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Prehistoric and Native Monterey Park: The Repetto Hills

Twenty-five years ago, a friend of mine mentioned that his grandfather would tell him stories about hunting rabbits around the seasonal creeks that flowed in the Monterey Park hills during the 1950s.¹ That blew my mind because I couldn't see how that was possible. Years passed and I wondered how Monterey Park existed in its regional living landscape before the times of human dominance. Which specific indigenous tribes were most associated with this city? The following article focuses on the pre-historic Repetto Hills,² a defining geological feature of the City of Monterey Park, and demonstrates that their ancient geographical position made the hills a source of sustenance and survival for neighboring indigenous villages. Existence of trails and footpaths in and around Monterey Park's hills suggests that they played a significant role in native village life.

In today's terms, the Repetto Hills are roughly bordered by Boyle Heights in the west, the Rio Hondo in the east, State Route 60 in the south, and Interstate 10 in the north. They were formed approximately five million years ago during the mountain-building and fault-forming Pliocene Epoch³ as continents moved to their current positions on Earth (See Figure 1). An ancient sea submerged Monterey Park during that time, which explains why the city's highlands are "composed almost entirely of [microscopic marine organism]-bearing massive siltstone"⁴ and fossil beds. During the Pleistocene Epoch, beginning approximately two million years ago, the

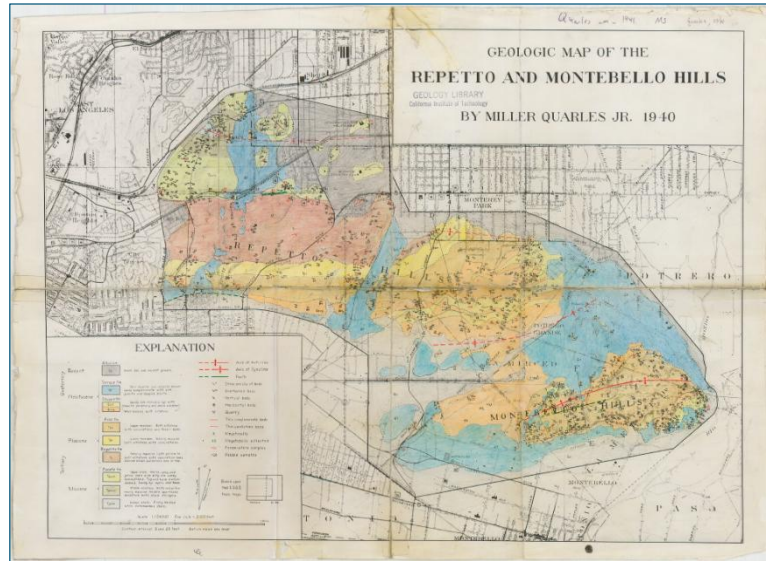
¹ Arturo Gonzalez, text message to author, January 3, 2026.

² This essay uses the name "Repetto Hills" as it appeared in Miller W. Quarles' 1941 master's thesis.

³ Miller Winthrop Quarles, *Geologic Map of the Repetto and Montebello Hills: Supplement 1 from "Geology of the Repetto and Montebello Hills" (Thesis)*, version 1.0, with California Institute of Technology and Tony Diaz, CaltechDATA, 1941, application/pdf, <https://doi.org/10.22002/D1.417>.

⁴ Quarles, *Geologic Map of the Repetto and Montebello Hills*.

entire Repetto Hills rose and the surface uplifted to dry land.⁵ Substantial erosion followed, forming a narrow pass beside present-day Atlantic Boulevard and carving the Repetto Canyon, which is the approximate location of the 710 Freeway between East Cesar E. Chavez Avenue and Valley Boulevard. By the start of the Holocene Epoch, approximately 12,000 years ago, life was flourishing in the Repetto Hills, where intermittent streams⁶ and the basin runoff sustained a wide variety of plants, animals, and other organisms.



