Humboldt County was among the last areas in the continental United States to be colonized. The environment here has been subject to colonial development for 150 years, but it was only a decade or two before the white colonizers had dramatically decreased its capacity to provide for human needs. This area, the land and everything on it, gives vivid testimony to the different attitudes toward the environment held by the white colonizers and the aboriginal people.

Located in the coastal mountain ranges of northwest California, the Kneeland area retains much of its ancient feel. Thanks to its rugged mountain geography and its elusive bay, European explorers and American fur trappers didn’t spend much time here. Not even the Spanish, who occupied the southern portion of California from around 1750 to 1850, seemed to want to venture this far north. Because Euro-American settlement is a recent historical development, the North Coast provides a dramatic opportunity to trace changes in the environment. A century and a half of white settlement has taken its toll, yet the primordial spirit of the land persists.

When walking in the redwood forest that graces the lower elevations of Kneeland, it is easy to feel that you have stepped back to an earlier time. In fact the feeling is so strong that you begin to sense if you turned around real quick, you could see the history and spirit of the place watching and waiting to see what you will do next.

This place has a spirit, all places do, but here in this place the spirit hovers near the surface waiting to be acknowledged and appreciated. It seems to miss the native people
of the area. Everything here, the water, rocks, trees, plants, animals even the wind had been related, and when the first people arrived here they entered into relationship with the land. They knew that everything was made of spirit, and engaged that spirit in relationship to keep the world in balance.\(^1\) The Whilkut no longer exist here. It was they who were charged with the responsibility of keeping the land whole by acknowledging and paying obligation to the spirit beings who provided for them. Their cosmology places them here, in and around Kneeland, because this is where they come from. The spirits here miss being in relationship with people, they have been ignored, ecological balance has been disrupted. The spirit of this land waits for humans to remember and fulfill their obligations so that balance and wholeness can be restored.

The spirit and history of a place is the accumulated experience of all the plants and animals, the rocks, soil and water, the climate and ether. This makes Kneeland unique, indeed it makes each place unique. This is what people feel when they take walks in the woods or hike the trails on the mountains. We speak of a peacefulness and a quiet, a slowing down of time, and we feel renewed and more connected. In the woods and creeks of Kneeland, even up on the prairie it's easy to sense this. Spirit has a long memory, it lives in the ancient trees, in the rivers and creeks and in the very air. It has the patience of millennia, and waits for us still. Life is dependent upon being in attentive relationship with all that is around, including human beings. Spirit needs to be recognized and related to in order to live.\(^2\)

The Whilkut developed a way of life based on this deeply held religious belief. There was no separation between religion and culture, every aspect of life was understood to be religious. Julian Lang, in *Ararapikva*, describes this concept best: "We have deified

\(^1\) Norton, Jack, Genocide in Northwestern California, p10
\(^2\) Warburton and Endert, Indian Lore of the North California Coast, p31
everything in the natural world. We consider all of nature to be alive, possessing both feelings and a consciousness. Hence the natural world is capable of seeing and hearing us, ‘blessing’ us, taking pity on us. The earth is a physical manifestation of God’s creative spirit, and we, human Beings (sic) are recognized by the Earth as a part of the natural world.”

Kneeland prior to 1850, is authentically, a place of cultural habitation. The Whilkut and the landscape had developed together over a long period of time, each relying on the other in accordance with Lang’s concept. The habitat, or environment in which the Whilkut lived, informed their way of life. In return the Whilkut also influenced the environment, informing its life.

The Kneeland Prairie and its surrounding creeks and rivers was home to a people that had for centuries lived in a reciprocal relationship of give and take with their environment. Just how long these people had been here is still a guess for scientists, some say 1500 years others say 3,000. Length of time living in a place would not have meant anything to them. As far as they were concerned, estimates of time were not important. What was important was the belief that they had originated in this place. All of the Indians in this part of California, had origin myths which located their beginnings in a place they called the ‘center of the world’, it was through this center that their creator came into this world and made everything in it. It is around the “center of the world”, that they made their homes and lived their lives. They took care of and gave thanks for the creators work by nurturing and praying to the spirits who became the plants, animals, water and air in their world in order to maintain and renew their world in health and prosperity. This single concept defines indigenous cultural life on the North Coast.

3 Lang, Julian, ARARPIKVA, p5
4 ibid
What came to be known as Kneeland's Prairie lies about 16 miles from the coast, just about due east from Humboldt Bay. The prairie can be seen from down on the coastal plain near where Freshwater Creek drains into the bay. The discovery of this bay, dubbed Humboldt Bay after the famous German explorer, and of Trinidad Harbor, coupled with the discovery of gold in the rivers that course through the coast mountains, brought the arrival of a significantly different culture, one that had no long history or relationship with the land, this would change the landscape and alter its culture of habitat.

