

UC Merced

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology

Title

A Luiseño Sweat House in Northern San Diego County, California

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7218b2tn>

Journal

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 8(1)

ISSN

0191-3557

Author

True, D. L.

Publication Date

1986-07-01

Peer reviewed

A Luiseño Sweat House in Northern San Diego County, California

D. L. TRUE, Dept. of Anthropology, Univ. of California, Davis, CA 956516.

THIS short report provides information on what may be one of the last surviving Luiseño sweat house structures in northern San Diego County. The general location of this feature is shown in Figure 1.

The structure described below was last examined by me in 1958 and its present condition is unknown. At that time, several photos were taken but no attempt was made to enter the structure and no precise measurements were made. It was the intention at that time to return later to document all of the appropriate detail. For reasons no longer evident, additional investigation was deferred for several years, and with the passing of the owner, access to the property was more difficult and my own interests were diverted to other projects. The information presented below represents an assessment based on memory and the available photographs. This is hardly state-of-the-art reporting, but the data represent a meaningful addition to at least one aspect of our knowledge of the Luiseño lifeway.

The Pauma sweat house, as it existed in 1958, was about 12 ft. (3.6 m.) long, 6 ft. (1.8 m.) wide, and had a roughly oval outline. It was set into the ground about 12 in. (30 cm.) on the upslope side and was lined with a roughly laid-up stone wall about 24 in. (60 cm.) high. The frame consisted of two forked posts which supported a single cross beam. Poles of smaller diameter formed the primary roof cover. The outer

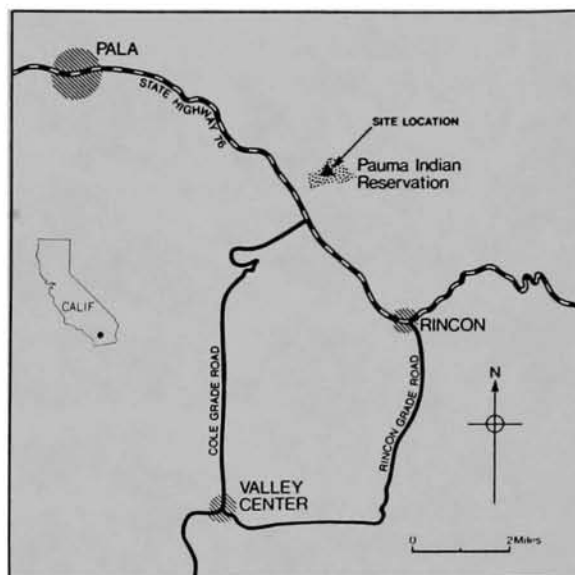


Fig. 1. Map showing location of Pauma Reservation and the approximate location of the sweat house.

cover of the roof at the time consisted of irregular pieces of corrugated iron and odd pieces of other scrap sheet metal (Fig. 2). It was explained by the owner that the metal had been adopted because the original roofing material (not identified) caught fire too easily. Figure 3 is an artist's reconstruction from the photos.

No formal entryway was observed and it is assumed that it was located on the side of the structure that had collapsed. This placement is supported by a lack of openings on either end or on the upslope side of the house. Drucker's Luiseño informants (1937: 12) stated that the heating fire of a sweat-house was located at the entryway, and the collapsed side of this house had been burned. The owner confirmed this burning, and said that he quit using the house because it frequently caught fire. According to the own-



Fig. 2. Photograph showing construction detail and condition of the Pauma sweat house in 1958.

