2003 Athabascan Languages Conference

Northern California and Southern Oregon Athabascan Cultural Overview & Tour
A Short Guide to the Tribes of Northwestern California
and Southwestern Oregon

Compiled by
Victor Golla
Ruth Bennett
Zo Devine

and

Staff of the Center for Indian Community Development
Humboldt State University
INTRODUCTION

Many participants in the 2003 Athabascan Languages Conference will be unfamiliar with the Indian geography of Northwestern California and Southwestern Oregon. This region, which was home to two quite distinct Athabascan subgroups, the California Athabascans and the Oregon Athabascans, is very different in climate, plants and animals, and traditional culture from most of the rest of Athabascan territory in North America. In this short guide we try to give you an overview of the Indian groups of the area, from the perspective both of aboriginal culture and of contemporary life.

The feature that newcomers to the area are most often struck by is its extraordinary diversity. The landscape is divided into a multitude of microregions, each with its own ecological profile. To a considerable extent aboriginal Indian cultures and languages were linked to these small regions.

To illustrate: Here in Arcata, in the flatlands around Humboldt Bay, we are on traditional Wiyot territory. In aboriginal times the Wiyot people had a lifestyle focused on collecting shellfish and on fishing in the marshy areas at the mouths of the Mad and Eel Rivers. However, if you drive north from Arcata on Highway 101, by the time you reach Trinidad, about 15 miles distant, the low sandy shoreline of the Humboldt Bay area has given way to steep and rocky cliffs. You have passed into Yurok territory. The cultural focus of the traditional Yuroks was on coastal sea mammal hunting and riverine fishing, and their language, although historically related to Wiyot, was as different from Wiyot as English is from Swedish. If you travel east on Highway 299 rather than north on Highway 101, 10 miles will take you to the small town of Blue Lake, which lies at the foot of the first major ridge in the Coast Range. In aboriginal times this was the furthest inland extent of Wiyot settlement. As you ascend the mountain (which used to be covered with a thick old-growth redwood forest) you enter what was Athabascan territory—in this particular area, the territory of the Mad River Whilkut, a hunting and foraging people. This pattern repeats again and again throughout northwestern California and southwestern Oregon: a different culture and language is encountered every twenty or thirty miles.

Yet alongside this close attachment to small, well-defined regions, the aboriginal peoples of this area were also—almost paradoxically—great travellers and sharers. Hupa people, for instance, regularly travelled from Hoopa Valley to the coast to trade, or went over the mountains to Karuk country to attend ceremonies, or went up into the high peaks to the east to hunt. This combination of an intensely local identity (and language) with wide networks of intergroup contact led to a great respect for diversity, which persists to this day.

Our intention in designing this booklet is to give the reader a feel both for the ecological, cultural, and linguistic diversity of this area, and also for some of its unifying themes, particularly the religious and ceremonial aspects of traditional life. In addition to a general catalogue of facts and figures, we have included a tour guide to some important Native American sites in the area. We hope you will have the time to explore our region while you are here, and come to know something of its unique charm.
ABORIGINAL AND CONTEMPORARY TRIBAL GROUPS OF NORTHWESTERN CALIFORNIA AND SOUTHWESTERN OREGON

I. Athabascan Groups

Hupa:

Aboriginal Territory - The main group of Hupa-speaking people traditionally lived along a 25-mile course of the lower Trinity River, from the mouth of South Fork north to the confluence of the Trinity and Klamath. In the lower part of this course the Trinity winds through Hoopa Valley (na:tinixw 'where the trails go back'), which was the center of Hupa territory. The Hupas called themselves na:tinixwe: 'the people of Hoopa Valley'. To the south and southeast, upstream on South Fork and the main Trinity, lived the Tsnungwe (ise:ningxwe: 'the people of Ironside Mountain'), who had their own leaders but also spoke Hupa. To the west, along Redwood Creek and the upper Mad River, lived the Chilula and Whilkut (xwiylq 'idxwe: 'the people of Redwood Ridge'), who also spoke dialects of Hupa. To the north, traditional Hupa territory bordered on Yurok (k 'ina) territory just south of the Yurok village of Weitspus or Weitchpec. The Hupa were also in close contact with the Karuks (k'inasni) who lived to the northeast, upstream on the Klamath River.

Contemporary Territory - Today, most of the descendants of the Hupa-speaking groups live on the Hoopa Valley Reservation in northwestern Humboldt County. The reservation, one of the largest in California, covers 144 square miles—a square, 12 miles on each side—bisected by the Trinity River. It includes all of Hoopa Valley. During the 1850s and 1860s most of the Tsnungwe, Chilula, and Whilkut people were relocated in Hoopa Valley, and many of their descendants are members of the Hoopa Tribe. Some Tsnungwe descendants, including some who live in traditional Tsnungwe territory, are petitioning for separate federal recognition of their tribe.

Language - Hupa, Tsnungwe, Chilula, and Whilkut were minimally different varieties of a single language, and were sharply different from the varieties of California Athabascan spoken by the groups to the south of the Hupa-speaking area. Whatever differences may originally have existed among the local varieties of Hupa, little of them has survived the dialect mixture and leveling of the reservation period. Hupa continues to be spoken, but all fluent native speakers are elderly. Language retention and revival efforts have been ongoing since the 1970s and the language is currently taught at both primary and secondary school levels. Several learners have acquired moderate fluency. A dictionary and a variety of teaching materials exist.

