

California Heritage Commission

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Att: Dave Singleton

Recently, I received a call from Tom Gates of the California Energy Commission. This call was in regards to the beliefs of the Quechan and Kamia people of Imperial Valley and why Obsidian Butte was important to them. I told him that I would write a letter on this subject but I would not send it to him. I told him that I would send this letter to you at the Heritage Commission of California. I have heard of this subject but I had never responded due to the fact that I had not made the connection between the Quechan and Kamia beliefs but both are about the same. And they come from the same language group, the Hoka. I believe Obsidian Butte is the remains of a very powerful snake known to the Kamia as Arse-weeuv. The snake was created in anger accidentally and therefore very dangerous. As a child I grew up in a Kamia family whose primary language was the Kamia dialect. I heard many stories and songs that told of this powerful snake. My grandmother's family originally came from New River in Imperial County. My grandmother's first cousin was married to a man named Narpia who was an informant to Gifford an anthropologist who wrote a book entitled "The Kamia of Imperial Valley". In this book it mentions a giant white snake with dots that was the repository of knowledge and it lived in the ocean. During the time of the Kurok ceremony, this snake went underground and emerged at the site where Obsidian Butte stands in Imperial County. This snake was burned into ashes at the Kuruk ceremony and all the knowledge within the snake went into the mountains in smoke. The snakes in the Kamia and Quechan belief is a very long story when both stories are connected and so I believe that Obsidian Butte is a sacred place and should be left alone.

Preston J. Arrow-Weed

Kamia/Quechan Singer