

**SEARCHING FOR GUASPET:  
A MISSION PERIOD RANCHERIA IN WEST LOS ANGELES**

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*Recent archival research along Santa Monica Bay has revealed the presence of a Gabrielino/Tongva settlement named Guaspet in the Ballona Wetlands, which was previously only suspected to have existed. In this paper, we review Spanish records from the Mission San Gabriel, the Pueblo of Los Angeles, and later Mexican civil records, which provide insights into the occupation of this Native American rancheria and the interactions of its residents with Spanish missionaries and ranchers.*

The Ballona is a drowned river valley in west Los Angeles, sandwiched along the Santa Monica Bay between the Santa Monica Mountains and the Palos Verdes peninsula (Figure 1). Ballona and Centinela creeks, which feed the Ballona wetlands, drain an approximately 110-mi.<sup>2</sup> area, bounded by the Westchester Bluffs and the Baldwin and Beverly Hills. During much of the Holocene and, significantly, when the Spanish first arrived in the region, Ballona Creek captured the flow of the much larger Los Angeles River.

Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI) has conducted archaeological surveys and excavations in the Ballona since 1989 (e.g., Altschul et al. 1991). A major part of our research during this time has involved the debate over Mission-period occupation of the area by the Gabrielino (Altschul et al. 2003). Initially, interest in this occupation focused on the village of Sa'angna. Alfred Kroeber (1925) was the first to apply the Gabrielino name of Sa'an to the area. Despite an intensive search by later researchers, no mention of Sa'angna was found in historical records. To the contrary, research by Chester King and John Johnson (King 1994, 2004; King and Johnson 1999) on Chumash and Gabrielino placenames and by William McCawley (1996) in his study of the Gabrielino have turned our attention to the rancheria of Guaspet (see also Van Horn and White 1997). In this paper, we focus on the preliminary results of our research on Guaspet. We present a view of Guaspet from three roughly contemporaneous historical perspectives, that of the mission, the pueblo, and the rancho. The records of these three institutions, reflecting the disparate needs and distinct orientation of each, constitute the basic threads of our story.

Who were the people of Guaspet and where was their settlement? The exploration of these questions begins with the hunt for Guaspet in mission records.

**THE MISSION PERSPECTIVE**

For the people of Guaspet, the importance of the founding of Mission San Gabriel cannot be overstated. The mission fathers literally gave life to the former inhabitants of this place by writing their names and the name of their rancheria on paper. No Mission-period map pinpointing the location of Guaspet has yet come to light. The two maps from that era published by Geiger in 1971 that do show Indian rancherias do not include Guaspet. Chester King (2004:Figure 2), however, has recently reconstructed the approximate locations of many of the rancherias documented in mission records, based upon analysis of marriage ties and other data. We have taken King's reconstruction of approximate rancheria locations and ethnic boundaries and redrawn his figure, using a base map of the Los Angeles Basin (Figure 2). King located Guaspet in the Ballona near the mouth of Ballona Creek, which, as we said earlier, carried the flow of the Los Angeles River during the early Historical period.

To date, the best and most consistent documentary evidence available for the existence of Guaspet derives from Mission San Gabriel records. For this study, two sources were used for mission records: the Early California Population Project database (ECP) housed at the Huntington Library and

