

# Hueneme

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**I**N THIS BRIEF ACCOUNT I wish to propose an etymology for the name Hueneme, which is attached to a point, a canyon, and a town (Port Hueneme) on the Pacific Coast in Ventura County, California. The town gained prominence during World War II when it was selected as the site of the United States Naval Construction Battalion ("Seabees") Center on the West Coast, a situation which still prevails. This etymology is put forth with all the reservations which accompanied that which I suggested for *Malibu*<sup>1</sup> in this journal.

The name is currently pronounced [wai'nimi], which appears to have been its local pronunciation, at least by speakers of English, for the past century. Gudde<sup>2</sup> tells us that the name of the post-office there was written *Wynema* in 1870, the year in which the town was founded. He also tells us that the spelling was changed to its present form in 1874, a change made, I suppose, in order to give the written form of the name a more Spanish appearance. The spelling *Hueneme* – which first occurred as the name which, Gudde also tells us, was applied by James Alden to the point in 1856 – must have originated with speakers of Spanish, and gives evidence of a pronunciation [we'neme] by them. This latter form, then, is the one for which we must seek an origin; the English pronunciation seems to be based upon the written, rather than the spoken, Spanish name.

However, the name Hueneme was not introduced into California by Spaniards. The Indians who lived in this part of the state before the coming of the white man were the Chumash, among whom those who lived in the Oxnard Plain, in the valleys tributary to that plain, and along the seacoasts for some distance to the northwest and southwest from the plain, were speakers of a linguistic subdivision

<sup>1</sup> "On Etymologizing Indian Names," *Names* 5.236–40 (1957).

<sup>2</sup> Erwin G. Gudde, *California Place Names*; revised edition, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles. 1962. p. 139.

of that stock called Ventureño (from San Buenaventura, now Ventura, the headquarters of Spanish and Mexican influence in this region); this language is now extinct. The map in Kroeber's "Handbook,"<sup>3</sup> which shows the geographical distribution of the villages in this part of Chumash territory, indicates that there were two principal clusters of settlement among the Ventureño. Both of these settlements were located on the coast at the mouths of streams and at the edge of the plain, beyond which the mountains come down to the sea. The one settlement at the northwest corner of the plain, near the mouth of the Ventura River, supported several villages the names of which are known; it later attracted the Spanish missionaries who established a mission there. At the southeastern end of the plain, near where Calleguas Creek reaches the ocean at Point Mugu and Mugu Lagoon, there was a complex of at least three villages, as we learn from Kroeber's map. The antiquity of settlement in this latter region, now the site of the Pacific Missile Range, appears to be confirmed by the recording of the name Mugu in 1542; it may be, says Gudde,<sup>4</sup> "the oldest recorded California name still in existence." Along the some twenty-odd miles of Pacific shore between these two clusters of aboriginal occupation Kroeber's map gives the names of but two villages, one of which was situated at the mouth of the Santa Clara River; the other lay near the swampy natural harbor now known as Port Hueneme. There is something curious, however, about this latter "village": its name does not occur in the list supplied by Engelhardt<sup>5</sup> of those inhabited sites which supplied neophytes to the mission some twelve or fifteen miles away. Any permanent settlement is of course dependent upon a supply of fresh water, but whether or not this harbor had such a supply I cannot say. It may be that the Chumash source of *Hueneme* was the name of an uninhabited place.

Two variants of this name occur in the original accounts accessible to me. Kroeber's map shows *Wene'me*; his text<sup>6</sup> reads as follows:

<sup>3</sup> A. L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*; California Book Co., Ltd., Berkeley. 1953. p. 526.

<sup>4</sup> Gudde, op.cit., p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M., *San Buenaventura, The Mission by the Sea*; Santa Barbara, Calif. 1930. pp. 165-6.

<sup>6</sup> A. L. Kroeber, *California Place Names of Indian Origin*; University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, 12.43 (1916). The apostrophe supposedly symbolizes glottalization, though that is not made explicit.

