



JULIA WOOCK / STAFF

NO BORDERS, JUST HORIZONS — Kumeyaay activists protest the Trump Administration's extension of the border wall east of Tecate that disturbs burial grounds and sacred cultural sites.



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SONGS OF FREEDOM — Kumeyaay bird singers seek divine intervention to prevent further desecration of ancient lands. Kumeyaay People have lived in the region for at least 12,000 years.

HOMELAND SECURITY REDUX

Kumeyaay demand end to destruction of burial grounds, sacred sites

BY JULIA WOOCK
Editor-in-Chief

INTERNATIONAL BORDER, TECATE, CA — Four generations of Kumeyaay bird singers offered sacred songs for those who came before.

...before Abraham.
...before Caesar.
...before Cabrillo.
...before Columbus.
...before Trump.

Horrified Kumeyaay recently discovered that a portion of Donald Trump's \$13 billion border wall slices through burial grounds and sacred cultural sites in the arid mountains of East County — unearthing tools, pottery shards and human remains.

Complaints to Trump Administration officials have fallen on deaf ears, so elders appealed to a Higher Authority.

Dr. Stan Rodriguez, a Santa Ysabel Kumeyaay elder, led the traditional bird singing and called for non-violent defiance of the desecration of his ancestors' graves with bulldozers and backhoes.

"They go over our sacred burial sites," he said. "They go over our sacred places to pray. Although they have made this border, this land is Kumeyaay land. They have tried to separate us. They have tried to keep us apart."

For at least 12,000 years the Kumeyaay and their forebearers flourished on a vast area of life-supporting land from what is now Oceanside and Escondido in the north to the beaches and mountains of Ensenada to the south. They also gathered food and traded as far east as modern day Yuma and Las Vegas.

On this Indigenous Peoples' Day they gathered at the sleepy Tecate port-of-entry in front of the tiny U.S. Border Patrol station to demand a cessation of the desecration of their land and religious sites by Homeland Security construction crews and heavy machinery. Tecate, a border hamlet tucked high in the dry mountains about 25 miles east of Southwestern College, is symbolic because it is separated by the rest of the original frontier community which is now Tecate, Mexico by the border drawn after the Mexican-American War. Politicians of the day redrew the border right through Kumeyaay land without consultation or care. Traditional Kumeyaay lands are sheared by the border much like the Berlin Wall or the Korean Demilitarized Zone, separating families and decimating a culture much older than that of the European invaders.

Kumeyaay activists are in the fourth year of a racially-

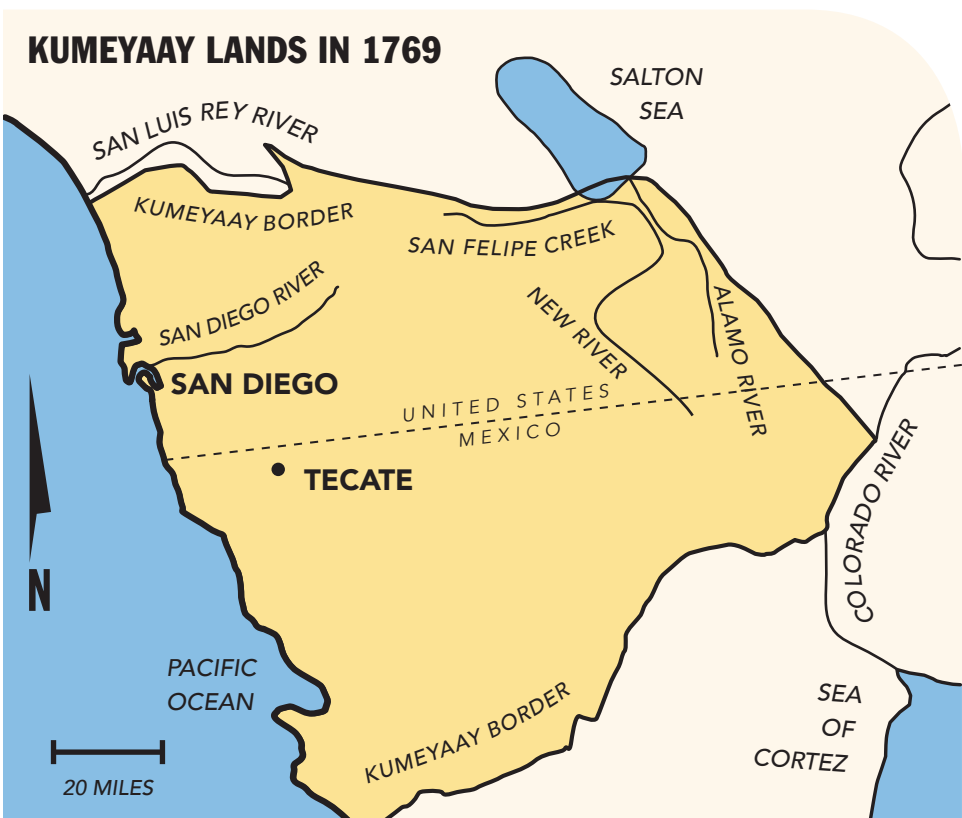
tinged battle with the Trump administration and its infamous wall that vivesects sacred lands where the remains of their ancestors rest in the sandy soil among granite boulders and chaparral. Rodriguez called the wall a violation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

