



# NORTHERN PAIUTE





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## NUMA, THE NORTHERN PAIUTE PEOPLE

Long before explorers or settlers ever set eyes upon the vast Great Basin desert the Northern Paiute people were living, hunting, and gathering food throughout the western interior region. The Northern Paiute people lived in a peaceful, beautiful land. If something was used or taken from Mother Earth, another thing was left in return with a prayer of thanks.

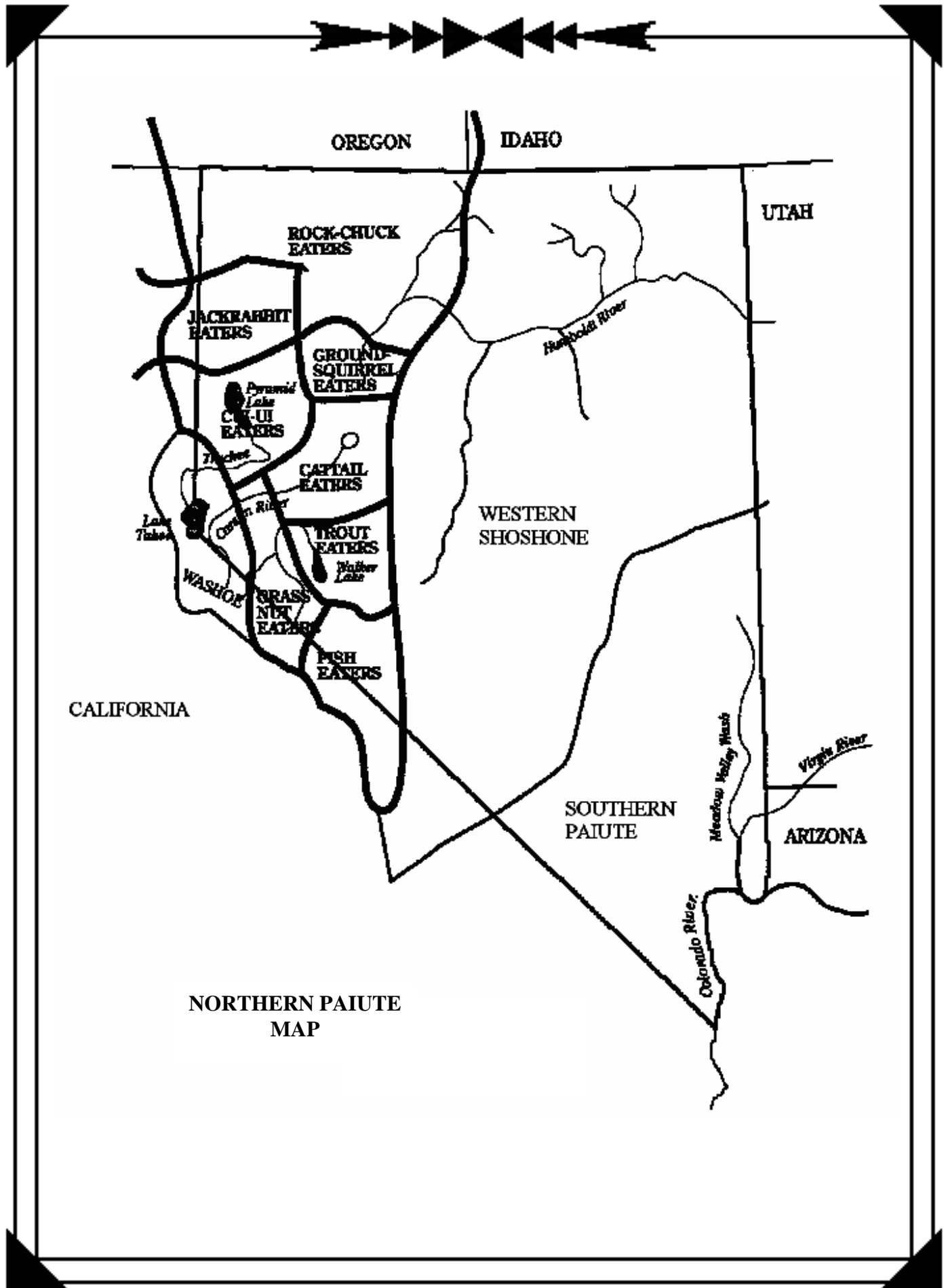
The Northern Paiute people had a word in their language to identify themselves. The word “Numa” means ‘The People.’ They roamed freely in the Great Basin area following a seasonal cycle in their quest for food. Within this area numerous bands lived, hunted, and traveled. The bands of Northern Paiute obtained their names from the most common food in the area or from geographical land features. An example of this are the names given to the bands: the Trout-Eaters, took their name from the huge salmon trout known as the Lahontan cutthroat that lived and spawned in Walker River, the Cui-ui Eaters, lived on the shores of Pyramid Lake and were named after a large black fish of the sucker family, which also spawned in the Truckee River; other bands included the Ground Squirrel Eaters, the Jackrabbit Eaters, Cattail Eaters, Grassnut Eaters, Rock Chuck Eaters, and Fish Eaters.

