Early Southern California
Southern California Early Period

TIME PERIOD: 8000–3000 B.P.

RELATIVE TIME PERIOD: Follows the Late Paleoindian tradition, precedes the Late southern California tradition.

LOCATION: Coastal regions of southern California from southern San Luis Obispo county to Baja California.

DIAGNOSTIC MATERIAL ATTRIBUTES: Drilled rectangular beads of *Olivella biplicata* and abalone shell, clam disk beads, *Olivella biplicata* spire and spire and base ground and/or chipped beads, serpentine beads, double-edge-perforated abalone pendants, double-central-perforated abalone ornaments. Shaped bone pins of ungulate metatarsals and bone pins made from birdbone shafts. Charm stones (plummet stones) with groove near one end for suspension, cobbled stones, discoidsals, doughnut stones, shaped stone spheres, and fired clay cylinders. Unnotched round-based large projectile points, large projectile points with side notches, large projectile points with stems, compound bone fishhooks and bone gorges, basin and flat metates, manos of a variety of types, spherical mortars, and shaped cylindrical and tapered pestles. Flexed primary inhumations often under cairns.

REGIONAL SUBTRACTIONS: San Diego region subtradition (La Jolla complex, Pauma complex), and Early Santa Barbara region subtradition (Oak Grove culture), and Late Santa Barbara region subtradition (Hunting culture, Campbell tradition). Terms in the literature that include both regions or early and late sub-time periods are Encinitas tradition and Millingstone horizon (Early Southern California Tradition), Intermediate horizon (Late Southern California Tradition), and Topanga culture (Santa Barbara region subtradition).

IMPORTANT SITES: La Jolla Valley (VEN-100), Rincon Point sites (SBA-1, 119, and 141), Point Pedernales (SBA-210), Fraier Point (SCRI-3), EL Monton (SCRI-3), Glen Annie (SBA-142), Areophysics (SBA-54), Campbell (SBA-52), Little Sycamore shellmound (VEN-1), Tank site (LAN-1), San Nicolas Island (SNI-16, SNI-40), Little Harbor (SCAI-17), Eel Cove (SCLI-43), Nursery site (SCLI-1215), Cogstone site (ORA-83), Newport Bay mouth (ORA-64), Pelican Hill (ORA-665, 667), Encinitas site (SDI-603), Scripps Estate (SDI-525), Ballast Point (SDI-48).

CULTURAL SUMMARY

Environment

Climate. Southern California is characterized by dry summers. Variable amounts of rain fall in the winter months. The average precipitation is 25–50 cm of rain a
year in lowland areas, 50–75 cm in most upland areas, and between 75 and 150 cm in the highest areas. The average temperature is above 9°C in the coldest month of January and less than 24°C in August, the warmest month. Freezing weather is uncommon on the immediate coast but occurs inland in the winter. At the beginning and end of the Early period, the climate was similar to the present. During most of the Early period, the climate was drier and warmer than the present climate. The dry, warm arid period was most pronounced between 5000–6500 B.P. Climate became similar to the present after 4000 B.P.

**Topography.** A large portion of the area is occupied by mountains of the Transverse Ranges and the northern end of Peninsular Ranges. The longest rivers are in the northern part of the area. These rivers flow to the west through valleys between the Transverse Ranges. These rivers extend approximately 70 mi (100 km) inland. In the Los Angeles Basin and San Diego area, most rivers flow southwesterly and extend 40–60 mi (60–95 km) inland to the divide between coastal and interior drainages. Sea level changes caused by deglaciation affected all coastal areas. In many areas, mountains meet the coast, and the short streams have steep gradients. The rising sea level did not greatly alter topography in these areas. In the Los Angeles basin and the San Diego plateau, the rising sea level created lagoons and bays, which extended significant distances inland. The newly created embayments apparently created environments that supported marine life. As sea level rise slowed and reached present levels, many embayments became filled with silt. Infilling apparently reduced the amount of marine life and the importance of most coastal settlements.

**Geology.** The Transverse and Peninsular Ranges are composed of sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic formations. Along the immediate coast, Miocene marine and more recent sedimentary deposits predominate. In the northern part of the area, these deposits extend to the interior. In this area, there are small areas where metamorphosed Mesozoic formations outcrop. Cherts associated with the sedimentary Miocene and the Mesozoic formations were used for stone tools. In the southern part of the area, the mountains in the interior are largely composed of Mesozoic intrusive granites. In places where granite rocks cover extensive areas, there are few local sources of material for chipped-stone artifacts. No sources of obsidian are present in the area, and obsidian found in Early southern California sites was quarried at Coso and other sources located east of the Sierra Nevada mountains to the north.

**Biota.** The main vegetation communities in the southern California coastal region are coastal sage, southern oak woodland, and chaparral. Increased aridity 8000 years ago was accompanied by the retreat of northern woodlands and invasion by plants that characterize the present vegetation. Grasslands were more extensive 3000–6000 years ago than now. Chaparral communities increased after the Early period around 2500 years ago at the apparent expense of grasslands. It is probable that prehistoric fire management during the Early period maintained many areas now covered by coastal sage and chaparral as grasslands. These grasslands were probably dominated by herbaceous annuals. Greater extent of grasslands may relate to the importance of seed-grinding tools during the Early period. Land and sea animals were the same species found in the area today.

**Settlements**

**Settlement System.** The presence of house areas, well-defined cemeteries, continuity in location of large settlements near large historic settlements, presence of indicators of occupation at sites during all seasons, and similarity in the range of activities conducted at neighboring contemporary sites indicate that many sites were permanently occupied. There do not appear to be significant changes in degree of sedentism during the Early period. There are changes in the ranges of sizes of settlements and their degree of dispersal across the landscape. After 5500 B.P., there were larger centers. These centers are located on prominent features near the coast. Most are in the northern half of the southern California coastal area. They often occupy larger areas than earlier settlements. Large sites are often surrounded by concentrations of smaller satellite settlements. Other small settlements are dispersed across the landscape between large sites. It appears that there were more, smaller, settlements during most of the Early period than during later periods.

**Community Organization.** Men’s and women’s areas are indicated by the distribution of artifact types. Men’s areas where artifacts were flaked and where scrapers, gravers, and other manufacturing tools concentrate are often separated from areas where grinding tools and tools such as large hammers and choppers concentrate in house areas. It is possible that men slept in sweat lodges.