Groups south of the Hupa:

Aboriginal Territory - At the time of white contact in 1850 at least half a dozen distinct Athabascan-speaking groups lived in drainage of the Eel River and its tributaries, or in the vicinity of Cape Mendocino. These included the Mattole and Bear River groups of the Mattole Valley and Cape Mendocino; the Sinkyone, who lived along the present route of
Highway 101 from Scotia to south of Garberville; the Nongatl, who lived along the Van Duzen River around Bridgeville, along the present route of Highway 36; the Lassik and Wailaki of the Eel River Canyon, along the Northwestern Pacific railroad line; and the Cahto, who lived in the valley around Laytonville. Each group spoke a distinct variety of California Athabascan, with the Mattole-Bear River dialects the most differentiated. Much of this territory is heavily forested or quite mountainous, sometimes both, and nearly all of these groups were small and relatively isolated. The Cahto were an exception, living in a lush valley in close contact with the Yukis of Round Valley and the Northern Pomo of the Willits area.

**Contemporary Territory** - Of the Athabascans of this area only the descendents of the Cahto have a reservation of their own, the Laytonville Rancheria, a few miles west of the town of Laytonville. A number of Wailaki and Lassik descendents are enrolled in the Round Valley Reservation, a large reservation similar in situation and early history to the Hoopa Valley Reservation. The confederated Round Valley Tribe also includes descendents of the Yukis, the Nomlakis, and the Konkow Maidus (relocated from the other side of Sacramento Valley). A few descendents of the Mattole and Bear River groups are enrolled at the Rohnerville Rancheria, between Scotia and Fortuna.

**Language** - Although Mattole (with Bear River) and Cahto stand apart from the other varieties, and may be considered emergent languages, it is likely that there was some degree of mutual intelligibility among all California Athabascan languages other than Hupa. With the possible exception of one or more Wailakis who claim a very restricted command of their language, no one survives who has native fluency in any variety of these languages. Over the last decade individuals have made efforts to acquire some second-language knowledge of Mattole, Cahto, or Wailaki, but it is not known how successful these have been.

**Tolowa:**

**Aboriginal Territory** - The Tolowa people (xms or xeshe') traditionally lived in the coastal redwood forest of the extreme northwesternmost corner of California, from just north of the mouth of Smith River to Wilson Creek, between Crescent City and the mouth of the Klamath. North of the Tolowas in the area around Brookings, Oregon, lived the Chetco, who were closely allied to the Tolowas and spoke a slightly different dialect of the same language. To the south, Tolowa territory adjoined that of the Yuroks, with whom the Tolowas traded and intermarried. To the east, the Tolowas shared the high country with several surrounding tribes, including the Yuroks, Karuks, and Hupas.

**Contemporary Territory** - Today, many Tolowa people are enrolled members of one of two federally recognized tribes, the Elk Valley Rancheria, located off US Highway 101 southeast of Crescent City, and the Smith River Rancheria, on Highway 101 a few miles south of the California-Oregon border, and either live on the rancherias or in the nearby area. Other Tolowa people are members of an as yet unrecognized group, the Tolowa Nation. In the 1850s the Chetcos, together with most of the Indian people of southwestern Oregon, were forcibly removed to the Siletz and Grand Ronde Reservations in northern Oregon, and their descendents live there or in non-Indian communities.
Language - Tolowa (with its close dialect Chetco) constitutes a separate language within the Oregon Athabascan subgroup, although there may have been some degree of mutual intelligibility with Tututni. No fully fluent native speaker survives, but the language is being kept vigorously alive by Loren Bommelyn, a fluent second-language speaker, who teaches at Del Norte High School in Crescent City. Bommelyn, who has an M.A. in Linguistics from the University of Oregon, has published a learner’s dictionary and teaching materials as well as technical papers on the language.

Southwestern Oregon Athabascans:

Aboriginal Territory - The rugged coast of southwestern Oregon from a few miles north of Brookings to a few miles south of Bandon was the home of several closely related groups of Athabascan-speaking people often referred to as the Tututni (or Tutudeneh), or sometimes as the Lower Rogue River Athabascans. The Tututni proper lived at the mouth of the Rogue River, near the present city of Gold Beach. Upstream on the Rogue River were the Mikwanutni and the Chasta Costa. North along the coast were the Eucre Creek and Sixes River groups. All of these groups spoke closely related dialects of the same language. Farther up the Rogue River, separated from the Tututni by a steep canyon, there were Athabascan-speaking groups on Galice Creek and in the valley of the Applegate River, living in close proximity to the non-Athabascan Takelmas who occupied the upper Rogue River Valley in the Grants Pass and Medford area. North of the Tututni on the coast lived the non-Athabascan Coquille tribe, but above them on the Coquille River there was another Athabascan group, the Upper Coquille. Further to the northeast, in the valley around Roseburg, lived the Upper Umpqua Athabascans.

Contemporary Territory - In the 1850s nearly all of the Indian population of southwestern Oregon was relocated on two reservations in the mountains southwest of Portland, the Siletz Reservation and the Grand Ronde Reservation. As a consequence, modern descendants of the Tututni, Galice-Applegate, Upper Coquille, and Upper Umpqua groups mostly live in or around these reservations, although some families have reestablished themselves in southern Oregon. A few Upper Umpqua descendants are enrolled at the Cow Creek Umpqua Reservation, along Interstate 5 between Grants Pass and Roseburg.

