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Nevada Indians in California

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This report details visits by Northern Paiutes to central and western California as early as 1846 and continuing through the beginning of the twentieth century. That these visits were not necessarily economically motivated makes this behavior seem somewhat unique in western native history.

LONG-DISTANCE movements by American Indians during early contact times, especially after the acquisition of the horse, were not uncommon events. In the East and Southeast, the native populations of large geographic regions were depopulated or displaced. In the west, partially due to the persistence of a pedestrian hunting and gathering lifeway, a somewhat different situation seems to have prevailed; the large-scale migrations that were common in the east and on the plains were apparently rare.

In marked exception, long-distance travels by the Colorado River Yumans appear to have been common and particularly well known. Kroeber (1925:727), for example, had this to say about the Mohave:

Tribes hundreds of miles away were attacked and raided. Visits carried parties of Mohave as far as the Chumash and Yokuts. Sheer curiosity was their main motive; for the Mohave were little interested in trade. They liked to see lands; timidity did not discourage them; and they were as eager to know the manners of other peoples as they were careful to hold aloof from adopting them.

Other groups may also have traveled long distances to trade or had trade links with distant areas. Items such as obsidian from the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada have been found as far away as coastal California (Hildebrandt and Mikkelson 1993; Hughes 1994; Jackson and Ericson 1994) and marine shell beads dating to ca. 6,600 B.C. from the Pacific coast have been found at Leonard Rockshelter in west-central Nevada, over 250 miles from their nearest source (Heizer 1978:691). Many of these items were probably moved by intermediary groups who traded them to neighbors, but direct contact is also possible. Long-distance pedestrian trade, of course, was not unique or limited to the west, as is clearly evident in exotic artifacts from Hopewellian sites in the eastern and southeastern United States.

What is of interest for the purposes of this report are long-distance visits of Great Basin

Indians to California. These visits apparently were not only for trade, but, like the Mohave, the Paiutes and their neighbors came to California out of sheer curiosity. The antiquity of such visits is unknown. Heizer (1978:692) suggested such long-distance travel may only have begun following white intrusions into the area, when traditional territorial boundaries changed.

Obviously, modern political boundaries did not exist in aboriginal times, but documented long-distance movements of pedestrian Great Basin groups west of the Sierra Nevada seem to have been rare. This article reports a series of visits to California by the Northern Paiute in the nineteenth century (see Fig. 1 for locations discussed in text).

HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF LONG-DISTANCE VISITS BY NEVADA INDIANS

What prompted the authors' interest in the phenomena was a somewhat cryptic reference in Agent Garland Hurt's 1857 report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. In his report, Hurt (1857:228) described an encounter with a group of Indians near Humboldt Sink:

. . . we met in all some two hundred [Indians], belonging to the Py-ute tribe, whom we found in the same degraded condition as the Diggers [Shoshone]; but what is most strange, the most of them speak the English language sufficiently well to be understood. It is evident that most of them have lived more or less in California, and have fled from thence, preferring indolence, with all its privations, to the habits of civilized life.

Thus, by 1856, at least one group of Northern Paiutes was apparently speaking English, and their agent suspected that they might have learned it while living in California.

In her sometimes romanticized account, Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims (Hopkins 1883), Sarah Winnemucca made several references to early visits to California by her grandfather, known as Truckee, "Chief" Truckee, or "Captain" Truckee. Truckee,

