

AMLT Newsletter – Summer 2016



Table of Contents:

Pg. 2	A MESSAGE FROM CHAIRMAN VALENTIN LOPEZ
Pg. 4	ETHNOBOTANY: A RELATIONSHIP WITH PLANTS
Pg. 6	MARIA ASCENCIÓN SOLÓRSANO {DE GARCIA Y DE CERVANTES}
Pg. 8	A CONVERSATION THROUGH TIME: TRANSCRIBING THE HARRINGTON NOTES
Pg. 9	AMAH MUTSUN ETHNOBOTNY
Pg. 10	WISDOM FROM ASCENCIÓN

A MESSAGE FROM CHAIRMAN VALENTIN LOPEZ

Dear Friends,

Our Amah Mutsun Land Trust (AMLT) is happy to share with you the second edition of our newsletter. The big news for our Land Trust is that we recently made a commitment to hire our first Executive Director, who will be joining us on October 1. We look forward to formally introducing you to the new Executive Director in our next newsletter.

Sempervirens Fund has been our fiscal sponsor since October 2013. In that time our AMLT has made tremendous progress and now our new Executive Director will lead us into the future as an independent land trust. The respect and trust we have for Sempervirens Fund could not be greater. Ho! to Sempervirens.

While giving a talk recently, I was asked what is the most important thing to know about traditional Mutsun stewardship. This was an easy question. The most important thing to know is that traditional stewardship involves creating a loving relationship with Mother Earth. Therefore we must treat Mother Earth as we do our biological mother: we must love her, show her appreciation by protecting her and giving her respect. We must trust that our mother will teach us all that is good and protect us from harm as long as we carefully listen to her. Perhaps the most important thing for us to do for our relationship is to pray for Mother Earth. We must continually pray and hold ceremonies so that Mother Earth can have balance. It's important that there be balance in the four seasons so that there is not too much drought or too much rain. We must have balance in what we take from Mother Earth compared to what we give her. Our loving relationship also means that we recognize the plants, the four legged, the winged, the finned, the water and all things that Creator gives us as our relatives. Only when people recognize the importance of this relationship will Mother Earth begin to heal.



AMTB member Nathan Vasquez (left) works with UCB students Trinity Miller (center) and Charles Woodward (right) to build a retaining wall to stabilize an archaeological site eroding out of a sand dune. Photo by Rob Cuthrell.

During the month of June our AMLT participated in a four week archaeological field study on California State Parks and Recreation property north of Santa Cruz. This study was conducted by AMLT Board Member Dr. Kent Lightfoot, California Department of Parks and Rec. District Archaeologist Mark Hylkema, and AMLT Research Associate Dr. Rob Cuthrell, UCB, with additional support from U.C. Santa Cruz. This study covered four known archaeological sites including one that is recognized as being one of the most important archaeological sites on the California coast. One of the goals of our AMLT is to conduct research that will help us learn how our ancestors lived before contact. We have previously conducted research on a site that provided good information regarding our ancestors going back 1,000 years. We believe the findings from this research will help us learn how our ancestors lived going back 6,300 years. This research also includes studying periods

of time when our ancestors had to deal with severe drought, heat and cold due to climate change. This was difficult work; approximately 25 persons, including five Mutsun Stewards and a Tribal elder, lived in tents with no running water for the four week duration of the study.

[On May 26th our AMLT signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) that provides tribal members access to their 5,800 acre Coast Dairies properties at Davenport, CA.](#) This access will allow our members to restore traditional Native stewardship to these lands. We will also be allowed to collect our traditional plants for food, medicine, basketry and so much more. Our AMLT will also conduct research on this project to identify and protect our cultural sites and to learn as much as we can about our ancestors who were here before us. Finally, per the Memorandum of Understanding, our tribe will provide educational interpretation and facilitate collaboration to help guide management planning at Coast Dairies. This partnership is in recognition that the traditional land stewardship will restore, enhance and promote a healthy ecosystem for present and future generations.