Language - All of the SW Oregon Athabascan languages closely resemble one another, and with the exception of Upper Umpqua were probably all easily mutually intelligible. Speakers of Tututni could apparently converse with Tolowa speakers, but Tolowa differs from SW Oregon Athabascan in important ways. All varieties of SW Oregon Athabascan except Tututni were extinct by 1965. Although the last fluent speaker of Tututni died in the 1980s, several semi-fluent speakers survive and are active in language revival efforts. A Tututni language program is sponsored by the Siletz Tribe, and there is a separate initiative under way at Lane Community College in Eugene.
II. Non-Athabascan Groups

Wiyot:

Aboriginal Territory - The traditional territory of the Wiyot people (kuhwil) stretched along the coast from a few miles south of Trinidad to the mouth of the Eel River, including the present sites of McKinleyville, Arcata, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, and several other towns, and the entirety of Humboldt Bay. There were three Wiyot groups: Potawot along the lower Mad River, Wiki around Humboldt Bay, and Wiyot proper along the lower Eel River.

Contemporary Territory - Today most people of Wiyot descent live on the 88 acre Table Bluff Reservation, near Loleta at the southern end of Humboldt Bay, on the 60 acre Rohnerville Reservation near Fortuna, or on the 31 acre Blue Lake Rancheria adjacent to the city of Blue Lake.

Language - Wiyot and Yurok (together called the Ritwan languages) are distantly related to the Algonquian family. Although the last native speaker of Wiyot passed away in the early 1960s, there is interest in reviving the language. The Table Bluff Tribe holds regular language classes for its members.

Yurok:

Aboriginal Territory - The traditional home of the Yurok people (’o:!) was the lower Klamath River, from Weitchpec, 25 miles inland, to Requa at the river’s mouth, as well as the coastline south to Orick, Big Lagoon and Trinidad. There were over 60 Yurok villages, divided into eight groups: Trinidad (Tsurai), Big Lagoon (Opyuweg), Orick, Requa (Rekwoi), Turip, Pecwan, Capell (Kepel), and Weitchpec (Weitspus). The Yuroks were in close contact with the Tolowas to the north along the coast, the Karuks upstream on the Klamath, and the Hupas on the lower Trinity. They were also in contact on the south with the Wiyots on the coast, and with the Athabascan Chilulas on Redwood Creek.

Contemporary Territory - Today, the majority of people of Yurok descent are enrolled members of the Yurok Tribe, which is among the largest in California. The Yurok Reservation is a strip approximately two miles wide that runs on either side of the Klamath River from its mouth to Weitchpec. There are small communities at Klamath, at the river mouth, Pecwan (or Johnson’s), and Weitchpec, but many Yurok tribal members live off the reservation. Many descendants of the Trinidad Yuroks (Tsurai) are members of the separate Trinidad Rancheria, overlooking Trinidad Harbor. The tiny Big Lagoon Rancheria is home to a few dozen descendents of the Big Lagoon Yuroks. Also separate from the Yurok Tribe is the 228 acre Resighini Rancheria along the south shore of the mouth of the Klamath River.

Language - Yurok and Wiyot (together called the Ritwan languages) are distantly related to the Algonquian family. There remains only a handful of fluent native speakers, most of whom are currently working with linguists from UC Berkeley on a Yurok Language Project in conjunction with the Yurok Tribe. The Tribe has a language coordinator and classes are regularly held, and master-apprentice teams sponsored.
Ceremonial Dances

I. Hoopa, Karuk, Yurok

These tribes hold world renewal ceremonies conducted by tribal leaders. These ceremonies include rituals conducted by a medicine person with assistants and one or more dances with participation from a number of camps. The major world renewal ceremonies include the White Deerskin Dance, at which deerskins and obsidian blades are incorporated into a display of ceremonial regalia, and the Jump Dance, where woodpecker headdresses and woven hoods with elaborate designs are worn by men, and deerskin dresses decorated with abalone, cedar nut beads, dentalia, and porcupine quills are worn by adolescent women. Each dance is held at specific locations and lasts ten days with a distinct schedule for each day. Individuals with group accompaniment sing the songs. Each dance has its own songs. Songs of the White Deerskin Dance have a solemn and dignified quality so striking that even the first-time listener is likely to recognize their sacred purpose. Jump Dance songs have a slow, irregular rhythm that gives the music a spiritual ecstatic quality. Xonsil ch'idilye is the Hupa name for White Deerskin Dance. Ya:xo: 'awh is the Hupa name for Jump Dance. Vuhvühî, is the Karuk name for the Jump Dance, and Sahvuhvüha, the name for the Deerskin Dance. Psyweg is the Yurok name for White Deerskin Dance. Wonikwulegoh is the Yurok name for Jump Dance.

The Brush Dance (Xon'na 'we, in Hupa; Ihvûnaa in Karuk, and Melih in Yurok) is traditionally held to heal and bless sick children. In the center of a pit, a medicine woman and her helper work on the baby while the mother holds it. Adolescent young women, children, and men of all ages participate in the singing and dancing. Singing consists of sets that alternate between “heavy songs, slow songs, and “light songs,” fast songs. Individual singers lead the songs, with the rest of the dancers joining in. All the dancers do the basic dance step for the Brush Dance. While the dancers are dancing, individual male dancers or pairs of dancers do displays of male expertise, termed “jump center.”