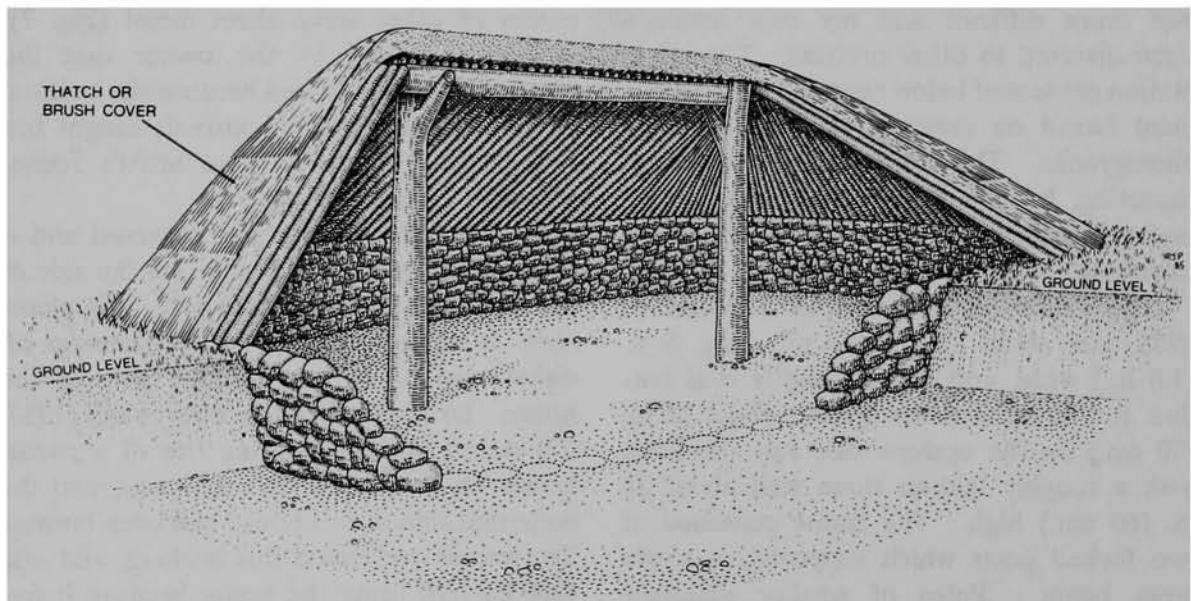


Fig. 3. Artist's reconstruction of sweat house from seven photos taken in 1958.

er, the frame of the structure predated the existing roof, and the mode of construction was said to be traditional.

It was not exactly clear when the structure had been last used, but the impression was that it may have been in the early 1930s or perhaps the late 1920s. The structure certainly postdates the move from the traditional Pauma Village (Kroeber's *Taghanashpa* [1925:590]), across the creek to its present position. Although this is not clear, it may have been in place already at the time Kroeber and Du Bois were working in this part of the state shortly after the turn of the century. To put the described feature into a more meaningful perspective, two additional comments are presented below.

The first relates to the physical circumstances of the structure, its ownership, and its place in the larger reservation context. With respect to location, the owner made it clear that the less said the better. This was not intended to be a secret, but simply a preference for minimal public exposure. The sweat house is (was) located on the Pauma Reservation which puts it into a geographic space of less than 100 acres. Its location is some considerable distance from the traditional Pauma Village, and is not associated with the currently used *Wamkish* area. It is (was) located on a parcel of land claimed, occupied, and used by its owner for many decades. At the time the structure was photographed, its owner was at least 70 years old. He died in his mid 90s a few years ago as the last surviving male elder of one of the three traditional Pauma lineages. Although the identity of this consultant has been deleted here (at his request), this information is available for serious scholars with a need to know.

In spite of the fact that this subject was not discussed at length, there obviously was no question in the mind of the consultant

about the ownership of the structure. Whether or not he built it originally is uncertain, but that impression was given, and it would have been discourteous to press the point under the circumstances. In any case, it was on his land and if he was not the original builder, he clearly had been responsible for its maintenance and more than one rebuilding over a period of several decades.

Based on the information available at the time, it was clear that this feature was considered to be private property and that it was used by its owner (and presumably his family and other invited guests). It was not described as a community facility in the traditional sense.

The second set of comments provides a brief look at the published ethnographic descriptions of Luiseño sweat house structures.

Kroeber, in his notes on the Luiseño (Du Bois 1908:185), described a sweat house and stated that it was similar to the regular Luiseño house, but smaller:

Two forked posts were erected and connected by a log on which poles were rested from both sides. A thatching of plants was covered with mud, and over this was put dry soil. The door was on one of the long sides.

Later, in 1925, Kroeber (p. 655) described a Luiseño sweat house as follows:

The sweat house was similar to the dwelling except that it was smaller, elliptical, and had the door in one of its long sides. It rested on two forked posts connected by a ridge log.

He did not cite the source of these data, however, nor did he provide the location of such a feature. It is of interest, however, that his description is almost identical to the Pauma structure described above.

Neither of these descriptions indicate the depth of a sweat house but both agree that

it was similar to a regular house, which was described as excavated about two feet into the ground. Kroeber's descriptions of Luiseño houses in general note that two forms were typical: one was a conical structure with a more or less round outline, the other a somewhat oval form with the described ridge pole construction. With respect to these houses, Kroeber (1925:654) stated:

The permanent houses were earth covered and built over an excavation some 2 feet deep. As was the case for the Cahuilla, accounts vary between descriptions of a conical roof resting on a few logs leaned together, and of a less peaked top supported by one or two planted posts. The inference is that both constructions were employed, the latter especially for larger dwellings.