As we build new partnerships, learn more about our history with cutting-edge research, and continue to honor our relationship with Mother Earth, the Amah Mutsun Land Trust is moving forward on our path to heal Popeloutchom. Thank you for reading our newsletter and supporting our vision.

Ho!

Chairman Lopez

ETHNOBOTANY: A RELATIONSHIP WITH PLANTS

By Sara French



Tending white root sedge for basket weaving at Pinnacles National Park. Photo courtesy Sara French.

Sara French is a research associate for the AMLT and the ethnobotanist for the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band.

Ethnobotany is the study of the human relationship with plants. We all engage in ethnobotanical relationships every day, but for many of us our relationship with plants is disconnected. We buy plant based foods and medicines from a store rather than gathering or growing them ourselves, but in the not so distant past our ancestors got the foods, medicines, and raw materials they needed directly from the land. This personal relationship with plants required detailed knowledge about how to find, gather, prepare, and care for the hundreds of plants that provided the backbone of life. The Amah Mutsun are working to restore their traditional relationship with native plants in order to fulfill their stewardship obligation to the Creator, maintain wellness within their tribe, and continue on the path of their ancestors.

The importance of native plants to the Amah Mutsun cannot be overstated. Prior to European contact, plants provided food, medicine, construction and craft materials, clothing, tools, instruments, detergents, and cosmetics for the Mutsun people. In the 1930s the anthropologist John P. Harrington interviewed Mutsun elders and recorded 157 plants that were traditionally used. These included 63 different plants collected for food, 101 collected for medicine, and 48 used as raw materials¹. Because Harrington interviewed only a handful of Mutsun people, his notes likely provide an incomplete account of the true diversity of plants in the Amah Mutsun ethnobotany. Each of these plants is associated with a rich history of traditional ecological knowledge about where to find the plants, how and when to harvest them, how to manage them, and how to turn them into foods, medicines, and other useful materials. The Amah Mutsun accumulated this knowledge over thousands of years because they lived connected to the land and engaged in direct relationships with plants every day.

We cannot talk about Amah Mutsun ethnobotany without also talking about the traditional resource and environmental management (TREM) practices associated with Mutsun plant use. Rather than domesticating plants and developing agriculture in the conventional sense, the Amah Mutsun maximized the natural bounty of California by tending the landscape in a way that maintained a highly productive and diverse patchwork of habitats and native plant resources. TREM in indigenous California included weeding, tilling, pruning, thinning fruits, selective harvesting, soil management, seed broadcasting, and controlled burning. This active management, combined with sustainable harvest techniques, ensured that native plant populations maintained their productivity and health over time. Equally important was the spiritual relationship with the plants, which

was expressed through prayer, ceremonies, and songs that were given to the Amah Mutsun by the Creator to help them fulfill their stewardship responsibilities.



AMLT Native Stewardship Corps recording ethnobotanical information on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District lands. Photo courtesy Sara French.

Today the Amah Mutsun are revitalizing their connection to the land by once again using, stewarding, and learning about their sacred plants. At Pinnacles National Park the Amah Mutsun participate in ecological and cultural restoration projects that include tending native sedges, gathering and spreading wildflower seeds, and burning and mowing native grasses. At the Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve the AMLT removes invasive shrubs and propagates seed to save patches of valuable medicinal plants and restore grasslands. At the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District the AMLT surveys for culturally significant plants and records basic ecological information about them so the tribe can rebuild traditional knowledge while providing valuable information to aid in resource management within the District. And in the AMLT Native Stewardship Corps, tribal members practice gathering and preparing the foods and medicines of their ancestors, while reintroducing ceremonies that help Mutsun people and Mutsun lands heal from generations of trauma.