The Northern Paiute patterned their lives around natural cycles and resources. Their constant search for food required them to travel from valleys to rivers to lakes. Their food sources also provided materials for shelter, clothing, and tools.

Because food was difficult to find, the Northern Paiute moved in search of foods available during the different seasons of the year. Plants, seeds, and insects were gathered while birds and animals were hunted.

The Northern Paiutes knew what to do to stay alive. There was not enough rain to grow crops. They were not farmers, but the people were wise and knew how to survive in a land where others might have perished. The Northern Paiute traveled by foot. They stayed in one place long enough to gather the foods available and moved on.

A



NORTHERN PAIUTE  
MAP



## SEASONS

Northern Spring brought the first fresh plant food of the season for the Paiutes. Men hunted ducks and caught fish while the women collected eggs from nests and gathered plant shoots and roots from along the shore.

Summer was hot and dry. Fish were plentiful and were caught and dried for winter use. Berries were picked and rice and other seeds were gathered and ground into coarse meal.

Fall was a fulfilling time for the Northern Paiutes. Pinenuts were harvested and rabbit drives began. Families came together to visit, dance, sing, and to prepare for winter.

Winter was a cold, long season. The men hunted for any game they could find. Stories were told in the wintertime, and new tools were made as well as clothing for the spring.



## NORTHERN PAIUTE DUCK DECOYS

The marshes of the Great Basin were a storehouse of food for the Northern Paiutes. Insects, seed stalks, eggs, small animals, fish, and birds supplemented their diets.

Duck decoys were made and used by the Northern Paiute in the same manner as they are used today by hunters. The materials needed to make a decoy came from the marshes and desert. The Canvasback duck skin was the best material for making a decoy. Fifteen large tules, one armload of cattails, and one freshly killed duck were needed for a decoy.

Greasewood sticks, about a foot long, were needed from the desert. Tules were bent and tied. The center was hollowed out, tied with a piece of cattail rope to hold the body together, and the tail section trimmed to point upward. The tide decoy was covered and the duck skin pinned down around short twigs of greasewood. The bill was tied shut and the decoy was ready to set afloat



## FISHING

Fishing involved both men and women. In the early days there were many different types of fish found in the lakes, rivers and streams of the Great Basin. The mountain creeks carried trout, chubs, minnows, and shiners. Pyramid, Winnemucca, and Walker Lakes also had a variety of fish. The huge cutthroat spawned in great numbers during late winter and spring and provided an ample food source.

The Cui-ui, a mysterious fish found only in Pyramid and Winnemucca Lakes, furnished tons of dried meat for the Indians that lived nearby. The Cui-ui spawned in April and May and migrated up the Truckee River. The Cui-ui spawned in great numbers and were often two to three feet deep in some places along the river. Men caught the fish, while the women cleaned and hung them to dry on racks. Slashes were made across the fish to keep them from curling up.

Fall was the most important time for food gathering. Foods gathered at this time would sustain the Northern Paiute through long winter months. Some autumn foods were pinenuts, jackrabbits, and deer.





