

# A Visual Survey of a Dominican Mission Site: Misión San Pedro Mártir de Verona

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## Introduction

From August 30 to September 5 1996, I, in the company of Paul Kaluzny (retired naval operations chief) and Fred Peyton (retired cartographer), conducted a visual survey at the second site of Misión San Pedro Mártir de Verona in the Sierra San Pedro Mártir, Baja California. This trip was conducted to gather site information and photographs for inclusion in a work in progress on the mission chain of Baja and Alta California. This mission site can be reached solely by horseback over extremely rugged terrain. The map, Figure 1 (Pepper 1966:42) showing the general route taken into the mission site is not to scale and is intended only as a general guide to location and elevation. Arrangements for horses, mules, supplies and guides were made through the Meling Ranch. Enrique Meling proved to be a most able and amiable guide. So, armed with 35mm cameras, film, note books, and a copy of Meigs' site plan, we were ready to go. The only measuring instruments we took were a 50 foot measuring tape, compass and a Magellan GPS 2000. All the photographs were taken by the author in September of 1996.

## Introducción

Desde Agosto 30 al 5 Septiembre de 1996, yo, en compañía de Paul Kaluzny (jubilado naval jefe de operaciones) y Pedro Peyton (jubilado cartógrafo), dirigimos unos estudios de la misión San Pedro Mártir de Verona, localizada en la Sierra San Pedro Mártir, Baja California. Este viaje fue inducido a reunir lugares de información y fotografía para incluir en un trabajo sobre la cadena de la misión de Baja y Alta California. Este sitio pude ser alcanzado unicamente a caballo sobre algunos terrenos sumamente difíciles. El mapa (Pepper 1966) indica la ruta general tomada del interior de la misión, no es destinado unicamente como guía general de ubicación y elevación. Preparaciones se hicieron para caballos, mulas, provisiones y guías fueron hechas mediante Meling Ranch. Enrique Meling comprobado ser el más dispuesto y amistoso guía. Es así que armados con cámaras de 35mm de película, cuaderno de apuntes y una copia del plan de Meigs nos preparamos y listos para salir. Nuestros unicos instrumentos fueron uno cinta de medir de 50 pies, compás y Magellan GPS 2000.

We met our guides at Vallecitos, a meadow just below the observatory. Enrique drove us to the end of the road at Los Llanitos, while the ranch hands with the mules and horses followed. After all of our equipment was loaded on four pack mules, we set out on an extremely difficult three hour trek to our first night's camp at La Grulla, located at an altitude of 8,100 feet (Fig. 2). The next morning, after packing up, we headed SE for two hours to El Alcatraz, where, after a short rest, we continued on for one and a half hours to our second campsite at Santo Tomás, at 6,327 feet (Fig. 3). In the morning we headed west toward the mission site.

Since there are no clearly marked trails, this part of our journey became extremely arduous, consuming two and one half hours, which was far longer than had been anticipated. After resting briefly at "Mission Camp," about one quarter mile from the mission site, we continued to the site which is reached by riding up a steep embankment of approximately twenty five feet to the top of a rise. Here we found the remains of Misión San Pedro Mártir.

