

Pala Tribe

The Pala Band of Mission Indians reservation is located in northern San Diego County, on a 16,273-acre reservation, home to a majority of the 937 enrolled members. Since time immemorial, Pala has been home to a band of Luiseño (Payomkawichum) people. In 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant signed an Executive Order that established the Pala Reservation for the Pala Luiseño band. In 1891, the Mission Indian Relief Act made Pala a permanent reservation.

In 1902, lands adjacent to Pala were purchased to expand the reservation. Additional lands were purchased because the Cupeño (Kuupangaxwichem), as well as other smaller Indian bands around Warner Ranch, were ordered to be removed from their homelands and relocated to Pala. The Cupeño people have always called their villages of Cupa and Wilakal home. They knew every plant, rock, animal, and physical feature in their homeland. It is where their ancestors are buried and home to sacred sites where religious ceremonies were performed. The Cupeño people did not want to leave their ancestral lands. They took their case all their way to the U.S. Supreme Court and even attempted to secure a reprieve from President Theodore Roosevelt. Their legal challenge was unsuccessful. The Court ruled that the Cupeño had no rights to their ancestral lands and ordered their removal. On May 12, 1903, Indian Bureau agents and 44 armed teamsters arrived to oversee the Cupeños' eviction. The forced removal is known as the Cupeño trail of tears.

In September 1903, the San Felipe Indians suffered the same fate and were forced to relocate to Pala. After the removal, the Cupeño people made up the majority of the population at the Pala Indian Reservation, followed by the Luiseño and then a much smaller number of Kumeyaay. Today, the majority of Tribal citizens are of Cupeño and Luiseño ancestry and consider themselves to be one proud people – Pala Band of Mission Indians.