

CAHUILLA TERRITORY

For the Agua Caliente people,
the greatest resources are land, spirit, and identity.

BY MONA DE CRINIS





LEFT: Tahquitz Falls in Tahquitz Canyon.
OPPOSITE: Indian Canyons.

Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, or Fifth People, the names of indigenous animals in a song. Cahuilla clans were named after some of these animals and helped differentiate the clans.

In *Stories and Legends of the Palm Springs Indians*, Francisco Patencio writes: "The coyote represents a tribe of people of his name, and the wildcat represents a tribe of people of his name; and she [Menil] taught them that Coyote must never marry with Coyote, or Wildcat must never marry with Wildcat."

By the early 1900s, traditional moiety marriage rules had begun breaking down, according to anthropologist and Cahuilla expert Lowell Bean, and the once-expansive Cahuilla territory was reduced to designated reservations representing the various Cahuilla tribes.

Today, there are nine Cahuilla reservations located in Imperial, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego counties: Augustine, Cabazon, Cahuilla Reservation, Los Coyotes, Morongo, Ramona Band, Santa Rosa, Torres-Martinez, and Agua Caliente. Historically, anthropologists and Cahuilla elders referred to these groups simply as the Mountain, Desert, and Pass Cahuilla.

For Agua Caliente Tribal Member Moraino Patencio, the son of a Mountain Cahuilla mother from the Santa Rosa Reservation and a Pass Cahuilla father from the Agua Caliente Reservation, Cahuilla boundary lines are measured more by

LONG BEFORE hearty pioneers and land-hungry European settlers discovered the rugged beauty of the Coachella Valley and surrounding areas, the Cahuilla people thrived in close-knit communities that dotted the land. The traditional Cahuilla territory stretches from the Borrego Desert in the south to the San Bernardino Mountains in the north and toward the Colorado River to the east and

includes the city of Riverside to the west.

Part of the Shoshonean division of the Uto-Aztecan linguistic family, the Cahuilla are delineated along paternal lines and divided into moieties, or clans, that dictated social norms such as marriage and were generally linked to a given subsistence territory.

Menil the Moon Maiden taught children of the First People, ancestors of the Agua





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sustenance and resources than longitude and latitude.

"The differences between the Desert Cahuilla and the Mountain Cahuilla had to do with available plants and when they became ripe for picking," Patencio explains. "In the desert, [one of] our primary food was mesquite, which ripened in July and August." During a three-week mesquite gathering and processing period, the Agua Caliente could net enough mesquite to sustain supplies for the year.

"In the Mountain Cahuilla territory, the oak trees would ripen with acorns in October and November, resulting in another three- to four-week gathering and processing period," Patencio continues. "This gave us the opportunity to go up into the mountains and join forces in gathering and processing while also encouraging community

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LEFT: Murray Canyon. **ABOVE:** Named after seven streams of water that flow from the rocks of Murray Canyon and form one continuous course, the Seven Sisters waterfall offers hikers a true oasis.

relations between the Pass, Desert, and Mountain Cahuilla."

The marriage of Patencio's mother and father illustrates the concerted focus on integration between neighboring people. "Intermarriage between the families extended relations so we could have not only trade, but also family connections between the Pass, Desert and Mountain Cahuilla. As you continue this pattern of marriage outside of your area and outside of your moiety, you continue to become related to people. The biggest boast you could make about that





Tahquitz Canyon
from the South Lykken Trail.

would be that you're 'related around the mountain,' which promoted peace and harmony as well as trade and communication."

Included in this network of extended families among local Cahuilla clans were the Pass Cahuilla, which inhabited the land stretching from San Bernardino to Indian Wells. "The Pass Cahuilla were along the trade route between Cahuilla and the Gabrielino people, which occupied areas from Los Angeles up to the Channel Islands," Patencio relates. "Since our trade routes were generally east-west, we traded the most with Colorado River and coastal peoples."

