

THE WORLD OF THE CHUMASH

When you visit the **Lompoc Museum**, you enter the world of the Chumash, recreated through the objects they made and used in their daily lives. The Chumash lived along the coast and inland where the climate was mild and the food bountiful. Occupying the area for at least 13,000 years, their villages are found from Malibu to San Luis Obispo along the coast and as far inland as the western edge of the San Joaquin Valley. The Chumash also inhabited the northern Channel Islands.



The Chumash hunted and gathered all they needed from their rich environment. A major part of their diet was shellfish and other sea life collected along the coast. A whale stranded on the beach was an occasion for feasting. Good hunters, the Chumash tracked deer and other wild game. Fish and waterfowl were taken from area rivers. The versatile acorn was a diet staple. Food was plentiful.

Everything the Chumash used was made from stone, shell, bone, wood, animal skins, or plant fibers. Superb craftsmen, they wove beautiful baskets and created superb stone and wooden bowls.

The **tomol** canoe was perhaps their supreme achievement. An ingeniously constructed and swift-moving boat, the **tomol** was used for ocean fishing and trading journeys between the Channel Islands and mainland.

For **shelter**, well-built dwellings were constructed on a framework of poles and covered with tule grasses. Several families lived together in these houses which may have been thirty feet or more in diameter. **Music and games** were very important in the lives of the Chumash. Although they belonged to a single language group, differing dialects were spoken in different districts. **Rock art** figured prominently in Chumash spiritual life. Chumash rock paintings are among the finest in the world in their use of color, form, and complex constructions.

"Chumash Indians" mural, painted by Master Artist Robert Thomas. 1992 Mural-in-a-Day sponsored by Lompoc



Mural Society.

At the time of the founding of the Missions, an estimated 20 – 50,000 Chumash may have been living in Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura counties. Thousands died from exposure to western diseases, but scant records make exact counts difficult. Gaps in our knowledge of the Chumash are being filled by ongoing research in archaeology, ethnography, and history.

Most of the kinds of artifacts the Chumash used can be seen in the Lompoc Museum, collected from nearby beaches, canyons, and hillside forests. A stone bowl... a perfectly flaked arrowhead... shell beads ... These tell the story of the earliest residents of the Lompoc Valley - before the arrival of the Spanish and construction of their Missions in the eighteenth century.

The Chumash of today continue to occupy their ancestral lands, fully participating in and adapting to modern communities while preserving their native customs. *To read more, go to santaynezchumash.org/culture.html and santaynezchumash.org/history.html.*