## GATHERING PINENUTS

For the Indians of Nevada, pinenut gathering in the fall was combined with religion, work, and play. Pinenut trees produced a nutritionally sound food that sustained the people through the winter. Pinenut time meant gathering of other families and served as a occasion for social reunion. Pinenuts were an important food source. In the early spring, before the trees began to bud the Paiutes prayed for a successful pinenut crop. In the late summer scouts and elders traveled to the mountains to find the most promising pinenut area. They returned carrying a pine bough with a few immature cones which were the sign of a good crop. After this plans were made for the annual ceremony, the Pinenut Dance.

As fall approached, when the rabbit brush bloomed yellow, enough pinenuts had to be gathered so that during the ceremony and dance everyone received a few pinenuts. A small group was sent to the pinenut hills to collect the nuts. After the group had collected enough pinenuts they returned carrying a small tree to show what they would be dancing and thankful for. The pinenut ceremony lasted all night. The Northern Paiutes knew that great power was in songs and dancing and if they danced the pinenut dance there would be a bountiful harvest. In holding hands and dancing together the Indian people expressed togetherness as a group. Friendships were also made or renewed.

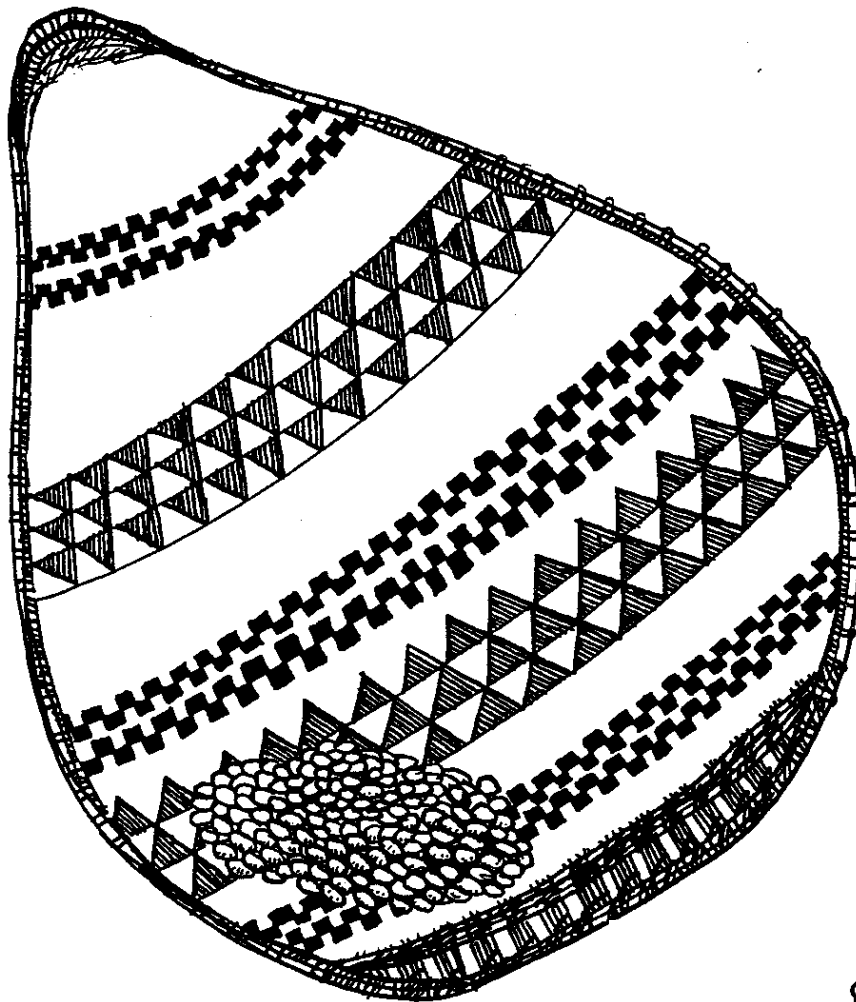
Around the time of the first frost, as the cones were bursting open, the Great Basin Indians could be found gathering, roasting, eating, and storing pinenuts. The small pinenuts were very abundant and were flavorful, nourishing, and a source of protein.

Men beat the trees with long stick poles with a hook on the end. This caused cones, nuts, twigs, and pitch to shower down on the women and children. The pinenuts were then picked from the cones and the ground.

