

Chumash Village – Landscape History



Wishtoyo Center—Chumash Village Coming Back to Life

Landscaping isn't only about bringing style and beauty to an environment, but also capturing the essence of what environmentalism means—preserving the land in a holistic and sustainable way, for the enjoyment of future generations. This is why noted landscape designer Nick Williams was so enthusiastic about the opportunity to contribute to a unique new project now underway in the gentle, rolling seaside hills of Southern California. There, at Nicholas Canyon County Beach on a 5 acre parcel of land in partnership with Los Angeles Beaches and Harbors, a living Chumash Indian village is being lovingly restored by the Wishtoyo Foundation through the vision and direction of Chumash Ceremonial Elder, Mati Waiya and his wife, Luhui Isha.

The Chumash Peoples have lived on the California coast for thousands of years, though few obvious signs remain of their long habitation. This village is an effort to extend and preserve Chumash cultural heritage, while also serving as a means of educating visitors about the culture and traditions of the tribe, the first Peoples of the region. They utilize traditional Chumash beliefs, practices, songs, stories and dances to create a greater awareness of the connection with and dependence upon the natural environment, not as “environmentalists” but as traditional practitioners of nature.

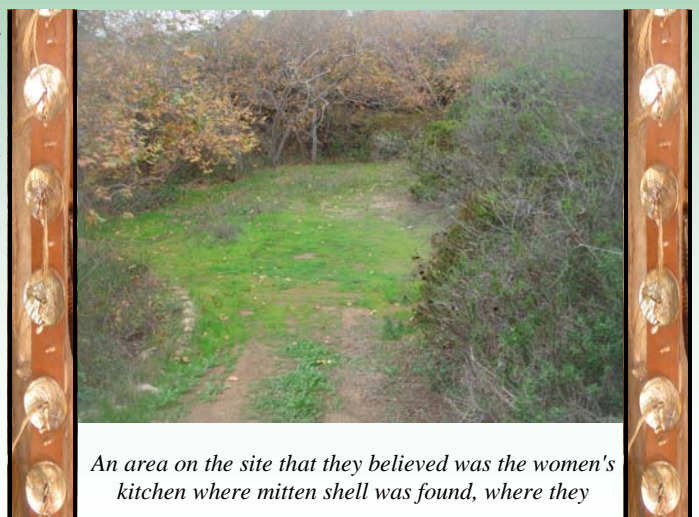
Mati is a Chumash ceremonial leader and Dolphin Dancer, and a lifelong resident of Ventura County who founded the Wishtoyo Foundation, a non-profit organization, in 1997. Wishtoyo's Chumash Village is his vision and has been his working passion for over a decade. Designer Nick Williams has contributed his time, talent and landscaping materials to assist in bringing a flourishing village landscape back to life. Mati is very grateful to have met Nick and believes that he has proven to be a true practitioner of nature and steward of the environment.



Mati Waiya and Nick Williams

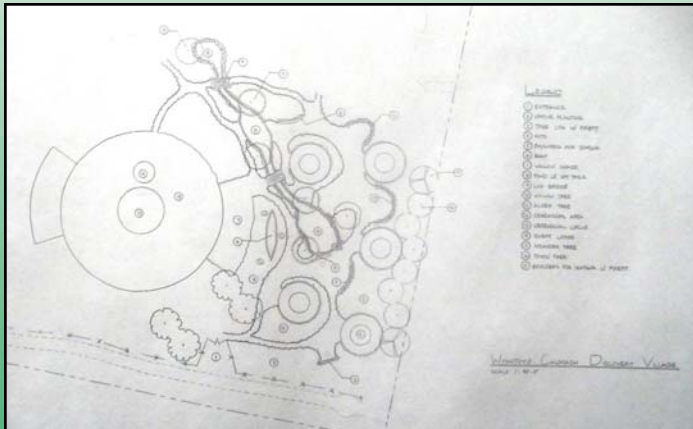


*Ceremonial Circle
sil'i'yik*



An area on the site that they believed was the women's kitchen where mitten shell was found, where they

