

A Luiseño Legend

Another tribe of Mission Indians in San Diego County of California are the Luisenos, who derive their name from the San Luis Rey Mission established in about 1770 by the Franciscan Junipero Serra. Many cultural similarities existed between them and the Dieguenos. Under American rule in 1846, the Indians were driven deeper into desert and mountain country, far back from the ocean.

Today, descendants of those first Luisenos still thrive on their reservation in San Diego County.

Long, long ago the Luiseno Indian tribe lived at the ocean side by the setting-sun. They loved their life there, feeding on the many seafood available with little effort. Their life was leisurely, crops were plentiful, all seemed serene and their tribe prospered.

The Luisenos worshiped their Great Spirit, the Sun-God. Always they did what was commanded of them by the Great Spirit. Their tribal leader and war-god, Uu-yot, was responsible to the Sun-God for the welfare of his people. Luisenos were loyal and obedient to both Uu-yot and the Sun-God.

One day, Sun-God willed the Luisenos to move eastward and settle in the land of the rising-sun. Many boats were made by the young braves, and the Luiseno tribe began their voyage to find a new home. Uu-yot led the fleet eastward through heavy mist and fog up the San Luis River.

To help keep the boats together, the Luisenos sang their sacred songs to each other while they traveled. At last they reached a beautiful canyon area with wide meadows and woods on either side of the river. They camped and rested, finding the land good. Plenty of acorns from the nearby oak trees were on the ground, providing their favorite dish of weewish, a kind of mush made by grinding acorn pulp in a stone metate. Weewish made delicious patty-cakes cooked over a fire or on hot rocks. Besides, the tribal children were kept busy collecting acorns for storage, a good winter food supply.

After several days of rest at this natural homelike campground, Uu-yot declared this to be a good homeland for them to settle upon permanently. All the Luisenos were happy, and agreed. Immediately, the people set to work establishing their family homes, creating a village. That very evening the entire tribe gathered around a large campfire and participated in a tribal thanksgiving ceremonial led by Uu-yot. A large feast followed, which was prepared by the women of the tribe in gratitude for their new land. Much dancing and singing continued into the night, a "home-warming" affair.

On the following days, garden land was prepared by young braves. Corn and root seeds were planted by all the families for a community garden. Others hunted for wild rabbits, deer, and other small game, as well as fishing the river for food supplies. Uu-yot gave thanks each day to sun-God for the many blessings bestowed upon his tribe, the Luisenos.

Later and without warning, a period of darkness and storms descended upon the area, with sharp lightning flashes and roaring crashes of thunder. Torrential rains fell upon the land. The river

overflowed, creating a dangerous situation for the tribe. Uu-yot led his people to higher ground and all were saved. They prayed to the Great Spirit to quiet the forces of nature that again they might live in peace and safety. Uu-yot gathered his tribesmen to smoke the sacred tobacco in the ceremonial circle, appeasing the Great Spirit and his gods of wrath. Soon thereafter, a thin line of light broke overhead through the black ominous sky and moved eastward. Next morning, out of the east, the Sun arose again, spreading widely its light, life, and warmth. The Luisenos were grateful and returned to their homes to clean up the debris left by the storm.