

AMLT Newsletter – Fall 2017



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A MESSAGE FROM CHAIRMAN VALENTIN LOPEZ



Sunrise from the summit of Mt. Umunhum. Photo courtesy Annie Burke.

Dear Friends,

Our Amah Mutsun Land Trust continues to work hard to fulfill our goals of conserving and restoring indigenous culture and natural resources within our traditional territories; researching and educating about the traditional ecological knowledge that our ancestors developed and followed for thousands of years; and stewarding our lands to ensure a resilient future for Mother Earth and all living things.

This summer we have eight Native Stewards working for sixteen weeks, spread over six work sessions. Our work is at locations such as Pinnacles National Park, Canada de los Osos Ecological Reserve, Wilder Ranch State Park, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve, and other locations. All of our work sessions include cultural learning such as cordage making, food processing, flint knapping, etc. We believe that all restoration must begin by restoring the spirituality of the land. For this reason our work also includes prayer and ceremony. Finally, we have talking circles where we talk about issues such as Tribal history, culture, values, beliefs, etc. We also talk about historic trauma, and how it leads to addiction, suicide, diabetes, poverty, depression, and more.

On one of these evenings in camp I told of how our Amah Mutsun Tribal Band is one of the oldest nations on earth. Our Amah Mutsun Nation is older than the Roman Empire and the Egyptian Empire. I talked of how the Catholic Missions, Spain, Mexico, California, and the United States all tried to destroy, dominate, and conquer our Mutsun humanity, culture, environment, and spirituality. I tell our stewards that regardless of our history, we never surrendered, signed a peace treaty or signed away our land, water or mineral rights.

I add that we were nearly exterminated and our Tribe has stayed continuous. We are still here, and we have a responsibility to restore our Tribe and relearn the indigenous knowledge of our ancestors to ensure our nation survives until the last sunrise. I add that our ancestors' journey was violently interrupted, and their journey was not completed. It is our responsibility to return to their path and complete their journey so we can honor our ancestors and fulfill our sacred obligation to Creator.

This year our stewards completed their fourth year of working with UC Berkeley's summer Archaeological Field School, which you can [read about in detail](#). One evening we sat around a fire and I talked of our tribal history and how restoring our culture has been very healing for all our tribal members. I believe this talk helped the Berkeley students better understand our Amah Mutsun Tribe.

We are working hard with our many partners and have much to celebrate but I do want to share a very important concern. Right now, the most important spiritual site of the Amah Mutsun, Juristac, now known as Sargent Ranch in south Gilroy, is under threat from a surface mining project which would substantially and irreversibly damage this sacred landscape. Juristac translates to the place of the Bighead and Bighead ceremonies were the most important ceremonies of the Amah Mutsun. Juristac was also the home of our spiritual leader, Kuksui. The mining proposal calls for the removal of approximately 100,000,000 tons of sand and an indeterminate amount of stone, cobbles and clay. The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band seeks to protect Juristac, and we ask for everyone's support. If you would like to learn more, or to find out how you can help the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band with our efforts to preserve Juristac, please review our website and sign our petition at <http://www.protectjuristac.org/>

In July and August we held our Amah Mutsun Land Trust Coastal Stewardship Summer Camp. You can read one camper [describe her experience](#), and see a [slideshow from camp](#). More than just our youth attended; parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles also came, as well as guests from other California tribes. We're thankful to the California State Coastal Conservancy for making this camp possible.

Finally, on Saturday, September 14th our Tribe held a ceremony to give thanks to Creator for allowing our return to Mount Umunhum, which Tribal Elder Nora [describes in detail](#). Our Ceremony announced to our ancestors that we were back and we will make sure that they are never forgotten ignored or erased from history.

Ho!

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Text and photo by EkOngKar Singh Khalsa, AMLT Executive Director



A little over a year ago I began work as the first Executive Director of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust (AMLT) and I consider it an honor to work in this position. Our organization was founded as the vehicle through which tribal band members, and we who are learning from them, would return to traditional Amah Mutsun tribal territory to steward the land. In this work we use methods and ways employed by the tribe's ancestors for thousands of years. All of us involved in the work of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust indeed have a sacred trust to fulfill.

Much has been invested to create the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and guidance and steady encouragement we receive from the tribal band is essential to our success. I am grateful for the warm welcome and support I continue to receive from tribal band members, members of the Tribal Council and the AMLT Board of Directors.