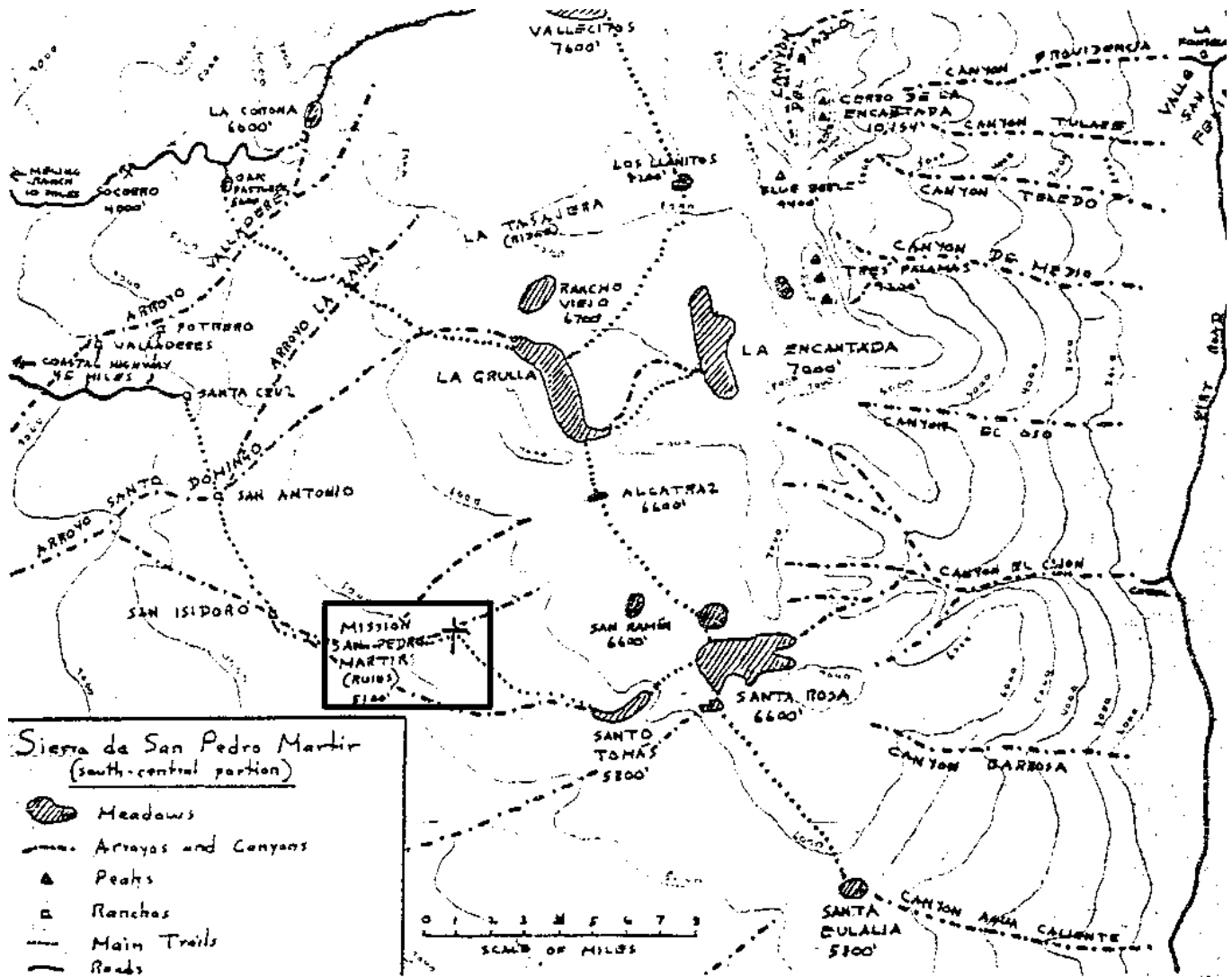


Fig. 1. Map showing general route taken to mission site.



Fig. 2. La Grulla meadow.



Fig. 3. Santo Tomás meadow at upper center of picture.

### Existing Conditions

One of the familiar pink signs which INAH has installed at the mission sites throughout Baja California, was in evidence. These signs describe the site, giving a brief history and pertinent information in both English and Spanish. As of yet, we have not determined when these boards were erected, but found them to be broken at the bottom mounting, causing them to lean forward.

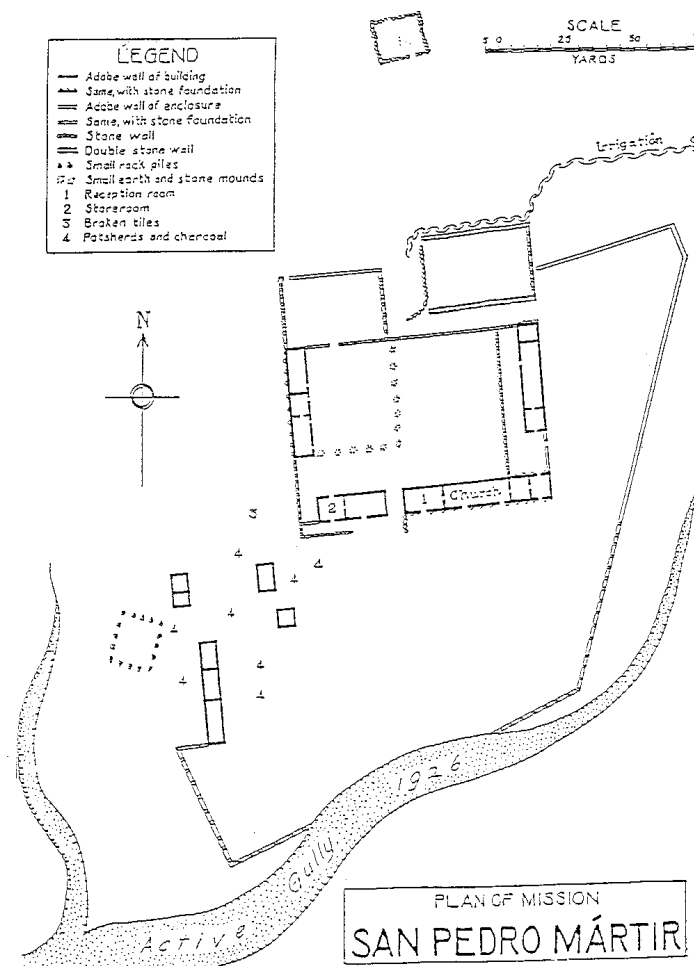


Fig. 4. Meigs' 1926 plan of Mission San Pedro Mártir.

