

BOOK REVIEW

Delfina Cuero: Her Autobiography: An Account of Her Last Years and Her Ethnobotanic Contributions. Florence Connolly Shipek. Menlo Park, California: Ballena Press, 1991. Pp. iii, 101. \$19.50 (hardcover), \$12.50 (paperback). ISBN 0-87919-123-6 (hardcover), 0-87919-122-8 (paperback).

As Ballena Press Anthropological Paper No. 38, this small book includes Delfina Cuero's autobiography, which was published originally in 1968, plus such new material as an account of her life from 1968 to 1972, a partial listing of her ethnobotanical contributions, two photographs, and a map of southwestern California and adjacent Baja California. Delfina Cuero was a Diegueño Indian, or Kumeyaay, who was born about 1900 and lived in San Diego County and nearby northern Baja California Norte until her death in 1972. Her perspective on the use of and change in the landscape and natural resources of the area as well as the data on specific plants are the two distinct contributions of major interest to ethnobotanists.

The importance of the collection, consumption and storage of plants and ani-

mals to the survival of non-reservation Indians before and during the acculturation period is clearly stated. The effect of cultural ignorance and violation of legal agreements on her people, as documented by Delfina Cuero's personal experiences, is dramatically presented by such examples as the division of hunting and gathering territories by land developers and two countries, and the negative impact of cessation of female initiation ceremonies on such activities as traditional plant use and human reproduction. The correlation is evident between cultural disintegration and habitat loss.

The 70 taxa listed at the end of the book are part of a larger work on the ethnobotany of Kumeyaay which is being prepared by Dr. Shipek. This particular set of data originated solely from Delfina Cuero during separate visits to Mission Bay Salt Marsh Reserve and Torrey Pines State Park in 1966 and 1968, respectively, both in coastal southern California. It is included because she was the only person who provided such information and it is a testimony to her contribution. Most of the entries have basic information but four plants have no use listed and 15 are without native names.

The utility of the plants is illustrated by 48 species with a single use and 18 with multiple uses. The ethnocentric categories are broken down as follows: medicine 40, food 28, soap 4, beverage 4, personal adornment 2, utilitarian 2, flavoring 2, smoking substance 1, thirst reliever 1, animal food 1, fiber 1, and construction material 1. Unfortunately, no voucher specimens were obtained. Plant identification was made in the field using P.A. Munz' *A Flora of Southern California* (1974) although this book was published after the field trips. In a few cases, the taxonomic nomenclature of the ethnobotanical list does not correspond to that in the flora. At least nine plants are introduced, which may represent resource experimentation as part of acculturation (e.g., *Brassica nigra* which is known by the Kumeyaay generic name for "edible greens" and *Avena fatua* which replaced an unidentified semi-domesticated grain). The lack of voucher specimens and the hiatus between Delfina Cuero's use of certain plants as a young woman and her reacquaintance with them many years later may be of concern to researchers who are interested in the reliability of this information. None-the-less Florence Connolly Shipek and her collaborators, Mrs. Rosalie Pinto Robertson, Dr. Margaret Langdon, and Mrs. Elisabeth C. Norland, are to be congratulated on bringing to the ethnobotanical community a tantalizing ethnobotanical compilation with a strong personal background of the Kumeyaay collaborator. Most of all, we have a special appreciation of Delfina Cuero for having shared her life and ethnobotanical experiences with us. The historical perspective in this book puts into painful perspective the destruction of a people, their knowledge and their plants.

LITERATURE CITED

- MUNZ, P.A. 1974. *A Flora of Southern California*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

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