The most persistent trade, Patencio says, was ceremonial in nature. Shell beads used in Cahuilla ceremony have been found at the Agua Caliente's Tahquitz Canyon village site and at *Séc-he*, validating the practice of trade with coastal tribes. "We, in turn, would produce and trade ceremonial points, or

arrowheads, made from clear quartz. And those items have been uncovered in Santa Barbara and the Channel Islands."

The Cahuilla also traded for volcanic rock that could be carved and used for cooking directly over a fire rather than the sometime precarious method of hot stones in woven baskets and clay from the Colorado River and San Diego's Palomar Mountain used to make pottery.

Many Cahuilla preferred acorns from coast live oak to those gathered locally, Patencio suggests, and these tasty treats were sometimes included in trade negotiations. "I have some Native friends along the coast who pick the good acorns and we now can buy them online," he says with a laugh. "So I guess we're still trading."

Shelter structures were also a telling difference between the Cahuilla territories. "On my mother's reservation, they used tree bark, earth, and rudimentary

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logs to insulate their homes as they lived closer to or in the snow," Patencio explains. "Their structures needed to be much sturdier than ours. We were more concerned with shade and protection from the heat and the ability for air to come through."

The Cahuilla, constructed well-ventilated round structures called a *kish*, made from palm, willow, and arrowweed that flourished near springs and canyon streams or crafted lean-to shelters nestled against primeval rock formations.

FROM TERRITORIES TO RESERVATIONS

As outsiders discovered the Coachella Valley's sublime bounty and potential therein, the Cahuilla tribes found their ancestral homeland disrupted as demand for supplies, lodging, communication, and infrastructure grew with an expanding United States.

In 1863, the William Bradshaw Trail stagecoach route cut a swath through the Banning Pass traveling from Los Angeles to the Arizona

THE LEGEND OF MOUL

Standing tall, strong, and majestic, the *Washingtonia filifera* — the only one of more than 2,800 species of palm trees worldwide native to California — is emblematic of the Coachella Valley. With its flirty "skirt" of dried fronds that sashays in the breeze and bundles of sweet fruit, this indigenous palm tree



(also known as the California fan palm and desert fan palm) is an iconic desert fixture, charming all who take respite from the heat beneath its radiant crown. But no one values this palm more than the Cahuilla people.

Utilized to build shelter, fashion bows for hunting, and craft eating utensils from its generous fronds and stems, the *Washingtonia* provided a variety of uses for the early Agua Caliente. More importantly, perhaps, the palm represents one of the best-

loved legends in Cahuilla lore: the story of Moul.

In *Stories and Legends of the Palm Springs Indians*,

elder Francisco Patencio relates the colorful tale of the palm's creation after the five Cahuilla headmen brought their people to this desert paradise where they would make their ancestral home. One of leaders believed his time was quickly running out. As he felt his life force weaken, he demonstrated



