur, which may never have exceeded 4,000 souls, was decimated (Aschmann 1959:252-253). From January 16, 1883, to March 22, 1884, ten Kate (1977), probably the first person to professionally study the ancient peoples of Baja California, and Lyman Belding (1885) together made extensive trips throughout the Cape Region, reporting that a supposedly “pure blooded” Pericú woman lived on the Rancho San Jacinto, an old ranch and *visita* (little church or chapel) of the mission of Todos Santos in the foothills east of El Pescadero (van der Pas 1977:48; Mathes, personal communication 2007). By then, descendants of the region’s Native groups had been subjected to a 300 year process of acculturation,
resulting in their extinction or inclusion in Mexico’s plural society.

The comments of Carlos Cota and Luz Manríquez are compatible with the lines of archaeological and historical evidence mentioned above. Although the stone enclosures reported in the historical and archaeological literature are significantly smaller than those identified in the Sierra de la Laguna, the archaeological evidence suggests that the stone features were utilized by Pericú, Uchití, or Guaycura peoples. Further insight into the region’s Native past will be gained mainly through research programs that integrate ethnohistoric sources, archaeological data, and to a lesser degree, oral history.

Conclusion

We have offered interpretations of three unusual stone alignments in the Sierra de la Laguna, Baja California Sur, Mexico. We formulated a series of scenarios, contextualizing the structures’ age, cultural affiliation, and function. We favor two interpretations: 1) the stone alignments of the Sierra de la Laguna were indigenous house foundations that were reworked by historic peoples, and 2) they are historic livestock corrals that subsequently were used by Pericú as windbreaks or temporary shelters from about 1750 to the early 1800s. The archaeological assemblages at each site combine historic artifacts (e.g., pottery) and prehistoric artifacts (e.g., hammerstones, scrapers, and projectile points), indicating an overlap of cultural traditions. These stone alignments may represent the last gasp of Indian life in Baja California Sur. Although our suppositions are somewhat speculative, we believe them to be instructive, underscoring the need for further research in the field of historical archaeology in Baja California Sur. Our hope is that future detailed investigations, including excavation of these stone alignments, will produce more data before the sites are disturbed or looted.

In the past decades, archaeological sites in the Baja California Sur have been seriously impacted by vandalism, development, and hobbyists who amass personal collections of artifacts (e.g., Father César Castaldí, among others [Massey 1955:162, 229, 260, 266, 1966b]). This situation is particularly egregious in the coastal zone from Santa Rosalía on the Gulf of California to the modern tourist resort of Cabo San Lucas. Luckily, archaeological sites in the mountainous interior have so far escaped this fate.

The Sierra de la Laguna is one of the least known archaeological areas of Mexico. Detailed documentation of human settlement in the Sierra de la Laguna is in its initial stages. The span of human settlement is long and textured. The ubiquitous, albeit subtle, signs of ancient settlement are evidenced in open-air encampments, stone tool processing sites, foot trails, pictograph and petroglyph boulders, and there are historic mines, missions, and ranches that punctuate the region’s cultural landscape. It is our hope that in the not too distant future intensive survey and excavation projects will complement the archaeological work that was initiated in the late 1970s.

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