

Indigenous Uses

For thousands of years, the Indigenous peoples of California and the Pacific Northwest have made use of seaweeds as nutritious delicacies, tools, and trade goods.

First Nations peoples would use the bull kelp's long, slender stipe as a fishing line, while its hollow upper cylinder and bladder could bail water out of a kayak (*baidarka*) or hold other liquids. They also took advantage of walking kelp's movability, arranging the kelp into rows that funneled salmon into their fish traps.

Several seaweeds have been coveted for their nutritional value and taste. A Coast Miwok term, *haskula*, referred to seaweeds that were good for eating, while *tcola* referenced seaweeds that were too tough. Some Coast Miwok, Pomo, and Yurok peoples collected and dried sweet-tasting sea palm blades. In British Columbia, giant kelp blades covered with roe (*kaaw*, pronounced "gow") are a delicacy for the First Nations, and could also be used for trading.

Today, one of the most recognizable edible seaweeds is nori. Indigenous peoples traded this seaweed across North America, from Alaska to California. People of Gitga'at Nation on the north coast of BC are known for the high quality of their edible nori seaweed (*leq'ask*). California Yurok people dry their *chege'l* in round cakes. Some of their inland neighbors restoring traditional foodways (and language) still trade for it, calling it *lah* in the Hupa language and *xêem* in Karuk.

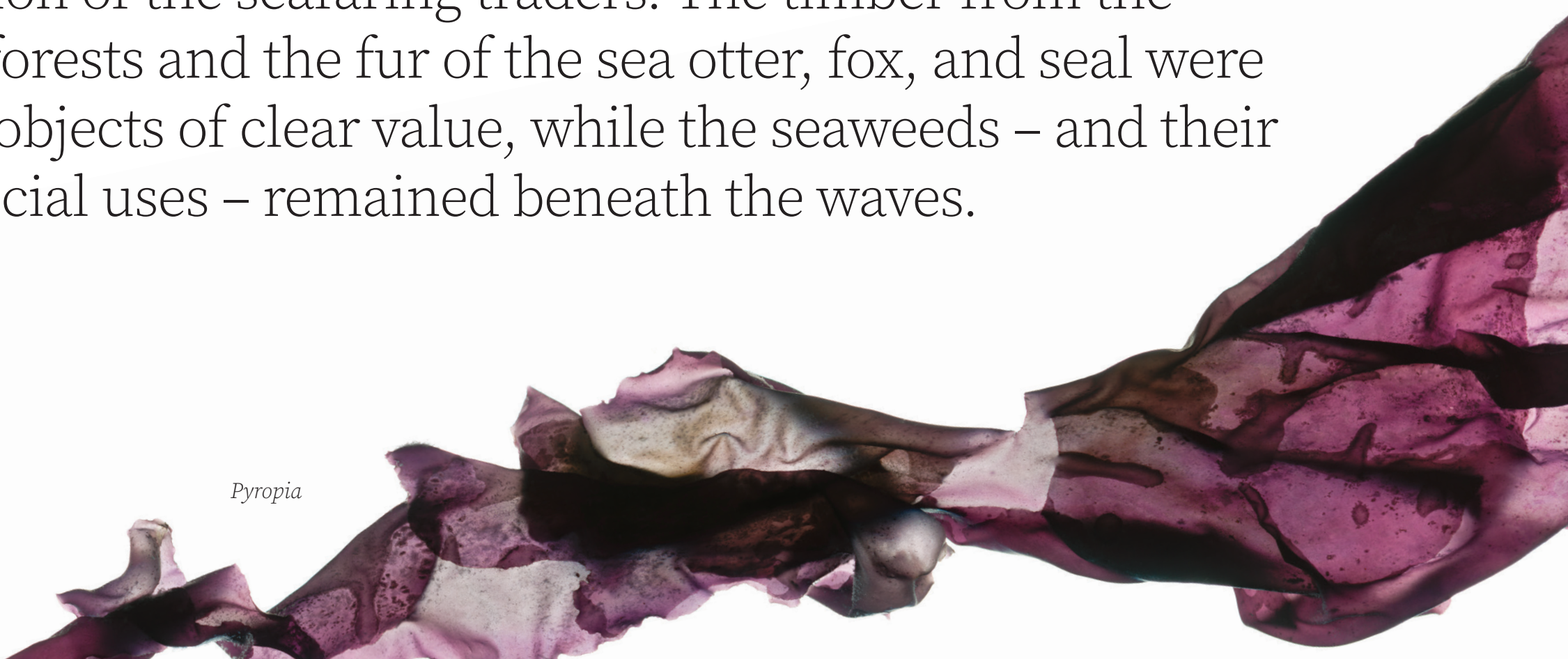
However, none of the Indigenous uses of algae caught the attention of the seafaring traders. The timber from the great forests and the fur of the sea otter, fox, and seal were shiny objects of clear value, while the seaweeds – and their beneficial uses – remained beneath the waves.



Nereocystis luetkeana



Postelsia palmaeformis



Pyropia