Nick developed an overall landscape design plan determining where boulders, a water feature, and trees would be placed, with an emphasis on mirroring nature as closely as possible. The on-site structures **currently** include a *sil'i'yik* -ceremonial circle, *ap'a'yik*-sweat lodge and numerous '*aps*' -Chumash houses. A circle of wood poles linked by lateral log beams form a mini 'Stonehenge' as the center of the site, serving as the foundation for ceremonial activity renewed in the heart of the village. A sweat lodge is nestled at the edge of a flowing stream, and six dwelling huts have been constructed. Mati speaks of the village with great enthusiasm and pride, "Chumash families and community come together here for traditional gatherings on the Solstices and Equinoxes to share in our dances, songs and storytelling. They come to teach and learn our language, basket weaving, traditional plant uses, and just to be with one another and have fun. When the Elders first witness this *Apanish Wishtoyo* – Rainbow village, some of them are brought to tears of happiness to see that there is hope for future generations and traditional practices."



Stream found on the site after cleaning up dumped concrete,

It was important to make sure it was properly restored, with the emphasis that only native plants and materials be used in the restoration of the village. Boething Treeland, a long established plant nursery in Woodland Hills, made a very generous contribution of trees and native plants, including transportation and labor on the site to get everything situated and planted according to plan. With over 50 yrs experience, Boething Treeland, manages over 800 species of plants and specializes in "native only" plant requests or other special needs, such as low water usage plants. Their contribution of plants, materials, time and expertise was invaluable.



From L to R-Mati Waiya, Luhui Isha, Marji Boething, Nick Williams



New Trees on the site donated by Boething Treeland

For authenticity, the work involved removal of most non-native plants brought here years ago from Europe and other areas around the globe.

There are long time California natives on the site, such as a grove of Sycamores (*Platanus racemosa*) that was already there, which will be augmented with the addition of the rare California Torrey Pine, (*Pinus torreyana*). As only two natural stands of Torrey Pine exist (in San Diego and Santa Rosa Island), this is a significant addition to the site.



A 10 limbed Sycamore Tree on the site



Mati Waiya and Nick Williams looking out at the Sycamore Grove

And even the revered Redwood (*Sequoia Sempervirens*) will be planted on the site, though not a Southern California Tree, yet the Chumash found redwood logs floating down the ocean currents from the North and would harvest the wood, plank and shape it, then sew the planks together with cordage made from dogbane (*Apocynum cannabinum* L.). The stitching was then covered with *yop* a combination of pine pitch and tar. This was an ingenious way to recycle redwood logs into *tomols*, canoes which the Chumash used for transportation and commercial trade throughout the numerous coastal villages of the Channel Islands and the mainland. Still, the Chumash make an annual journey on traditionally built redwood planked *tomols* to Santa Cruz Island.

Will people stand under the great Redwood one day, in awe a thousand years hence as they stare up into its majestic canopy? Who will know that it began here, with the generosity of the good people from Boething Treeland and to all who have contributed...



Redwood Canoe - Tomol



Mati and Nick agree that cultural awareness begins with our primal attachment and relationship to the land and environment, something strongly emphasized in Traditional Chumash Lifeway.

The dramatic ocean views, clean coastal air, and the smell of native plants combine to take you on a sensory journey when you visit the site. People are invited to come and *feel* the gentle presence of the village, and enjoy the peaceful and simplistic way of life experienced there.

For the land is thought to be sacred in the Chumash tradition, not just something to be tilled and sculpted for our business and recreational use, but something that grounds and connects us to nature and all other life on the planet.

Simplicity in design, natural design, are at the heart of Williams' craft throughout his career. The land was cleared of illegally dumped concrete and trash by Mati and his local volunteers, removing the blight of our modern culture as a first step in bringing this 8,000 year old Chumash village back to life. Natural underground sources of water were found, and the site was designed to be a living example of simplistic and harmonious existence with the land, air and water; a way of life that is almost therapeutic when compared to our hectic modern lives, with a cleansing, spiritual approach to healing the land and ourselves as we coexist within.