Dresses for the girls and young women are the northwestern California style of deerskin dresses with aprons decorated with abalone, cedar nut beads, glass beads, dentalia, and porcupine quills. They wear basket hats and necklaces made from abalone, glass beads, and dentalia. Boys and men wear deerskin hides, hold otter hide quivers and arrows, wear necklaces made from abalone, pine nuts, and dentalia, and have headrolls made from woodpecker scalps and adorned with many feathers.
These tribes periodically conduct a ceremonial dance for the occasion of a girl's first menstruation. This dance, called the Flower Dance, (Ch 'iwa:l in Hupa; Ihuk in Karuk), is held in the pit of the traditional house. The men sing several sets of dances during the night, building in number, until the last night when they dance all night long. At the end of the dancing, the girl emerges and runs to the river a number of times to establish her status as an adult woman in the community.

The Kick Dance, (Ch 'iltul in Hupa; Piyniknik in Karuk) is traditionally held to establish the power of Indian doctors. They validate the woman's professional status in the community. The dance begins at sunset and continues all night long. The men are seated on stools and they each kick one foot out in front of them so that it falls and strikes the ground on each beat of the music. This is what gives the dance its name.

II Tolowa:

Tolowa people held world renewal ceremonies. The major Tolowa world renewal ceremonies focused on ceremonies connected with the taking of the first salmon, eels, smelt, and seal lion. The annual first sea-lion hunt was the most elaborate ceremony, involving a joint expedition of large canoes from each village to the rookeries off shore. The canoes rendezvoused and sailed out together but split up as soon as they reached the rookeries. From then on each canoe proceeded to hunt and transport its own catch with each returning to its own village's beach.

Nedosh is the Tolowa Feather Dance held at Nelechundun where a large Tolowa dance house was reconstructed in the 1990's. The music of the Feather Dance is dramatically different from other Northwestern California dances. The rhythms are upbeat, created by male singers whose style is energetic. Girls and young women display their dresses at the dance. They dance in pairs across a dance line that curves across the width of the Tolowa Dance house. Their dresses are the northwestern California style of deerskin dresses with aprons decorated with abalone, cedar nut beads, dentalia, and porcupine quills. They wear basket hats and necklaces made from abalone and dentalia.

Adolescent women, children, and boys and men of all ages participate in the dance. The dance is held at night, with the amount and length of dances increasing on successive nights, with dancing on the last night continuing in sets throughout the night.

III Wiyot:

For centuries, Wiyot people held annual world renewal ceremonies, but none have been held in the lifetime of any living Wiyot people. It is believed that the Jump Dance was held near Kolike 'me, on the mouth of the Mad River, and that other world renewal dances were held at other major villages.

On February 26, 1860 there was a tragedy that devastated the numbers of Wiyot people, and has remained a pervasive part of their history. A large number of Wiyots were massacred as they were sleeping after a ceremonial dance at the village called Tuluwat on Indian Island in Humbolddt Bay and in other ceremonial spots up and down the coast. The massacres put an immediate stop to all Wiyot ceremonies. Wiyot people today honor those who lived and died during this tragedy with an annual ceremony at the end of February.
Food

For the Hoopa, Karuk, Tolowa, Wiyot and Yurok tribes food has historically been plentiful on the mountains and valleys of northwest California. All the tribal people made good use of it all. Their way of life was sustained by river and creek fishing for salmon and trout and for trading for coastal shellfish, sea lions, and whales. Deer and elk were hunted. Acorns were a staple and were most commonly eaten as acorn soup, a thick soup with a consistency of mush. Berries, such as blackberries and huckleberries were an important food source, as were roots, such as wild potatoes.

Cooking and eating baskets were made from a combination of willow, pine, or hazel. Distinctive designs were woven into the twined baskets. Dome-shaped baskets, rather than peaked or flat shapes, are common throughout Northwestern California. Today people of these tribes still weave baskets and eat traditional foods and use traditional basket utensils on special occasions.

Housing

For the Hoopa, Karuk, Tolowa, Wiyot and Yurok tribes houses were, historically, rectangular in shape, made from split planks, with a plank roof (Hoopa used cedar, other tribes redwood), a smoke hole at the top, and a round side entrance with a sliding door. Inside the house was a fire pit and extending all around the outer edges was a shelf used for storage. Women and children always slept in the living house, but men usually occupied sweat houses. Sweat houses were used for sleeping, gambling, and for ceremonial purposes. They were like the living house, except smaller, and with roof planks often extending to the ground.

Most tribal people today live in contemporary, western style dwelling spaces. The Department of Health and Urban Development (HUD) usually supplements the costs of constructing housing on the reservation. HUD’s mission is to remedy unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions and to alleviate the acute shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for of low-income people while promoting and sustaining the culture, education, language, health, welfare, self-sufficiency, and economic independence of its residents.

Transportation

The Hoopa, Karuk, Tolowa, Wiyot and Yurok tribes had a strong transportation system along the river systems that ran through their respective territories using dugout canoes constructed from redwood. Canoes were constructed with stone tools by a process of burning out the inside and hacking out a blunt-ended outer shape and a rounded-out interior. Boats were steered with paddles, also constructed from redwood. Boats were thought of as living beings and parts of the boats were named with the names for human organs. For example, in the Hoopa language, the back seat of the boat is called, Me'neg' miq'it dahya'wing'ay its back-on it-it extends upward. The inside of the boat is called mi'kyuns'a:n its heart, or its insides-it lies there. The foothold in the boat is called k'ijonjo'l its kidney.