I am happy to say that the land trust has accomplished a lot in the past 12 months. We are participating in stewardship, native plant restoration, cultural learning and research with many partners and are celebrating Amah Mutsun culture and ceremony throughout the tribal territory. We are completing 16 weeks of the Native Stewardship Corps program, we celebrated the reopening of Mt. Umunhum, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Bureau of Land Management governing research and cultural resource assessment at Cotoni-Coast Dairies, and completed significant research at a 6,500 year-old coastal archaeological site with the University of California. Sempervirens Fund, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Peninsula Open Space Trust, California State Parks The Christensen Fund, Kalliopeia Foundation and National Parks Service remain among our steadfast and much appreciated supporters of these programs.

Although we are for the moment a small organization we are having a big impact thanks to our many generous donors and dedicated part time staffers and consultants. We look forward to growing and building greater organizational capacity to fulfill the many opportunities we see before us. The support we receive from generous individuals and private foundations makes all the difference and all this work possible. Thank you to everyone for your support and for your continued good wishes. Please stay tuned. We are just getting started.

EkOngKar Singh Khalsa, Executive Director

MY EXPERIENCE OF THE AMLT COASTAL STEWARDSHIP SUMMER CAMP

Text and graphics courtesy Alexis Moreno, 16, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band member and UwiSmak singer



The Amah Mutsun Land Trust implemented its first ever coastal stewardship summer camp for Native American youth in July, 2017. The camp brought tribal youth, and their families, to the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band's coastal territory near Año Nuevo for two weeks of cultural learning, coastal stewardship, and lots of fun. The California State Coastal Conservancy Explore the Coast grant program supported this unique experience.

My experience at the AMLT Coastal Stewardship Summer Camp at Costanoa Lodge will be one to remember. I was fortunate to participate in such a fascinating experience that will always be with me in the future. It was a great opportunity to meet each and every one of my cousins that live throughout California individually. We learned about our ancestors, cultural activities, sacred places, sacred songs and ethnobotany. Some of the cultural activities we did included making medicine bags, pendant necklaces, and clapper sticks. We had talking circles at the end of every day, and those were the most important parts to me. All the activities we did, we did together, and it meant a lot to me to experience working with others in a team.

To me, making medicine bags is holding something that is important to you in your medicine bag and keeping it close to your heart. I learned that your first medicine bag and first pendant necklace is to be given away to someone who you care about dearly.

Buckeye

- Mutsun name: Chatta
- Scientific name: *Aesculus californica*
- Medicinal: ~~Plaid~~met for eating and reduced after leaching after boiled for toothache and loose teeth.
- Nuts used ground to paste for hemorrhoids
- Nuts used as fish poison
- wood used as base board for fires

Blue Elder Berry

- Scientific name: *Sambucus nigra caerulea*
- Mutsun name: Sauce
- used for clapper sticks
- shafts fire wood drill making edible leaves
- dedaction for Stomach ache
- used for dyes/wristle arrow
- Type of Plant: Tree, Shrub
- Nativity: NATIVE
- Toothed leaves subdivide into five or three leaflets
- textured bark, curved hanging branches, Dark blue or blackish berries whitish

Alexis Moreno

I made my very first clapper stick at the youth camp, and it was a great experience to learn the meaning behind the clapper stick and why it's a big part of our tribe. One sacred song that we learned was the "Lo Le" song. This song is a women's dance song that only the women dance to. We learned about a lot of plants and their uses through the knowledge of our culture. All of the plants were native plants; three that I cherish are blue elderberry, California buckeye, and checker lily. Blue elderberry is used for clapper sticks, and usually clapper sticks are for the elders. However, I have a clapper stick because I am a member of UwiSmak, the Mutsun women and children's traditional singing group.

I made the connection with cousins that sing in the UwiSmak singing group at summer camp, and became one myself. I'm becoming well-educated about our sacred songs and the background behind them. Being closer to my tribe and picking up knowledge is what is most important to me. We should be able to pass down our wisdom generation to generation. I learned a lot during the Youth Camp and I'll certainly be there for next year. Our knowledge is the paramount of our tribe. Creator specifically preferred our people to visit these sacred places. Creator gave us the obligation to take care of Mother Earth and living things. I've learned that the youth are important because we are the next step that leads to success. I will always cherish learning these cultural ways, so my experience at the Amah Mutsun Youth Camp as a youth will always be one to remember.