Into the latter decades of the eighteenth century, the Repetto Hills were teeming with wildlife. Its two flanking subterranean rivers converged to the south forming a flooded, marshy wetland.⁷ The north faced a vast and open valley that extended to the base of the San Gabriel Mountains roughly twenty miles away as the crow flies. The hills and surrounding areas were likely vegetated with chaparral and woods.⁸ Although it cannot be known with certainty which type of native flora existed within the city limits of Monterey Park, it is reasonable to posit that sage, sugar bush, yarrow, mulefat, yerba santa, buckwheat, deer grass, wild roses, poppies,

⁵ Quarles, *Geologic Map of the Repetto and Montebello Hills*.

⁶ Automobile Club of Southern California, *Metropolitan Los Angeles 1930*, road map (Los Angeles: Automobile Club of Southern California, 1930; repr., 2018).

⁷ Blake Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, Johns Hopkins Paperbacks ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 17.

⁸ Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 20.

sycamores, coast live oak, elderberry, and toyon were present in the immediate vicinity.⁹

Coyotes, skunks, rabbits, squirrels, mice, gophers, snakes, lizards, hawks, songbirds, doves, and insects were likely part of this localized ecosystem as well.

It is in this environment where native people, commonly referred to as Tongva,¹⁰ resided. They subsisted on the diverse flora and fauna in the area. People foraged plants for food and medicine. They gathered grasses and reeds and wove them into baskets and building materials.¹¹ Women processed and prepared acorns from local oaks that provided essential fats and fiber. Men hunted rodents and other small animals including amphibians, insects, and larva. They were mobile people and lived in accordance with the seasonal patterns of their environment.¹²

Still, the native population typically established permanent villages proximate to flowing streams and other reliable sources of fresh water. Over a dozen such villages dotted the northern portion of the central region of *Tovaangar*,¹³ which became known as the San Gabriel Valley. For example, to the west of the Repetto Hills, *Yaanga* is believed to have been the largest village in Tovaangar and was located near the present-day intersection of the 101 Freeway and the Los

⁹ Amigos de los Ríos, *Emerald Necklace Native Plants*, poster produced in 2016 for Emerald Necklace Rio Hondo, on display at Bosque del Río Hondo Los Angeles County Park, Los Angeles County, photographed by author, December 28, 2025.

¹⁰ The author is aware that the term “Tongva” is considered by some native groups to be a misnomer and they recognize the correct name to be *Kizh* or *Kitc*.

¹¹ Amigos de los Ríos, *Kich (Keesh)*, poster produced in 2016 for Emerald Necklace Rio Hondo, on display at Bosque del Río Hondo Los Angeles County Park, Los Angeles County, photographed by author, December 28, 2025.

¹² Evidence of the native people’s mobility is found in the existence of a vast network of ancient trails and footpaths that connected permanent villages. Trails and footpaths were illustrated in early maps of the region. Allen W. Welts, *The Gabrielino Indians at the Time of the Portolá Expedition*, map, 1952; copyright 1962, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California and George W. Kirkman, *Principal Historic Sites, Old Highways, Also Battle Fields, Spanish, Mexican, Early American, in Old Los Angeles County*, 1937, map, Map Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, TESSA: Photos & Digital Collections, accessed January 9, 2026, <https://tessa2.lapl.org/digital/collection/maps/id/29/>.

¹³ Tovaangar refers to the entire Los Angeles Basin. There were hundreds of villages in Tovaangar. This essay focuses on the very area of the Repetto Hills, that are within the modern city limits of Monterey Park. Sean Greene and Thomas Curwen, “Mapping the Tongva Villages of L.A.’s Past,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-tongva-map/>.

