

UC Merced

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology

Title

Lee: *Walking Where We Lived: Memoirs of a Mono Indian Family*

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3sm3r36w>

Journal

Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 22(2)

ISSN

0191-3557

Author

Dick Bissonnette, Linda E.

Publication Date

2000-07-01

Peer reviewed

generally assumed. Greenwood (1972) argued this position nearly 30 years ago based on findings from Diablo Canyon, 40 km. north of Vandenberg.

Certainly the discovery of a single typological specimen would never resolve this issue conclusively, but I think it unfortunate that the Santa Barbara sequence was seen as so intractable that its revision in this or other instances was not considered. Such criticism notwithstanding, the Vandenberg Project represents a significant, if not remarkable, contribution to California coastal archaeology and this monograph should be consulted by anyone investigating prehistoric maritime societies along the west coast of North America.

REFERENCES

- Bennyhoff, James A., and Richard E. Hughes
1987 Shell Bead and Ornament Exchange Networks Between California and the Western Great Basin. *American Museum of Natural History Anthropological Papers* 64(2).
- Erlandson, Jon M.
1994 *Early Hunter-Gatherers of the California Coast*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Greenwood, Roberta
1972 9000 Years of Prehistory at Diablo Canyon, San Luis Obispo County, California. *San Luis Obispo County Archaeological Society Occasional Papers* 2.
- Holson, John, Robert Gargett, Susan Anton, Lori Hager, Randall Milliken, Thomas L. Jackson, James A. Bennyhoff, Susan Goddard, Robert Orlins, Earl Alexander, Kenneth W. Gobalet, Dwight D. Simons, Elizabeth Skinner, and Peter Ainsworth
2000 Data Recovery Excavations for the Wildcat and San Pablo Creeks Flood Control and Water Resource Project at CA-CCO-269, -270, -600, and -601, Contra Costa County, California. Report on file at the Central Coast Information Center of the Historical Resources Information System, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park.
- King, Chester D.
1982 *The Evolution of Chumash Society: A Comparative Study of Artifacts Used for Social System Maintenance in the Santa Barbara Channel Region Before A.D.* 1804. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis.
- 1990 *The Evolution of Chumash Society: A Comparative Study of Artifacts Used for Social System Maintenance in the Santa Barbara Channel Region Before A. D. 1804*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Leventhal, Alan
1992 *A Reinterpretation of Some Bay Area Shell Mounds: A View from the Mortuary Complex, ALA-329*. Master's thesis, San Jose State University.
- Warren, Claude N.
1964 *Cultural Change and Continuity on the San Diego Coast*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.



Walking Where We Lived: Memoirs of a Mono Indian Family. Gaylen D. Lee. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, vi + 208 pp., 30 black and white photographs, 2 maps, \$23.95 (hard cover), \$10.95 (paper).

Reviewed by:

LINDA E. DICK BISSONNETTE

California Dept. of Parks and Recreation, Calaveras District, 22708 Broadway St., Columbia, CA 95310.

Walking Where We Lived is a personal history of a Nim (North Fork Mono) family. It is the first published account of this Sierra Nevada tribal group written by one of its members. Gaylen Lee, in collaboration with his mother, Ruby Pomona, provides an insider's perspective on Western Mono culture organized around seasonal activities, childhood memories, and historical events. Very appropriately, the book begins and

ends with springtime, moving in a circle from the Pomona family's version of the Nim origin story to a statement about cultural survival.

In the foreword, Mark Q. Sutton mentions the new generation of anthropologists doing research with the Mono people. I am honored to be among this group. When I visited Ruby Pomona and some of the other "Nim ladies" last spring, it was very heartening to sense the positive self-esteem in their heritage preservation efforts. The Mono Nation has an articulate declaration of tribal sovereignty. Like a warm Mono wind, their leadership brings a notable change in the political climate. Strengthened federal mandates for Native American participation are helping to improve communication between native peoples and public agencies. Sierra National Forest tribal liaison Lorrie Planas' many years of diplomacy contribute greatly to the co-management trend.

In Chapter 1, Lee describes his extended family, the linguistic and other cultural traditions learned from his grandparents, and the closeness he feels to his ancestral homeland near the upper San Joaquin River. Lee confirms the "ancient and unbroken relationship to [their] indigenous homeland" and their relative isolation as the main reasons for their cultural survival (cf. Dick Bissonnette 1997). Ironically, by intentionally excluding "puberty concepts" and "individual's 'medicine' experiences" from his accounts, calling it "no one else's business," he lets outsiders know that secret-sacred knowledge continues to be passed down in "chiefly" families (p. 11).

