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#### **Title**

Sutton: *An Introduction to the Archaeology of the Western Mojave Desert, California*

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and there are symptoms of an intellectual puberty, it will be a while yet before we get the keys to the microscope and do any serious dating.

#### NOTE

1. Address: International Association for Obsidian Studies, Dept. of Anthropology, California State Univ., Chico, CA 95929.

#### REFERENCE

Michels, Joseph W., and Ignatius S. T. Tsong  
1980 Obsidian Dating: A Coming of Age. In:  
Advances in Archaeological Method and  
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New York: Academic Press.



*An Introduction to the Archaeology of the Western Mojave Desert, California.* Mark Q.

Sutton. Salinas: Coyote Press *Archives of California Prehistory* No. 14, 1988, vi + 104 pp., 29 figs., 9 tables, appendix, bibliography, \$8.70 (paper).

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The basic sources on California archaeology and ethnography are in agreement about the western Mojave Desert. They concur that there are practically no published excavation or survey reports, that there is no confirmed cultural sequence, and that a paucity of ethnographic literature makes cultural identification almost impossible. Fortunately, these problems are becoming less acute.

With the population and building explosion in the Antelope Valley and eastern Kern County, surveys and test excavations mandated by the California Environmental Quality Act are happening at a dizzying pace. Archaeologists from throughout southern California are working, in increasing numbers,

in the western Mojave Desert. The results of their surveys and testing programs are becoming available.

With this background, it can be said that Sutton's *An Introduction to the Archaeology of the Western Mojave Desert, California* has appeared just in time. For archaeologists working in this part of southern California, there is a need to know the pertinent research questions. What kinds of dates can be expected? What kinds of lithics, pottery, and rock art are there? For any question about western Mojave Desert archaeology, the essential source book now is Sutton's *Introduction*. In essence, Sutton has summarized and synthesized nothing less than all the archaeology ever done in the Antelope and Fremont valleys up to 1988. Most of the data were unpublished and unavailable to archaeologists other than those who did the original work. With so many new archaeologists working in the area, Sutton's *Introduction* has arrived at a crucial time.

The strength of Sutton's work is the presentation of raw data, organized by category, that facilitates comparisons with data from outside the area and new findings from within the area. The introduction clearly sets out Sutton's goals, to summarize and synthesize the rather substantial unpublished literature on the area. Chapter 2 succinctly describes the environmental setting and includes a brief section on all the important lithic resources. Chapter 3 reviews the meager ethnographic background data for the area, underscoring the deficiencies in our information on the cultural make-up of the region. Chapter 4 reviews the history of archaeological research of the area which began with private collections in the 1930s, proceeded to excavations by avocationalists in the 1950s, and finally to professional archaeology from the 1960s to the present.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 synthesize the data,

placing them into a chronological framework of early prehistoric (older than 3,000 years), late prehistoric (3,000 B.P. to 300 B.P.), and protohistoric/historic. The first period scarcely is represented in the archaeological record, but there is a great deal of data from the second. The data from the late period are organized into categories for easy reference, i.e., chipped stone, ground stone, ceramics, shell, bone, perishables, human remains, architecture, rock art, faunal remains, and floral remains.

Three sections have a more theoretical bent; settlement pattern, trade, and cultural affiliations. In these, Sutton leaves the cut-and-dry presentation of archaeological data, and ventures into the realm of prehistoric cultural reconstruction. With so little formally reported archaeology, the path is slippery. Yet Sutton's conclusions are firmly based on the existing evidence. Principally, they are as follows: the existence of major villages during the late prehistoric times belies the notion of hunter-gatherer bands wandering the deserts; the richness of western Mojave sites may be attributable to their geographic location on

major trade routes and crossroads (an hypothesis first proposed by Roger Robinson); and the cultural/linguistic affiliation was a kind of "proto-Kitanemuk."

The summary chapter, in which a tentative prehistoric cultural sequence for the area is proposed, probably is premature. Two of the more controversial conclusions deal with a dramatic increase in population, including permanent villages, after 3,000 B.P. and the virtual abandonment of the Antelope Valley at around 300 B.P. Both these conclusions have been brought into question by recent excavations near Palmdale and the Fairmont Buttes and ethnographic research of Nineteenth- and early Twentieth-Century documents. But Sutton would be the first to predict that his tentative prehistoric sequence would be revised in the light of new findings.

Thanks to Sutton's overview, archaeologists are now brought up to date, at least to 1988, on the extensive, largely unpublished findings of western Mojave Desert archaeology. Sutton has laid the foundation and provided the materials with which future interpretations will be built.