Today, motorboats are more common on the Trinity than boats that are paddled. However, dug out canoes are still made and used for ceremonial purposes. Transportation is primarily via motor
vehicles on state and tribally maintained roads systems. In rural areas, public transportation is limited.

**Doctoring**

The Hoopa, Karuk, Tolowa, Wiyot and Yurok tribes paralleled many California indigenous groups in their theories relating to disease. Traditionally they held that sickness was caused by the intrusion of poison into the body, caused by persons trained in creating illness in others, or by other evil forces.

To counter the effects of these forces, Indian doctors practiced one or more types of doctoring. Herb doctors gave herbs and recited curative prayers. Dream doctors dreamed of the taboo that had been breached or the cause of the illness. Singing doctors recited curative formulas and sang. Laying on hands doctors transferred powers from themselves into the patient through their hands. Tracing doctors found the locations that people were seeking, such as where people were lost in the mountains. Sucking doctors removed poison objects through a pipe that was shaped like two cones, one inverted and on top of the other, joined at their narrow points. There was also a doctor who could do all of the types of doctoring.

In 1892, John Slocum founded the Shaker Church, a doctoring religion in the state of Washington that spread among indigenous people. The Indian Shaker religion spread to northwestern California soon after, and remains there today. Shaker doctors are equivalent to Protestant ministers who combine the laying on of hands with group rituals such as the ringing of bells and step dancing in a circle and include some Christian elements.

Today, Indian Health Service (IHS), an agency within the US Dept. of Health and Human Services, is the principal federal health care provider and health advocate for Indian people. Its goal is to assure that comprehensive, culturally acceptable personal and public health services are available and accessible to American Indians and Alaska Natives. The IHS provision of health services to members of federally recognized tribes grew out of the special government to government relationship between the federal government and Indian tribes. This relationship, established in 1787, is based on Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution, and has been given form and substance by numerous treaties, laws, Supreme Court decisions, and Executive Orders.

On the Northcoast, IHS has compacted with the United Indian Health Services (UIHS) to provide medical services to American Indians. A new UIHS health complex, Potawot Health Village, being built in Arcata will be the largest Indian health facility in California when completed. The Hoopa Tribe operates its own health services and operates the only hospital in the eastern Humboldt area.

**Education**

Today, most tribal children attend public schools. However, traditionally, educating Indian children depended on the family. Elders took charge of children’s education with stories as a central focus in their teaching. After contact, Indian education came under control of the federal government, which has had a variety of policies and practices regarding the education of Indian people. For a period of time from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, Indian children, including children from local tribes, were sent to distant boarding schools, sometimes as young as age 7. There they were educated in vocations and trades and punished for speaking their ancestral languages.
Indian Law

Traditionally, The Hoopa, Karuk, Tolowa, Wiyot and Yurok people resolved most conflicts by a system of payments, where if both parties agreed upon the payment, the matter was settled and couldn't be brought up again.

Today Indian law is a comprehensive body of knowledge within a historical, factual, and legal framework. Lawyers and other advocates train in this field to address the complexities faced by states, Indian tribes, and the federal government when dealing with Indians, Tribes and tribal resources. Tribal courts, or law departments within tribes have been established for researching Indian law issues, and there are a number of organizations, such as the California Indian Legal Service, whose work is devoted to legal issues relating to tribes. The Hoopa Valley Tribe has a Tribal court which exercises general civil jurisdiction and limited criminal jurisdiction relating to reservation resources. The Yurok Tribe has a limited jurisdiction tribal court that has principally handled issues related to regulation of the tribe's fishery. The Blue Lake Rancheria, the Big Lagoon Rancheria, and the Rohnerville Rancheria participate in a consortium that operates the Northwest Intertribal Court, established to handle child welfare issues.

SOURCES

HOOPA


KARUK


TOLOWA


**WIYOT**


**YUROK**


Arcata (arkéyta) — Called Union or Uniontown when it was founded in April 1850 as a supply base for the interior mines, the name was formally changed a decade later to a "local Indian" word. Although the town was on Mad River Wiyot (Potawot) territory, *Arcata* is not derived from a Wiyot placename but is based on Yurok *oket'oh* 'where there is calm water, a lagoon' (< o- locative + *ket'oh* 'be a lagoon'). This was also the name applied by the Yuroks to Big Lagoon, on the coast about 20 miles north of Arcata.

On the coast north of Arcata

Cher-Ae Heights (čorey) — The casino and restaurant operated by the Trinidad Rancheria, on the high rocky coast about one mile south of the small town of Trinidad. The name is that of the former Yurok village at Trinidad, *tsurey* (spelled Tsurai in many ethnographic sources).

Orick (órik) — The small town at the entrance to Redwood National Park, at the mouth of Redwood Creek. The name is derived from the Yurok village of *orekw* 'where the river flows out' which was located near here.

Requa (rékwə) — The small settlement on the bluff at the mouth of the Klamath River, site of the Yurok village of *rek'woy* 'river mouth'.