From down on the bay looking east, the prairie appears as a big bald spot on the top of the mountain. In the winter and early spring the bald spot is covered with brilliant white snow. The snow melts into green grass and multi-colored wildflowers in spring, lasting until early summer when the sun dries it up turning it brown. Then, thanks to California's Mediterranean climate, the grass begins to green again as the fall and winter rains arrive.

From up on the prairie looking in any direction but east you see several smaller prairies, surrounded by giant redwoods and fir trees which cover peacefully rolling hills. The transition zone between the forests and prairies is home to a special category of plants that define the transition. The tan oak is found here, its acorns provided food for man and animals. Early settlers called these prairie-capped mountains the bald hills. Lieutenant George Crook, of Fort Humboldt, described the bald hills in 1853, "-back from the bay a few miles were what was known as the bald mountains the tops of which were denuded of timber evidently by fires and were then covered with grasses running off into a dense forest of redwood towards the ocean." 5 Kneeland Prarie has an elevation of about 2,600 feet. The views to the north, east and south is of successive mountain ranges

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5Norton, Jack, Genocide in Northwest California, p54
as far as the eye can see, and to the west an ocean stretches to the horizon. This is what
the world looked like to the Whilkut..

The prairie, known first as Brown’s then Kleizer’s and finally Kneeland’s, had been
part of the Whilkut cultural habitat. There is some disagreement among anthropologists
who have studied this area, some say it was their territory, others that it was the boundary
between the Whilkut and the Nongatl. Most recent evidence suggests that it was Whilkut
land down as far as Iaqua buttes. Pliny Goddard studied the Athapascan language and
found that the Nongatl name for Kneeland’s Prairie was setcondindai, and they considered
it outside of their territory. This large, grassy expanse was the feeding ground of vast
herds of elk and deer. Grasses, seeds, berries and an assortment of bulbs, corms and
tubers as well as the acorns were also utilized for food, the acorn was a primary plant
food. From the Mad River and many creeks which drain the mountains the Whilkut
obtained salmon and eels, the primary animal source of food. The prairie, as well as the
rivers and creeks down below in the forest, made up the cultural habitat of several
villages of Whilkut.

In 1966 an archeologist from San Francisco State University, Robert Ostrovsky, came
here to survey the proposed dam site to be built in Butler Valley, just down the hill from
the prairie on the northeast side. His research reveals that several Whilkut village sites
were discovered by L. L. Loud in 1915. Loud places one site at the mouth of Canon
Creek, where it enters the Mad River and another at Boulder Creek, where it enters the
Mad. Loud also mentions a village, considered larger and more important, 2 miles south

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6Heizer, R. F., The California Indians, p67
7Goddard’s Athabascan Texts, Kroeber
of the confluence of Maple Creek and situated on the Mad Kneeland Prairie, the largest in the area, was an important gathering and hunting spot.⁸

The land offers some insight into Whilkut culture. In fact their culture was so thoroughly destroyed by white settlers, that the land may be our only remaining clue into their lives. How did their religious beliefs about the land shape the way they hunted and gathered? The Whilkut, as well as all the other Indian tribes in the Northwest, supposedly did not practice agriculture. They were hunters and gatherers who simply collected whatever nature provided, or so we have always assumed. This designation has done injustice to the native people and exposed our own western ignorance.

Once we look closely at the processes involved in keeping this kind of grassland open and the plants flourishing and productive year after year, a deeper reality surfaces. Think about the quantity of plant material needed to supply even one village with baskets, or housing material, nets and other implements. We begin to see that the productivity of these areas must have been influenced by human intervention that was highly specialized and sought to maintain a harmonious balance between the humans and the land ensuring its continued productivity. The care they gave to the area reflects their cosmological awareness of having been created here as well as the knowledge that everything was alive and had spirit.

This new definition of agriculture has only been developed in recent years, not by anthropologists, as one might expect, but by forest ecologists who are beginning to recognize and appreciate this deeper reality. The earlier idea that separate agriculturists from the passive food gathering methods of the hunter gatherers is being rethought. Broader definitions are being worked out which reflect our growing awareness that

⁸Ostrovsky, Robert, An Archaeological Survey of the Proposed Butler Valley Reservoir
subsistence activities, like everything else, occur along a continuum. Each point along the continuum represents a greater degree of interaction between people and their environment. It is pointed out that California in general, and the Northcoast in particular, supported higher population densities and concentrations than in almost any other region of North America. A growing awareness of the land and its geographic parameters is leading us to a new understanding of the complexity and sophistication of native life on the North coast.

The prairie habitat in Kneeland, with its vigorous and varied plant and animal species, was kept in balance over a long period of time as a result of very specific practices, informed by the cosmological beliefs of the native people. L. L. Loud describes how the prairies were maintained, “Within the forests, at all elevations from sea level to the tops of ridges, there were small open ‘prairies’, producing grass, ferns, and various small plants...Most of these patches if left to themselves would doubtless soon have produced forests, but the Indians were accustomed to burn them annually, so as to gather seeds...”