Walking through the site, it became obvious that time and nature have taken their toll on the foundations that Meigs had so well defined in 1926. The adobe walls have long since melted away, leaving barely visible traces of stone foundations in some places.

Meigs' drawing was marked up and the comparison is shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5. As can be seen in Figure 5, the potsherds and other items are spread over a greater area than in 1926. There are literally thousands of potsherds, charcoal and broken tiles scattered around the site, extending from the east perimeter wall, north to the small structure, to the west a few hundred feet beyond the stream and to the southern "Active Gully."

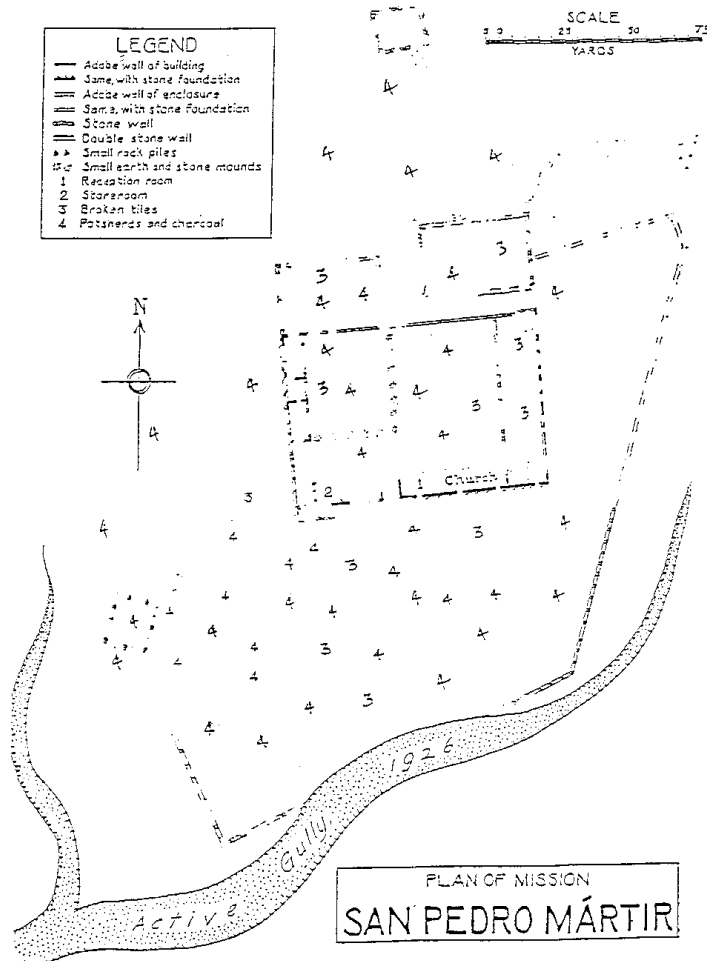


Fig. 5. Modified site plan showing conditions in 1996.