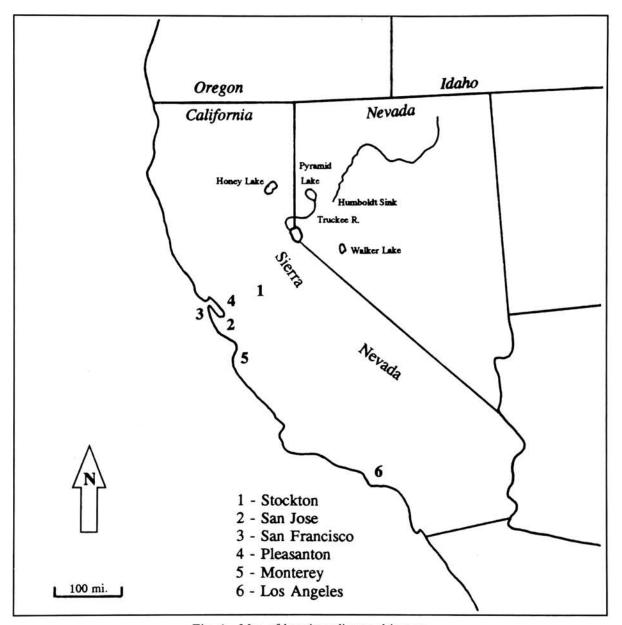


Fig. 1. Map of locations discussed in text.

probably one of the most famous Northern Paiutes, apparently met John Charles Frémont in 1845, fought with him against the California Mexicans in 1846, and became a renowned spokesman for the Paiute people in the early contact period. Originally, Truckee was probably a headman from the *Küpadökata* (ground squirrel-eater) band from the Humboldt Sink region. Interestingly enough, Truckee may have

begun his career as a guide and friend to travelers even prior to meeting Frémont.

In 1844, the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy party, a group of emigrants principally from Missouri, set out for California. Upon reaching the Humboldt Sink sometime in early October, the group was befriended by a Paiute man who answered so many of their questions with "Truckee" (said to mean "all right" or

"okay") that he became known as "Chief" or "Captain" Truckee (Kelly and Morgan 1965: 119).1 Securing the man as a guide, the group crossed the "forty-mile desert" (Cline 1963: 112) between the Humboldt Sink and the bend of the Salmon Trout River, later to be named the The party continued west, upriver. They left the Truckee River, passed Donner Lake, and crossed the Sierra near Donner Summit, paralleling the modern routes of Interstate 80 and the Southern Pacific Railroad (Cline 1963:188; Kelly and Morgan 1965:115-121). In later years, Truckee was said to have guided other wagon trains over the mountains and was noted by many sources as accompanying Frémont's California Battalion in 1846 (Aram 1907; Kelly and Morgan 1965:210-213, 337; Bryant 1967:227-228; Hermann 1972:101).

In his earlier Great Basin exploration of 1843-1844, Frémont missed the Humboldt Sink and the Küpadökata band by entering Paiute country from the north, through Kuyuidökata ("Cui-ui eater") territory and Pyramid Lake. It is interesting to note, however, that on January 15, 1844, upon meeting a major encampment of Kuyuidökata near the present site of Nixon, Nevada, a map was drawn in the sand by the Indians. They indicated that beyond the Sierra could be found people like Frémont and his men, suggesting a prior knowledge of California's Great Valley and Sutter's colony of New Helvetia (Frémont 1845:219; Heizer 1958).²

Frémont's 1845-1846 expedition arrived at the Salmon River at the beginning of December, traveling north from Walker Lake and Agaidö-kata (trout-eater) territory. They crossed the Sierra Nevada at Donner Pass on December 4, 1845, continuing on to do battle with the Mexican Californians. Frémont made no mention in his memoirs or any other sources of securing native guides on this trip, though his own party included several Delawares (Frémont 1887).

The "muster rolls" or pay records for Frémont's California campaign have several inter-

