When we think of technology in relation to food today we are most likely to envision blenders, espresso machines and thermal immersion circulators. But food preparation and propagation technology have been the core adaptations that allowed native peoples to inhabit arid lands.

In 4800 BCE, the skeleton of a large mammoth was discovered in a remote section of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. One of the rib cages showed evidence of v-shaped cuts made for a primitive stone tool. Humans adapted to new artifacts of Southern California are grinding stones.

There are two main combinations of grinding tools: mortars and pestles, and grinding sliders and hand stones. Mortars are round holes ground deep into a boulder by repeated pounding with a long, heavy stone pestle. Grinding sliders are smooth flat surfaces where items are ground using hand stones. In the Southwest, these are often called mortars, metates and manos.

The grinding sliders or holes found in large edzes found in the area are one of knowing that mashed foods were used these tools lived in the area. As returned sea- level lowered to its present amount, the area was flooded by sea for long periods of time. The longer a grinding tool was used, the deeper it became.

Grinding tools were essential to processing foods by grinding seeds, nuts, meats and acorns. Women traditionally used these tools to grind the foods into a fine flour, creating meal for cooking. Silver, copper and stone were em- ployed as a food preparation tools.

Controlled burning was practiced to open the land and allow new plants to grow. Resources were intensified based on experience in order to properly harvest plants during specific seasons. Areas like Anza-Borrego’s volca- noic soil were found to be excel- lent for growing crops in fields irrigated by local springs. Earthen pits for roasting plants like agave have been dated to nearly 6,000 years. Recent archaeological discover- ies have supported Kemerer’s asso- ciation of crop domestication with the discovery of agave, medicine and fiber for as long as people have lived in the area.

Neil Hitch from the Imperial Valley Desert Museum lead the April 15th seminar.

QUESTION: What is the connection of the IVDM exhibit to the Desert Museum?

ABOVE: Grinding stone used to process food along the shore of ancient Lake Cahuilla. LEFT: The atlatl man has been one of the most commonly known Native American tools. While exact dates are still debated, the smaller points were probably used in the smaller atlatl hunting technology. Some of the most ubiquitous and have centuries of oral traditions about tending the land.

While recent archaeological re- search, however, suggests that large sharp points were also used as arrowheads for hunting. Many large animals that were trapped in the area were found to have been driven off cliffs into water. The atlatl was recently discovered in Jacumba.

Land of Extremes

EDITOR’S NOTE: A series of stories on the history of man in our desert and the efforts of the Imperial Valley Desert Museum to tell that story will run through October. Illustrating the page last week was a new crop of interns return in the fall connected to the IVHigh journalism program.

NATIVE PEOPLES INHABIT ARID LANDS

Food technology reveals much about ancient peoples

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