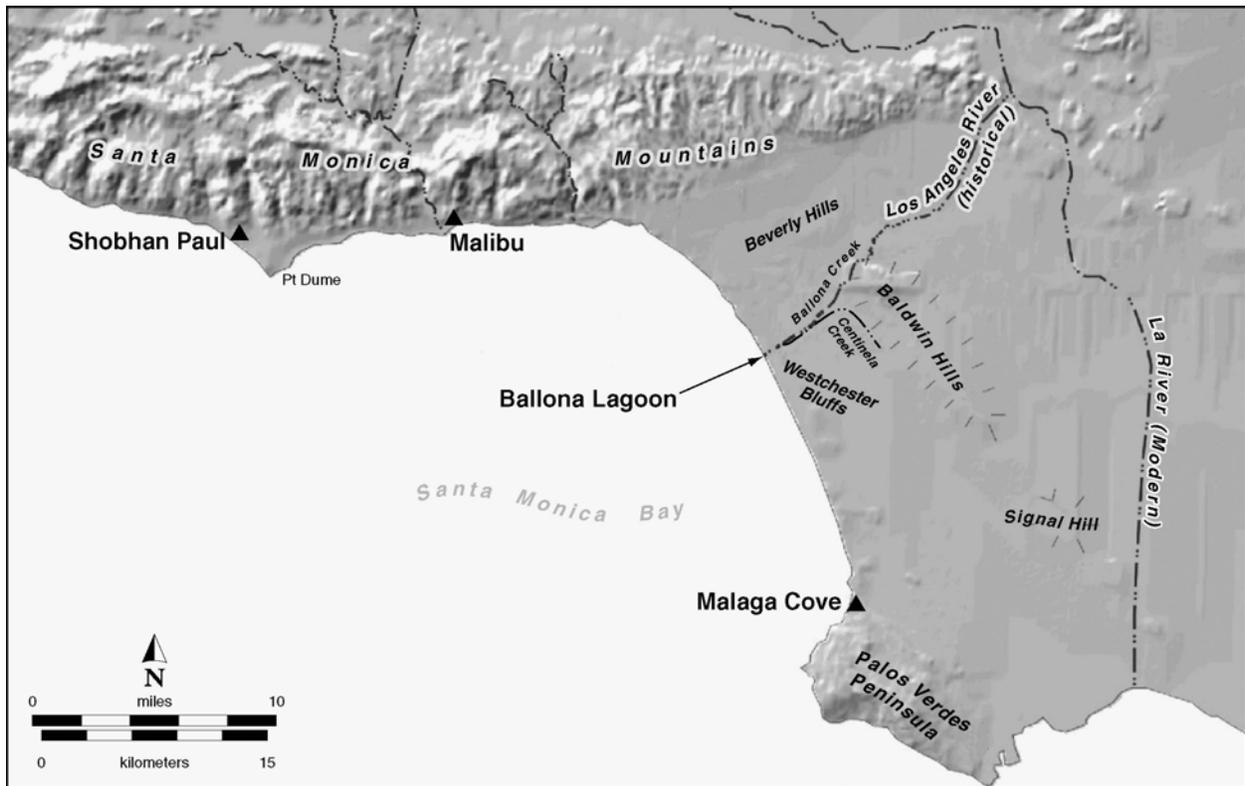


Figure 1. Location of the Ballona Lagoon, along Santa Monica Bay, southern California.

available on-line (<http://www.huntington.org/Information/ECPPmain.htm>), and Temple's (1962) microfilmed *Extracts of Church Records from Mission San Gabriel*. These documents immediately revealed a significant problem: the variable spelling of the name Guaspét. The only solution has been to identify likely spellings, establish best-estimate criteria, and sort the entries using them. In addition, the mission records include many references to a second rancharia with a very similar name, most consistently written with a double-a (as in the rancharia name "Guaaschna"). Both marriage and death records from Mission San Gabriel (as reproduced in the ECPP database) were used to locate natives claiming Guaspét as home and to confirm spellings and family names. In addition, we have identified several baptisms of Guaspét natives from Mission San Fernando records, also available on the ECPP.

For many individuals, going to Mission San Gabriel to be baptized meant leaving their village never to return, as many died shortly after arrival. Some may have returned in death to be buried in the Ballona; however, only two baptized persons were recorded to have been buried at Guaspét. Joseph (SG Bp 1953), an infant baptized in 1790, is unique in being the only person listed as having been born, baptized, and buried at Guaspét. In addition, a roughly translated death record reads, "we have learned of the death of an adult Indian woman, Dalmacia [SG Bp 3432], who died in her rancharia of Guahaspét."

The preliminary total of 115 baptized individuals from Guaspét represents one of the largest groups recruited by Mission San Gabriel, based on ECPP data. A preliminary total of 193 people, including subsequent generations of people originally from Guaspét, have been identified in mission records. Careful examination of baptismal, marriage, and death records on the ECPP have preliminarily identified 149 people from Guaspét and subsequent generations who were part of a total of 32 distinct families, as well as an additional 44 individuals without offspring. This number was arrived at by following out generations of individuals -- that is, in some cases the rancharia of a gentile parent was



Figure 2. Approximate locations of Native American rancherias documented in mission records (rancheria locations and ethnic boundaries adapted from King 2004:Figure 2).

listed, which confirmed that child’s origin in Guaspét. Connections between parents and other rancherias among what King calls the western Gabrielino place the rancheria in the general locality of the Ballona. Of note are names of spouses from the nearby rancherias of Comicraibit and Jautibit, located by King (2004:Figure 2) between the pueblo and Santa Monica Bay (see Figure 2). Somewhat later in time, marriage partners came from slightly more distant settlements, such as Pimubít, identified as Catalina Island, and Soabit, located near San Pedro.

