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# Early Hunter-Gatherers of the California Coast

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by Ted Cooley, Jerry Moore, and Andrea Gerstle, with supervisory assistance from Loren Santoro and Todd Hannahs. In the laboratory, critical contributions were made by Sandra Day-Moriarty, Pam Post, Anne DuBarton, and Andrea Gerstle, lab directors for various phases of the project. Ted Cooley and Loren Santoro produced most of the primary data on which my discussions of the chipped stone tools and debitage are based. At UCSB, Pat Lambert, Greg Dean, Phillip Walker, Madonna Moss, and Timothy Hazeltine identified the vertebrate remains, while Chantal Cagle, Brian Haley, and I identified the shellfish remains. Analysis of soil pH was conducted by Jeanette Simons of WESTEC and Tom Rockwell of San Diego State University. Artifact illustrations have been drafted by Mike Caldwell, Pam Easter, Roy Dugger, April Perkinson, and Lance Petersen. Andrea Gerstle drafted the original map of SBA-1807, and Wendy Mailho and Madonna Moss took several of the photographs. My thanks also go to numerous colleagues who allowed me to reuse illustrations from their earlier works or their files.

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(though one possible fish bone was identified), including deer, a member of the dog family, rabbit, gopher, and a rat-size rodent. The gopher bones and most of the rabbit bones are unburned and may be intrusive elements in the site fauna. In contrast, much of the deer and undifferentiated large mammal bone is burned, suggesting that deer hunting contributed significantly to the site economy.

ORA-386 appears to be a relatively well preserved early Millingstone site reflecting a mixed economy based on shellfish collection, seed gathering, and land mammal hunting. Unfortunately, major questions about the nature and antiquity of the site occupation remain unanswered. If the earliest date is correct, it may suggest the presence of a Paleocoastal component at the site, though the context of the date leaves considerable doubt about this. At present, it seems more likely that the site may have been occupied between about 6500 and 7500 cal BP—toward the end of the early Holocene and the beginning of the middle Holocene.

### THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY COAST

Breschini et al. (1992) list five sites in Los Angeles County that have produced radiocarbon dates older than 7000 RYBP (Table 9-5). Due to potential contamination of  $^{14}\text{C}$  samples, however, the antiquity of several of these sites is suspect. At two of the sites (Haverty and Los Angeles Man), deeply buried human skeletons were found in the early 1900s and later tentatively dated to the late Pleistocene. More sophisticated dating of these skeletons suggests that they probably date to the middle Holocene (Bada 1985:646; Taylor et al. 1985:137). The early Holocene age of LAN-271 may also be anomalous, since marine shell dated to  $7575 \pm 175$  RYBP is thought to have been contaminated by fossil shell (M. Cottrell, personal communication, 1988). At the La Brea Tar Pits (LAN-159), a human burial has been dated to 9000 RYBP, but contamination from oil impregnation cannot be ruled out. Several of these sites are discussed in more detail below, but the best data on early Holocene adaptations in the Los Angeles area come from the Malaga Cove site (LAN-138) and the slightly younger Sweetwater Mesa site (LAN-267).

#### LAN-171 (The Haverty or Angeles Mesa Skeletons)

In 1924, construction by the Haverty Company in the Culver City area of Los Angeles unearthed several human skeletons buried 6 to 7 m below the ground surface (Stock 1924). The burials appear to have been interred in a marshy area at the base of the Baldwin Hills. Found near the skeletons were a bone awl fragment, a quartzite core tool, and some freshwater gastropods. The depth of the burials and the partial mineralization of some bones suggested that the cemetery might be of Paleoindian or "Early Man" age (Wallace 1955:216; Berger and Protsch 1989:59). An amino acid racemization age estimate of  $> 50,000$  years fueled speculation about the antiquity of the skeletons (Taylor et al. 1985:137). Berger and Protsch (1989:59) reported a somewhat ambiguous  $^{14}\text{C}$  date of  $10,500 \pm 2000$  for a femur from one of the Angeles Mesa skeletons and quoted the submitters as believing that the date confirmed the "Early Man" age of the

site. Earlier, however, Taylor et al. (1985:137) reported four dates on various fractions of human bone ranging between 4050 and 7900 RYBP.

A detailed review of the excavation history, context, archaeology, physical anthropology, and dating of the Haverty skeletons was published recently by Brooks et al. (1990). They concluded that the remains of at least eight individuals (three females, three males, and two adolescents) are present in the collection. These appear to have been closely associated with one another: all were found at a similar depth in an area about 3.5 m in diameter. Eleven new accelerator dates on human bone gelatin and osteocalcin extracts from four of the Haverty skeletons range from  $2730 \pm 190$  to  $15,900 \pm 250$  RYBP, further confusing the issue of their antiquity. Based on the new dates, Brooks et al. (1990:80) suggest that some of the skeletons may not have been interred at the same general time period. Given their clustering and depositional context, however, it is hard to imagine that the burials are not temporally related. The true antiquity of the Haverty skeletons remains unsettled, but the wide range of  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates available hardly lends credence to a Pleistocene age.

#### LAN-159 (La Brea Tar Pits)

Best known as a paleontological locality, the La Brea Tar Pits also have produced occasional artifacts, a human burial ("La Brea Woman"), and the bones of Pleistocene animals that may show signs of butchering by humans (G. Miller 1969). According to Breschini et al. (1992), dating of these items has produced dates of  $4450 \pm 200$  RYBP (wooden atlatl shaft),  $9000 \pm 80$  RYBP (human bone),  $15,200 \pm 800$  RYBP (extinct fauna), and  $15,400 \pm 300$  RYBP (extinct fauna). Dillon and Boxer (1989:144) also list a date of  $12,650 \pm 160$  (UCLA-1292B) for the site, though I could not find the date in the source (Berger et al. 1971:46) they referenced. The earliest of these dates raise the possibility of a late Pleistocene human presence in the Los Angeles area (Moratto 1984:54). Given the formidable problems involved in dating bone collagen and decontaminating samples from a tar seep (see Ho et al. 1969), however, the dates should be regarded with caution, as should the potentially modified bones.

The partial skeletal remains of a young woman ("La Brea Woman") were discovered in the tar pits in 1914. Nearby were the remains of extinct animals, a mano, and some shell beads. After trying to decontaminate the sample of oil residues, Berger et al. (1971:46) dated a bone collagen extract from part of the La Brea Woman skeleton to about 9000 RYBP. Even without such contamination problems, many bone collagen dates have since been found to be erroneous. Chester King (personal communication, 1988) has studied the shell beads found with the skeleton, however, and found them to be similar to beads from Level I at Malaga Cove and Cemetery A at SRI-3, suggesting that an early Holocene age for the burial may be valid.

#### LAN-138 (Malaga Cove)

The multicomponent Malaga Cove site on Santa Monica Bay was excavated in the 1930s by archaeologists from the Southwest Museum (E. F. Walker 1937, 1952). Four discrete occupation levels were identified in an 8.5-m (28-foot) deep sequence of strata in dune