Chapter 2 is a sketch of the rugged beauty of the Nim homeland in the high Sierra, life before the "government caught up with them" (Dick-Bissonnette n.d.), and a description of his family's physical features. The latter are idealized, especially when he writes that the men were "invariably tall, usually six feet or more" (p. 15), and when he repeats his grandfather's boast that the Nim defeated the Wowa (Chukchansi) in battle near Oakhurst and "sent them home crying" (p. 18).

Chapter 3 is a revised account of the Nim's first encounters with Spanish and Mexican invaders, including Moraga's expedition and reports of a previous encounter in the mid-1700s. In an unfortunate overstatement, Lee writes that "women were a valuable trade item" (p. 20) before the early 1800s, and were stolen on periodic raids. He qualifies this comment by saying that it "wasn't stealing in the modern sense of the word" (p. 21), and that they only took women from enemy groups, never from friends or strangers. Thoughtful readers might look to Bruhns and Stothert's recent volume, *Women in Ancient America* (1999), to contextualize Lee's statement and consider individual men's social strategies and the effects of warfare on internal and external social relations.

In Chapter 4, Lee discusses Nim social organization and religion, clarifying the "two sides" of their traditional society as *Kwi'na* and *Isha*, Eagle and Coyote (p. 31). He reiterates his authority as a fifth generation *Kwi'na*, and descendant of *bohenabs*, translated as leaders. Here Lee cites his grandmother, who said the *bohenab*, whether man or woman, "led ceremonies, settled disputes, and guided decisions" (p. 32). He or she "seeks guidance from others, especially the older people. That is why we call him a leader, not a chief" (p. 32). It is also noteworthy that the *ana yagan* and other traditional ceremonies outlived governmental and missionary attempts to "civilize" the Indians.

Chapter 5 chronicles the devastation of the Gold Rush in the central-southern Sierra Nevada from the Nim point of view. Lee's account of the Mariposa Indian War includes oral history from his elders who said, for example, that "[James] Savage was a bad man" (p. 48). These recollections are supported by careful documentary research and geographic knowledge, recounting the chain of events and their long-lasting effects. Lee acknowledges his wife Judy Barras Lee's historical research that is most evident in this important chapter.

Chapters 6 and 7 describe hunting, gathering, and fishing practices, games, and lessons. There is not much new information here, but it is more engaging to read it from a personal perspective than from a normative ethnography. One of the hardest lessons for Euroamerican researchers to accept, but one that is found in many traditional, small-scale societies, is "not to ask too many questions but to listen and follow by example" (p. 107).

Chapter 8 tells of ranchers, lumbermen, miners, and settlers who came to the mountains in the late 1800s and the changes they introduced. Chapter 9 describes the annual acorn harvest, understory burning, and cooking practices. Chapter 10 deals with missionaries, schools, and the Forest Service. Chapter 11 concerns the activities of winter, such as storytelling, games, basketry, and beadwork. The epilogue summarizes the major changes in the homeland and culture of the Nim, but concludes with words that echo a reaffirming Yokuts prayer; "all of my ancestors are always with me" (p. 179; Kroeber 1925:511).

One of the contributions of Lee's book will be the orthography for Nim words that he and Evan Norris devised. Family and group differences in pronunciation and word use continue to challenge attempts to codify California Indian languages, but the message here is that simple phonetic spelling, if that is possible, is preferable to linguistic symbols that are difficult to read and to reproduce.

Gaylen Lee's timely book belongs on every Californianist's reading list, along with classic and contemporary anthropological works on the Nim.

REFERENCES

- Bruhns, Karen Olsen, and Karen E. Stothert
1999 Women in Ancient America. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Dick Bissonnette, Linda E.
n.d. Unpublished Interview Notes from Auberly, California, 1993, in possession of the author.
- 1997 Foothill Yokoch, Mono, and Miwok Women: An Anthropological Perspective. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Kroeber, A. L.
1925 Handbook of the Indians of California. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 78.



Rock Art Studies in the Great Basin. Eric W. Ritter, ed. Salinas, CA: Coyote Press Archives of Great Basin Prehistory, No. 1, 1998, 124 pp., 50 figs., 11 tables, references, \$15.00 (paper).

Reviewed by:

ALANAH WOODY

Nevada State Museum, 600 N. Carson St., Carson City, NV 89701.

Rock art research is currently enjoying something of a boom, so the publication of six papers (out of 18) presented at the 1990 Great Basin Conference is not surprising. Including more of the rock art papers presented at the same conference, however, would have provided a more balanced view of the current state of Great Basin rock art studies. In addition, it would have fattened up the volume, which at some 74 pages of text (excluding the 50 pages of figures), seems rather thin. That aside, this volume has something to offer rock art specialists and interested archaeologists alike, as it provides an insight into some current developments in this field.

For the nonspecialist, Ritter and Hatoff's chapter will perhaps be of most interest, since their discussion of scratched rock art at Nevada's Pistone site in the Wassuk Range reviews current