Angeles River. This is the general area where the City of Los Angeles was founded in 1781. The *Lisanchanga* village was located beside the Rio Hondo at the southeast edge of the Repetto Hills by present-day San Gabriel Boulevard and East Lincoln Avenue. Based on historical sources, the village site closest to Monterey Park is identified as *Apachiangna*¹⁴ and appears to have been located along the southern side of the Repetto Hills between East Los Angeles College and Boyle Heights.

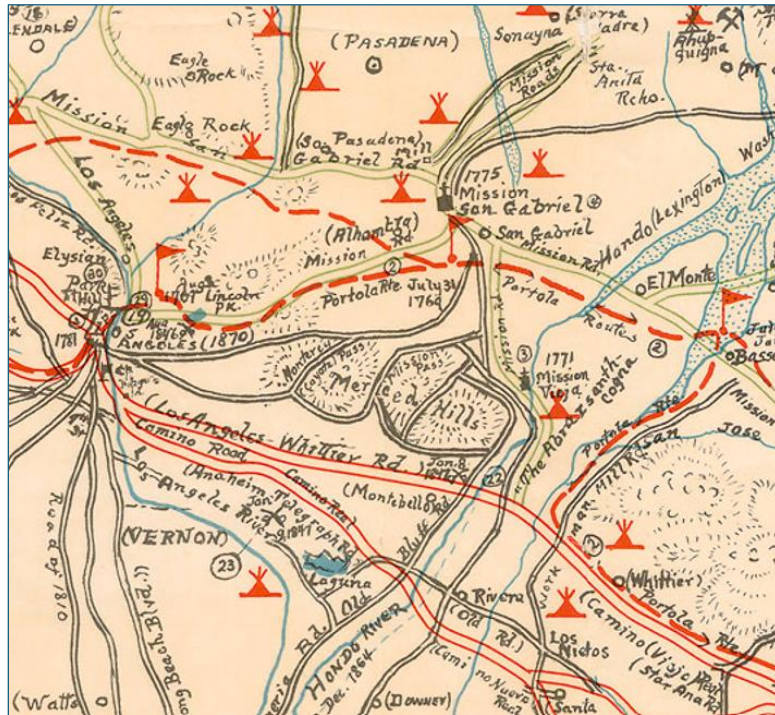
While the specific reasons why the Repetto Hills were frequently visited by the region's indigenous inhabitants cannot be known with certainty, it is reasonable to conclude that the hills served as an important source for foraging, hunting, and the gathering of food, medicine, and building materials. The presence of thickets and brush growing near seasonal creeks in grassy and wooded hills must have attracted myriad creatures to exist within the localized ecosystem of Monterey Park's portion of the Repetto Hills. Also, these hills were at a crossroads that linked the Yaanga, Apachiangna, and Lisanchanga villages with dozens of other Tongva settlements including the prominent *Ochuunga* and *Shevaanga* villages.¹⁵

In studying George W. Kirkman's 1937 map, *The Kirkman-Harriman Pictorial and Historical Map of Los Angeles County: 1860 A.D.*, one may notice a cluster of "ancient" routes encircling and traversing the "Merced Hills".¹⁶ (These are substantially the same Repetto Hills of focus in this article.) Labeled routes include Monterey (Coyote) Pass (presently Monterey Pass Road) and Mission Pass-present-day Atlantic Boulevard. In addition, Kirkman's map shows that

¹⁴ East Los Angeles College, "Land Acknowledgement," accessed January 9, 2026, <https://www.elac.edu/about/Land-Acknowledgement>.

¹⁵ The Ochuunga and Shevaanga villages were generally located in the present-day regions of the cities of Alhambra and San Gabriel, respectively.

