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Stone Pipes and Cloud Blowers from San Clemente Island

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Among the more significant ritual items in California archaeology are tubular stone pipes and the so-called cloud blowers. The latter are stone tubes with a series of holes; in some cases resembling a musical instrument of some kind; however, they are shaman's paraphernalia and were used by blowing smoke through them. Several items in this class were recovered in the San Clemente excavations and they are described here.

It is not clear that all of the items identified as "pipes" were actually smoked. Stone tubes may have been part of shaman's curing implements, used to suck out (magically) the objects causing illness. Most of the archaeological objects identified as pipes in California show no evidence of having been smoked. Some do, however, and ethnohistoric evidence indicates that the plant used was some variety of *Nicotiana* sp., or wild tobacco. The plants grow widely in southern California and are also found on most of the islands but there is no direct evidence that any of the San Clemente specimens were smoked.

Ledge Site

Fragments of three tubular pipes were found at Ledge and two were associated with pit features (Fig. 17.1a). The age is protohistoric, possibly as recent as the Mission Period. One was broken into two pieces, while eight additional fragments represent at least two more pipes. These are the standard Late Period sub-

conical pipes of southern California which are also found in central California. They probably had bird bone stems when complete. A favored material was a red siltstone which was used also for pipes on other islands and the mainland. The source of this stone is not known.

In 1984, one of the cache pits at Ledge contained a tubular pipe, the bird bone mouthpiece with asphaltum on one end, three pieces of deer antler, and *Olivella* shell beads (Fig. 17.2). (This was uncovered by a student on her first excavation, in her first unit.)



Fig. 17.1. a. (top) Red siltstone pipe from Ledge Site, 8.4 cm long, b. (bottom) Green steatite pipe from Eel Point Site, 8.7 cm long.



Fig. 17.2. Cache pit with pipe (upper right), antler pieces, and shell beads at the Ledge Site.

Eel Point C

Eel Point C yielded fragments of three steatite tubular pipes. All were broken as offerings. The most complete example (with Burials 2 and 4) is about half complete and seven fragments were found.

Also from this site are two cloud blowers of gray steatite. One, with Burial 9, is about 80 percent complete and is in four fragments. The other is in eight pieces, representing only about 20 percent of the complete artifact (Fig. 17.3 a and b). One of the fragments was found with the other cloud blower; they are made of the same material and are closely similar. The other seven fragments were widely scattered over Units 3, 4, and 4A. It is possible that both cloud blowers were originally deposited with Burial 9 and the pieces were scattered when later graves were dug into the site.

Table 17.1 gives the provenience and measurements of the San Clement specimens. Similar cloud blowers, but with more holes, are on exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, the Southwest Museum (Fig. 17.3c and d), the State Indian Museum in Sacramento, and the Santa Barbara Museum. These are without provenience and dating, so the ones at Eel Point C are very important in providing a context of 2000-3000 years ago for this relatively rare artifact type. Orr (1968) does not mention cloud blowers from his extensive work on Santa Rosa Island.



Fig. 17.3. Tubular pipes from the southern islands. a.(top) Perforated steatite tube, from Eel Point Site, 20 centimeters, b.(second from top) Perforated steatite tube fragments, from Eel Point Site, c.(third from top) Perforated steatite tube, from LA County Natural History Museum and attributed to San Clemente Island, 12.5 centimeters, d.(bottom) Perforated steatite tube, from Southwest Museum and attributed to Santa Catalina Island, 25 centimeters.

Table 17.1. Pipes and Cloud Blowers, San Clemente Island.

| Area | Depth (cm) | Associations | Shape | Material | Length (cm) | Diameter (cm) | Small end diameter (cm) | Perf. diameter (cm) | Fig. |
|-----------|------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------|
| Ledge | | | | | | | | | |
| P-30 | 30-60 | Feature 4 | Tubular pipe* | red siltstone | 8.4 | 2.9 | 1.3 | 0.7-1.3 | 17.1 a |
| Eel Pt. C | | | | | | | | | |
| 2C | 140-205 | Burials 2 & 4 | Tubular pipe** | steatite | 8.7 | 2.4 | 1.6 | 1.6-1.0 | 17.1 b |
| 4A | 170-180 | Burial 9*** | Cloud blower | steatite | 20 | 4.9 | 4.3 | 2.1-1.7 | 17.3 a |
| 4**** | 140-160 | | Cloud blower | steatite | 15.0+ | 4.9 | 4.6 | 2.4 | 17.3 b |

Notes:

* The Ledge pipe was in a cache pit that also included another unrelated pipe fragment, a *Haliotis* dish, and *Olivella* disc beads. Fragments of two additional pipes were found at Ledge, but they were too small to reconstruct the whole specimens.

** The Eel Point C pipe was with a mixed burial that also contained pieces of whale bone, a shell fishhook, bone whistle, and a quartz crystal. Fragments of two additional pipes were found at Eel Point C, but they were too small to reconstruct the whole specimen.

*** The Burial 9 cloud blower was found in a red-stained sand lens with bones from human hands, 23 quartz fragments, a stone bowl fragment, stone and shell beads, and ochre and asphaltum fragments. Also associated was one piece of the Unit 4 cloud blower.

**** The Unit 4 cloud blower was in small pieces widely scattered. Only about 20 per cent of the complete specimen was recovered.