The largest family from Guaspét recorded at Mission San Gabriel contained 14 members over three generations. This family was founded by Cristoval (native name Sucaraguit) (SG Bp 3966) (Figure 3), who was likely born at Guaspét ca. 1775 and was 30 years old when baptized on April 19, 1805. His wife, Christovala (SG Bp. 3981), was a native of Pimubít and about 10 years younger than Cristoval. Between 1804 and 1814, they had six children who were baptized. Their two oldest boys, Perfecto (SG Bp 3744) and Cristoval (SG Bp 3974), were also likely born at Guaspét, but soon afterwards the family moved to the mission, as the next four children list “Mision” as their origin. The father Cristoval died at age 44 in 1819, after which Christovala remarried and subsequently died in 1828.

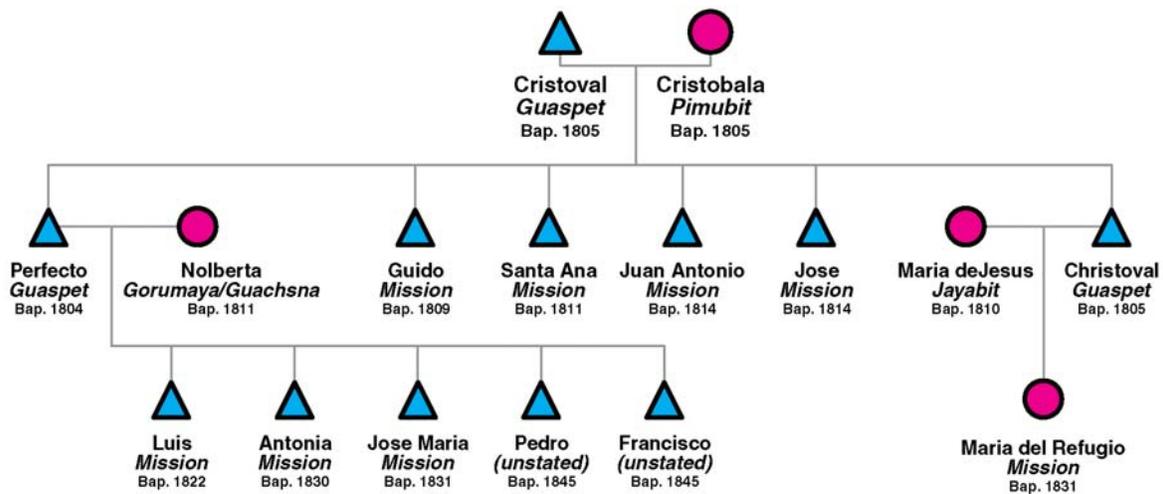


Figure 3. Example of one family from Guaspets documented in Mission San Gabriel baptismal, marriage, and death records, as available through the Early California Population Project.

In 1820, Perfecto married Nolberta (SG Bp 5053), daughter of a leader (*tomeamor*) from Gorumuya, a village reportedly located in the San Bernardino area (King 2004:Figure 2). It appears that Perfecto and Nolberta moved from the mission to the San Bernardino area and had five baptized sons between 1822 and 1845. The other older son, Cristoval, married Maria de Jesus (SG Bp 4527) from Jayabit (or the mission) in 1825, and one son was born and baptized in 1831, the same year Maria died.

Analysis of the preliminary total of 32 families from Guaspets illustrates the changing origins from native rancherias in early generations to the mission in later ones. The majority of baptisms of people from Guaspets were apparently conducted at the “yglesia” or church of Mission San Gabriel. Beginning in 1803, baptisms of individuals were recorded in clusters; that is, several people from Guaspets were baptized on the same date. Perhaps this is indicative of active missionary recruitment of gentiles from specific rancherias, as discussed by King (2004). To date, however, no mission document has been found that specifically mentions recruitment at Guaspets or any direct contact between the padres and this rancheria.