Other tools used were large cone-shaped baskets called burden baskets. Winnowing baskets were like curved trays. The nuts taken from the cones were eaten from the shell, ground into flour, and stored for future use

The flour could be made into a thick pinenut soup. Pinenuts are still gathered today in much the same manner, but with a few changes. Canvas blankets are used under the trees to collect cones and nuts. Ladders are used to climb to the top of trees to get the cones and, in most cases, burlap bags are used instead of burden baskets.

Today very few younger Nevada Indians have learned the technique of roasting pinenuts in a winnowing basket. In the past pinenuts were cleaned and roasted in the winnowing basket. No longer is the pinenut considered an important staple food source. Pinenut gathering today is regarded by native people as a tie with traditions of the past and still enjoyed annually.



## RABBIT DRIVE

Rabbit drives were also held during the fall in late October and November. Jackrabbits were fat and plentiful from a summer of eating grasses. Their fur was also at its best. The rabbit boss would organize the drive. He was in charge and would lead the drive. During the rabbit drives the Paiutes set up nets of twisted sage and hemp fibers. These nets were three feet high by one hundred feet long.

The whole family took part in this activity by chasing the rabbits into nets set up in a wide U-shape across the desert valley. The people participating would walk toward the nets making loud noises and beating the sagebrush where jackrabbits were hiding. At the nets, more people were waiting with clubs to kill the rabbits. The rabbits were skinned, and their hides were cut into strips and tied together to be woven on a loom into rabbit skin blankets.

A single rabbit skin blanket for an adult required as many as one hundred and forty skins. These blankets were warm and fuzzy because the fur was on the inside. No part of the rabbit was wasted. Almost every part could be used to provide food or clothing. The hunting party would kill several hundred rabbits, enough for food and skins, for warm clothing, and blankets to be used in the cold winter months.



## NORTHERN PAIUTE SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

When the non-Indians entered the Great Basin area they found Northern Paiutes making a living from a land where others might perish or starve. With primitive tools, weapons, nets, and stone hammers, the Northern Paiutes managed to live and survive in an area which had a variety of wild food and materials for shelter and clothing.

There were no tribal chiefs until years after the explorers and pioneers began to live and prosper in this area. The Northern Paiute moved in small family groups and were named by the way they got their living. The strongest or most knowledgeable person was the group leader. A strong political system had not been developed because the groups and bands were small. During the fall the groups came together to gather pinenuts and help with the rabbit drives to prepare for winter. Each member, including the children, were required to help gather food.

Certain household duties were performed. Most work was divided between the men and women of the Northern Paiute community. During the pinenut harvest men and women worked side by side.

The men would knock down the pine cones and nuts, the women would pick them up. When the task was completed both groups would help carry the pinenuts back to camp.



## CUSTOMS FAMILY LIFE

Northern Paiute children were highly regarded by their parents. Girls or boys born into a family were welcomed. Children were an important part of the Paiute family. They helped in gathering food and were the ones to carry on the family customs and traditions.

The children's education was based mainly on teachings from the grandparents. Small baskets would be made for the children to carry. Girls went with women elders to learn and help in gathering foods. Boys went hunting with their fathers and grandfathers.

The grandfather taught lessons to the children by telling stories and legends. The grandfather passed on the history, customs, and ceremonies of the Northern Paiute people. The coyote appeared in many stories because he was an example of bad behavior. Stories showed how children would be embarrassed in public by following the tricky ways of the coyote.