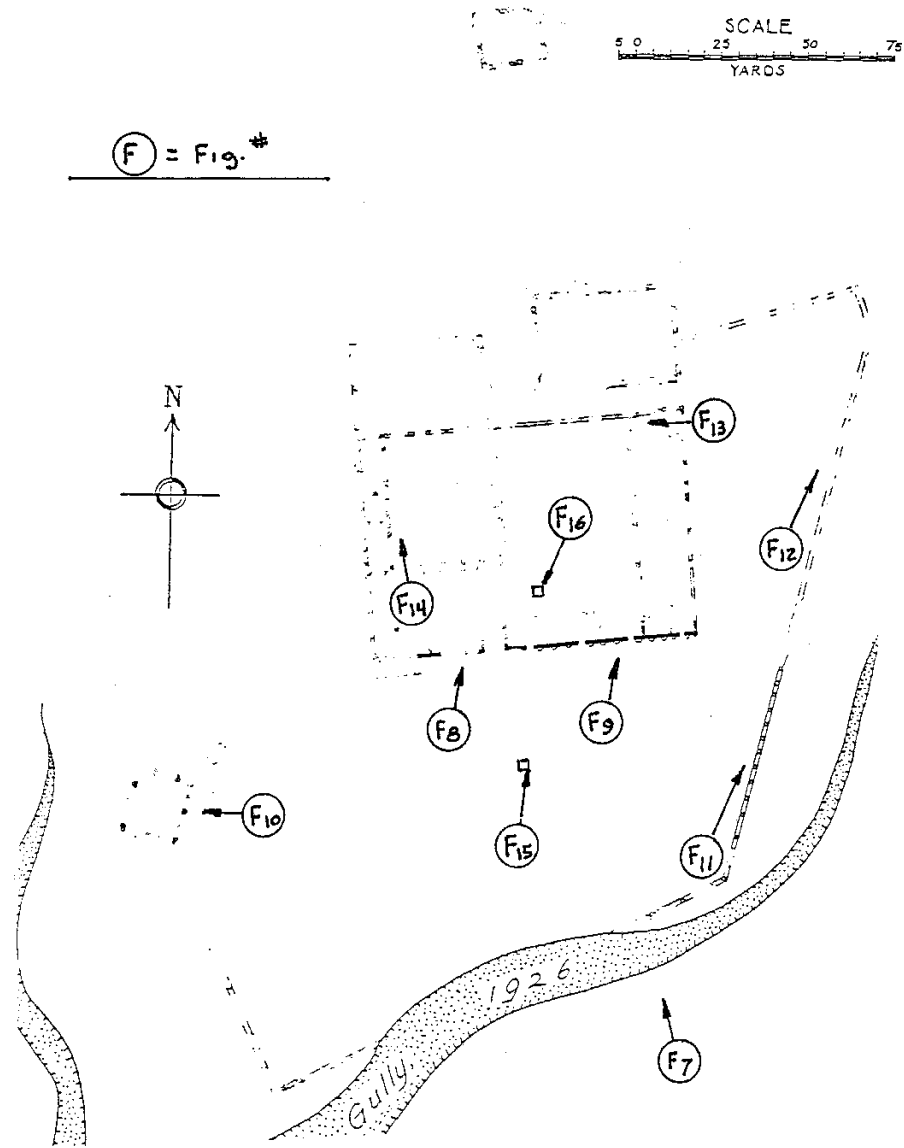


Fig. 6. Indicates the various photographic locations and views of the site.

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Figure 7 shows the south wall foundations of the church, reception room and storeroom. This foundation is the best preserved of all the foundations at the site. This wall measures approximately 28 inches high, 18 inches thick, and 155 feet long.



Fig. 7. Southern view of mission site.



Fig. 8. Western section of mission compound wall.

A closer view of the western section of the south wall in Figure 8 reveals a breach where flooding and runoff have caused potsherds, broken tiles, and other unidentified items to be scattered about a large area south of the mission.

The eastern section of the south wall, Figure 9, is the best preserved.

Southwest toward the stream, the seven outlined quadrangles (shown on Meigs' plan, Fig. 4) were not visible, but the square area adjacent to the stream was still discernible. This area contained mainly rocks and broken tiles (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9. Eastern section of mission compound wall.



Fig. 10. Unidentified area southwest of mission compound.

Looking northward from the southeast corner of the perimeter wall, it is evident that only about 100 feet of rock foundation, remains of the eastern wall, Figure 11. After the first 100 feet of rock foundation, there is an absence of rock, Figure 12. Since no digging or any excavation was conducted, it is not known if soil had covered the rocks or if they had been



Fig. 11. Southern section of perimeter wall.

removed, either by natural means or, possibly, by man. The best measurements indicate that the entire length of this eastern perimeter wall to be in excess of 280 feet long. The irrigation ditch to the north, as indicated by Meigs, was not located.



Fig. 12. Northern section of perimeter wall.

Only a few sections of the north wall of the mission compound were visible (Fig. 13). The best measurement of the length of this wall was approximately 153 feet.

Inside the mission compound, the only indication that three rooms had existed on the west side, as indicated by Meigs, are mounds of soil where walls had once stood (Fig. 14).



Fig. 13. Northern wall of mission compound.



Fig. 14. View of western wall of mission compound.

Two surface items were photographed. Dr. Jack Williams identified the objects shown in Figures 15 and 16. The first, Figure 15, has been identified as a roof tile fragment. It is approximately  $3 \frac{3}{8}$  inches long  $1 \frac{5}{8}$  inches to  $2 \frac{5}{8}$  inches wide, thickness varies from  $\frac{5}{8}$  inches to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. The left edge was finished in a way to indicate it was the outer edge of the tile. From measurements taken it was determined that the fragment was part of a tile with a radius of  $6 \frac{5}{8}$  inches.