When native people were prevented from practicing their traditional subsistence activities, a “process of environmental change began that led to the gradual decline in the number, range, and diversity of many of the native species and habitat types that once flourished here.” Jepson points out that in his time, ca. 1930, in Humboldt County, there is more forested land than when the white man first came here. There are also confirmed reports of some prairies having evolved into forest.

On the Kneeland Prairie several techniques of environmental management were employed. The simple method of digging bulbs, tuber and corms gives a good example of

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9Before the Wilderness, Blackburn and Anderson, p16
10Norton, Jack, p 23
11Blackburn and Anderson, Before the Wilderness, p72
one method. When looked at with some knowledge of plant biology and horticulture, it is obvious that much more was actually going on. The corms of the brodiaea plant, as well as that of the camas and wild onion bulbs, were dug, prepared and eaten by the Indians. The Indians knew how plants grew. They knew that from certain parts of a plant, a new plant would grow. Harvesting rituals required that only certain quantities be taken. The way in which the bulbs were dug, when they were dug and how many were dug was controlled by the Indians so that continued productivity and expansion of patches were ensured. Digging actually constitutes a form of tillage, turning the soil over and aerating it. The digging of bulbs, like all the activities of the Indians, was controlled by a set of rules designed to maintain harmony between the plant spirits and the people.

To gather efficiently the quantity needed for food while ensuring future harvest, the Indians developed other practices that stimulated future growth. Harvesting of the larger bulbs and the replanting or scattering, of the smaller bulblets increased the area of the patch making it easier to gather the amount necessary and providing for the following year's harvest. The digging process also aerates the ground, which stimulates the growth of the bulblets left behind and may have eliminated competitive plant growth in the bulb patch. Separating the smaller bulbs and replanting them farther apart results in the harvest of larger bulbs. Every good gardener knows that from time to time you have to dig, separate and replant bulbs to maintain their vigor. At one time the blue flower of the Brodiaea bulb, a member of the lily family, covered huge patches of the prairie, now they are listed as a threatened species by the US Fish and Wildlife Division of Endangered Species.

The process of acorn gathering is being re-examined. The acorn harvest represents the primary plant food resource of the Whilkut, as well as most every tribe in California. There are many factors to consider about the gathering process. First, not all acorns on a
given tree ripen at the same time. Two, if too many ripen and drop to the ground before they are gathered, the deer and bear will get them. A technique was developed in answer to these problems. A week or two prior to the acorns falling on their own, they are knocked from the tree with a branch; this allowed all the acorns to be gathered at once, before the animals could get them. Knocking also had the affect of pruning the tree, ridding it of dead and potentially diseased wood. This stimulates new growth and increases the following year’s crop. Acorn gathering, like all their activities, was conducted with a deep sense of religiosity. Everything in their culture was informed by the governing principle of reciprocity.

Fire was probably the most widely employed method of controlling the environment in support of subsistence efforts. There are many early accounts by whites that report the evidence of fire on the prairie. George Gibbs, in his journal of the Redick Mckee expedition into this land in the 1850’s, relates that from their location “on the other side was a small parry of about 80 acres, from which, however, the grass was mostly burnt,...” This was in September of the year. Newspaper accounts from the 1870’s also report “wildfires” sweeping across the prairie. Some of these may be due to the Indians trying to maintain their traditional practice of burning to increase and improve seed yields and quality, or maybe just to harass the settlers. There are several mentions of ‘wildfires’ on the prairie in the Susie Baker Fountain collection. This posed a problem for the ranchers who were to come, so the California State Legislature, in 1850, made it a crime to set prairie fires and included a list of punishments for such crimes in the Indian Indenture Act of 1850.

\[12\text{Blackburn and Anderson, p45}\]
\[13\text{Gibbs, George, Redick Mckee's Expedition, p 9}\]
Fire acted to stimulate new and early plant growth making it possible to get two or more harvests from certain varieties of grasses. The abundance and richness of the grass attracted deer and elk to the prairies where they were easy to hunt. Fire also helps eliminate or cut down pests and diseases which would otherwise decrease plant yields. The burning of the area just beneath oak trees is thought to have increased the yield of acorns as well as making them easier together. Burning the grass and other ground litter also serves to convert the stored mineral content of the plant into ash which provides readily available nutrients to be utilized by new growth.

Fire also causes plants to grow in particular ways increasing their human usefulness. The hazel and willow switches used for basket making had to be of a certain quality and length, they also had to be abundant to provide material for the many baskets that would be needed by a village over time. Small, frequent, controlled burns produce a bushy shrub with many new, long, slender shoots year after year, just right for twining into baskets. Modern fire control experts also recognizing that small controlled frequent burns cut the risk of wildfires that have the potential to cause major damage by eliminating the build up of litter on the forest floor. In addition, controlled burning in forested hunting areas eliminates deadfall, stimulates the growth of shrubs used by deer for browsing and makes passage and therefore hunting easier.