esting entries, including a Jose Trucky, a Juan Trucky, and a Philip Trucky; Juan and Philip are noted as being with Companies B and C, and Jose is listed with Company B (Rogers 1951:23-24). A version of the rolls published in the Madera County Historian (Madera County Historical Society 1966) lists a Truckey at 44 years old and a Jose Trucky at 24 years old. Yet another version of the "muster rolls" notes a Private Jose Trucky enlisting at Sacramento on October 15, 1846 (Reading MS). A manuscript in the Bancroft Library entitled "U. S. Army California Battalion of Mounted Riflemen, Muster Rolls 1846-47" (Anonymous 1846-1847) also lists Jose, Juan, and Philip Trucky. Jose Trucky was listed as a private, enlisting on October 26, 1846, in Sacramento, in Captain H. L. Ford's Company B. He was paid \$25 a month and had signed up for a three-month enlistment, with his service expiring on April 12, 1847. Juan and Philip Trucky are noted as enlisting as privates on October 26, 1846, at Cosume (sic), with Captain G. P. Smith's Company C. Both men were also enlisted for three months at \$25 a month and were discharged on April 13, 1847. The payrolls show that all three men signed for their payments by marking an "X" (Anonymous MS). Kelly and Morgan (1965:210) noted that a Bancroft Library manuscript listed all three as enlisting at the Pueblo de San Jose on October 26, 1846.

Bryant (1967:227-228) noted that Truckee and his brother went to California with an emigrant group and accompanied Frémont's California Battalion from Monterey to Ciudad de Los Angeles (Los Angeles) in 1846. It is likely that the Paiutes accompanied the Imus party of emigrants to California in 1846 (Kelly and Morgan 1965:205-213).

While these muster rolls note the presence of Jose, Juan, and Philip Trucky, other manuscripts reported that additional Paiutes were with Fremont's forces. Martin (MS:38-39) reported the following:

Some of the enemy were in sight of us, on the south side and marching in the same direction. We had about 6 Truckee indians [sic] with us. One of these an old fellow had an old musket which he always carried although he had no idea of shooting it; always taking to his bow and arrows when it came to fighting. He happened to stray away some distance from the main body when the Californians made a dash on him, but he drove them off with his arrows and regained the column in safety. We travelled along the Sta. Clara river until we reached the horse trail crossing the San Fernando Mts.

The "old fellow" referred to might well have been Truckee.

In further corroboration of this 1846 California visit is a medal given by the National Association of Veterans to Truckee's brother, Pancho (also known as *Pam-Ma-Ha*, "wild hay"). The bronze medal was apparently awarded during the National Centennial in 1876 to commemorate Pancho's participation in the Mexican War. The inscription reads: "Pancho—Guide and Interpreter—Cal. Vols." Unfortunately, Truckee did not receive a similar medal due to his demise some 16 years earlier in the spring of 1860 (Hermann 1972:94-99).

William Wright (pen name Dan De Quille), a contemporary of Mark Twain on Virginia City's Territorial Enterprise, often wrote of the local Indians. Regarding the Northern Paiute, De Quille (1877:192) reported that:

The Paiutes range nearly up to Oregon, and far south toward Arizona. They have always been great travelers and as early as in the days of the mission fathers were in the habit of crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains and visiting the Pacific seaboard every summer -- a journey still taken by many of them each year, as not a few women are married to Spaniards who own large ranches in the vicinity of Santa Cruz and other towns in the southern part of California.

In describing Truckee, De Quille (1877:200-201) added:

Old Captain Truckee, in whose honor the Truckee River was named, was a very intelligent man, and was always a great friend to the whites. He had been a good deal with Fremont and other American explorers in the capacity as guide . . .

Captain Truckee died in the Palmyra Mountains, in 1860, from the bite of some insect-probably a tarantula . . . He had in his possession a recommendation from Colonel John C. Fremont, speaking of him as being a faithful and efficient guide and a good honest man. He also had other documents of similar character from other white men . . . He had been much about the Catholic missions in California and desired to have a cross erected at the head of his grave with his name cut upon it.

De Quille (1877:201) also noted that Captain John (this is likely Juan Trucky [Truckee], a son-in-law of Truckee), spoke at Truckee's funeral

De Quille (1963) stated that he was accompanied in his explorations of the Carson and Humboldt sinks by a Captain or "Capitan" Juan. De Quille (1877:204) also related that

When Fremont passed through the country and took Captain Truckee into his service as a guide, Juan and nine other adventurous Piute youths accompanied him. When they reached California, these young Piutes liked the country so well that the majority of them remained there several years. Juan lived there ten years. He worked on a ranch . . . Then he learned the Spanish language, which he spoke quite as well as the Mexicans generally speak it.

