Convento Fragment

Resident priests maintained quarters at the center of a mission's built core. This side of the convento probably housed Tumacácori's later priests. They could enjoy privacy, keep watch on the goings-on of the mission, and entertain guests.

Segesser recounts his efforts to re-create a European-style celebratory cake for a holiday known as Shrovetide. His improvisation (and mixed results) may sound familiar.

"I obtained fresh, well-salted butter from Holland, as well as eggs and milk, trying to fulfill my promise.

Next, I took an earthenware dish, put the butter in it, and heated it on glowing coals. Because no wood is available here, everything must be cooked on hot coals, which are imported from across the sea.

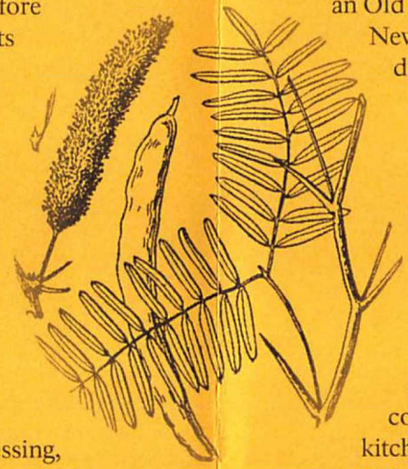
. . . then I created a nice dough out of good white flour.... adding milk and eggs, although I could not even guess what is required for cake. I made the dough in the way one makes crullers. I did not have a pastry bag, so I made the dough harder on the outside and yet softer on the inside with eggs, in the way one prepares the cakes for mothers in childbirth.

In the end I was half successful, since one cake rose whereas the others remained as hard as a rock."



Melhok ki

The O'odham, with their intimate knowledge of the landscape, took advantage of the many foodstuffs offered by the Pimería Alta. One massive mesquite tree, like the one shading the traditional O'odham home before you, can produce multiple harvests of protein-rich bean pods. Agave hearts, palo verde pods, cactus fruit and other wild edibles could be gathered at various times of year. Hunting parties secured game like deer, rabbits, and birds. The O'odham also cultivated crops of beans, squash, and corn which were well-adapted to the weather patterns of the Pimería Alta.



Customs of food gathering, processing, and preparation were forged over millenia in harmony with the region's resources. Native crops and plants provided a nutritious diet for the O'odham. Spain's introduction of an entirely new food landscape wreaked havoc on nearly every aspect of O'odham culture.

Orchard

Rows of neatly planted fruit trees stretched over four acres within the walls of Tumacácori's mission orchard. For the O'odham, the orchard may have seemed a wonderland of exotic, sweet, and juicy treats. Imagine tasting a fresh ripe peach for the very first time.

For the Spanish, the fruit trees branded the landscape as now belonging to Spain's worldwide empire. We can also imagine the comfort they gave to priests, soldiers, and settlers who left their homes across the sea, never to return. That same peach, so novel to the O'odham, was a taste of that faraway home.

Cooking Ramada

Hundreds of years after colonization, it can be difficult to separate which parts of a regional cuisine came from which continent. Even the humble flour tortilla is a unique invention using an Old World ingredient (flour) with a New World preparation (flatten the dough and cook on a hot stone). Modern Mexican food is the cuisine of the *mestizaje*, or blending of multiple cultures to create something original.

Humans are a creative and adaptable species and we express ourselves with food. As the world becomes even more globally connected, what new combinations will emerge from our kitchens? What classic favorites will remain? And who will we share them with?

Hungry for more?

Courtyard garden

This courtyard garden features several fruit trees, ornamental plants, and native succulents. It is likely that missions like Tumacácori relied on their courtyard gardens primarily for medicinal plants and essential herbs and spices. Most have become familiar staples of the modern American spice cabinet – rosemary, cilantro, thyme, oregano, parsley. Fennel isn't as popular today, but held a favored role in mission-era gardens.

Traditionally "Spanish" spices like paprika and saffron were so precious, they probably never made their way to the farther reaches of the Spanish frontier.