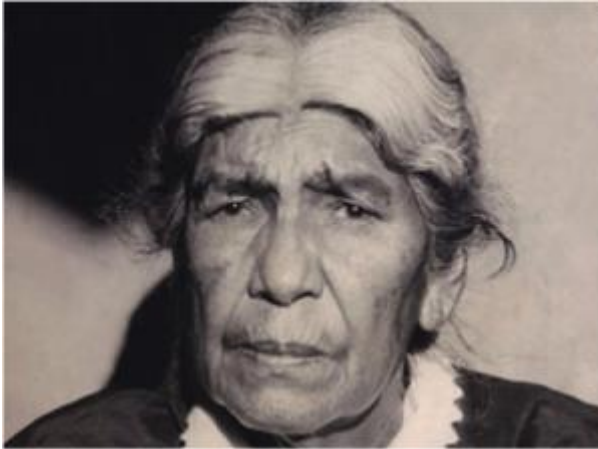
The indigenous stewardship work of the AMLT not only restores ethnobotanical traditions and knowledge within the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, but it also provides an example to all of us who are interested in reclaiming a direct relationship with nature. The plants are still there, the knowledge is still there, and we can still find connections to the earth through a reciprocal relationship with the land around us if we choose to follow that path. I encourage all of you interested in learning more to [sign up for the AMLT mailing list](#), attend one of our volunteer events, spend time learning about the plants around you, and consider [donating to the AMLT](#) so we can keep this important work moving forward. The AMLT is committed to maintaining and sharing ethnobotanical knowledge and relationships for the benefit of all beings within Popeloutchom.

¹ Bocek, Barbara R. 1984. "Ethnobotany of Costanoan Indians, California, Based on Collections by John P. Harrington." *Economic Botany* 38 (2): 240–255.

MARIA ASCENCIÓN SOLÓRSANO {DE GARCIA Y DE CERVANTES}

“Motrme hinsu haisa rittca ittcon yete hallac.”

By Ed Ketchum



Ed Ketchum is the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band's historian, a member of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band Tribal Council and the Amah Mutsun Land Trust Board of Directors, and a great-great grandson of Ascención Solórsano.

No one knows when she was really born, her parents Barbara and Miguel were still hiding from “Tasuguic” the Yokuts shaman, once married to her mother. “Tasuguic” was not a charlatan, he had nearly killed Ascención’s mother, Barbara, with a swipe of his poisonous hand. “Tasuguic” then escaped turning into a hawk. Barbara and Miguel spoke Mutsun at home with their children.

At thirteen Ascención went into a coma. Ascención appeared dead to those present. When Ascención awoke, she reported that she had travelled to the land of the dead. There, she was told, “to return, it was not her time.” When Ascención’s grandfather Junipero “Chachititer” married Sopatra Capicion “Sipuacsa” it joined the Mutsun speaking people and Yokuts people into one tribe. Both of Ascención’s grandfathers had served as Alcaldes at Mission San Juan Bautista during the Mexican period.

Ascención became a curer and comforter to the hungry, crippled, sick, home-less and just down and out. Ascención’s life experience was not normal by any measure. So when J.P. Harrington came to her in 1929, Ascención recognized their partnership would be essential for her people in the future. J.P. Harrington spent nearly a year mining Ascención’s memory of the Mutsun language, customs, cosmology, medicine and more. It therefore is only fair that at her death and later people wrote and composed about her life.

Following are a sample of some of those endeavors:

[“Pomp and Ritual”](#): An obituary for Ascención published February 2, 1930 in the San Francisco Chronicle.

[“Scientist Cheats Grave”](#): An obituary for Ascención published February 1, 1930 in the Los Angeles Times.

[“The Woman Who Remembered Paradise”](#): Larry Englemann’s feature about Ascención and the Amah Mutsun published July 10, 1988 in the San Francisco Chronicle.

[“Ascención Solorsano”](#): An undated poem written by John P. Harrington about Ascencion.

[“Ascención”](#): A flyer for the 2008 ethno-historical cantata produced by California State University, Fresno’s Department of Music.

