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Early Hunter-Gatherers of the California Coast. Jon M. Erlandson Plenum Press, New York, 1994. xiii + 336 pp., figures, tables, references, index. \$45.00 (cloth).

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Abstract

REVIEWS AND BOOK NOTES

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descriptive report. The stage is set for a comprehensive human osteological analysis and an integrative treatment of the mortuary and habitation aspects of the site. A comparison of pre-cemetery, cemetery, and post-

theory in his introduction, Erlandson unabashedly champions a cultural ecological approach to the study of California coastal middens, and his research is heavily focused on environmental reconstruction and subsis-

cemetery subsistence and cultural organization is needed. If and when such analyses are undertaken and reported, then the Loma Sandia site will have lived up to its potential.

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In California midden research, with its long history of serious scholarship, Jon Erlandson's book is a major landmark. This is the first time an international publisher has seen fit to print primary data from a California investigation, and it is to Erlandson's credit that he was able to place his study into a broad theoretical context that has attracted interest from afar. This volume also marks a turning point in the California cultural resources management (CRM) literature. Much of the information presented was generated through CRM projects, particularly excavations associated with construction of oil and gas pipelines in the Santa Barbara area. California archaeology has struggled with the explosive growth of CRM for nearly 30 years, particularly with the rapid accumulation of unsynthesized and unfocused gray literature. This monograph demonstrates a coming of age, if not respectability, in this arena.

The book is a revision of Erlandson's 1988 doctoral dissertation, in which he presented excavation results from three early Holocene shell middens on the northern coast of Santa Barbara County. These site reports remain at the core of the present volume, although with a greatly expanded theoretical context, and geographic coverage widened to encompass the entire California shoreline. The book includes 10 chapters, beginning with an excellent theoretical introduction, followed by thorough descriptions of local environment (chapter 2), cultural historical background (chapter 3), and field and analytical methods (chapter 4). Chapters 5–7 present basic site information, which is synthesized in chapter 8. Chapter 9 is a thorough summary of all known California coastal sites (as of ca. 1993) dating from ca.

His field and analytical approach epitomizes what is sometimes referred to by practitioners as "low impact/high resolution archaeology," in which emphasis is placed on relatively small excavation samples, small mesh (1/8" and 1/16") processing, water-screening, laboratory sorting, and intensive, fine-grained post-field analysis, supported with ample input from specialists. Inferences developed from this approach demonstrate its effectiveness, particularly with respect to paleoenvironmental reconstruction, but the diminutive size of the samples subjected to this fine-grained analysis cannot be entirely overlooked. Total excavation volume from two of the three sites combined was less than 7.0 m³, while the number of mammal elements identified to species for the entire project (excluding pocket gopher and mice) was 19. Certainly, constraints imposed by the CRM context of the studies, as well as problems with preservation and physical access (one site consisted only of a thin band of midden exposed in a cut beneath a thick band of alluvium) contributed to these low numbers, but they also represent the inevitable downside of highly intensive analysis.

At the heart of the study is an attempt to use midden constituents to evaluate diet and settlement. Evaluating faunal constituents with strict attention to mesh size (a theme repeated throughout the volume), Erlandson employs bone/shell to meat ratios to conclude that the inhabitants of all three sites not only used marine resources, but obtained a majority of their animal foods from the sea. Shellfish was the primary faunal commodity. He further argues, based on seasonality studies, that the sites were part of a semisedentary settlement system. Erlandson acknowledges the many pitfalls associated with dietary inferences based on midden constituents, and he cannot be faulted for his rigorous attempt to reach quantified conclusions, but there is some room to question the results of these calculations as accurate reflections of diet. There are many ways to convert midden data into dietary indices, and different approaches yield very different results. Strict use of bone:meat ratios tends to underestimate the contribution of large animals that were frequently subjected to field butchering. When minimum numbers of individuals (MNIs) are used for meat weight derivations, however, the dietary contribution of large vertebrates is seen to be much greater. Analysis based on MNIs is, of course, not

8000–5500 B.C. This combination of site data and broad-based overview provides an effective backdrop for the discussion of general issues in chapter 10.

Although he mentions both optimization and risk

without its own problems, but the point here is not to endorse one method over the other, but rather to invoke caution about hard and fast dietary models based on midden calculations, particularly those involving small

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