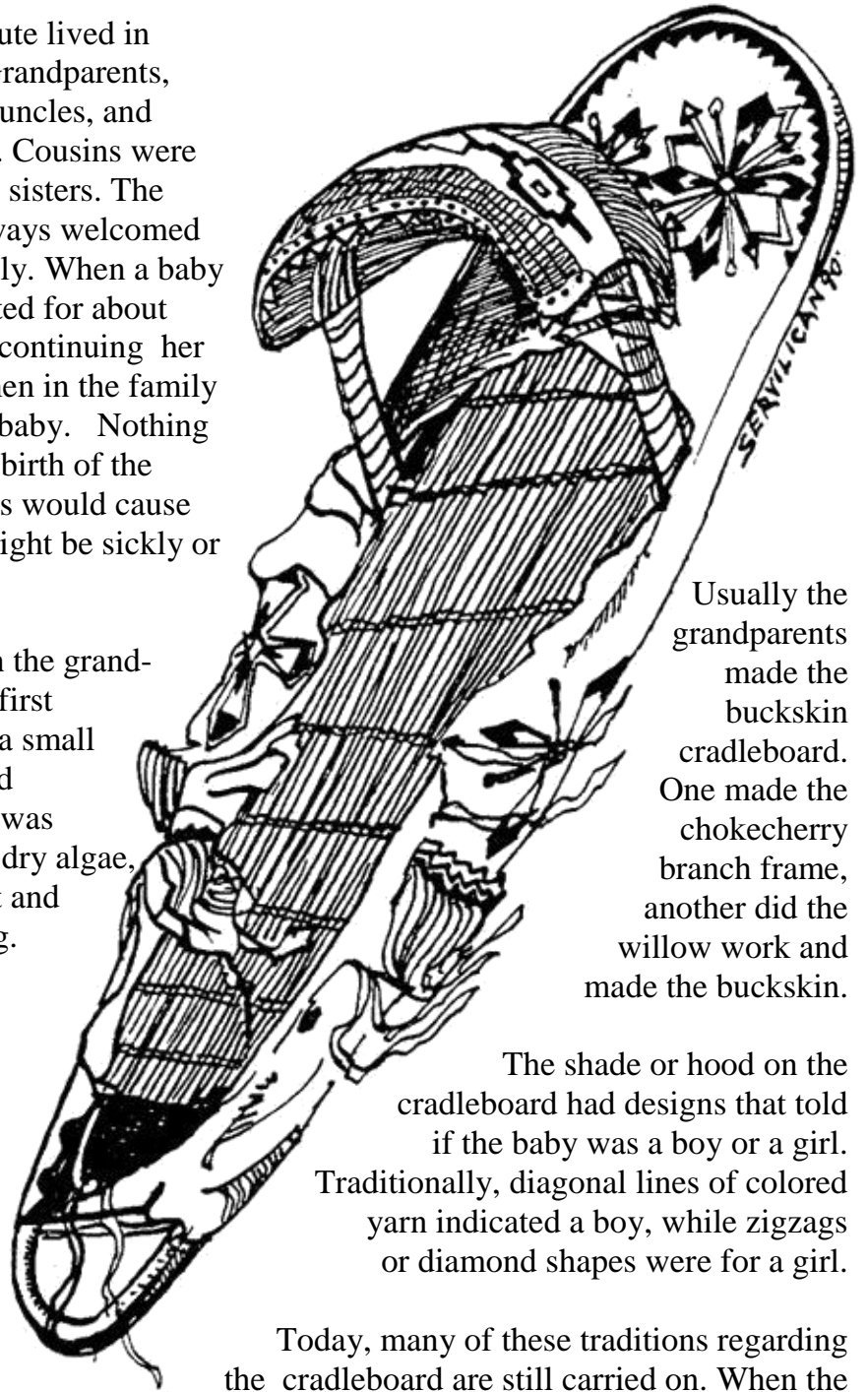
Today, children are raised differently than they were in the past. They attend public schools and employment causes many families to relocate to cities or other states away from grandparents who continue to be so important in the everyday life of the Northern Paiute.



## CRADLEBOARDS

The Northern Paiute lived in extended family units. Grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles, and cousins resided together. Cousins were regarded as brothers and sisters. The arrival of babies was always welcomed by the entire Paiute family. When a baby was born the mother rested for about twenty-five days before continuing her daily chores. Other women in the family took care of her and the baby. Nothing was prepared before the birth of the baby. It was believed this would cause bad luck and the baby might be sickly or die.

When the baby was born the grandmother or aunt made its first cradleboard shaped like a small boat made from unpeeled willows. The new baby was wrapped in rabbit skins, dry algae, or sagebrush rubbed soft and tied with buckskin lacing. When the child was about two months old or could hold up its head a buckskin cradleboard was made.



Usually the grandparents made the buckskin cradleboard. One made the chokecherry branch frame, another did the willow work and made the buckskin.

The shade or hood on the cradleboard had designs that told if the baby was a boy or a girl. Traditionally, diagonal lines of colored yarn indicated a boy, while zigzags or diamond shapes were for a girl.