Klamath (klaməθ) — The Klamath River, the town of Klamath at its mouth and Klamath Lake at its headwaters, all take their name from *tlamat/, the Chinook Jargon ethnonym for the Klamath tribe of south-central Oregon.

Lake Earl — A large lagoon on the coast west of Crescent City. Although this is in Tolowa territory, the name is an Anglicization of the Yurok name, *rrf/, of uncertain meaning.

Yontockett (yantákət) — On the coast west of Crescent City near the site of a large Tolowa village, *yan'dagəd* 'southward uphill'.

On the coast south of Arcata

Loleta (loliyto) — A small town near the mouth of Eel River, east of Ferndale. It was first called Swauger, after the owner of the land on which it was built. In 1893 the residents, wishing a change, accepted Mrs. Rufus S. Herrick’s choice of the present
name, which she believed to be a version of the original Wiyot name of the site. The
Indian name was in fact katawó’o’t, but an elderly Wiyot played a joke on Mrs. Herrick
by telling her that the name was hosh wiwitak ‘let’s have intercourse!’

Weott (wiyat) — Although this small town on the Eel River is in what was Sinkyone
(Eel River Athabascan) territory, its name is based on wíyo’t, the Wiyot word for the
tribelet living along the Eel River between Scotia and the coast (extended by
ethnographers to include all speakers of the Wiyot language).

Mattole River (matowl) — From the aboriginal and historical ethnonym of the
Athabascan tribelet of the area. Li (1930) recorded the Mattole term as bedool, and
Teeter (1958) gives me’tuul as the Wiyot equivalent. The word is not analyzable in either
language.

Sinkyoine Wilderness State Park (síkyóyn or sínkíyown) — The name is derived
from the ethnographic term for the Eel River Athabaskan tribelets living between the
South Fork of the Eel River and the coast, and along the main Eel River north of its
confluence with the South Fork. This, in tum, is apparently derived from the name
applied to them by the Katos to the south, sin-kiyahan ‘coast people’.

The Hoopa Valley region

Hoopa Valley (húwpá) — From hup’o, the Yurok name for Hoopa Valley (in tum
possibly derived from Chimariko hopew-da ‘acorn place’, the Chimariko name for the
principal village in Hoopa Valley, called ta’k’imit-ding ‘acorn soup cooking place’ in
Hupa). When spelled Hupa it is the ethnogaphic term for the Hupa-speaking people of
the Trinity River, and subsequently for their language. (Thus: “The Hupa of Hoopa
Valley speak Hupa.”)

Horse Linto Creek — Entering the Trinity from the east between Willow Creek and
Hoopa Valley. A very creative corruption of Hupa xahsln-ding ‘eddy place’, the village
at the mouth of the creek.

Tish-Tang-a-Tang Creek, Tish-Tang Point (tistæni) — The name of a creek and
mountain at the southeastern end of Hoopa Valley. From diysh-tang’a:-ding ‘grouse(?)
promontory place’, a village on the east bank of the Trinity at the southern end of Hoopa
Valley. The unanalyzable first element diysh is probably an archaic form of diwh
‘grouse’.

Matilton (matilton) — The area on the east bank of the Trinity near the airport, site of
the major village of me’dl-ding ‘boat place’, also called Captain John’s Ranch.
Senalton (senálton) — The area on the east bank of the Trinity near the highway bridge and the shopping center, site of the Hupa village of tse:wina:l-ding ‘overturned rocks place’.

Soc'tish Creek (sáktš) — On the west side of the Trinity opposite Miskut. From sawhjich ‘I throw (berries) into my mouth’, a Hupa family name.

Miskut (miskɔt) — On the east bank of the Trinity about a mile and a half north of the shopping center, site of the village of mis-q’it ‘on the riverbank’.

Along the Klamath River

Terwah Creek (təˈrwa) — On the north side of the Klamath upstream from the Highway 101 bridge, the site of Fort Terwah, a U.S. Army post ca. 1857-60. From the name of the Yurok village at this location, trwrr ‘locust’.

Mettah Creek (mɛytə) — From the Yurok name of the village at the mouth of the creek, metaa.

Capell Creek (kəpɛl) — From kep’él, the name of the Yurok village near the mouth of the creek, site of the principal Yurok fish weir.

Pecwan (pekwan) — A small Yurok community, also called Johnson’s, on the north bank of the Klamath about six miles west of Weitchpec. From the name of a Yurok village a mile or more downstream, pekwan, from which many of the families now living in Pecwan were relocated after a disastrous flood.

Weitchpec (wɪtʃpek) — The town at the confluence of the Klamath and the Trinity, from the name of the Yurok village here, wets-pék or wets-pus ‘confluence place’.

Ikes Creek — On the Klamath River south of Somes Bar. Named for a Karuk Indian called “Little Ike,” a corruption of his Karuk name, ēehkan.

Ishi Pishi — On the Klamath River near the mouth of Salmon River. From Karuk ishipish ‘extending down’, a former village located nearby. The name refers to the end of a trail that descends from the mountains here.

Tea Bar (Ti Bar, Tee Bar) — An old mining town on the west bank of the Klamath between Somes Bar and Happy Camp. Named after the nearby Karuk village of tiih.

