Stone Quarrying by the California Indians

The materials used by the California Indians were mainly stone, wood, bone, pottery, and skin.

The most important function of their quarries was to supply materials for the implements and tools to be used to hunt (stone points for war or hunting weapons, mortars or metates for grinding seeds, sling stones, chipped knives for meat cutting), or to main-tain their necessities such as house-building, skin-dressing, clothing, or decorative or ceremonial objects such as beds.

Generally, stone was quarried locally; but the California Indians traded with neighboring and dis-tant Indian tribes for important sources for stone materials not available in their own area.

Researchers have concluded that there was no private, individual ownership of the California Indian quarry sites. The stone resources belonged to the group. Because of this the quarries belonged to all tribal members. Some tribal members developed abilities to produce finished or manufactured articles from a particular stone.

The Indians on the Coastal Ranges of California were known to have used stone the earliest when they quarried obsidian, soapstone, red ochre, and chert in Sonoma County and red ochre and schist in Contra Costa County.

Deposits of serpentine (verde antique) and soapstone (steatite) have been quarried on Santa Catalina Island since the Indians lived there.

Stone & California Mission Construction

The most prevalent types of construction of the Spanish missions in California were the use of adobe bricks, wood, and a masonry technology brought from Spain and Mexico. Experienced masons and laborers were brought from Mexico and Spain to train and work with the Indians to build stone columns, foundations, trim, aqueducts, lavanderías, fountains, some ranch buildings during the late 1700s, etc. More substantial buildings were constructed of stone from local quarries, such as Mission San Juan Capistrano’s “Great Stone Church.”

Gargoyle Waterspout in the Mission San Luis Rey de Francia Lavandería, photo by Nicole McCleaf

Mission San Miguel Arcángel, photo by E. Collacott


History of Quarrying in California from the California Indians up to Present Time


Peggy B. & Patrick Perazzo
email: pbperazzo@comcast.net
phone: 925-754-8460

Stone Quarries & Beyond:
Quarry Workers – Stone Cutters & Stone Carvers
- Historical Dealers of Stone & the Finished Products
http://quarriesandbeyond.org/

History of California Stone Quarries
Some California Stone Quarries
By Peggy B. Perazzo

Below are photographs of some of the California quarries that supplied dimension stone. A few of them are still active. You can learn more about California quarries and view photographs in the California state section of our web site.
http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/california.html

Colusa Sandstone Quarry ca early 1900s (left)
Brownstone Quarry (aka Colusa quarry) 2006 (right)

Raymond/ Knowles Quarry, “Sierra White,” Madera County (below & lower right) & Wagon hauling Academy Black Granite, Fresno County (left)

McGilvray Granite Quarry & Works (left 1900s)
Folsom Prison Quarry Sacramento Co. (late 1800s)
Folsom State Prison & Power House (late 1800s)

Sespe Canyon Ventura County
Upper story of the Digg’s building in Woodland built of Ventura Co. Sandstone

Columbia Marble Quarry & Works Tuolumne County

Granite Quarry, Corona Riverside Co. (ca 1904)
Shed & Yard at Rocky Pt. Granite Quarry, Tulare Co.

Eureka Slate Quarry & Works, Slatington, El Dorado County
Riebeckite rhyolite in the Valley of the Moon flagstone quarry, Sonoma Co.

F.W. Aggregates dolomite, quarry, Inyo County
Modern transportation for desert & mountains (ca 1919)