Today, many of these traditions regarding the cradleboard are still carried on. When the baby is in the cradleboard it feels safe, secure, and can sleep without being disturbed. Most babies are kept in a cradleboard until they are a year old.

Many Indian mothers today still use the cradleboard for their babies. Babies are wrapped in warm blankets and placed on a soft, quilted pad or pillow before lacing. Today, many Northern Paiute children have a cradleboard, used as an infant, to be proud of.



## SHELTER

Shelter was another basic need of the Northern Paiute. The materials used were based on natural native plants and climate. Since the people were nomadic, they stayed in one area for a short period of time. Shelters were simple and built wherever they happened to camp. The shelter was shaped like a cone with a circular framework of a dozen long, strong willow poles placed vertically. Bundles of tule reeds, grass, cattails, sagebrush, pine boughs or willows were used to cover the sides.

To build a house the Northern Paiute put a frame in a circle. One end of the willow sticks was set and pushed into the ground. The circles of the willow were tied around the sides with bark, string, or cord to strengthen the upright poles. An opening for the door was left in the lower row. The doorway faced the east, toward the rising sun and away from the cold wind. The second bands around the upright poles made the frame tighter and stronger and formed the top of the door. The third circle was added and the willows were pulled together to make the top of the house. The floor was lined with reed mats or grasses from the marsh.

Tule, willow, or sagebrush were draped over the frame leaving a vent hole at the top for smoke to go out. In the winter or if a camp was to be in a location for a long period the shelters were built more carefully. The shelters were patched and repaired from year to year, abandoned when not needed, and burned when death occurred in them.

In the summer a simple shade was constructed using four poles on each corner. They made roofs thatched with willows. The Northern Paiutes also wove slender willow fences to act as a windscreen for protection from the wind that blew sand into their eyes and food.

## CLOTHING

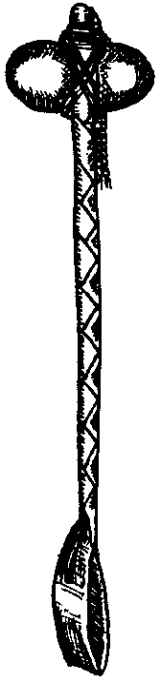
Another basic need was for clothing. As with food and shelter, the Northern Paiute were very resourceful in using materials found easily.

In the beginning the Numa people wore little clothing. Sagebrush provided materials for hats, sandals, and many other things. Strings of sagebrush bark were dampened and pounded until fibers were formed. By twisting and weaving sagebrush the people fashioned skirts, over-shoes and even diapers. Since sagebrush was growing all around it became the source of most clothing. Shirts were also made from tules. Animal skins were also used when available. The most important item of clothing was the rabbit skin blanket. This blanket was worn around the shoulders and used as a blanket at night. It was used in the winter and also in the summer when desert nights became very cold in the Great Basin. Everyone, including children, had a rabbit skin blanket out of necessity.





## TOOLS AND WEAPONS



The most familiar Indian artifact is the common arrowhead. Many people find and collect arrowheads. Different types of stones are used. The sizes and shapes were different depending on the use. Obsidian, a natural glass and volcanic product, was used most often. Arrowheads are symbolic of the Indian people of the Great Basin.



Often the obsidian was brought in from distant places. A piece of buckskin was used to protect the palm of the hand from splinters when making an arrowhead. A deer antler tip was used for flaking or chipping the obsidian. While pressing down with the antler tip, chips flake away to form a sharp edge.



Hunting game was important to provide food for the people. Some arrowhead points were large and crudely formed, attached to spears and thrown by hand. The atlatl, a stick which acted as an extension to the hunter's arm, was used with a spear and could be thrown with great force to kill large game animals.



### SCRAPERS

Scrapers were used for removing the flesh of animals, working bone, and cutting. They had a sharp edge and came in different sizes. Modern tools such as files, planes, chisels, or knives serve the same purpose as scrapers did in the past



### DRILLS

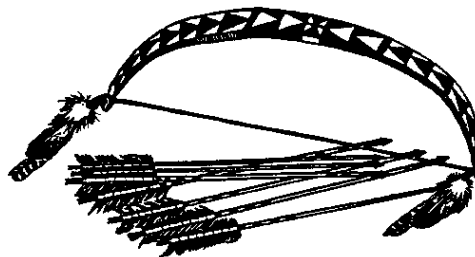
Drills were used to make holes in wood, bone, and shells to make pipes and drill bead holes for pendants or weights for fishing.