The fragment shown in Figure 16 is thought to be a type of dish or platter used during the mission era. It is a San Agustin blue/white circa 1750 Puebla, or 1800 Majolica style. Measurements are approximately 2 inches long,  $1 \frac{5}{8}$  inches wide, turned up corner is raised  $\frac{3}{16}$  inches at the tip. Average thickness is  $\frac{1}{16}$  inches.



Fig. 15. Roof tile fragment.

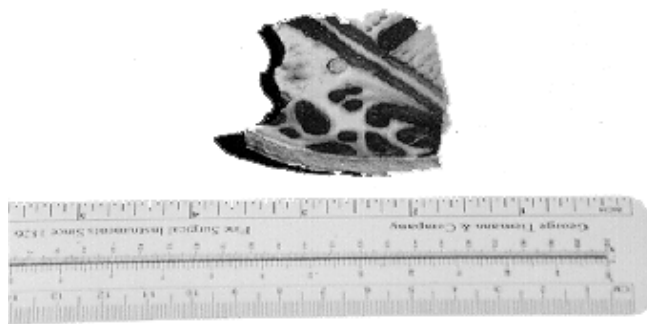


Fig. 16. Dish or platter fragment.

As the day was ending, we regretfully had to leave this isolated mission site and head back to our camp. This had been a true adventure and an unforgettable experience which we hope to repeat someday.

### **Geographical Data**

We obtained data from a Magellan GPS 2000. The location of Mission San Pedro Mártir is 30°-47' 27" N, and 115°-28' 20" W; elevation is 4,843 feet.

The location as reported by Taylor (1971) is 30°-45' N.

### **Historical Remarks**

Little information has been passed down to us concerning this remote alpine mission. On April 28 1794, after a difficult two week journey through the rugged sierra, a small weary party of Spanish missionaries and soldiers arrived at a high mountain meadow. Here, on the western slope of the, as yet unnamed, Sierra of San Pedro Mártir, they began the work of establishing the sixth Dominican peninsular mission. On this day Fray José Oriente planted the holy cross, celebrated mass and formally dedicated Mission San Pedro Mártir de Verona, (Mathes 1977). Their stated objective was to Christianize the Kiliwa Indians living in the rugged foothills and deep canyon of that towering mountain range. The original site of this remote mission, known as Casilepe, remains uncertain today, although archaeologists speculate that it may have been located in the meadow of La Grulla, (Foster 1991), at a lofty 8,100 feet elevation.

Because of the extreme cold and short growing season to be found at such high elevations and the hostility of the Indians, it was only a matter of months before the mission was moved to a more favorable site (Bancroft 1886 and Engelhardt 1929). Here, at a place known as Ajantequedo, elevation of 4,843 feet above sea level, the extensive ruins of this remote mission are found. Though the Dominicans were able to cultivate some crops, namely corn, wheat, barley, and beans, their efforts were more successfully aimed at the grazing of cattle and horses in the lush alpine meadows.

From the few written records to survive from that mission, it is apparent that the mission population was never large. The only population figures available show 60 persons in 1794, 92 in 1800, and 94 in 1801 (Robertson 1978). The Kiliwa proved to be a contumacious people, not easily subdued. One authority estimates the Sierra aboriginal population during the early mission period at 630, of which less than 20% were ever domesticated for mission work. In spite of its remote location, San Pedro Mártir did not escape the scourge of the European diseases, and, as at all Baja California missions, the Indian death rate far exceeded the birth rate. San Pedro Mártir was the first of the Dominican missions to die, although just when its downfall occurred is a subject of dispute. Written records (Weber 1979) covering the later years of this beleaguered mountain outpost being almost nonexistent and contradictory,

we are forced to rely on estimates for the date of its demise. These estimates place the terminal date as early as 1806 and as late as the mid 1820s (Bancroft 1886, Engelhardt 1929, Mathes 1977, Pepper 1973).

### **Conclusions**

From the fragments examined at the site, it becomes clear that tile roofs and floors were in use at the mission, just as Meigs reported.

The blue/white San Agustin china fragment is typical of that supplied to the padres for their personal use.

The dimensions shown on Meigs' site plan of 1926 prove to be extremely accurate.

This site is so remote that man seldom intrudes here, and the information gathered indicates increased erosion, uncovering many more artifacts than were in evidence when Meigs did his survey. It would seem that this mission site would not only be an ideal location to conduct an in depth archaeological dig, but that time is surely running out as nature's relentless forces continue to eradicate what is left there. My personal hope would be to see a joint binational archaeological excavation in recognition and preservation of the historic missions of Baja California.

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