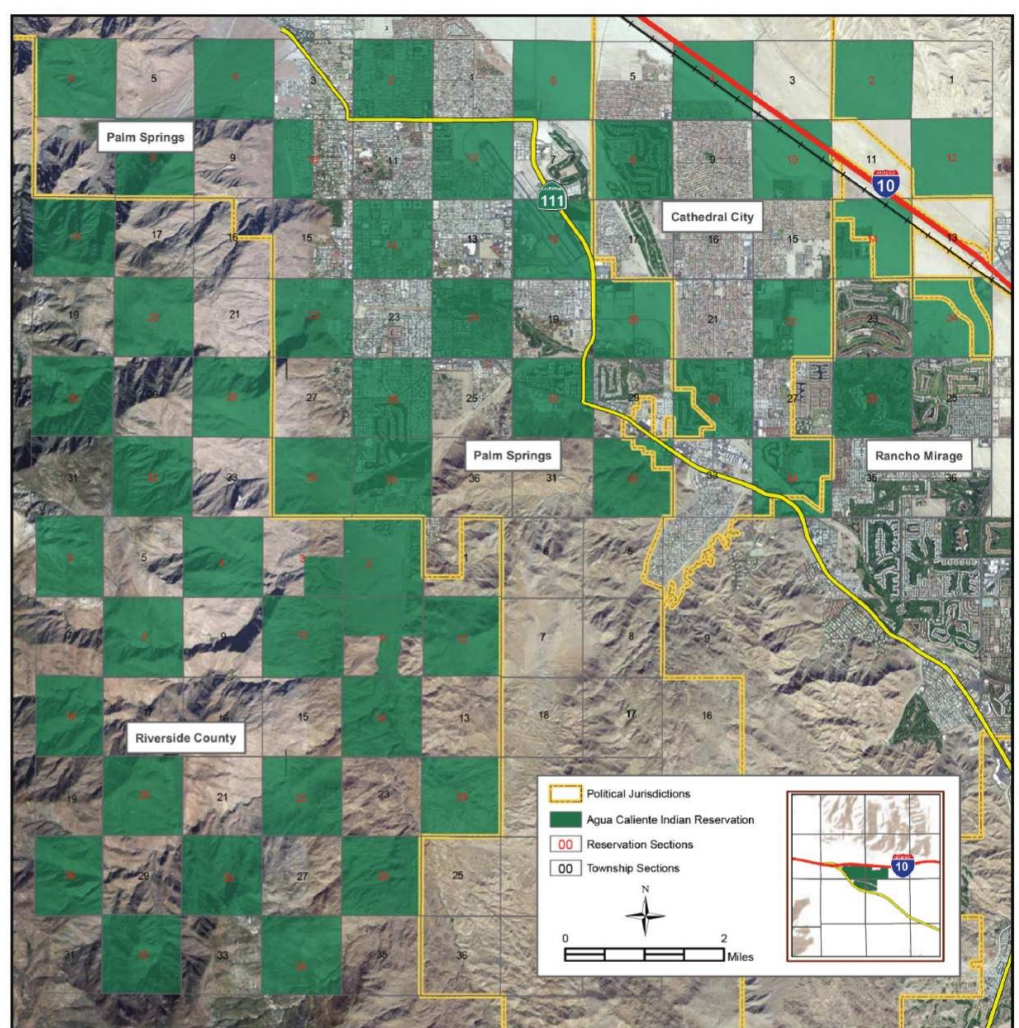
the depth of his love and leadership by transforming himself into a fruiting palm tree that would forever be known to his people. As he stood straight and regal with his final breath, he sprouted bark around his body and leaves from the top of his head. As others came to witness this selfless act couched in one final shape-shift, they took his seeds and spread them throughout the land. That is how the *Washingtonia* came to blanket the desert lands.

gold fields. The Southern Pacific Railroad followed in 1876 as the first steam engine chugged between Los Angeles and Indio. That same year, President Ulysses S. Grant set aside Section 14 — 640 acres now bordered by Sunrise Way (east), Indian Canyon Drive (west), Alejo Road (north), and Ramon Road (south) — as part of an executive order allotting a checkerboard of even-numbered sections (odd numbers were given to the railroad) as the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation.

President Rutherford B. Hayes extended the reservation the following year in 1887 to cover the even-numbered sections in three townships, which comprised some 30,000 acres. Then, on Jan. 12, 1891, the U.S. Congress passed the Mission Indian Relief Act, authorizing allotments from the acreage comprising the Reservation. However, more than 50 years passed before the Secretary of the Interior approved the allotment election — land parcels owned by individual Tribal members. The Equalization Act of Sept. 21, 1959, finalized the individual Indian allotments.

In 1877, the government established reservation boundaries, which left the Cahuilla people throughout the territory with only small portions of their traditional territories.

In 1997, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians and the city of Palm Springs entered into the first land use agreement between a city and a federally recognized tribe ever recorded in the country. On a combined basis, the Tribe and its members currently represent the largest single land owner in Palm Springs. Today,



approximately 31,000 Reservation acres and 7,000 off-Reservation lands make up Agua Caliente land. The Reservation stretches across parts of Riverside County and the cities of Palm Springs, Cathedral City, and Rancho Mirage in a checkerboard pattern of landholdings that includes Tribal trust land, allotted trust land, and fee land.