### ARROWS

Men made bows and arrows. Arrows were made out of cane, rosebush shafts, and willows. Rose and willow were very sturdy and the placement of flint/obsidian arrowheads on the shaft were used for big game hunting. Small arrows were for small game.

### BOWS

There were two types of bows. The men used two and one half to three foot bows for small game and four foot bows for large game.















## LANGUAGE

The Paiute language belongs to a part of the Uto-Aztecan branch. Although the language varies, members of different bands can still understand each other.

Over the years the Paiute language has adapted many English terms due to the contact with non-Indian explorers and settlers. Reservation schools and boarding schools have also had an impact on the language by changing and sometimes eliminating the use of it.

On remote reservations the language is taught at home and in the schools, so that present day children can learn the language and cultural activities of the Northern Paiute people.

- |                        |  |                        |
|------------------------|--|------------------------|
| 1. Su-mu-u             |     |                        |
| 2. Wa-ha-u             |     | Northern Paiute Number |
| 3. Pa-he-u             |    |                        |
| 4. Wa-tsi-qui-u        |   |                        |
| 5. Ma-ne-qcu           |  |                        |
| 6. Na-pa-he-u          |  |                        |
| 7. Na-ta-kwa-tsi-kwe-u |  |                        |
| 8. Wo-kwo-sa-kwe-u     |  |                        |
| 9. Su-mu-kaw-du-u pu   |  |                        |
| 10. Su-mu-ma-nu        |  |                        |

NORTHERN PAIUTE LANGUAGE  
VOCABULARY

Boy            Nat-se

Girl            Za-a

Rabbit        Cam-mu

Fish            Pah-gue

Deer            Der-hutcha

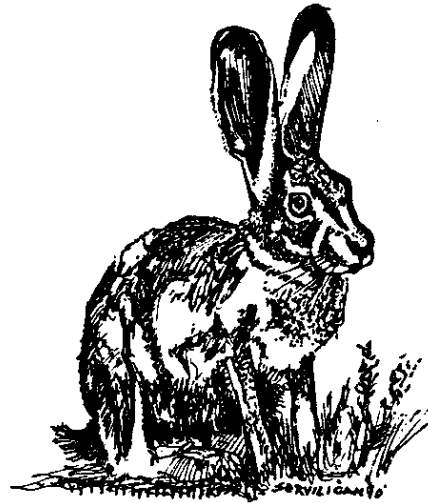
House        No-bve

Spring        Tah-mano

Autumn       U-ban-nu

Summer       Tad-sah

Winter        Tdo-mo





## SARAH WINNEMUCCA

Sarah Winnemucca was born in the Pyramid Lake area around 1844. Her grandfather was Truckee, who guided Captain John C. Fremont, her father was Chief Winnemucca II.

Sarah acted as an interpreter after the Pyramid Lake Wars. She held this position until she began reporting the suffering and wrong-doings done to her people from the whites. Sarah went on lecture tours to Washington D.C. where she met with government officials to demand that changes and policies be made to improve the lives of the Paiute people. Despite her efforts, the conditions of the Indian people were not improved. She continued to inform the American people of the brutality of the agents and about the government officials that did not care. She also spoke of life for the Paiutes before the non-Indian came to the state of Nevada

Sarah did not want charity for her people, only a place to live without fear of being moved. She wanted a place where they could make a living for themselves. When Sarah sought rights for her people she described her Paiute traditions and sang songs. She also wore a buckskin dress to remind non-Indians that her American heritage was different from theirs. Many people wanted to learn Sarah's point of view.

Sarah Winnemucca was a national figure of the Indians of Nevada during the 1800s. She was responsible for the passage of the Dawes Act of 1887, which paved the way for Native Americans to become citizens of the United States.

Sarah married Lieutenant L.H. Hopkins in 1882 at Helena, Montana. She became Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins.

In 1883, Sarah Winnemucca was the first Indian woman to have a book published: *Life Among The Paiutes: Their Wrongs and claims*. She worked for Indian justice and brought attention to the suffering of her Paiute people.