Yreka (wayrίyko) — The county seat of Siskiyou County, located at the north end of Shasta Valley. From wāik’a’, the Shasta name for Mt. Shasta.
Athabascan Sites Tours

By Ruth Bennett, PhD

ARCATA TO TOLOWA ANCESTRAL TERRITORY

Crescent City: Tolowa ancestral lands are set in the stunningly beautiful and diverse natural environs near Crescent City, about an hour and a half north of Arcata. These environs include the Lake Earl lagoon, Smith River estuary, and Elk Valley. Tolowa history, traditions, and legends were lived in ancient thriving villages, located throughout the area. Today the federally recognized Tolowa tribes are the Smith River Rancheria and Elk Valley Rancheria. The Tolowa Nation is seeking recognition.

How to find it: The road to Tolowa territory is Highway 101 north from Arcata, running first through Wiyot territory. Seven miles north of Arcata, the road crosses the Mad River. The ancient Wiyot village of Kolik’me on the north bank of the mouth of the Mad River was a ceremonial site where Wiyot people once held the Jump Dance. Continuing north through and past McKinleyville, Highway 101-north crosses over the Little River at its mouth. This is the border of Wiyot and Yurok territories.

The highway continues north through Yurok territory, from Trinidad (Tolowa: Tumshrayme’), to Orick and into Redwood National Park. The road north crosses the Klamath River at Requa (Tolowa: Tachit), a major Yurok ceremonials center where the Brush Dance is held annually. Highway 101 north enters Tolowa territory at the mouth of Wilson Creek (Dageet’It’sa). It continues north through to Tolowa lands to Crescent City (Ta’atdun).

Ancient Tolowa Villages: North of Crescent City the road passes into the heart of Tolowa territory, and the ancient village sites of Eechulet on Lake Earl and Yan’dakut, the Tolowa center of the universe, on the Smith River. Further upstream is Ninglichuundun, another important Tolowa village.

How to find them: Highway 101 continues north from Crescent City toward the Smith River. Near the Crescent City northern city limits on Highway 101, a right turn leads into the Elk Valley road. Continuing north on Highway 101, a left turn connects onto Lake Earl Drive, and access to Lake Earl. Eechulet is an ancient Tolowa village on a peninsula on Lake Earl. A left turn farther north leads to Fort Dick and to Yan’dakut, the Tolowa Center of the World, on the Smith River downstream from Highway 101. Or, continuing north on Highway 101, at Dr. Fine Bridge the highway crosses the Smith River. The village of Yan’dakut is downstream, to the west. Gushchume’ is at the mouth of Elk Creek. Ninglichuundun is on the Smith River, to the east, upstream from Highway 10.

The road continues north into towards Brookings, Oregon, the territory of Chetco people.
ARCATA TO HUPA ANCESTRAL TERRITORY

**Hoopa Valley:** The road from Arcata to the Hoopa Valley passes from the Pacific Coast through ancient Athabascan territory of forests, the Mad River and its north fork, Redwood Creek and Willow Creek to the Trinity River. The Hoopa Valley Tribe takes its name from the Hoopa Valley, the geographical spelling of the word Hupa, which is Yurok in origin.

**On your way to the Hoopa Valley:** On your way to the Hoopa Valley you will go past the places listed below. They are recommended as a brief exploration for travelers interested in Hupa and the other Athabascan languages of the county.

**Blue Lake:** The Blue Lake Rancheria is a small reservation adjacent to the town of Blue Lake, with a mixed population of Wiyot, Yurok, Hupa and other Indians. Both Wiyot and Athabascan peoples have always lived in this area.

**How to find it:** Take Highway 101 north from Arcata. Follow directions for Highway 299 from Highway 101 two miles north of Arcata and go east. Cross the Mad River to Blue Lake. An important village near the present town of Blue Lake was located north of the highway from the Blue Lake exit.

Village sites in the Blue Lake area are *Yitse’n xasindilding* (Hupa: down hill-they come out-place), *Xochh’indilding* (Hupa: they go to the bottom-place), and *Kawch’osishtinting* (Mad River Whilkut).

**Lord-Ellis Summit:** The westernmost summit of the coastal range traversed by Highway 299 is Lord Ellis.

**How to find it:** Continue east ascending on Highway 299. The first summit is Lord-Ellis.

The sites in the Lord-Ellis area are *Diq’a:n me:yiwire:na:t* (Hupa: ridge-[a plant]-around it), *xwiy1q’it ch’e:willin me:q* (Hupa: Redwood Ridge- it flows out-in it), Redwood Valley.

**Redwood Valley:** *Xwiy1q’it* Athabascan people populated the Redwood Valley along Redwood Creek, as well as upstream and downstream from the valley.

**How to find it:** Continue east on Highway 299. A mile east of Lord Ellis Summit is an exit sign marked “Redwood Valley.” The route is a paved road through a forest glade. After approximately three miles, the road levels and then crosses Redwood Creek. Prior to the 1850’s, this section of the valley was a center of population for the Xwiy1q’it people.

The village sites here are *le:nawh hayah* (Hupa: they live together-there), *kaxusta’ding* (Chilula, Whilkut) (Philadelphus-among-place), *Xwiy1q’it* village near the junction of Highway 299 and Redwood Valley Road, and the *k’ina’xontahding* (Hupa: Yurok house-place).
Ketan-nahchting (Chilula, Whilkut) is on a flat bordering Redwood Creek on the east, about _ mile N of Tom Bair's Ranch house near where the road crosses the Creek.

Nolehting (Hupa: waterfalls-place), Nolehting (Chilula, Whilkut) is the largest Xwiytq’it village, about 12 miles upriver from mouth of Redwood Creek.