The baptisms of 10 other individuals claiming Guaspets as their place of origin were conducted at or near the pueblo. Under closer scrutiny, we find that four of these baptisms actually took place at the rancheria immediately adjacent to the town (presumably Yangna or Yabit). These baptisms could represent relocated Guaspets people (or their offspring), who had become part of the labor force residing at Yangna. Through studying the Mission San Gabriel records on the ECPP, it is clear that there were Gabrielino from numerous rancherias that were baptized at Yangna.

These baptismal records offer insight not only into the baptized individuals from Guaspets, but also their gentile parents, who never accepted Catholicism themselves. In this way, the roster of rancheria residents is significantly augmented. There is also a clear pattern, at least initially, of taking gravely ill children to a church or mission for baptism, as evidenced by close dates between baptism and death and by notes concerning the recipient’s condition, such as “in danger of death” (*articulo de muerto*).

Hugo Reid’s 1852 description of recruitment suggests gentiles were herded, sometimes bound, from their rancherias into the mission (Heizer 1968). Englehardt (1927), however, disputed claims that force was ever used to recruit neophytes. This clearly was the case in the forced roundup of Serrano and Cahuilla groups around 1811 (Bean and Vane 1995). Nevertheless, no similar report of force being used

to bring in the natives of Guaspet has been found to date, yet some gathering of adult men from Guaspet for baptism in San Gabriel appears to have taken place during 1804 and 1805. We can only speculate on what inducement was used to bring them into the fold. Randy Milliken (1995), Steve Hackel (2005), and Larson et al. (1994) have each suggested that gentiles were drawn to the mission by desperation resulting from the environmental devastation caused by the rapidly increasing herds of the missions and pueblo, and the replacement of native plants by introduced crops and associated weeds. Although this hypothesis does not account for all recruitment in the region, it does have some appeal for explaining the recruitment of people from Guaspet, at least from a perspective on Mission-period documents. Early mission maps published in Geiger (1971) suggest that the padres had little contact with natives west of the pueblo and focused their recruitment on rancherías to the north, south, and east. As we discuss below, it was the ranchers who interacted with natives in the western rancherías. In addition, recruitment of adults from Guaspet and neighboring rancherías began once the pueblo's herds became established in the area. Fear of death may have inspired the early recruitment of infants and children, but adults began coming to the pueblo and mission only after vast herds of cattle, sheep, and horses began to spread across their lands.

### THE PUEBLO PERSPECTIVE

The Franciscan padres at San Gabriel and San Fernando were by far the best-educated persons in the region and were among its very few literate residents. It is no wonder that their records contain the only direct references to Guaspet found to date. Eighteenth-century descriptions of local Indians written by anyone *other* than a missionary are found only among the directives and correspondence of the governing authorities of Alta California. No first-hand account of the thoughts or opinions of the original Spanish settlers of Los Angeles regarding their Indian neighbors has apparently survived. They were not likely to have recorded them themselves, as they were primarily illiterate. Their actions towards the Indians were occasionally noted by others, however, who indicate that the settlers immediately put the natives to work. Indian laborers began drifting into the pueblo almost from the day it was founded and were critical to its early survival. Correspondence such as that of Governor Pedro de Fages in 1784 suggests that without the aid of the gentiles, that year's food crop would not have been planted.

The first identified report of Indian activity in the Ballona area dates to 1787 and reveals that Indians who lived near Santa Monica Bay had killed and eaten cattle (Mason 2004:22). No report, however, of the investigation that followed has been located. At that time, the Ballona was apparently considered to be common land belonging to the pueblo (Harlow 1976:18).

The cattle referred to in this report may have come from the herds of Juan José Dominguez, a retired soldier from the San Diego Presidio, who received the first documented grant of grazing lands in the Los Angeles area in 1784. Dominguez' lands were located well south of the pueblo on the lower part of the San Gabriel River, near the ocean. This provisional grant, which originally included Palos Verdes, evolved into the Rancho San Pedro.

There is a tenuous but interesting connection between the cattle of Juan José Dominguez and Guaspet found in correspondence from 1789, when a theft of Dominguez's cattle was reported. The connection between Dominguez and Guaspet is made through Francisco Xavier Pico, who had been caring (as the *mayordomo*) for Dominguez' Rancho San Pedro between 1787 and 1790. According to the baptismal registers, Pico was the officiant at several baptisms, including the only baptism to take place in Guaspet, that of the infant Joseph (SG Bp 1953) in 1790, the year following this incident. Pico clearly knew the natives of Guaspet and must have visited the ranchería during his service as caretaker of Dominguez' cattle. Pico, born in Sinaloa, Mexico, served in the military until being discharged in 1787. Then, in 1790, not long after officiating at Joseph's baptism at Guaspet, he reenlisted in the army for a 10-year stint (Mason 2004:25-26) and his name disappears from local baptismal records. He died in Santa Barbara in 1835 (Northrop 1984:205).