“Hueneme, in Ventura County, is originally a Chumashan place name, Wene’me or Wene’mu.” All other sources give only the form ending in *-u*: on p. 195 Henshaw<sup>7</sup> has *Wenemu* – the spelling of Juan Pico, his literate native informant – and then *we-né-mu*, his own recording (made about 1884) of that informant’s pronunciation; and on p. 198 of the same work the form *wen-ne-mu* is given as the source of Spanish Hueneme. In the recent publication<sup>8</sup> by Thomas Blackburn of George Henley’s manuscript account of his work (done in 1913–14) with one of the few remaining speakers of Ventureño, we find “*Hue né mu – Hueneme.*” One searching for an etymology of the aboriginal name underlying modern Hueneme, therefore, may confidently operate with Chumash *we'nemu*.<sup>9</sup>

It may be well to inform (or remind) the reader at this point that we have in print neither a grammar nor a dictionary of any Chumash language. The published materials consist of several more or less satisfactorily recorded word lists, and a very few badly written texts. What I have to say here about this name is based in part on field work I have carried on over many years with the only surviving speaker of the closely related, but distinct, Chumash language once spoken along the coast to the west of Ventureño, the tongue of the Santa Barbara region.

In Barbareño Chumash there is a suffix *-mu* with the meaning “a place where something is done, where something is found.” I will not

<sup>7</sup> R. F. Heizer, editor, *The Mission Indian Vocabularies of H. W. Henshaw*; California Indian Linguistic Records, Anthropological Records 15:2, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Blackburn, “A Manuscript Account of the Ventureño Chumash,” *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey*; Department of Anthropology-Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1963. Pp. 139–58.

<sup>9</sup> Among the names of Chumash villages that were written down a significant number end in *-mu*: cf., e.g., the lists in Henshaw (op.cit., pp. 194–200), Kroeber’s map, the lists in Engelhardt’s various accounts of the separate missions, and in C. Hart Merriam, *Studies of California Indians*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955, pp. 191–209. Since this is so, one wonders if the change from a Ventureño [we<sup>h</sup>nemu] to [we’neme] was not made by Spanish speakers after the name had been borrowed, and whether Kroeber’s form *Wene’me* (recorded in the early years of the twentieth century) may not simply be an “Indianization” of the current Spanish form by his informant who had forgotten the native form. There are other indications of an inclination toward what I may call vowel harmony in the place-names of Spanish California, which I will study when the opportunity offers itself.

undertake to prove the existence of this suffix in the Ventureño language, although there are data which can be interpreted in this way. We therefore make a cut *wene-mu*. The information which suggests where to look for an etymon of the segment *wene-* was supplied by Candalaria Valenzuela, the Ventureño Indian who was George Henley's informant in 1913 when she gave (loc. cit.) a meaning for *Hue né mu* – Hueneme: "a half-way place, for rest." The reader is again reminded that modern Hueneme lies some ten miles or so along the coast from Point Mugu, and perhaps twelve to fourteen miles southeast of the mouth of the Ventura River, roughly halfway, that is, between the two principal centers of Ventureño coastal settlement. So much for an explanation of the first part of the informant's statement.

Again in Barbareño Chumash the verb meaning "to sleep" has the shape /weʔ/ or /weʔ̃/, depending upon the construction in which the word appears. (The symbol ʔ is used for the glottal stop and ʔ̃ for an *n* accompanied by glottal closure, articulations which are meaningfully distinctive in the language, i.e., "phonemic.") The Ventureño for "to sleep" was cognate with this form: Kroeber<sup>10</sup> gives the San Buenaventura word for "to sleep" as *ukwe*; Pinart<sup>11</sup> supplies *kue* for the same language and in the same sense (both of which are really inflected forms signifying, 'I sleep'); and Seán,<sup>12</sup> in an unpublished text of about 1810, translates Spanish *has dormido*, "did you sleep?" by Ventureño *puhé*, i.e., presumably, something like [p-weʔ] in which the *p-* is the marker of the second person singular.

We can then be reasonably sure of the following: the Ventureño verb meaning "to sleep, to take a rest" was something like [weʔ] alternating with [weʔ̃]; the language had a locative suffix *-mu* and a derivational pattern, according to which a formation *weʔ̃ne-mu* "place where one sleeps or rests" does no violence to the little we know of the language; and there was a place-name *we'nemu* defined

<sup>10</sup> A. L. Kroeber, *The Chumash and Costanoan Languages*; UCPAAE 9.267 (1910).

<sup>11</sup> R. F. Heizer, editor, *The Mission Indian Vocabularies of Alphonse Pinart*; California Indian Linguistic Records, Anthropological Records 15:1, University of California Press, 1952. p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> I expect to publish this text in the near future. It is a *Confesionario*, or handbook for confessors, in the handwriting of José Seán, who was missionary at San Buenaventura from 1797 to 1823. The form in question occurs on its page 7a.

by a native informant as meaning "a place for rest." What I have done here is to combine stray bits of information into a hypothesis which does not, I hope, violate any of the evidence which suggests an etymology for a place-name which heretofore lacked one. Whether or not the theory is correct, it will stand until a better one replaces it.

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