A CONVERSATION THROUGH TIME: TRANSCRIBING THE HARRINGTON NOTES

By Jay Scherf

The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band has formed a partnership with UC Berkeley, the Western National Parks Association, and the Native American Language Center at UC Davis to transcribe the 78,000 pages of ethnographic Harrington Notes relevant to the Amah Mutsun. The project brings tribal members, students, and volunteers into the transcription and interpretation process. Here, Amah Mutsun Land Trust Project Assistant Jay Scherf shares some of his reflections on transcribing the Harrington Notes.

Though it feels strange at times reading words that Doña Ascención Solorsano spoke to John P. Harrington ninety years ago, we realize that in a way Doña Ascención was speaking to us as well. She didn't give Harrington tens of thousands of pages worth of information for nothing. She must have known how much she was leaving to her people; that she was providing invaluable records of Mutsun culture and history so her descendants could fulfill their sacred obligation to the Creator.

She must have known this more than Harrington did. Otherwise, maybe he would have attempted to organize his notes, to clean up his chicken scratch and translate it out of the phonetic language he made up. Alas, this task now falls on us, a team of Amah Mutsun Tribal members, UC Berkeley students, and volunteers working with the Amah Mutsun Land Trust.

But we are meeting the task head-on. In the 2015 project year alone, our team transcribed about 9,000 pages of notes into digital format. We also translated 1,500 pages to make the information accessible to a non-academic audience. The year's work culminated with the publishing of the first volume of Mutsun Ways, a digital newsletter meant to disseminate information gleaned from the notes to Tribal members. Formatted, interpreted, and with added photographs and commentary from contemporary Tribal leaders, we intend to publish themed editions of Mutsun Ways four to six times per year.

Though many thousands of pages remain, the thought of transcribing them seems less daunting than it did just a year ago. We can look back on the progress of our efforts, measured both in the quantity of pages transcribed and in the creative partnerships formed to facilitate this work. Harrington's notes are being brought out of the archives, page by page; Doña Ascención's wisdom is helping the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band return to the path of their ancestors.

AMAH MUTSUN ETHNOBOTANY

By Sara French, AMLT Research Associate

Ethnobotany is the study of the human relationship with plants. Each AMLT newsletter will highlight a native plant that is used by the Amah Mutsun. We hope you enjoy learning more about the useful and culturally significant plants all around us.

California blackberry – **eenena**

Rubus ursinus



Photo courtesy [Keir Morse](#), [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#)

Did you know that there is both a native blackberry and a non-native blackberry in California? The native blackberry has smaller, straighter, and more abundant thorns than the non-native blackberry, and it doesn't grow so aggressively as to crowd out native plants like the non-native blackberry does. The Amah Mutsun call the native blackberry **eenena**, and it was traditionally considered a favorite food. The berries are becoming ripe right about now and can be eaten raw right from the bush once they turn a dark purple color. The Amah Mutsun also used the California blackberry for a variety of medicinal uses.

WISDOM FROM ASCENCIÓN

By Jay Scherf, AMLT Project Assistant

Ascención Solórsano was a Mutsun healer and leader who had extensive knowledge of Mutsun culture, language, plant uses, and customs. In the 1920s and '30s she shared her knowledge with John P. Harrington, an ethnographer from the Smithsonian Institute. Harrington recorded over 78,000 pages of her wisdom, which are stored at the Smithsonian. In each newsletter, we share a selection from these notes. Here are some of Ascención's words:



Manzanita (Tcuttur) with flowers and ripening fruit. [Photo](#) courtesy [Nick Fullerton](#), [CC BY 2.0](#)

Reel 61.1, Frames 128-130

Tcuttur is the manzanita, the fruit of which is eaten...

There are two kinds of manzanita here. The bigger kind the Indians didn't eat because it was nothing but pit. But the smaller kind had much powder inside and that type they did used to eat. The bears used to eat much of the bigger kind, so they used to say...

The fruit of the manzanita is good for making agua fresca [and has medicinal uses].