It is probably not a coincidence that the date of these cattle theft reports preceded the earliest baptisms of children from Guaspet, including the infant Joseph, by only a year or two. This association

makes it clear that the first contact between the people of Guaspét and the Spanish was probably with herders and not padres. This was likely a general trend for many other rural rancherías in areas away from the mission or pueblo. In Mission San Gabriel records, there are at least two instances of multiple Gabrielino being baptized at their home ranchería. Using ECPP data, on August 23, 1784, multiple baptisms were done at the rancherías of Jutucubit (SG Bp 986-1011) and Jaysobit (SG Bp 1012-1017). There were undoubtedly others undertaken during rounds of rancherías by Padres or lay people performing baptisms. In rural areas, however, it does appear that there was regular contact between Gabrielino and ranchers, who at times performed baptisms at rancherías. For example, according to ECPP data, Francisco Avila baptized several Gabrielino at the ranchería of Seobit on separate occasions between 1800 and 1802.

### THE RANCHO PERSPECTIVE

As previously mentioned, the Rancho San Pedro was established not far from Guaspét in 1784. In the same time frame, more than 50 private ranchos were founded around the pueblo. Yet the beginning of the rancho period in the Ballona has always been dated from the petition of 1819 by its presumed first claimants, Agustín Machado and Felipe Talamantes. Recently discovered information, however, suggests an earlier use of the Ballona.

Mason (2004:57) reports that around 1802, Pío Quinto Zuñiga, a retired presidial soldier, was given the first grant of land in the Ballona. Known as Rancho de los Quintos (from Zuñiga's name, Pío Quinto), it was located at the mouth of the Los Angeles River, at that time in the Ballona area. If true, this assertion would establish a rancho presence in the Ballona during the Mission period, some 17 years earlier than previously thought. Significantly, Zuñiga's use of the area would overlap directly with the peak recruitment of neophytes and the last years of the occupation of Guaspét.

Verification of Mason's information about the Rancho de los Quintos has been difficult. Bancroft provides some confirmation -- a petition by 30 pueblo citizens protesting granting of the "Rancho de los Quintos" to Machado and Talamantes in 1819. A later 1822 letter also refers to Rancho del los Quintos as being "at the mouth of the river [Ballona Creek]." The Ballona grant had belonged to Zuñiga and his sons but had been rescinded after his death because his sons did not comply with the rules governing such grants. They probably lost the grant while the oldest son was in the army, about 1808 or 1809.

Background on the Zuñiga family reveals several tenuous but important connections to Guaspét. Zuñiga was a native of Guadalajara, Mexico, and arrived in California as a soldier assigned to Mission San Juan Capistrano. Here he served as a godparent for several Indian baptisms and was an official witness to the first marriage to take place at the mission. In 1779, he married a Juaneño neophyte named María Rufina. By 1789, however, Zuñiga was at San Gabriel, serving again as witness at a marriage (SG #346). From this date forward, he lived in Los Angeles and raised cattle and crops.

Significant to our story, Zuñiga was the officiant at the baptism of a 30-year old Gabrielino woman named María from Guaspét in 1803 (SG Bp 3532). If the information about Rancho de Los Quintos is correct, members of the Zuñiga family might have been living or spending time herding cattle in the Ballona during these years. Pío Quinto's children, being half Juaneño themselves and familiar with the similar Gabrielino language, might have been able to establish ties with the residents of Guaspét. One confirmation of these ties is the baptismal record of the child José Francisco from Guaspét in 1809 (SG Bp 4284). The parents of José were gentiles, but his godparents were Pío Quinto's son Quillermo and María Angela Quinto Zuñiga.

After the Zuñiga family left the Ballona around 1809, grazing in the area was again open for use by all stockowners of Los Angeles. Among those to take advantage of this opportunity were Felipe Talamantes and Agustín Machado, who were certainly familiar with the land and its advantages. Felipe had served as *mayordomo* for Dominguez, while Machado began grazing cattle on the Dominguez lands at San Pedro in 1810 "under the assumption that the lands had been abandoned." When Dominguez died, the appearance of a new owner meant Talamantes and Machado needed to find new grazing land.