De Quille also recorded that Juan married a Spanish woman in California. Juan described his wife as being very avaricious, always encouraging him to earn more money. In De Quille's (1877:205) account, Juan remarked

Me no want no more money—no more senorita. Too much all time want new dress. One night me vamoose. Me come over mountains to my people, ketch me one Piute wife. She no all time want "money, money."

It is clear that some Paiutes accompanied Frémont in his 1846 campaign and some probably stayed in California. That these included Truckee, and perhaps his brother, Pancho, seems highly probable.

Of Truckee's 1846 trip, Sarah Winnemucca (Hopkins 1883:9-10) observed that

When my grandfather went to California he helped Captain Fremont fight the Mexicans. When he came back he told the people what a beautiful country California was. Only eleven returned home, one having died on the way back.

They spoke to their people in the English language, which was very strange to them all.

Captain Truckee, my grandfather, was very proud of it, indeed. They all brought guns with them. My grandfather would sit down with us for hours, and would say over and over again, "Goodee gun, goodee, goodee gun, heap shoot." They also brought some of the soldiers' clothes with all their brass buttons, and my people were very much astonished to see the clothes, and all that time they were very peaceable toward their white brothers. They had learned to love them, and they hoped more of them would come. Then my people were less barbarous than they are nowadays.

The "muster rolls" indicate that Truckee and his men did not remain in California beyond the end of Frémont's campaign. According to Sarah Winnemucca (Hopkins 1883:10), however, he again ventured to California following his return.

That same fall, after my grandfather came home, he told my father to take charge of his people and hold the tribe, as he was going back to California with as many of his people as he could get to go with him. So my father [Poito or Old Winnemucca] took his place as Chief of the Piutes, and had it as long as he lived. Then my grandfather started back to California again with about thirty families.³

This was the beginning of an almost annual pilgrimage to California by Truckee and his band. Around 1854, Sarah, then ten, accompanied such a group:

It was late that fall when my grandfather prevailed with his people to go with him to California. It was this time that my mother accompanied him . . . All my kinsfolk went with us but one aunt and her children [Hopkins 1883:21].

When we came to Sacramento valley (it is a very beautiful valley), my grandfather said to his

people that a great many of his white brothers were there, and he knew a great many of them; but we would not go there, —we would go on to Stockton [Hopkins 1883:27].

We left Stockton and went on farther to a place called San Joaquin River. . . . We only crossed that river at that time [Hopkins 1883:33].⁴

Following this visit, until 1856, there is little record of the Paiute forays into central California except Hurt's (1857) account of the English-speaking natives. It is apparent that what he recorded was an encounter with a portion of Truckee's band of Küpadökata Paiutes, some of whom had visited California.

In 1858, there appeared this report from a northern California newspaper:

"A Paiute Emigrant"

Chief Winnemucca, an old Pah-Ute Indian, has left Honey Lake with twenty tribesmen, to try to purchase a ranch in the Sacramento Valley on which to settle. He is said to be intelligent and friendly [Marysville Daily National Democrat 1858:2].

The next report of Paiutes in California comes from the Stockton San Joaquin Republican in July of 1859 (as cited in Taylor 1860:106).

"Indian Camp at Stockton"

Near the Center Street Bridge, on the southern side of Mormon Slough, are "encamped" some forty of the Pah Utah Indians, who have loafed about Stockton for years past. They are located under two oaks, about half under each. The trees look rather oddly, for there are piled upon the branches and the trunk all manner of "traps," blankets, shocking bad hats and bonnets, skirts of more colors than Joseph's coat of old, rags and even babies in baskets. Some of the females are rather comely, or would, if they were washed and put in clean clothing. Quite a number of the party, especially the younger ones, talk excellent English. They have been from Carson Valley about two months, and intend leaving for the San Jose Valley in a few days. They have no tent, and the trees are their homes for the time being.