¹⁶ The map does not use the term "Repetto Hills" as a label. To stay consistent with the essay, the Merced Hills might be the furthest right (east) hill that is adjacent to the Rio Hondo. The left three hills illustrate the Repetto Hills. Kirkman, *Principal Historic Sites, Old Highways, Also Battle Fields*.



indigenous trails and footpaths followed general courses along what contemporary Monterey Park residents would recognize as Garvey Avenue, East Cesar E. Chavez Ave/West Riggin Street, and San Gabriel Boulevard/Hill and Potrero Grande Drives (See Figure 2). Footpaths leading out

of the Rio Hondo wetlands into the higher (and dryer) grounds of the Repetto Hills likely provided alternative ways for people traveling past the Lisanchanga village to access other villages, especially after episodes of heavy rainfall and flooding. These paths extended across the greater Los Angeles Basin, facilitating trade networks and inter-village relationships that linked the population of central-north Tovangaar to Tongva settlements along the San Pedro and Santa Monica Bays, the San Fernando Valley, Cucamonga, Temescal Canyon, the Santa Ana River, and beyond.¹⁷ This implies that the Repetto Hills were frequently utilized and crossed by Tongva people.

¹⁷ Kirkman, *Principal Historic Sites*.



Native plants and animals are still found in the Repetto Hills. At Sequoia Park on Ridgecrest Street, a coast live oak tree stands on a north-facing slope beside a neighborhood sandlot (See Figure 3). Toyon shrubs hold the steep hillside on Cadiz Street (See Figure 4). Brittlebush shrubs bloom yellow flowers and attract bees along Potrero Grande. Coyotes are spotted on a regular basis in these hills, prompting neighborhood residents to

take precautions to avoid getting their pet cats or small dogs snatched up as urban prey.¹⁸

Meanwhile, skunks waddle to hide under parked cars, squirrels run up utility posts and along Southern California Edison wires, lizards dart across the land, and hawks hover over the city's hills. The idea that rabbits once thrived around seasonal creeks in Monterey Park is no longer difficult to imagine.



Their geological record, their geographic position, and the proliferation of native plants and animals all contributed to the dynamic role that the Repetto Hills played in an environment that preceded human hegemony. These hills functioned as a vital ecological and cultural crossroads within Tovaangar, linking villages, facilitating movement, and providing reliable resources for the greater indigenous population that once resided in this vast coastal basin.

¹⁸ Coyotes are ancient canines that first appeared in North America by the early Pleistocene and survived major extinction events and have long lived and hunted in these hills. Dan L. Flores, *American Serengeti: The Last Big Animals of the Great Plains* (University Press of Kansas, 2016).

