

THE MOUNTAIN THAT WEEPS

Directed by Bradley Munoa

Pechanga Creative Studios, 2019, 70 minutes

Reviewed by **Jeanne Ferris**

THIS INDIE DOCUMENTARY OPENS WITH A RECITATION OF THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE at a Riverside County Board of Supervisors hearing in 2005. The bridging shots of heated courtroom dialogue reveal a disputatious land-use courtroom battle. The title alone is compelling, and the subject matter is my personal favorite: underdogs versus a giant, wealthy corporation.

Granite Construction Company (GCC), a publicly held company with fifty-four quarries in the West, proposed a seventy-five-year open-pit mining project on Temecula's southern border at the nexus of Wexéwxi Pu'éska, now known as Pu'éska Mountain.

Pu'éska “translates to ‘where the rocks cry’ because it was there that the rocks wept after Wuyoót, Káamalam’s first leader, died and the first funeral in history was held,” according to the film’s website.

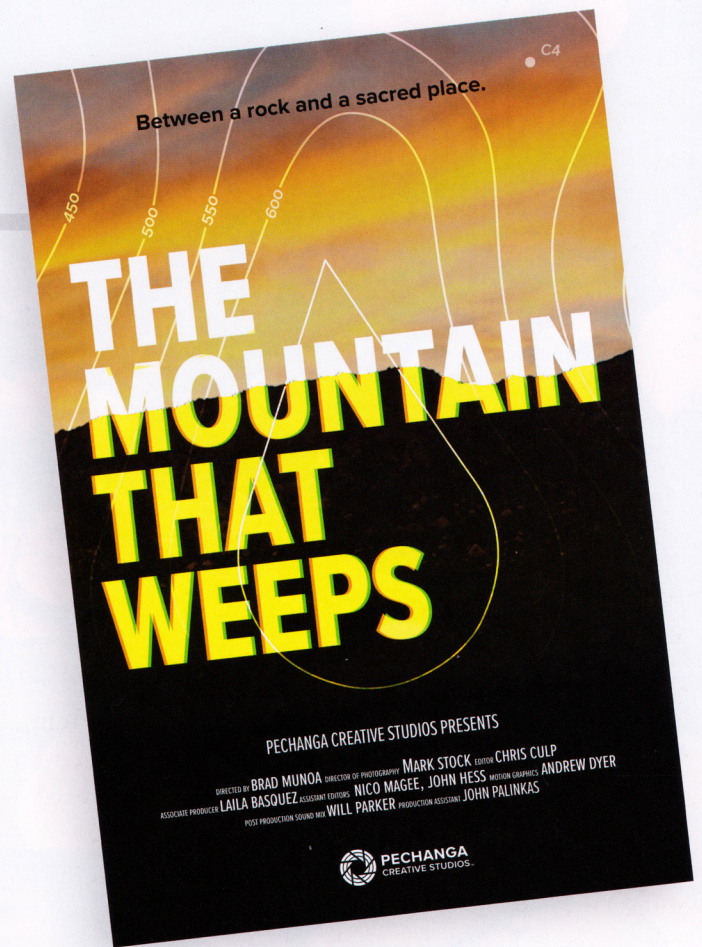
This area remains sacred and vital to the Payómkawichum (People of the West), better known as the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians. They are one of seven Luiseño bands: Pechanga, Pauma, Pala, Rincon, San Luis Rey, La Jolla, and Soboba.

Liberty Quarry would not only unequivocally destroy the Luiseño’s sustained spiritual culture of more than ten thousand years but also its revered acorn-producing oak trees, which are also thousands of years old. For-profit industries are notorious for wreaking havoc long after their consumption, leaving behind erased landscapes and poisoned waters.

The City of Temecula, local grassroots group Save Our Southwest Hills, and the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve created a coalition to stop GCC. When Pechanga and the other six bands formally united with the non-Native communities in the legal fight, their unprecedented alliance produced visceral expressions, captured in close-ups.

The Mountain That Weeps is an enlightening example of forgiveness and gratitude. Pechanga’s duly elected chairman Mark Macarro and his council’s testimonies of cultural trauma and religious violations were inspirational and eloquent.

The editing and composition of cross-cutting shots between plaintiffs, defendants, discovery phase, pleadings, news footage, interviews with professionals, and academia were coherent and relatable. The audio was so clear; songbirds in the background



sounded like real life. The narrator kept a quick pace while the score seemed generic—royalty-free computer-generated music, perhaps?

Aerial footage of the area supported by renderings, maps, and photographs lent an eagle’s perspective of the far-reaching effect of potential destruction regarding clean air, wildlife corridors, and open spaces.

The disingenuous testimonies of people hired by GCC were straight out of Central Casting. Denial of an attempted bid for annexation by the ad-hoc coalition led to shocked responses. Pechanga Cultural Coordinator Paul Macarro’s final plea, “Do not let them tell you our history because they don’t know [it],” fell on deaf ears.

GCC won its appeal in 2012 with a verbose yet vague 8,500-page environmental impact report. It included hydrological information that was purposefully inadequate.

The shattering final verdict from judge (a shallow congressional candidate) evoked genuine outrage. You can’t make up this plot twist—unless you write Hollywood horror. Fortunately for Wexéwxi Pu'éska and the Payómkawichum, life imitated art the right way—with tears of joy.

Spoiler alert: How the underdogs won is a satisfying power play and worth a tub of buttered popcorn.

Watch the film online at www.mountainthatweeps.com.