Tumacácori National Historical Park

Explore Tumacácori

Mission Foods



Duration | Distance | Accessibility



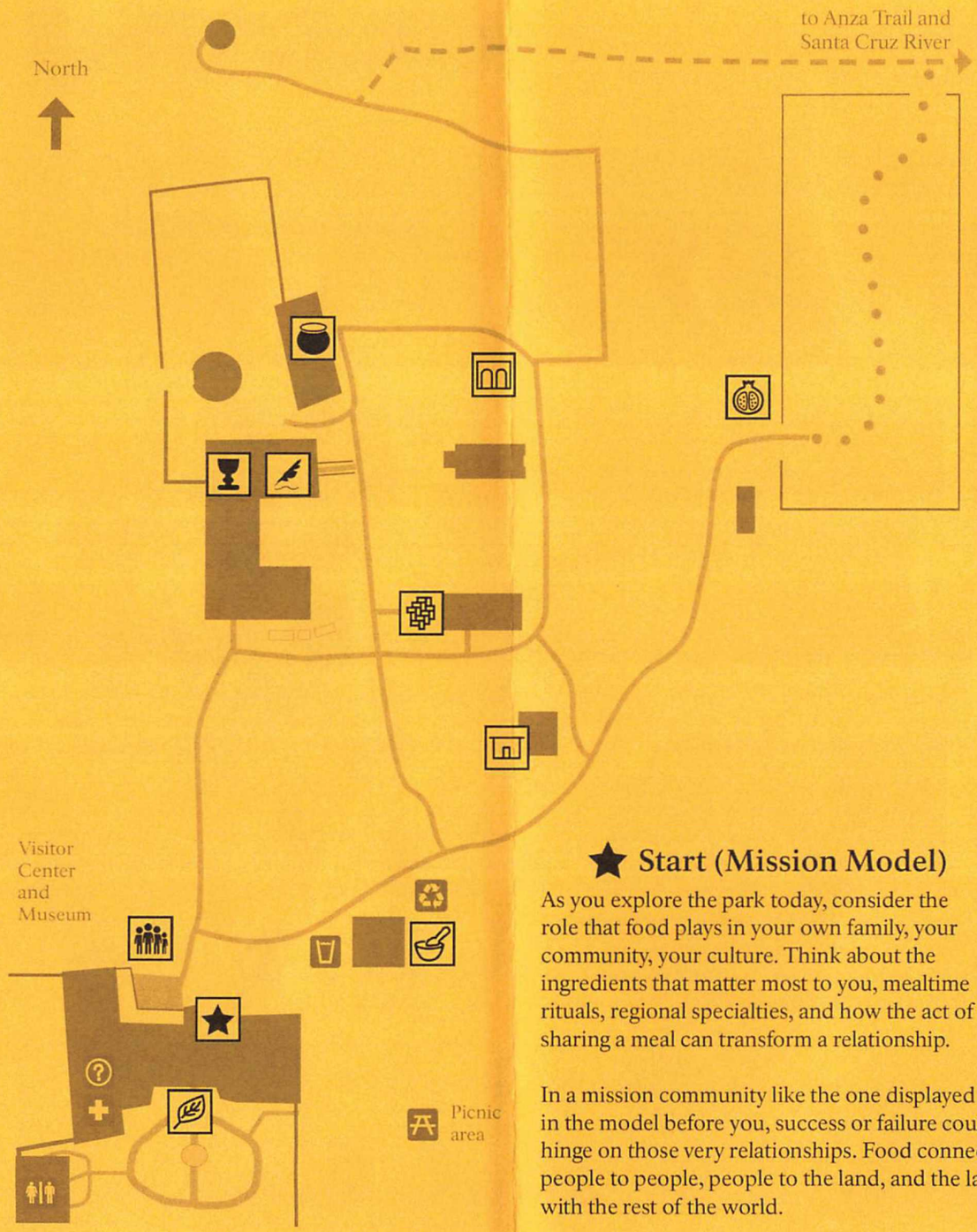


1/4 mile



Tips for a Safe and Responsible Visit

1. Stay on trails
2. Protect historic structures
3. Respect wildlife
4. Dispose of trash properly



★ Start (Mission Model)

As you explore the park today, consider the role that food plays in your own family, your community, your culture. Think about the ingredients that matter most to you, mealtime rituals, regional specialties, and how the act of sharing a meal can transform a relationship.

In a mission community like the one displayed in the model before you, success or failure could hinge on those very relationships. Food connects people to people, people to the land, and the land with the rest of the world.

Community Plaza

Father Keller once remarked that the *"Indians do not come to Christian service when they do not see the maize pot boiling."* In fact, it was probably not the sight, but the smells and sounds of food being prepared here that invited the community.

Wood smoke hung in the air. Fresh-baked bread emerged from earthen *hornos* (ovens). Tortillas went *pat-pat-pat* as they moved from hand to hand. Chickens ranged freely and animals were processed for their meat on any open ground.

Sanctuary

Food had a place in Catholic ritual and was represented in the finishes of the church sanctuary. Keen observers will note two edibles painted inside the archway over the stairs. Just above the corniced pillars on each side, faint outlines remain depicting a chalice with grapes and a sheaf of wheat. This location is where congregants would approach to receive the sacramental wine and bread of the ritual of Holy Communion.

Sacristy

Priests reported the essentials of mission business back to colleagues in Europe. But "tummy troubles," it would appear, also found their way into the official records.

Father Ramón López was described as *"... very delicate ... he eats with repugnance and his stomach turns over and produces pernicious humors."*

Father Pedro Font suffered terrible food poisoning and *"... had some trouble finishing the march ..."*

Father Gaspar Stiger wrote in a burial record that the deceased was put to rest *"without being confessed due to having glutted herself with excessive eating of squash."*

Storeroom

The O'odham maintained a thriving civilization for thousands of years before the Spanish arrived. Yet their subsistence farming methods did not impress European newcomers who valued production, yield, and surplus. Instead, the missions undertook vast monocultures of wheat and rangeland that saw thousands of head of cattle.

A storeroom like this one put the entire community's food supply in one location and on display, advertising the Spanish ideal of a maximally productive landscape. It may have been difficult to resist the allure and security of a well-stocked pantry. However, large scale agriculture took its toll as well. Water sources were fouled, erosion hastened, and the lower diversity of food sources made the food supply more susceptible to drought.

Convento Complex

The mission's kitchen was located adjacent to the storeroom, at the far end of the mound to your right. Meals were simple, bland, and oft-repeated. The daily ration for troops on campaign was *atole*, corn meal mush mixed with hot water. It was drunk for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Jesuit Father Philipp Segesser, who served at Tumacácori, wrote this in March 1730.

> *"... every day the same, like our container of iron in which [the cook] boils together the meat, the soup, and the cabbage. You do not see any other pot or pan in the kitchen. An earthen bowl serves him to heat the oil, if necessary. Another ceramic bowl serves him at times to boil a rice stew. There are no forks, funnels, or any kind of scoops, except for a ladle to skim off the meat."*