Drucker (1937:12) listed both circular and oval floor plans, conical superstructures and single centerpost construction, but did not mention the two post support system described by Kroeber. Two of Drucker's informants agreed that the sweat house was semisubterranean, and one suggested a two-foot-deep pit. The other proposed that the pit would have been about one foot deep. All three agreed that the roof was earth covered directly on poles. One informant put the entrance facing north, three agreed that it was a flush opening (no extended entry), and all agreed that the doorway was more or less rectangular in outline. All of Drucker's informants agreed that the entry was on the side of the house, and that the fire was placed at or near the doorway. One of Drucker's sources put the fire on the surface, two suggested that it was typically put into a pit. Two informants reported that there would have been no smoke hole, and all agreed that direct fire heat was used.

Bean and Shipek (1978:553) noted that Luiseño sweat houses were round, semisubterranean, and earth-covered. They referred to a conical mud-and-earth-covered structure reported on the Soboba Reservation about 1885, and credited those data to a photo by C. C. Pierce (Bean and Shipek 1978:555, Fig. 6).

Harrington (1978:110 [original 1933]) referred to sweat house construction in the Luiseño area and noted that two types existed: those that were dug into a bank; and those that were earth-covered. The thatching material was described as *Kiiwat* (deerweed, *Lotus scoparius*) and, if available, several other kinds of reeds and rushes.

In sum, details on Luiseño houses are not plentiful and there may be some questions concerning the exact configuration and construction of aboriginal forms. Furthermore it seems reasonably clear that by the time Kroeber and Du Bois collected data, sweat houses already were uncommon, and by the time Drucker collected his data, there were meaningful differences of opinion with regard to some of the basic construction details.

According to Kroeber (1937:3), the last sweat houses in the area were used from 25 to 75 years prior to 1937, and in his opinion the use patterns as reflected in the ethnography were "not strongly fortified by sanctions or entrenched by custom."

Given these observations, it is of interest that the Pauma sweat house described above was claimed by an individual and apparently did not function primarily as a community facility.

Recognizing that the Pauma sweat house probably dates to the present century and that it may or may not reflect prehistoric forms or practices, it is a historical feature of some interest, and is certainly well worth describing. This is especially true if it

represents the original source of Kroeber's data on Luiseño sweat houses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The line drawing (Fig. 3) was done by Robert Pengelley. Comments by the referees are appreciated, and to the degree possible their suggestions have been incorporated into the text. Georgie Waugh and Suzanne Griset read the original draft and made several useful comments.

It was noted by one referee that the use of sweat houses has been revived in some *Ipai* and possibly *Tipai* contexts in the south county and that this practice may by now have spread to the Luiseño territory. This important and interesting information is greatly appreciated.

REFERENCES

- Bean, Lowell John, and Florence C. Shippek
1978 Luiseño. In: Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 8, California, Robert F. Heizer, ed., pp. 550-563. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.
- Drucker, Philip
1937 Culture Element Distributions: V. Southern California. University of California Anthropological Records 1(1).
- Du Bois, Constance Goddard
1908 The Religion of the Luiseño and Diegueño Indians of Southern California. University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 8(3).
- Harrington, John P.
1978 Annotations. In: Chinigchinich: A Revised and Annotated Version of Alfred Robinson's Translation of Father Geronimo Boscana's Historical Account of the Belief, Usages, Customs, and Extravagancies [!] of the Indians of this Mission of San Juan Capistrano Called the *Acagchemem* Tribe [1846]. W. Bright, ed. Banning: Malki Museum Press.
- Kroeber, A. L.
1908 Notes on the Luiseños. In: The Religion of the Luiseño Indians of Southern California, by Constance Goddard Du Bois, Appendix 2. University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 8(3).
- 1925 Handbook of the Indians of California. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin No. 78.
- 1937 Preface. In: Culture Element Distributions: I, Southern California, by Philip Drucker, pp. 1-4. University of California Anthropological Records 1(1).



A "Battle Scene" Petroglyph Panel in the Coso Range, California

ROBERT M. YOHE II and

MARK Q. SUTTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Univ. of California, Riverside, CA 92521.

DANIEL F. MCCARTHY, Archaeological Research Unit, Univ. of California, Riverside, CA 92521.

IN their work, *Rock Drawings of the Coso Range*, Grant et al. (1968:70) described a site in Sheep Canyon (which they called INY-9A [S-151]) containing some 744 drawings. In association with that site, Grant et al. (1968) noted evidence of a sheep corral (which they thought dated to the historic period), a cave site, hunting blinds, and cairns. They further noted (1968:70) that over half of the design elements recorded in Sheep Canyon were of bighorn sheep. That site has been revisited several times, most recently by the senior author in 1985, and is formally recorded as CA-INY-1375 (Fig. 1). Of particular interest is a panel depicting what appear to be 12 opposing bowmen. That panel is described herein and comparisons to other such (rare) occurrences are made.