This group may have included "Princess" Sarah Winnemucca. Her following comment recorded her "education" in San Jose:

In the spring of 1860, my sister and I were taken to San José, California. Brother Natchez and five other men went with us. On our arrival we were placed in the "Sisters' School" by Mr. Bonsal (sic) and Mr. Scott. We were only there a little while, say three weeks, when complaints were made to the sisters by wealthy parents about Indians being in school with their children. The sisters then wrote to our friends to come and take us away, and so they did, -at least, Mr. Scott did. He kept us a week, and sent word to brother Natchez to come for us, but no one could come, and he sent word for Mr. Scott to put us on the stage and send us back. We arrived at home all right, and shortly after, the war of 1860 began . . . [Hopkins 1883:70].

The school was apparently the College of Notre Dame, founded in San Jose in 1851 by several sisters of the order Notre Dame de Namur, two of whom had previously educated Indian children in Oregon. It was chartered as an institution of higher education in 1855 and was later moved to its present location on the William Ralston estate in Belmont. Unfortunately, no records of Sarah's attendance remain (Loomis 1975:83; Sr. Anne C. Stark, California Province Archivist, Sisters of Notre Dame, College of Notre Dame, Belmont, California, personal communication 1988; see also Canfield 1983:31, 266-267; Morrison 1990:41-44).

It is noteworthy that many authors have described Sarah as "well educated." If this were the case, she surely did not receive much formal education during her brief stay in San Jose, but probably learned to speak English and perhaps even write while staying at the home of Major William Ormsby in the Carson Valley in 1859 (Hopkins 1883:58; Fowler 1978:34-35). Nevertheless, Canfield (1983:20), noted that an emigrant who met Sarah near the Humboldt Sink in 1859 described her as "highly intelligent, educated and speaking fluent English."

By 1868, the Central Pacific Railroad was established across the southern tip of the Pyramid Lake Reservation, creating the town of Wadsworth. The Pyramid Lake Agency allowed this incursion with compromise, and many of the

reservation's Kuyuidökata and other Paiutes worked for the railroad or the town residents. The railroad, happy with their cooperation, offered the Paiutes free rides and, as a result, many of the Indians reinstituted their highly mobile pattern. As in Truckee's day, and much to the chagrin of their agent, Nevada Paiutes would, in season, pick hops in the Sacramento Valley, attend powwows throughout the state, or even visit Fourth of July celebrations in San Francisco (Garvey 1879:110; Spencer 1880:124; Hopkins 1883:96; Sears 1890:148).

The free rides were generally offered on top of the cars or in empty freight cars, a highly dangerous practice that prompted this obviously biased comment from a California newsman:

"Another Good Indian"

It is said that about two Piutes per week are killed by the cars of the Central Pacific Railroad, in the neighborhood of Truckee and Reno. One was killed last Friday and his "soul started the journey to the home of fat grasshoppers" [Plumas National 1872:3/1].

With the coming of the railroad, the Paiutes had extended their range of travel over the entire United States. Not only did they travel with regularity to San Francisco in the late 1860s, but they also visited the "Big Father" in Washington, as Numana, or Captain Dave, did in 1888 and as Sarah Winnemucca had done earlier, in the late 1870s (Hopkins 1883:96, 217-218; Canfield 1983; see also Wihr 1974).

Another well-known though seldom attributed aspect of widespread Paiute culture was the Ghost Dance. The 1870 Ghost Dance was begun by *Wodziwob* ("Gray Hair"), a Paiute from Fish Lake Valley, some 90 miles southeast of Walker Lake in *Pakwidökata* (chub-eater) territory. The ritual was probably spread into Oregon and California by *Weneyuga* ("Standingup"), also known as Frank Spencer. He reportedly stayed on the Pyramid Lake Reservation for some five years, during which time he made trips to California to visit the Washoe and to

Oregon to visit Paiutes living there among the Modoc and Klamath. In northern California, the 1870 Ghost Dance had a most pronounced effect, being incorporated into their already extant "cult" religious organizations (DuBois 1939; Hittman 1973; Harner 1974:92; Fowler and Liljeblad 1986: 460).