Additional Cahuilla reservations representing territories include Morongo in the Cabazon and Banning area; Augustine in Coachella;

Cabazon in Indio, Mecca and parts of Coachella; Cahuilla in Anza; Los Coyotes in San Diego County's Warner Springs; Santa Rosa between Pinyon and Idyllwild; Twentynine Palms in the Indio/Coachella and in Twentynine Palms in San Bernardino County; and Torres-Martinez in La Quinta, Mecca, and largely under the Salton Sea.

Regardless of government-mandated reservations, it is the land itself that embraces and holds the story of the Cahuillas. Protecting and conserving these ancestral homelands is

ABOVE: The Agua Caliente Indian Reservation was established in 1876 and expanded in 1877.

paramount in the vitality of the area's indigenous people.

For the Agua Caliente, the surrounding canyons and water sources such as the Agua Caliente Hot Mineral Spring are the foundation upon which the Tribe continues to flourish. "Our land is what we always need to return to and rely on," Patencio says. "If we can preserve the area and preserve



our knowledge of how to utilize the canyons and all their resources, we can sustain ourselves through whatever may come in the future."

This truth became glaringly evident during the Great Depression, Patencio notes, when the income stream afforded by land leases established during the late 1800s dried up and families found themselves returning to traditional means to survive. "At that point, we realized that we had to supplement

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our livelihood with hunting and gathering," he recounts. "This further highlighted the fact that we had to keep ourselves grounded in what was available in the canyons and keep them in their natural state."

Patencio remembers his grandfather's stories of returning to the canyons to hunt in order to provide enough food to feed their families. "For us, it's both a reality check but also almost like a survival strategy," he

ABOVE: Chino Canyon.

OPPOSITE: Agua Caliente Tribal Building opening with Eileen Miguel (under snake), Priscilla Patencio (glasses), Peter Siva (fifth from right), and Anthony "Biff" Andreas (sixth from right).

says, "and with that come all the reasons and all the cultural significance of our canyons. We have to preserve everything that we had before and that we were before — that is where our culture ties itself to a physical location. It's more than just a geographical

area; it becomes something of a cultural heritage site and connects us to everything — our past, where we are today, and who we truly are.

"The Indian Canyons and Tahquitz Canyon are examples of the real world for us," he continues. "Everything else that we've built with the cities that have developed on the Reservation, that's all an artificial world that's been created through waves of different Europeans and lastly California becoming part of the United States. Each wave brought their own idea about the reality they wanted to establish for themselves but none of that was real to us. Only when we can go back into the canyons, do we understand what our real world is like, and how we lived in line with nature, the true reality, and survived for millennia before any of these artificial concepts were created."

Patencio points to designer landscapes laden with non-indigenous plants and large grassy areas in the middle of the desert as examples of manmade "nature."

"We don't have the year-round spring-fed streams and rivers to feed these things



anymore, so we just pump out more water from the ground and we think it's OK, but it's not really living in harmony with the world around us," he explains. "People think that's nature, that's reality, but it's really not.

With feet in two disparate worlds, the Agua Caliente

march ever forward. "There's our outside, interactive life with the prevalent culture or cultures and then there's the internal, inward-looking life as Native Americans where we all connect," Patencio divulges. "When we're together, we're

less individuals than we are an

entity. In this way, we go back hundreds of years knowing that this is who we were then, this is why we did what we did, and this is where and how we learned. This real world of the canyons and birdsongs connects us to both our past and our future." 🍌

PALM SPRINGS AND ITS INCARNATIONS



Since the day the First People made their home near the bubbling Agua Caliente Hot Mineral Spring in what is now downtown Palm Springs, led there by the Horns of the Fox, the Cahuilla have called the area *Séc-he* (sound of boiling water).

Centuries later, Spanish explorers saw the spring and surrounding paradise for the first time. Jose María Estudillo and Brevet Captain José Romero were ordered by the newly minted

Mexican government in 1823 to establish a route from Sonora to Alta California. It is believed that these two men were the first non-Natives to record the existence of Agua Caliente (hot water).

Today, the spring is known as the Agua Caliente Hot Mineral Spring around which the village, then town, then city of Palm Springs blossomed. In the early 1900s, Palm Springs began to establish itself as the world-class tourist destination it is today.