The coastal forest that covers the Kneeland area, outside the prairie, is dominated by giant redwood trees, some of which are thousands of years old. These have been measured at 52 feet in diameter and upwards of 350 feet tall.

It is the redwood trees, ancient survivors, who keep the spirit and memory of this place, it is they who wait patiently to be addressed with respect and reverence. We are awed by their existence, yet we never really question how they came to be. The native people influenced this part of their habitat as well. "Through out the mixed
conifer forest there is visible evidence of the fact that fire has been a significant force in natural selection. The small and frequent burns managed by the Indians helped to check succession, reduce competition and remove aged and diseased trees."  

Could this be why so many of them lived such a long time?

The forest animals were also “managed” by the Indians. The Whilkut, by virtue of their inland settlements, relied more heavily on animals in the forest to supplement their core diet of fish than did the Indians who lived on the coast. Small burns rid the forest floor of the built-up accumulation of fir needles and redwood duff. This allowed the growth of the herbaceous plants that deer and elk browsed on.

Other methods of resource management include seedbeating, coppicing and pruning of trees. There are two primary methods of gathering seed, one ensures future harvest, and the other does not. The Whilkut understood this and developed methods that would encourage future growth. They clearly understood the reproductive mechanisms of the various plants they used, they knew that new life came from the tiny seeds they gathered. They could have simply broken the seed heads off or torn the plants from the ground. Instead they used seed beaters, specially designed paddles or baskets that were used to knock the seeds from the plant to be caught in another basket. In so doing, many seeds are knocked to the ground where they germinate and grow into the plants that will produce seeds in the next cycle.

\[14\] Blackburn and Anderson, p12
Copicing is a radical form of pruning and was used on plants from which basketry material was gathered. By shearing a shrub or tree radically, or lightly in the case of pruning, new growth comes back thicker and the shoots tend to be long and straight, perfect for basket making. Even the gathering of firewood was done with care, redwood was not to be burned, the creator had ensured this by making the redwood impervious to fire.\textsuperscript{15} The wood that was used for fire was gathered sustainable, otherwise it would have been necessary to travel farther and farther away from the village to find enough to heat their homes and cook their meals. There is no evidence to show that this was the case. The seasonally permanent location of their villages on the rivers and creeks in the area was essential for them to exploit the water's resources, a primary means of support.

This level of resource management was achieved because the Whilkut had intimate, spiritual knowledge of their environment and acted from a sense of being in relationship with it. This in turn informed the development of the socio-political structure and spirituality in their culture. Spirituality informed their everyday activities and wasn't reserved for Sunday. Strict rules governed who owned harvesting rights in certain locales. The Wiyot were said to have been afraid to travel too far up the mountain for fear of being driven back by the Whilkut, who claimed the Kneeland prairie as their own. Even though they could see the bountiful prairie from their villages down on the bay, they seldom attempted to reap its produce. There are stories of Wiyot women being shot for trying to gather tan oak acorns on property that belonged to the Whilkut.

In addition to property rights, there were proper rituals to be performed, rules about when to harvest and for how long the harvest should continue. Weather conditions and patterns were taken into account. Certain tools and techniques for harvesting were

\textsuperscript{15} Warburton, Austen Indian Lore of the North California Coast, p 30
employed, these were determined by the type and part of plant that was being harvested. It seems obvious that the Whilkut had a highly developed and sophisticated knowledge of their habitat and the processes they needed to perform to keep it productive. By studying the landscape in an area we can come to know something of the people who used to inhabit it. They lived not merely on the land but through the land because they were of the land. This is what Kneeland was like when the Whilkut lived here.

Is there a correlation between cultural diversity and species diversity? And if so, why? Consider this idea. Native people believe that plants and animals are honored through human use and that our use reinforces the feeling that plants, animals and humans all belong to a place. “When a Karok women went out to collect pine roots, hazel stems, and bear-lily roots for her baskets, she moved in an animate and indeed passionate world. She gathered her basket materials from people—from a woman and her children who had once been dreadfully poor. By plucking roots and stems she was not harming these people but rather honoring them, transforming them into beautiful baskets that would be displayed at ceremonies, “sitting in glory before the rich people.” The woman was thus helping the roots and stems fulfill their destiny. A commonly heard anecdote is of an Indian elder, asked why certain plants which had grown in large numbers no longer do, who replies, no one is harvesting them any more. In other words, no one is having a relationship with them, their spirits have gone untended and our obligations to them are not being fulfilled. The diminishment and loss of cultures that had intimate and familiar relationships with the plants and animals here has indeed led to the loss and diminishment of the plants and animals in the Kneeland area, proof of which would become evident once the white settlers took the land over.

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16 Blackburn and Anderson, p20
Into this well-ordered, intimately spiritual and sustainable world came a new people. A people with a different history and relationship to land. “This religious view, of being so deeply connected to a particular place that a people simply sprang up from it, is almost inconceivable to Europeans, whose history is so rife with migrations that many of us feel that moving somewhere else is the way we carry on our family traditions.”17 With the idea of Manifest Destiny and the doctrine of discovery, the white settlers imposed their world view on the land and its indigenous inhabitants.