Gayton (1930, 1948a, 1948b) discussed the spread of the Ghost Dance into south-central California where the ritual was spread to Mono, Yokuts, and Tubatulabal groups by Joi'joi, a Mono, who acquired it during trips to Nevada. The ritual also likely spread to the Kawaiisu and Interior Chumash. Gayton (1930) also suggested that it spread to the Pleasanton area, as well as to the Miwok, Maidu, Pomo, and other groups. The 1890 Ghost Dance was also a Paiute invention with great effect on the Plains though little effect on the Indians of California.

CONCLUSION

By the turn of the century, the policy of free train rides for the Indians was suspended. In 1905, the Central Pacific rail shops were removed from Wadsworth to Sparks, Nevada, and it would appear that the period of "wanderlust" for the Paiutes had ended. While individual Paiutes may have traveled to California, the movements of large groups or even "bands" apparently had ceased. What remains is this little known record of Paiutes in early California. Their contribution to the founding of the state and its early agricultural history has unfortunately been overlooked. It is hoped that this report has helped record the role that Nevada Paiutes played in the history of California.

NOTES

1. Heizer (1960:1) noted that the name "Truckee" derives instead from a French-Canadian scout. Still another source (Haecox, as cited in Kelly and Morgan 1965:209) maintained that the name was applied by an emigrant named Foster due to the "peculiar gait of the Indian to keep pace with horses of the Whites."

- 2. Early accounts of mounted horsemen with buffalo robes and Spanish blankets encountered at Walker Lake by Jedediah Smith in 1827 (Brooks 1977: 174-176) and of horsemen speaking an unfamiliar language and having salmon at the Humboldt Sink in 1829 (Ogden 1961:153-154) were reiterated by Layton (1978, 1981), wherein he suggested that the group encountered by Ogden might have been Sierra Miwok (Layton 1978:245; 1981:135). Layton (1978: 257) also commented that the Humboldt River might have become a "trans-basin highway for predatory horsemen" moving between the Rockies, the Columbia and Snake rivers, and California.
- 3. In aboriginal times, the Kuyuidökata had no single chief, although after white contact such a role seems to have been formalized largely through the needs and expectations of the whites. Old Winnemucca, also known as Poito ("hole in the nose"), was probably the first to hold such a position. According to his granddaughter, Sarah Winnemucca, Old Winnemucca was "chief of the entire Piute nation" (Hopkins 1883:5). While this might suggest an incipient political movement among the Paiutes to unite under one chief, it seems more likely that this nominal unification was the result of an attempt by the government to produce one leader with whom to conduct relations as well as an attempt by an educated and proud granddaughter to exalt her grandfather's position among both whites and Indians (Stewart 1939:129). Heizer (1960:6-7) also discussed the emergence of strong chiefs as a response to Euroamerican contact.
- 4. Sarah's brothers, Natchez and Tom, reportedly worked for Hiram Scott and Jacob Bonsall on the Bonsall ferry crossing the San Joaquin (California Historical Landmark No. 437) near Stockton. Canfield (1983:7-11) also recorded that Scott and Bonsall hired Paiutes to work as vaqueros on their ranch.
- 5. Canfield (1983:31), who wrote a comprehensive biography of Sarah Winnemucca, noted that in a later report in 1873, Sarah said she attended Notre Dame from 1861 to 1863. In an 1879 interview, Sarah stated that she received her education at the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary in San Jose from 1858 to 1860, but no records of such an institution have been found.
- 6. In 1864, Old Winnemucca, Sarah, her sister Emma, and other Northern Paiutes, in an attempt to gain funds for their tribe, put on stage reviews in Virginia City and San Francisco. The performances in San Francisco were apparently not well received and resulted in little economic gain for the Paiutes (Canfield 1983:37-43).

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