Kumeyaay activists drew national attention last month when a viral video showed a vicious White woman profanely mocking and insulting Kumeyaay protesters at a remote border wall construction site near Descanso. She hopped on one foot and spun drunkenly in circles as she spewed vituperous names and racist invectives at the Native Americans gathered for a religious ceremony. She taunted them for "losing" their land and pushed them as they sang and prayed.

Rodriguez said winning and losing are in the eye of the beholder.

"These borders are an effort to keep us away from our own family, our own friends, our own relatives," he said. "Borders do not work. They will never work. It is a waste of time and a waste of money."

Kumeyaay were hunted and chased into the rocky mountains of what is now eastern San Diego County by Mexican expansionists in the early 19th century, then nearly exterminated by Americans



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HOMELANDS OF THE OLD ONES

Kumeyaay People have lived in this region for 12,000 years after traversing the Bering Strait Land Bridge during the Ice Age. They are thought to have lived primarily west of the Cuyamaca Mountains, though they are known to have wandered great distances north to acquire trading materials and east to trade with the Yuman People in present day Arizona.

Kumeyaay moved back and forth from the mountains to the ocean with the seasons, harvesting plants and small plots of crops they had cultivated earlier along the way. During summers they gathered acorns and hunted in the mountains, during the winters they would live closer to the beaches. They were acute stewards of the land, which they considered a living, sacred entity and a partner in survival.

As Spaniards, Mexicans and

Americans invaded their homelands, Kumeyaay were forced to the east, living most of their existence in the dry foothills and mountains. After the Mexican-American War of 1846–48, an international border was drawn between the two countries right through the heart of Kumeyaay land. During the Indian Wars of the period from about 1880–1900, Kumeyaay lost much of their remaining land to greedy settlers, prospectors and other invaders. They also lost most of their culture and heritage for more than a century until Mexican Kumiai helped to retrace it in recent years.

Southwestern College is built on Kumeyaay land, as is the entire college district. Construction of homes and shopping centers have routinely unearthed the sites of Kumeyaay villages and burial grounds.



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— Dr. Stan Rodriguez, SANTA YSABEL KUMEYAAY ELDER



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APPEAL TO HIGHER AUTHORITY — Native Americans of the Southwest borderlands including the Kumeyaay, Apache and Tohono O’odham have seen their ancestral lands vivisected by the border after the Mexican-American War of 1846-48.



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WE WERE HERE FIRST — Kumeyaay lived in harmony with the land in what is now Tecate, where the border splits through ancient lands, and the border wall desecrates burial grounds and cultural sites.



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THIS LAND IS OUR LAND — First Americans are hoping for better treatment under the Biden Administration, according to Kumeyaay elders protesting the desecration of Indigenous lands in border regions.

in the 1880s and 1890s during the period that marked the Indian Wars. Survivors were stripped of their language, culture and lifestyle. Children were forced into English schools, forbidden to speak their Iipay language or practice any ancient customs. Some Indian schools lasted into the late 1960s and were not banned until 1978. Only in recent years have Mexican Kumeyaay who were able to maintain their Iipay tongue, bird songs and other cultural treasures helped to reestablish the culture among the northern Kumeyaay of San Diego County.

Rodriguez said Kumeyaay are survivors who still pray, celebrate life and find ways to come together. “Everything they have tried to do since 1492 to erase us as a people has been unsuccessful,” he said. “We still live in our traditional homeland. They have not taken that away from us. We still have our singers. We sing our traditional songs, which they tried to erase and make illegal until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed on August 11, 1978.”

Singing, speaking and living are acts of resistance, Rodriguez said. There is power underfoot. “When we talk about the Holy Land, this is our Holy Land,” he said. “Each peak is holy. Each valley. This mud. This land is sacred to us and by us coming together we acknowledge that. We do this not only for the Kumeyaay, but for all people. Each and every one of you here is native from somewhere. To be able to hold that deep in your heart and allow it to grow is important.”

Americans should not be satisfied with “tolerance,” Rodriguez said, because it is a mediocre standard at best and corrosive at worst. “Tolerance has a connotation, it’s

BANDS OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

KUMEYAAY PEOPLE OF SOCAL AND BAJA

Indigenous Kumeyaay People have lived in what is now the border region for at least 12,000 years after crossing the Bering Strait Land Bridge from Asia and migrating down the coast. Spanish missionaries called the natives Los Dieguenos. Americans often called them Mission Indians, a name some Kumeyaay bands kept in honor of their ancestors who bore the name.