**Windy Point:** Windy Point is visible from the Berry Summit rest stop on Highway 299. The point is to the south. This was an important training ground for stick game players. To obtain luck, they ran from the summit to the end of the point in one breath.

**How to find it:** Continue east on Highway 299. The road ascends to Berry Summit, the watershed between Redwood Creek and the Trinity River.

The site there is **Tse:tsoxa:tinteht** (Hupa: rock-[a plant]-wide).

**Willow Creek:** Willow Creek is next to the small town of Willow Creek. Some ancient Hupa village sites are located on and around the creek.

**How to find it:** Highway 299 intersects with Highway 96 north in Willow Creek. Take a left turn at this junction and follow Highway 96 north to the Hoopa Valley. The road crosses over Willow Creek. The village **Xo’xohding** is at the mouth of Willow Creek and the village of **Xo’xohding yinuq’** is upstream from the mouth of Willow Creek.

**Sugar Bowl:** At this site there was a miy, a rain rock that was a powerful place where Rain Rock medicine was made.

**How to find it:** Following Highway 96 north, the road proceeds through a forest, cuts across hillsides, and skirts a canyon. Five and a half miles north of Willow Creek there is a view of a circular valley known as Sugar Bowl Ranch.

The sites there are **Xayahme’** (fishing place) and **Miyme’** (rain rock place).

**The Hoopa Valley:** California’s largest Indian reservation is located in a strikingly beautiful wild river valley. This valley is the destination of the exploratory tour. Some important Hupa villages are near Highway 96, such as **Diyshta:ng’a:ding**, **Me’dilding**, and **Ta’k’imilding**. The Hupa name for Hoopa Valley is **Na:tinixw** (where trails go back). The people call themselves **Na:tinixwe** (those of Hoopa Valley).

**How to find it:** Continuing north past Sugar Bowl, Highway 96 enters the Hoopa Valley.

**Diyshta:ng’a:ding** (grouse-promontory- place): This village is at the upriver end of the Hoopa Valley on the eastern side of the Trinity River. This important Hupa village was at the entrance to the Hoopa Valley coming from upstream and the people were sociable, friendly, and skillful in uniting the people of the valley with the Tsnungwe Athabascan
people, their upstream neighbors coming from Le:lding and other South Fork Trinity River villages.

**How to find it:** As you continue north on Highway 96 and pass the turnoff to Tish Tang Campground. A sign, painted with Hupa basket designs marks the entrance to the Hoopa Indian Reservation. After about a half mile, the highway reaches a vista point. Across the river are the xontah (traditional Hupa houses and former homes of Hupa families) of the ancient Diyshta:ng'a:ding village. This village is one of three such reconstructed village sites in the Hoopa Valley.

**Me'dilding** (boat-place): This village is across the Trinity River from Blue Slide just downriver from the turn onto Shoemaker Road at its northern end. Me'dilding is the site of the Hupa Brush Dances.

**How to find it:** Past Diyshta:ng'a:ding, continue north on Highway 96. Me'dilding above the far riverbank at the next pullout place to the right.

**Pliny Earle Goddard's House:** The linguist Pliny Earle Goddard (1868-1928) was originally a missionary to the Hupas. His church, now called the Church of the Mountains, still stands. (It is now Presbyterian; in Goddard's day it was interdenominational, and Goddard himself was a Quaker). Just north of the church is the parsonage where Goddard and his family lived between 1896 and 1899. Goddard supervised the construction of both the church and the parsonage.

**How to find it:** From Highway 96, take a left turn onto the road that Hoopa Elementary School and Hoopa High School are on (these are visible from the highway). At the end of the block there is a stop sign, turn right. The Presbyterian Church of the Mountains is 1/3 mile on the right.

**Hoopa Valley Tribal Museum:** During open hours, it is possible to visit the Hoopa Tribal Museum and view their extensive collection of Indian dresses, baskets, and other ceremonial artifacts from the tribe's extensive heritage.

**How to find it:** North on Highway 96, past the turn of to the schools, take a right turn at the Hoopa Valley Shopping Center. The Museum is located in between the supermarket and the casino. See the map at the end of this section.

**Ta'k'imilding:** (acorn cooking place): This is a Hupa village on the eastern side of the Trinity River downriver from the Trinity River bridge. It is the site for four principal ceremonies: the Jump Dance, the White Deerskin Dance, the Flower Dance, and the Brush Dance. Ta'k'imilding is today's spiritual center for the Hoopa Valley Tribe.

**How to find it:** Going north on Highway 96, the road crosses the Trinity River bridge. It passes the Hoopa Valley Shopping Center and other Hoopa Valley businesses. One-
tenth mile north from this area there is a left turn off to the historic village of Ta'k'itimilding. The village is on the riverbank, shaded by trees, and many of the traditional houses are kept in repair. Since this is a site of considerable religious significance to the Hupa people, please be respectful during your visit.

Sources

Bennett, Ruth. Hupa Place Names. In Hupa Ethnographic Database. Center for Indian Community Development, Humboldt State University, ms.

Bommelyn, Loren. 1972. The Tolowa Language. Arcata, Ca: Center for Indian Community Development, Humboldt State University.

Arcata to Tolowa Ancestral Territory

LEGEND

- Highway
- Rivers

Pacific Ocean