Beginning in about 1542 and lasting 300 years, many explorers sailed along the North Coast. The harsh weather and the ocean topography drove them away. Not even the fur trappers stayed very long. It would take something really valuable to lure whites to this part of the North Coast. That something would be discovered at Sutter’s mill in 1848.

The gold rush was on. White men from all over the country joined men from all over the world in a race to get to the gold and make their fortune. They left their land and their families in search of something to make them rich and happy. Their relationship to land was one-sided; get as much as you can from it, and when it runs out move on. This attitude would have an impact on the land.

The discovery of gold on the Klamath and Trinity rivers brought white men into the northern part of the state. Finding a safe harbor north of San Francisco and closer to the mines became the goal of many who wished to make their fortune selling overpriced supplies to the miners. At the same time Dr. Josiah Gregg, along with eight other fed-up miners, decided to cut a path to the coast from the mines at Rich Bar. The Gregg party reached the coast in the winter of 1849, but by the time they made it back to San

17 Hinton, p93
Francisco to report their discovery of a bay which could harbor ships, it had already been discovered by sea. Immediately the race was on to found towns and set up a trade with the mines.

During the months of February and March no less than 15 ships attempted to find the elusive port of Trinidad. Old Spanish maps were all they had to guide them. In March 1850, the *Alta California* newspaper reported “the certainty of mineral wealth abounding in the region of Trinidad.” By April 2, 1850, it reported that, “Prosperous towns will soon be springing up, speculation will be rife and the foremost in the field will reap a rich reward.” By the 8th Trinidad had streets laid out and tent houses erected. Five days later an election, in which 140 votes were cast, was held to organize a town government. The business of supplying the mines on the Klamath was underway. Similar settlements sprang up around the newly discovered Humboldt Bay. Union on the north, Bucksport, Humboldt City and Eureka to the south. Almost simultaneously the cutting of trails to the mines began. Using the land to get rich was about as far as these early settlers could see.

No account was given of the Indians whose land the settlers were stealing. Secure in the knowledge of their racial superiority and rights to Manifest Destiny, the white settlers disrupted a world and way of life that had proved rich and satisfying for thousands of years.

The Whilkut controlled much of the mountain territory surrounding the bay. Any trail to the mines from the South Bay settlements would pass through their land and disrupt their world. Just weeks after the founding of the towns of Trinidad and Union, trails had been established to furnish the Klamath mines with supplies, which proved to be good timing as, “The time of greatest excitement in the mines of this district was during the summer and fall oaf 1850 and the following winter, with the result that the packing trade
was of great importance to the coast towns.\textsuperscript{18} The Klamath mines, to the north of the South Bay towns was too difficult to get to, but the Trinity mines were just to the east.

Humboldt City and other South Bay towns saw their future in trails leading to the Trinity mines. A trail was cut over an Indian path, which led up the Elk River to the Kneeland Prairie, headed south to Iaqua Buttes and east to the Trinity River. Not to be out done, the city of Eureka cut two trails up to Kneeland’s Prairie, one went up Ryan’s Slough and the other up the Freshwater Slough. The junction up on the prairie would be met with another trail leading from Union up over Boynton’s Prairie to the north. Kneeland became the junction for the three main trails leading over to the Trinity mines (see map). Rather than cut new trails through the dense woods, the settlers relied on a network of trails that already existed, having been developed by the Indians. Some led from villages down on the river up to the prairie, others connected prairies and still others were used as trade routes between the tribes.

Trails were much more than paths leading to places. Trails were alive and had spirit. There were proper ways to walk upon them, offerings which must be made in order to have a safe and prosperous journey. For the Whilkut the paths along the ridge tops represented a “physical manifestation of a cosmological principal of walking between the dimensions of good and evil. Balance was the strength.”\textsuperscript{19} The white people came from a different world and did not have the eyes to see this, or anything else, for what they were here in this world. To them a trail was just a way of getting somewhere. People don’t have relationships with things like this, we use them without any obligation to them. Perhaps the mines became unproductive because the trails leading to them had not been respected, they were not walked in balance, obligations were not met.

\textsuperscript{18} Coy, p69
\textsuperscript{19} Bean, p228
So trails were cut and pack trains were soon engaged in the profitable business of carrying supplies to the mines. Towns around the bay grew quickly, and the white speculators were here to stay. Grizzly bears were the packers biggest problem. George Gibbs, in his journal of the Redick McKee expedition remarks that "...this country seems to be the paradise of the grizzly bear, for their signs are visible everywhere." Indeed, the Josiah Gregg party, traveling overland from the Trinity mines in 1850 and hoping to find the bay and the friendly Indians they had heard about, encountered numerous grizzlies. The packing companies hired hunters to kill the grizzlies, thus eliminating one problem. They did such a good job that soon there were no grizzlies left in the area.\(^\text{20}\) The only problem left was the indigenous people.