Southern California is home to 13 Kumeyaay bands. San Diego County has more Native American reservations than any other county in the United States. The Kumeyaay were split into SoCal and Baja People by the border drawn after the Mexican-American War in February 1848.

Southern California Kumeyaay Bands:

- Campo Band of the Kumeyaay Nation

- Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians
- Barona Band of Mission Indians
- San Pasqual Band of Indians
- Inaja Cosmit Indian Reservation
- Capitan Grande Indian Reservation
- Santa Ysabel Band of Diegueno Indians
- Ewiiapaayp Band of Kumeyaay Indians
- Manzanita Indian Reservation
- Jamul Indian Village of the Kumeyaay Nation
- Mesa Grande Indian Reservation
- Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation

Baja California, Mexico, Kumiai Bands:

- San Jose de la Zorra
- La Huerta
- Juntas de Neji
- San Antonio Necua
- Santa Catarina (Kumeyaay Pai Pai)

negative,” he said. “Like I tolerate this heat or this inclement weather. Each and every one of us has something we can teach each other. We can be like a bundle of arrows. One arrow is easy to break. A bundle of arrows is unbreakable.”

Rodriguez pointed toward Baja California where Kumeyaay on the other side of the border were conducting similar ceremonies.

“It is regrettable that we cannot come together as one People again because of this border and sing our songs together and celebrate our indigenosity and our lives,” he said. “This is the best we can do right now. Someday we will all be together again.”

Brooke Baines, 19 a member of Saving Homelands of the Indigenous and Ending Land Desecration (SHIELD) represented a new generation of Kumeyaay activists.

“I wish we could just come together and have a gathering right here,” she said. “We can hear them and they can hear us. There’s just this invisible line stopping us from being together.”

Forcible separation has prevented Kumeyaay from interacting with “cousins” *al otro lado*, Barnes said, in some cases preventing close relationships from ever meeting, similar to a 200-year version of the Berlin Wall.

Ronny Paipa, a Campo Kumeyaay, said separation feeds sadness.

“Obviously the border separates us and I think it’s really hard because (Kumeyaay living in Mexico) have it a little bit harder over there than we do,” said Paipa. “I think people tend to forget that our people are over there, too. Just because the border crossed us (people may) think it’s just Mexico or they’re Mexicans, but that’s not the case.”

Baines agreed. She said it is essential to raise awareness of the border-spanning reality of the Kumeyaay.

“I feel like it’s very important that the Border Patrol has a good understanding that our people are on both sides and that it affects us and it saddens our heart that we can’t just easily come together,” she said. “This border wall and all these Border Patrol (agents) interfere when we try to do things together. I feel like the Kumeyaay people and people of this land, in general, go unnoticed, especially on the (southern) side.”

As historic transgressions loom, so does a 21st century killer — COVID-19. Baines said Native Americans — including local Kumeyaay — have been hit hard. Gov. Gavin Newsom and his COVID-19 response team have acknowledged the situation.

“We are faced with the stark reality that Indigenous Peoples are being disproportionately impacted by the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and make up many of the people on the front lines — tribal leaders making sure elders and communities are cared for, farmworkers ensuring that we have fresh food on our tables and medical personnel treating those who have fallen sick,” said Newsom. “As the state faces historic wildfires,

Indigenous Peoples have fought fires, provided shelter and shared traditional ecological knowledge of cultural burns to prevent future large-scale fires. And, in the midst of these challenges, Indigenous families continue to be impacted by the federal government’s xenophobic immigration policies, and construction of a border wall could threaten cultural resources.”

Baines said it was “beautiful” to have people unite to raise awareness, even during a pandemic. Education is the greatest tool, she said.

“Get educated on the Kumeyaay people,” she said. “That’s the biggest thing you can do. There’s a Kumeyaay Community College that’s open to all people.”

Courses include Kumeyaay history, culture and the Iipay language. Kumeyaay Community College is hosted through Cuyamaca College and offers an Associate in Arts in Kumeyaay Studies.

California’s Native Americans are not alone when it comes to bisection by the border, said Baines. Apache, Tohono O’odham and San Xavier People in Arizona face the same struggle, as do Pueblo People in New Mexico.

“In weeks to come we would like to plan a day where we are all out on the border wall on the same day and creating a line almost as if we were holding hands,” she said.

Rodriguez said Kumeyaay culture was like an earthen pot shattered by encroachment. Each community got a shard of the pot and when they come together, he said, they grind them together to make a powder. They then add new clay and form a new pot.

“It has our past, what we do today as our present and we make it strong for our future.”