Appendix

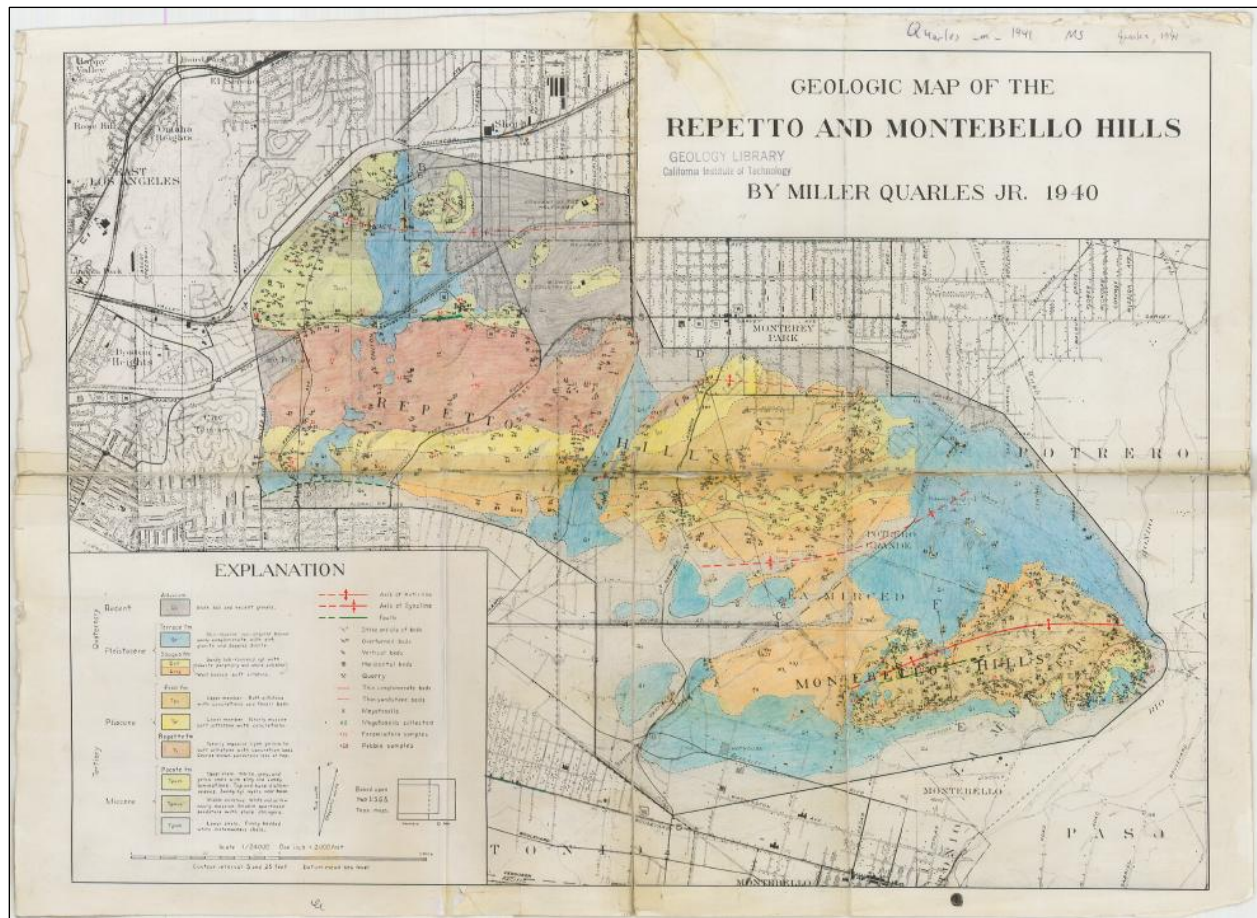


Figure 1. Geologic Map of the Repetto and Montebello Hills.

The Repetto Hills run through the City of Monterey Park and were possibly formed during the Pliocene Epoch approximately five million years ago. Unlike the adjacent Montebello Hills, these do not have oil deposits.

Source: Miller Winthrop Quarles, *Geologic Map of the Repetto and Montebello Hills: Supplement 1 from "Geology of the Repetto and Montebello Hills"* (Thesis), version 1.0, with California Institute of Technology and Tony Diaz, CaltechDATA, 1941, application/pdf, <https://doi.org/10.22002/D1.417>.