These new Californians, confident in their right to take the land and do with it as they pleased, developed their own ideas about how to deal with the Indians. Almquist had this to say, "history tells us that no more sorry record exists in the Union of inhuman and uncivil treatment toward minority groups than in California"\(^\text{21}\) Up to now in the development of the west, the problem of what to do with the Indians had been solved by removing them even farther west and settling them on reservation land, land that was usually considered to be of no value to the whites. Treaties had been used to legally divest the Indians of their land in exchange for certain considerations and payments from the government.

California presented a problem since there was no farther west to go. Federal policy and state policy were at odds and in the mean time the miners and settlers themselves were taking the issue into their own hands. Many of the packers moving across Kneeland adopted the 'shoot on sight' solution. Gov. Burnett having no sympathy for the Indians,

\(^{20}\)Humboldt Historian, Fall 1996, p19  
\(^{21}\)Heizer and Almquist, p202
and viewing them as an impediment to progress stated in a speech to the state Legislature, "a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races, until the Indian race becomes extinct. This must be expected. The inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power of wisdom of man to avert."\textsuperscript{22}

It was on the pack trails in Kneeland where trouble first became serious in 1851. Trains of 20 to 30 mules each converged on the prairie.\textsuperscript{23} They trampled bulb beds, over grazed on grass, preventing the harvest of seeds while the packers shot elk, deer and other game depleting their numbers. Those animals who survived retreated farther back into the hills and began to exhibit fear when approached, making it harder to kill them for food. In addition a few whites were beginning to settle the area, building homes and barns on the prairie stealing Indian women, and bringing in livestock, further infringing on the Indian's world and their ability to survive. The result was an increase in hostilities on both sides.

During the next ten or fifteen years the settlers practiced their own solution to the "Indian problem". These found expression in the Humboldt Times, the local weekly newspaper that had been established in 1854. In response to the proposed reservation system James Beith, a 49er who had settled in Arcata wrote, "I can never tolerate the idea of moving the Indians to some reserve close at hand, for such a course is fatal and most disastrous to our interests. A combination of such has served to render this County the poorest in the State, and will only prolong our misery..." his solution, supported by many, was to remove the Indian to some remote island in the Pacific. The idea being that they could not escape and return to their ancestral homes.

\textsuperscript{22}Hoopes, Chad, Domesticate or Exterminate
\textsuperscript{23}Wiltsee, Ernest, Pionerr Miners and the Pack Mule Express and Humboldt Historian
A second solution was offered. Extermination. As trade with the mines fell off the settlers began looking for other ways to make a living. Several farms were settled on the prairie land in Kneeland beginning as early as 1851. The Whilkut reacted to this invasion of their world, and depletion of their food base with raids on the livestock causing the settlers to abandon their farms, for the time being. Indian resistance was seen by the whites as an impediment to progress. The Humboldt Times reported that the Indians are, “a serious draw back to all kinds of business, prevented the development of our agricultural resources and retarded the progress of our county generally”.

Local militia were raised and charged with the responsibility of “breaking up or exterminating the skulking bands of savages”. In 1859 the Times lauded the work of a group of militia that had succeeded in “clearing out’ the Whilkut in the Kneeland area, “The importance of this successful termination of the expedition to this section can scarcely be estimated...The fine body of grazing and agricultural lands on the upper Mad River can now be occupied without danger to life or stock; trade and travel can be resumed in safety, our Weaverville mail will arrive with regularity, and hunters can enjoy their sport with out fear of being waylaid by the skulking savages.” Kneeland was now thought safe for white people.

Up until 1870 Kneeland had only one farm, that belonging to John Kneeland, who settled a claim in 1852 and then filed with the U.S. Land Claims court in 1855, paying $5,000 for 160 acres. At the same time he bought property down in Union, where he made his permanent residence. For a while in the early 1850’s he tried to farm potatoes, but had only limited success. Trouble with the Indians forced him back into town.26

24 Humboldt Times
25 Rawls, p179
26 SBF vol.10, p25
James Kleizer settled a place on the prairie, without benefit of a legal claim, a year before Kneeland, but abandoned it to set up a flour mill in the Hoopa Valley. Some still called the place Kleizer’s Prairie years later. The only other white residents at this time were squatters and backwoodsmen who, having no legal title to the land, or wanting another man’s land, often resorted to violence to get what they wanted. James D. Henry Brown sold his blacksmith shop in Eureka and moved to Kneeland’s Prairie in 1853, where he partnered with Albert Hitchcock raising stock. He gained a reputation for not liking anyone, Indian or white. It is alleged that he often killed and scalped white men and blamed it on the Indians, then volunteered to head up a posse to hunt the offender down and kill him. He didn’t stay around long and eventually moved down to Elk river.

Passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 slowed the squatter’s squabbles and led to a new wave of more permanent settlement. Several factors attracted settlers to Kneeland. The trails leading to the Trinity mines encouraged cattlemen to begin ranching; the men in the mines were hungry for beef. The weather must have attracted people as well. Kneeland is only about 16 miles from the coast, but its location and elevation are enough to give Kneeland more sun and warmer temperatures, a welcome relief from the gray, chilly drizzle down below. A third attraction was based on a gamble. The county, cut off by lack of telegraph and rail from the southern settlements, planned a road through Kneeland to Mendocino county. In 1874 the county commissioned a survey crew to study the route. This would have made Kneeland a bustling community, but it was not to

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27 Great Register of Humboldt County
28 Cooper
29 Irvine, Leigh H.
30 Humboldt Times, December 23, 1871
be. An easier and more politically significant route along the Eel River Valley was found.

Early settlers in Kneeland came from all over the country and western Europe, lured by cheap land and expectations of opportunity. Many who came had already tried homesteading in other states. The United States Census for 1870 shows that a little over half of those who came were from prior frontier states, almost a quarter came from Maine, and another quarter came from Europe, mostly from Ireland. John Hurley and his family, who eventually bought the Kneeland ranch, is a good example. He and his wife Catherine came from Ireland and first tried Nevada. Catherine had three daughters in Nevada before moving to Kneeland in 1870. The Mullens and the Fitzgeralds followed a similar pattern.

Edward Lee Fitzgerald bought 200 acres in 1867 and began a cattle and sheep ranching operation. He also grew hay and grain. In 1874 he built a log house, making it only the second house on the prairie. The settlement of families created the need for a school. Until 1869, the nearest school was 16 miles away down in Bucksport. The Kneeland prairie School District was established from part of the Bucksport district in 1869. Classes were held in the home of Mrs. James Polk Gearheart and in 1871 the first commencement was held. A one room school house was soon built.

The Homestead Act may have afforded cheap land, but it did not solve the conflict with the Indians. By 1863 the Indians had been decimated by disease, and seen their game diminish, their land taken from them without compensation, watched their women be harassed and molested and their children stolen and sold into indenturship. 34 Jack

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31 Census 1870, 1888
32 SBF, vol. 75, p, 920
33 Salyer, Marc, p3
34 Heizer, California Indians
Norton in his book *Genocide in Northwestern California* estimates that 10,000 Indian children and young women were kidnapped between 1850 and 1863. Heizer and Almquist shocked their contemporaries by suggesting that this was the primary cause of the Indian Wars. In April of 1863, John Kneeland, the esteemed founder of Kneeland’s Prairie, acquired a young Indian girl, known as Sylvia, who was indentured to him at the age of 14 for a period of 15 years.  

An attempt to relocate the Indians was made in 1855, rounded up by the military they marched to a reserve in the Klamath region. This reserve had a reputation for having horrendous living conditions, and a corrupt administrator, causing the “near extermination of these tribes.” Those who survived made it back to their ancestral land only to see it being taken over. In retaliation they raided, killed livestock and burned crops. Frantic appeals were made to the government for protection. In a letter to the Humboldt Times dated February 4, 1860, one rancher said; “Indians are murdering our citizens, killing our stock, burning and robbing our houses. Without an effectual remedy soon applied, our frontier settlement must be depopulated.”

In the middle of the Indian wars oil was found in the southern part of the county. The Pennsylvania oil boom had collapsed and speculation ran high in Humboldt county. First reports indicated that Humboldt oil was of even better quality than the eastern kind. The primary use for oil, was as kerosene, or lamp oil, for which there was great demand. Many thought that oil would replace lumber as the leading industry in Humboldt County. Soon investors from afar started oil mining companies. By 1865 they had formed 12 oil mining districts in Humboldt. Not even the Indian Wars being raging in the region could prevent the mining for oil in the Kneeland area. The mining district that encompassed

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35 Norton, *Genocide in Northwestern California*  
36 Humboldt Times January 27, 1855
Kneeland was known as the Humboldt Buttes Petroleum Mining District. At least one company, the Blue Slide Oil company, incorporated in early December of 1865 in Eureka; paying a fee of $200,000.\textsuperscript{37} No oil is reported to have been found in this district, although they tried on and off for 40 years.

Agricultural development initiated by the settlers, reflects an attitude toward land which places value on what they can get from the land: the land itself had no value. The early settlers were equally divided between stockmen and farmers.\textsuperscript{38} Soon only a few stockmen would survive. What happened to the farmers is not clear since the 1880 Census does not list occupation. We do know that during the 1870's many settlers sold out to their ranching neighbors.\textsuperscript{39}