RETURN TO MT. HUMUNHUM – PLACE OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

By Eleanor Castro, Amah Mutsun Tribal Elder and AMLT Board Member



Photo courtesy Charles Krenz.

September 14, 2017 was a great ceremony day for our people, the Amah Mutsun. The day started early, and up 3,486 feet atop Mt. Umunhum, which means “Place of the Hummingbird” in the Mutsun language. The clouds were surrounding us and it was cold at first, but as the day went on the sun slowly came out and the valley below shown though. Although the radar tower loomed above us it made no difference to our feeling of blessings and happiness.

After everything cleared, you could see for miles and miles, even to the San Francisco and Monterey bays. It is then that I realize why our people felt this was a sacred place. That the people knew they were blessed to be selected by Creator to take care of these lands and this mountain. Not only because of habitat or it being the place of the hummingbird, but because it felt like you were closer to the Creator and the ancestors. How more blessed could you be?



Amah Mutsun Tribal Band member and AMLT Native Steward Paul Lopez lights the ceremonial fire the traditional way; Amah Mutsun dancers during the summit ceremony. Photos courtesy Annie Burke.

We want to thank the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District and our Tribal Chairman Valentin Lopez for working together to bring this about. Midpen revitalized the land by adding trails and facilities to the area for everyone to enjoy its beauty. We thank them for placing atop Mt. Umunhum a sacred circle for all Native people to hold ceremony. We thank Val for helping them to understand our people's needs. And we thank our tribe, the Amah Mutsun people, for being the first to bless this place by dancing and singing our sacred songs. We are truly blessed.

As I came up around to the top of the mountain and saw the beautiful sight of the circle it took my breath away. As I later learned, I was not the only one who had the same response. The ancestors were truly happy that our people were back, and they let us know it.

The circle itself was set according to tradition and circled by stones that were cut by a professional stone cutter from back East. There were multiple entrances to the circle, one from the East and another from the North. From the top of the mountain the view was simply spectacular. Midpen listened to what our people wanted, and we are truly happy for this.



Chairman Valentin Lopez leads a prayer. Photo courtesy Annie Burke.

It has been over 200 years since our people held ceremony on this sacred "Place of the Hummingbird." To the Mutsun people, hummingbird is part of the Creation story and the symbol of our tribe. Hummingbird brought fire from the center of the earth—when it was flooded—from the badger people. He saved the people with his bravery, intelligence, and speed. Many tribes from this area have similar stories of hummingbird.

We had many Tribal members and invited guests show up for our ceremony. We wanted to share our prayers for healing the land and the people. This mountain is sacred to our people and all Native people of this land. Our people are still here; Creator put us here to care for the land, Mother Earth, and to protect her.

Through no fault of our own the lands were taken from us. Everything was taken from us. First the Spanish came and enslaved us in the missions. And then Mexico and the United States did everything they could to eradicate us, but this ceremony shows all that we are still here. The people will thrive and become a great nation again.

We thank Creator for this ceremony. We danced our sacred dances and sang our sacred songs. Thanks to the dedicated Amah Mutsun dancers and the Umismak singers and the tribal people who gathered in support of our people, our land, and Creator. Thanks to our Elders, who do their best to help the people go forward and honor our ancestors and our children going into the future.

miSte

It is good.

Aho

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON THE COAST OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Text by Rob Cuthrell, AMLT Research Associate

Photos by Kent Lightfoot, AMLT Board Member and UC Berkeley Professor of Anthropology



In 2016, Amah Mutsun Land Trust partnered with California State Parks and researchers at UC Berkeley to begin a two-year research project to explore how Native groups lived on the coast of northern Santa Cruz County. The study includes excavations and analysis of materials from five archaeological sites that range in age from less than 200 years old up to nearly 7000 years old. The ultimate goal is to understand how Native people used natural resources in the landscapes around them, and whether these resources and landscapes may have been stewarded to enhance their productivity and sustain their use.

As a collaborative research project, AMLT's Native Stewards worked together with professors, graduate students, and undergraduates from UC Berkeley to carry out archaeological fieldwork. This summer, eight Native Stewards, led by Tribal Elder Eleanor Castro, participated in the project for three weeks from late May to early June. During the fieldwork, all the participants camped out together in a scenic streamside field at Wilder Ranch State Park, just north of Santa Cruz.