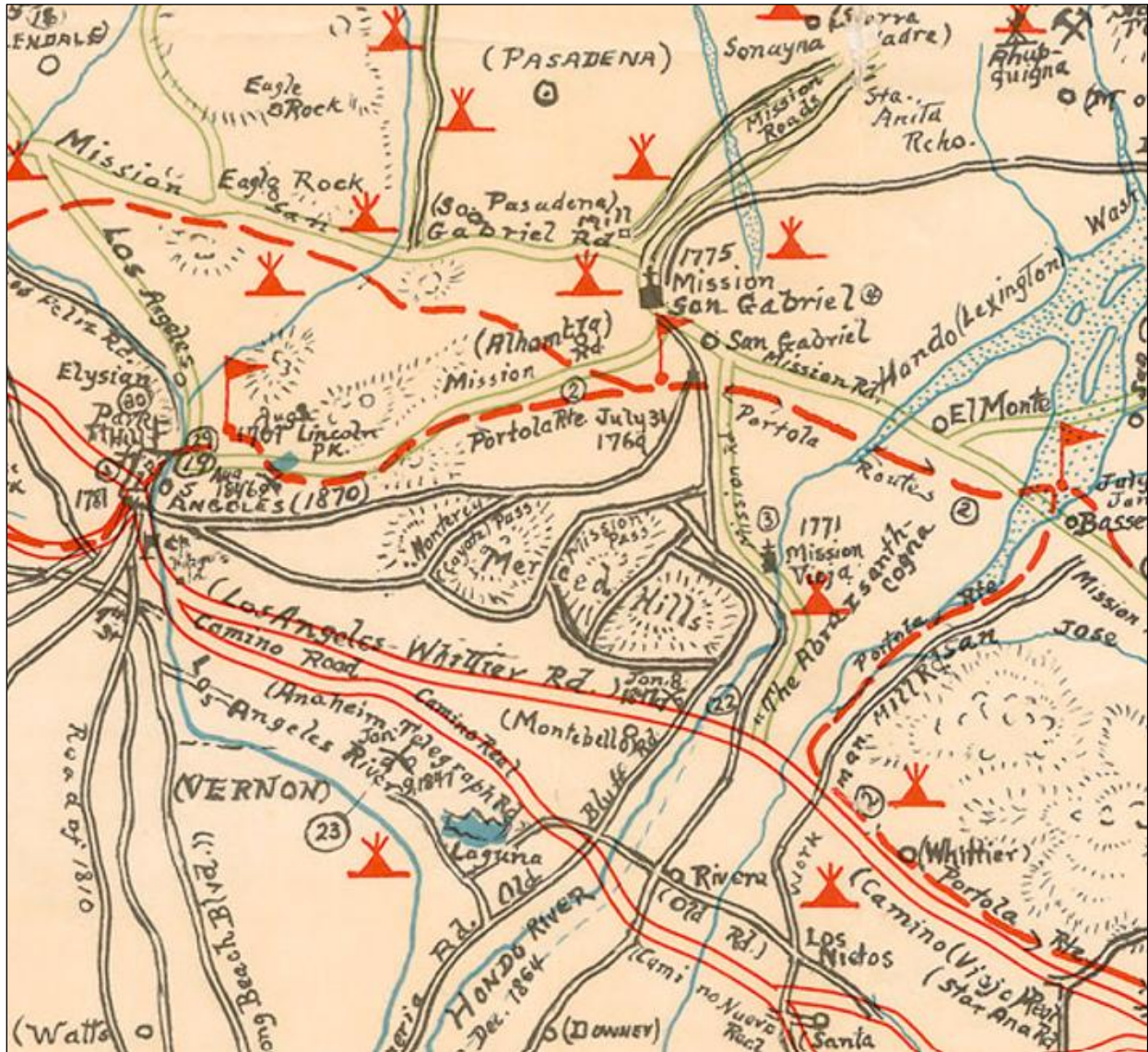


Figure 2. Principal historic sites, old highways, also battle fields, Spanish, Mexican, early American, in old Los Angeles County, 1937.

The “Merced Hills”, also known as the Repetto Hills were surrounded by “Indian Villages”. “Ancient” trails cross over these hills, including Coyote Pass and Mission Pass.

Source: George W. Kirkman, *Principal Historic Sites, Old Highways, Also Battle Fields, Spanish, Mexican, Early American, in Old Los Angeles County*, 1937, map, Map Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, TESSA: Photos & Digital Collections, accessed January 9, 2026, <https://tessa2.lapl.org/digital/collection/maps/id/29/>. This image is a small segment of a larger map produced by Kirkman.



Figure 3. Coast Live Oak.

At Sequoia Park on Ridgecrest Street, a coast live oak tree stands on a north-facing slope beside a neighborhood sandlot.

Source: Photograph by author, December 8, 2025.



Figure 4. Toyon shrubs.

Toyon shrubs hold the steep hillside on Cadiz Street in Monterey Park.

Source: Photograph by author, December 8, 2025.

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