

UC Merced

The Journal of California Anthropology

Title

Bennyhoff: *Ethnogeography of the Plains Miwok*

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0bq9752z>

Journal

The Journal of California Anthropology, 4(2)

Author

McW. Bickel, Polly

Publication Date

1977-12-01

Peer reviewed

\$6.95. Includes, according to the flier, a disk recording and accompanying booklet (12 pages) to introduce the Maidu people and their music [not reviewed]. (2) *Paipai and Seri Utilitarian Crafts* (Mescal Fiber Cordage; Coiled Basketry; and Paddle and Anvil Pottery), by R.C. Michelsen, \$136.00 [not reviewed]. (3) *Pictorial History of California Indian-White Contact (1579-1880)*, by A.B. Elsasser, \$105.00 [not reviewed]. Both (2) and (3) are produced by Logos Signum Publications, 19122 Lindsay Lane, Huntington Beach, Calif., 92646. They are both color or black/white series of 120 and 100 slides respectively, together with booklets. Available in December, 1977.

From the San Diego Museum of Man, three recent *Papers* are available: No. 11, "The Stature of Early Southern California Populations," by Spencer L. Rogers, 1977, \$3.00. No. 12, "An Early Human Fossil from the Yuha Desert of Southern California," by Spencer L. Rogers, 1977, \$3.00. No. 13, "Chumash Wooden Bowls, Trays, and Boxes," by Dee T. Hudson, late 1977.

Forthcoming books for review are: *Tailholt Tales*, by F.F. Latta, Bear State Books, 1977. This is a reprinting of "Uncle Jeff's Story," an account dealing with the Indians of San Joaquin Valley, first published in 1929 and long out of print. *Handbook of Yokuts Indians*, also by F.F. Latta (1949) is scheduled for reprinting sometime in late 1977. *The Painter Lady: Grace Carpenter Hudson*, by Searles R. Boynton, Interface California Corp., Eureka, late 1977, \$32.50, is an illustrated work featuring mostly the Pomo Indians from near Ukiah, where Grace Hudson achieved some fame for her splendid paintings of local Indians (see accompanying illustration).

*Lowie Museum of Anthropology
University of California, Berkeley*

Ethnogeography of the Plains Miwok. James A. Bennyhoff. Davis, California: Center for Archaeological Research at Davis, Publication Number 5. 1977. 181 pp., maps, bibliography. \$5.00.

Reviewed by POLLY McW. BICKEL
San Francisco State University

This work describes the procedures and results of an attempt to determine the locations of aboriginal village sites of speakers of Plains Miwok, a central California linguistic group. Bennyhoff used data from ethnography, archaeology, and history, with emphasis on the latter. This intensive use of all three kinds of data, which permits crosschecking of conclusions drawn from any one source, was an innovation in California ethnogeographic studies. Previous work had mainly used ethnographic data, subject to the uncertainties of faulty memories and an "ethographic present" which often was much later than the missionization period and thus was unlikely to represent the aboriginal situation. Others who preceded Bennyhoff in the use of historical documents as sources of demographic and geographic information did not attempt to determine linguistic affiliation of the populations they traced. Bennyhoff found that this could be done by study of suffixes of female personal names as recorded in mission documents.

The book is a 1976 revision of Bennyhoff's 1961 doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley. Revisions were mainly incorporation of most original endnotes into the text, and a bibliographic update marking the publication of many ethnohistorical sources since 1960, most of which had been consulted by Bennyhoff in manuscript form. The preface and Chapter I explain the purpose of the study, which arose from a felt need to determine aboriginal linguistic boundaries in order to better interpret the archaeological record of late prehistoric occupation of central California. Chapter 2 describes the historical

geographic setting, and Chapter 3 is a brief summary of Plains Miwok culture, based primarily on the salvage ethnography of the 1900's. Chapter 4, "Ethnogeography: Problems and Sources," is of most general interest, particularly the introduction (pp. 17-24) which discusses how one does ethnogeographic research. The subsequent sections on historical, ethnographical, and archaeological sources of information for Plains Miwok ethnogeography are essential reading (and have been since 1961) for students of central California anthropology. Chapter 5 is a detailed discussion of Plains Miwok tribelets and their locations, which takes the reader through the sources of information and the processes by which Bennyhoff arrived at his conclusions regarding tribelet existence and location. Chapter 6 discusses the boundaries of the Plains Miwok linguistic group which may be deduced if the conclusions of Chapter 5 are accepted; especially important is the discussion of the separate Bay Miwok linguistic group which was not recognized in early linguistic mappings of the area. Chapter 7 states general conclusions of the work, including the observation that Plains Miwok boundaries followed the general California pattern whereby one group occupied both sides of rivers and streams, with linguistic boundaries following drainage divides or transecting areas unsuitable for permanent habitation. Another conclusion is that tribelets were grouped into larger cooperative units as evidenced by military alliances, resistance to missionization, and patterned intermarriage, since the cooperative units deducible from historical evidence cross-cut environmental divisions and do not consist solely of immediately adjacent tribelets, Bennyhoff argues that the cooperative units were aboriginal, probably based on economic interchange of use-rights to the different resources controlled by member groups.

The work is an excellent presentation of methodology for ethnogeographic study, par-

ticularly in its exhaustive discussion of historical sources and the threads of reasoning followed in reaching conclusions. The ethnographical and archaeological data are treated in less depth than the historical, although adequately for the use to which they are put. Readers should be cautioned against wholesale acceptance of Bennyhoff's archaeological "districts" for central California. In this work they are not adequately defined, and some underlying assumptions need to be questioned (e.g., that "rare traits from one site will be typical of the district" [p. 48]) as well as Bennyhoff's use of "type sites" in characterizing a "district." He does not offer the "highly detailed comparisons of cultural inventory" referred to by Fredrickson (1973:94), and until these are forthcoming, use of his "districts" outside the context of Plains Miwok ethnography is unwarranted. I would welcome a report from Bennyhoff on the archaeology of the Plains Miwok area, preferably of the quality of this stimulating ethnogeography.

REFERENCE

- Fredrickson, David A.
1973 Early Cultures of the North Coast Ranges, California. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis.



Fig Tree John. An Indian in Fact and Fiction.
Peter G. Beidler. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 1977. 152 pp., Illus. \$4.95 (paper), \$10.50 (hardbound).

Reviewed by E.N. ANDERSON
University of California, Riverside

This brief book compares the historic Fig Tree John—a peaceable Desert Cahuilla—with the fictional Fig Tree John, a savage