At first, they shared the communal grazing lands of the Ballona with other settlers. Then in 1819, they officially requested a grant from the government to control the land. Rancho La Ballona was “temporarily” conceded to Talamantes and Machado in 1819. The only documentation of either this request or concession has been found in the previously mentioned petition signed by other residents of the pueblo. With this “temporary” concession, the Machados and Talamantes families moved into the Ballona. It was another 20 years, however, before they won the formal grant of La Ballona. By then they had made extensive improvements, building homes, digging irrigation ditches, planting crops, and establishing a vineyard (Cowan 1977:18; Robinson 1939:6).

And what of the people of Guaspét? Less is known in civil and mission records about the status of the people of Guaspét once the Machado and Talamantes families took over the rancho. Members of Guaspét continued to be recruited for baptism until 1819, but the records are silent after that. Robinson (1939b:108-109) asserted that the work of the ranch was done by the local Indians, one group of whom had their huts not far from Machado’s home and another group having their village against the Westchester Bluffs. Houses are depicted in both locations in the *diseño* which was made to accompany the 1839 grant application for the Rancho del Paso de las Carretas, an early name for La Ballona. Mission records provide one of our last glimpses of Native Americans in the Ballona. On March 21, 1839, Felipe Talamates officiated at the single baptism of a boy *artículo de muerto* named José Dolores (LA Bp 914) from the Rancho de la Ballona. The boy’s parents were two Luiseño neophytes from Mission San Diego, suggesting that some of the Native Americans who worked on the rancho were imported from outside the area.

We also examined the corresponding documents for the adjacent Rancho Sausal Redondo. On the *diseño* for that land grant, another possible vestigial remnant of the name Guaspét has been noted in the label “Guaspita” and “Coral de Guspita” on the bluffs overlooking Ballona Creek in essentially the same location as the word “Guacho” is shown on the *diseño* for the Rancho La Ballona.

This rancho, 5 leagues in extent, was formally granted to Antonio Ignacio Avila in 1822 (Cowan 1977:96), but was not confirmed for over 50 years. Due to these challenges to Avila’s claim, the *expediente* for the Sausal Redondo includes more testimony than does the Ballona’s. It appears from this testimony that by the 1850s the name *Guaspita* referred to a corral or place for gathering cattle that was located on the bluff tops within the boundary of the Rancho Sausal Redondo (*Expediente* 354, California State Archives). Survey records made at this time and subsequently, reveal no permanent residents at Guaspita, and no description of Guaspita was found among the case files, despite the extensive litigation over the claim to this rancho.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this preliminary study, we can conclude with some confidence that the Gabrielino settlement of Guaspét was located somewhere in the Ballona. We have documented that a preliminary total of 115 people from Guaspét were baptized between the years 1788 and possibly as late as 1819. The preliminary total number, including subsequent generations of people from Guaspét, is 193 people. This span of years indicates the existence of the rancheria during the Mission period and the presumed operation of the Rancho Los Quintos in the Ballona. There is also evidence of interaction between the gentile residents of Guaspét and local Spanish ranchers during this period; and that at least one Spaniard, Francisco Xavier Pico, actually visited the rancheria. It seems clear, based on both civic and mission records, that ranchers likely had more direct contact with the Gabrielino at their home rancherias than mission officials did.

Recruitment of people from Guaspét began well after the padres at San Gabriel had recruited among the mission’s nearest neighbors and peaked around the same time that the padres began recruiting among the rancherias of what is today west Los Angeles. It probably is not coincidental that this recruitment occurred at the time that the Spanish herds of cattle and horses had grown tremendously, and the pueblo had expanded grazing into the Santa Monica Bay area. As Milliken (1995), Hackel (2005), and

Larson et al. (1994) suggest, the destruction of native habitat by these herds may have been one motivation to drive people from Guaspet to the pueblo and the missions.

The evidence, or more correctly, the lack thereof, points to Guaspet being abandoned before 1820; certainly the native way of life was gone by that date. The hunt for Guaspet in the documentary record is far from finished. While some sources expected to produce answers have not, others have added surprising new data. One of these sources may yet lead to a first-hand description of Guaspet.

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