The large numbers of cattle, pigs and sheep soon began to destroy the natural balance on the prairie. Pigs rooted around with their bulldozer noses, tearing up plants and shrubs, devouring tubers and decimating the acorn crop. Many turned feral, ranging over larger tracts of territory with the same results. The ranchers, wanting to maximize the number of cattle per acre of land, soon overgrazed the area, resulting in serious problems of erosion. Over grazing also caused a decrease in the vitality of the prairie grass which could no longer provide enough forage for the number of cattle. Grass hay became an important crop, it was needed to feed cattle when the grass gave out and meant an additional cost for the rancher. Additionally, the cattle trampled into extinction some of the native plants the Indians had relied upon for food and fiber.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37}Lowell, F. L., Mines and Mineral Resources of Humboldt County, CA State Printing Office, 1915,
\textsuperscript{38}Census of 1870
\textsuperscript{39}Salyer, Mark An Application of the Frontier Thesis to patterns of Settlement And Frontier life in Kneeland, 1973 Barnum Contest winner
\textsuperscript{40}Salyer, Mark
In an attempt to expand the prairies, the settlers took to ringing the trees on the border; hoping that the trees would die and the prairie would take over. These attempts failed, although they do serve to illustrate the wastefulness of the settlers. The idea that these seemingly abundant resources were in fact limited, never occurred to them.

The settlers returned to their homes at the end of the Indian Wars, life in the hills stabilized. The 1870's was a period of consolidation. Many of the ranchers relied on local game to supplement their diet. Widespread killing resulted in a serious depletion of game. The last of the grizzlies and elk, as well as a substantial number of deer were killed.\textsuperscript{41} According to Ray Raphael in his Book, \textit{An Everyday History of Somewhere}. By 1873 the elk population had been so severely depleted that a law was passed making it a felony to kill elk, a two year term in jail was punishment.

As white settlement stabilized during the 1870's a hotel and trading goods store were opened. Benjamin Franklin Jarnigan bought a piece of land near the bridge over the Mad River in 1874. Apparently, ranching didn’t provide enough income, or maybe he felt it was a hard way to make a living, Jarnigan opened his home as a hotel in 1879 and sold out part of his land. A. Wiley opened his general merchandise store at this time.\textsuperscript{42} The nearest stores were down in Eureka or Bucksport, a trip to the store could take an entire day. Nothing else is known about the store, but if his prices were fair it must have done a good business.

Later in 1893, Archie McBride leased the Jarnigan place and put up a new building intending to create a resort. Hunting, fishing, a warm climate as well as a sulfur spring drew the fog weary folk from down on the coast. Pleasant Mt. View, as it was named burned down in 1898. A second hotel was built sometime in 1880’s by Dan Campbell.

\textsuperscript{41}ibid
\textsuperscript{42}SBF vol.112, p260
the Fair Oaks hotel was on the Iaqua road near the Kneeland school. An article in the Humboldt Times mentions the delicious peaches, fruits and veggies, honey, sweet cream and butter, all produced near the hotel.\(^{43}\)

There was no commercial logging in Kneeland until 1940, but many of the ranchers logged parts of their land, the lumber was used for their houses, barns and fences. Some, like the Fitzgeralds and Barrys sold some of their logs to the Pacific Lumber Company in order to make a little extra money. Many supplemented their income by stripping tan bark from the tan oak trees and selling it to the local tanneries. Killing the trees in the process. The production of roofing shingles and rail road ties took place on may ranches.\(^{44}\) Tan bark and shingles would become leading exports in Humboldt county during the 1890's.\(^{45}\) Resource extraction, without regard for the resource, endures to the present day.

During the 1870's the white settlers exerted their way of life in Kneeland. By 1880 there were only a hundred or so whites, struggling to make a living in Kneeland. Their attitude towards the land resulted in damage to the environment. Before white contact, this same area amply supported 300 Whilkut without damage to the environment.\(^{46}\) This same pattern of white settlement, destruction of the indigenous culture supplanted by that of the settlers, took place throughout Humboldt County. The 15 or so indigenous cultures were destroyed, and replaced by a single culture, lacking spiritual ties with the land. And the land suffers, holding on to its memories.

\(^{43}\)SBF, vol. 41, p 525
\(^{44}\)Nash, Glen Making a Living, Making a Life in Humboldt County
\(^{45}\)Humboldt County Chamber of Commerce, Humboldt County Statistics December 1, 1891
\(^{46}\)Noton, Jack
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Maps of California Athabascan Territories

Back to Cahto Home Page

Clickable Map of California Athapaskan Language Areas

(under construction--only Cahto and Wailaki areas even started yet)

Test of Tiger Map of Cahto Area

(Right now this shows too many place names on too small a screen--completely illegible due to overlap)

http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/6010/mapindx.html
The Fight for Hoopa Valley

Pack Trails of Humboldt County, California 1865

Boundary established by Special Order #24, June 26, 1863

- Camps and Forts
- Yurok (Lower Klamath) Reservation, 1855
- Hupa Territory
- Smith River Indian Reservation

From maps in the Humboldt State University archives
CULTURE ELEMENT DISTRIBUTIONS:
NORTHWEST CALIFORNIA

By: Harold E. Driver (D.E.)

Def. Ex. 20

Map 1. Tribal territories and origin of informants (data).