There were several notable discoveries during our fieldwork this summer. In 2016, we collected archaeological samples from several buried cultural layers in an ancient sand dune on the edge of the coastal bluffs. These cultural layers dated between about 3000 and 7000 years in age, making this site one of the oldest coastal sites in the region. This summer, we explored whether there were buried cultural deposits in the fallow agricultural field system surrounding the sand dune. Using ground-penetrating radar and augering, we found a shell-rich cultural layer beneath the agricultural fields, suggesting people were not living exclusively in the dunes.

We also investigated an archaeological site of unknown age that had never been studied before. This site, located on a small flat area along a steeply sloping hillside above Laguna Creek, has been relatively undisturbed since the time it was inhabited by Native people. At many archaeological sites, cultural materials have been mixed and destroyed by historical practices such as tilling or earth-moving. But at this site, we discovered intact cultural features buried less than eight inches below the soil surface. One of these features was a cobblestone pile made of rocks that had been brought up from the creek below. It was clear from the coloration and signs of cracking that many of the stones had been heated to high temperatures. These may have been cooking stones used for earth ovens, or they may have been used in a sweat lodge.

Analysis of biological materials from the sites—such as animal bones and plant remains—is ongoing, and we should be able to make interpretations about those materials next year. Already it is clear that different types of resources were used at the sites based on their location and the time period. For example, the ancient site in the sand dune system overwhelmingly contains animals that live in or near the ocean, with few plant foods. However the later inland sites contain a mix of coastal resources along with land animals and plant foods. When this project is completed, we will have a better understanding of how Native systems of natural resource use developed and changed through time in this region.



AMAH MUTSUN ETHNOBOTANY

By Sara French, AMLT Research Associate



[Photo](#) courtesy [Curtis Clark, CC BY 2.5](#)

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.

Mutsun name: mamakwa

English name: California wild rose

Scientific name: *Rosa californica*

The wild rose grows in spiny thickets throughout California, often in moist areas and along stream banks. The shrubs are usually three to four feet tall but can easily grow head high. The flower is pink to white with five petals that are 10-20 mm long. In the center of the petals there are many stamens, attached to a superior ovary. After the rose loses its petals, the urn-shaped hypanthium matures to a brilliant red, and this fruit is referred to as a rose hip.

The Amah Mutsun people traditionally use rose hips as an internal medicine and as a wash for scabs and sores. Rose hips have a sweet and pleasant flavor, and they can be eaten fresh, dried, or used to make tea. Rose hips are a nutritious wild fruit, full of vitamin C, calcium, beta-carotene, and antioxidants. Flavonoids and triterpenes are compounds with medicinal properties found in the plant. Rose hips are harvested at the end of fall, and some tribes consider the flavor of the fruits to be best after the first freeze.

WISDOM FROM ASCENSIÓN

Edited by Jay Scherf, AMLT Program Coordinator



Pokker, wild cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*). [Photo](#) courtesy [Noah Elhardt](#), [CC BY 2.5](#)

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:

Reel 61.1, Frames 48.2 – 51.1

Pokker, *Wild Cherry*, Islay,¹ *Prunus ilicifolia*

My mother told me—I myself did not see it—that they used to gather lots of wild cherry seeds and when they had gathered lots, they put them on to boil, and they tasted the same as cooked beans. They threw out the outer shells, only eating the nut inside.

It's harmful to eat lots of the raw wild cherry fruit. One likes them and eats them and eats them, and then gets nauseated and gets very sick. But nothing will happen if you don't eat them like a hog.

There's a lot of wild cherry on Pacheco Pass, and up there in the hills, there's also a little bit around Gilroy. The wild cherry is a tree, the same as a cultivated fruit tree. There's black wild cherry and red wild cherry, and both types are found around Gilroy. There used to be a ton of wild cherry trees, both black and red ones, there on the road to Solis; those trees are around fifteen feet tall, and spreading, but now they've built a big house to one side of the trees, and now I can't go to eat them when I want to. They've taken my orchard from me, I don't like it at all.

¹ *The Spanish term, islay, is itself derived from the native Salinan name for wild cherry, slay.*

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