Sweat lodge -*ap'a'yik*

NATIVE CALIFORNIA TREES

The following native plants and trees were found or may be used in the restoration of this Chumash Indian Village:

Torrey pine - *Pinus torreyana*

A variety of the Torrey Pines grows exclusively on Santa Rosa island. Only two natural stands of Torrey Pine exist (in San Diego and Santa Rosa Island).

Redwood - *Sequoia sempervirens*

The Chumash would find Redwood logs that channel currents brought ashore from up north and they would utilize the wood for making tools and for building canoes, called *tomols*, to navigate the Santa Barbara Channel. Being adept fishermen, the *tomol* was central to the Chumash heritage. The routes used by these canoes wove Chumash communities together for trade and kinship.

Sycamore - *Platanus racemosa*

The Chumash made wooden bowls from burl-lik found on the trunks of some sycamore trees, which were smooth and round and made in various sizes for different purposes, from chia containers to washbasins. The name for sycamore tree, *qsho'*, is also a word for wooden bowl.

Toyon - *Heteromeles arbutifolia*

Chumash used Toyon berries for both roasted and dried food. Its hard wood was fashioned into a variety of tools, used for digging, fuel, making dance sticks, cradle boards, harpoons, and also used in rituals.



New trees donated by Boething Treeland



Chumash house called '*aps*' with a newly planted tree

Oaks-native - Quercus

The Island Oak (*Quercus*) can be found on Santa Rosa Island, but has varieties and hybrids spread over many of the Channel Islands. The Chumash produced acorns, and the fruit provided one of the most important foods for all Native Americans in California

Redbud - Cercis occidentalis

The twigs were used to weave baskets and the bark provided a faint reddish dye for the finished basketry.

California bay - Umbellularia californica

Californian bay was used as a flavoring for food and as a way of strengthening the immune system. It was eaten during the first 2 weeks of a new season. This means it was eaten four times each year to help people adjust to the changing seasons and to the changes of life, and also enhance immunity to colds and flu. Healers used this to help the spirit adjust to the changes required in the healing process.

Monterey cypress - Cupressus macrocarpa

A species of cypress that is endemic to the Central Coast of California. In the wild, the species is currently confined to two small populations, near Monterey and Carmel, California. These two small populations represent what was once a very large forest on the west coast, so the addition to the site is a restoration for this species as well. The surviving trees from this forest are as old as 2000 years.



New trees donated by Boething Treeland

Catalina Ironwood - Lyonothamnus floribundus

Yet another significant restoration of a species that once flourished in this area. 20,000 years ago, this unique sub-species of ironwood tree grew abundantly on the mainland. Now, this tree exists nowhere else in the world but Catalina.

Black walnut - Juglans

Black walnut would be collected and eaten by Chumash natives. The smaller tiny nuts were sweet to eat; and the Chumash used walnut meat to shine stones and seal them. The walnut husks, like manzanita berries, were used as dyes to stain and color baskets and other pigments.

Catalina cherry - Prunus ilicifolia

The fruit and seed were eaten by native Californians. The seed, once leached of hydrocyanins, was highly valued as a food. One hat-full of islay was worth two hat-fulls of acorns; two and a half hat-fulls of islay were worth one hat-full of chia.

California willow - Salix

The Chumash used the medicines drawn from the willow bark for aches and pains, much like we use aspirin today. Their dome-shaped homes called *aps* were also made of willow.

Manzanita - Arctostaphylos

The Chumash people gathered the berries eat them fresh or they could be dried then ground for winter meals. They also could be cooked into biscuits and made into a beverage using the fruit and branch tips. Dried fish were smoked over a fire of Manzanita wood. They would boil Manzanita berries and use the water for treatment for poison oak rashes. Also used as a dye to stain baskets.



Dracaena Draco Tree



The new women's ceremonial circle and sweat lodge at the Chumash Village in Malibu with a Dracaena Draco Tree in the back



Ap with whale bone



A ceremony at the Chumash Village in Malibu, in the sil 'Tyik,



New Trees on the site donated by Boething Treeland



Wishtoyo's Chumash Village



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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