In 1885, Sarah started and taught the first school off the reservation for Indian children near Lovelock, Nevada Sarah taught English, reading, writing, and sewing to twenty-five students. She also taught the children to honor their tribal culture and traditions. She had financial help and encouragement from friends in the east, especially from Elizabeth Peabody of the Peabody Foundation.



On October 6, 1891, Sarah died from tuberculosis, the same disease her husband died from. She was buried at Henry's Lake, Montana

In the years to come, the Paiute people fought for their rights. Today the Paiutes are continuing hard legal battles in court for land and water rights.

In 1971, Nevada's first historical marker honoring a woman, Sarah Winnemucca, was erected along U.S. 95 inside the east entrance to the Fort McDermitt Reservation on the site of the old officers quarters.

Engraved on the marker is "...she was a believer in the brotherhood of mankind."





## WOVOKA

In the state of Nevada in the Smith and Mason valleys, Wovoka grew up at a time when white settlers were taking over the lands of the Northern Paiute Indians. Like many Paiute Indians, Wovoka went to work at a ranch and took the name Jack Wilson. While working as a ranch hand Wovoka did not forget his heritage.

In 1887 and 1889, he had visions which he revealed to other Paiute people. Wovoka told them he had been to the land of the dead and returned with a message and songs from the Great Spirit. He told them that the Paiute people must dance and soon all the problems they were having would be "swept away by a great flood." He said dead Indians and relatives would come alive again and the Indian people would soon become strong and live on the earth free from the whites.

Before long the Ghost Dance had spread to more than thirty different tribes that thought Wovoka's dreams would come true. The dance spread through the Great Plains area. The Sioux Indians named it the Ghost Dance. Frightened white officials called in soldiers to stop the spread of the dance before trouble started. In 1890, Wovoka's teachings were shattered when the U.S. Army captured a group of Sioux Ghost Dancers.

Problems arose and the U.S. Army and Indians were involved in a great fight known as the Wounded Knee Massacre. Three hundred Sioux men, women, and children were killed by soldiers who were afraid of the Indians and the Ghost Dance.

The hopes and dreams of the Native Americans to live on the earth without the white man died.





## **TRUCKEE**

Truckee was born around 1780-1790. Truckee was recognized as a chief of the Northern Paiute band that lived in the Pyramid Lake and Humboldt areas. He was a friendly guide and helped John C. Fremont and other California emigrants. He wanted to keep peace with the whites. He fought in California's Mexican War from 1846-1847 with John C. Fremont. He spoke Spanish and English. Captain Truckee, as he was known, died on October 8, 1860. He was the grandfather of Sarah Winnemucca.

## **PANCHO**

In 1846 Pancho was a famous guide and interpreter for Captain John C. Fremont. He spoke three languages: Paiute, Spanish and English.

Pancho first met Fremont and his company on the Humboldt River near the town now known as Lovelock. Fremont took Pancho and his two brothers to show him the best routes and feeding places for their horses. Pancho remained with John C. Fremont until the end of the Mexican War in 1848. Pancho received a Medal of Honor for his contributions in the Mexican War.

Pancho spent the rest of his life at Pyramid Lake. He was instrumental in the acquisition of the Pyramid Lake Reservation. The government wanted to remove all Indians from the Pyramid Lake area. Pancho responded by sending his medal to Washington, D.C. telling the government he had lived at Pyramid Lake all of his life. The government approved and verified that Indians could remain on the present day Pyramid Lake Reservation.

## **NUMAGA**

Numaga was leader of the Pyramid Lake Paiutes in 1860. He was known as young Winnemucca; he was cousin to Sarah Winnemucca and his concern was to better the living conditions of his people. After the Pyramid Lake Wars, Numaga negotiated peace with Colonel F.W. Lander to keep the Indians near the lake.



## JOE ELY

As a former Tribal Chairman of Pyramid Lake, Joe Ely emerged as a leader during the water negotiations in 1991 in an effort to have the tribe share water from the Truckee and Carson Rivers, and to save Pyramid Lake. Ely was a tough, rational negotiator who has been in the news on numerous occasions. In May of 1989, he signed a historic agreement with Westpac Utilities, the water distributor for Reno and Sparks, to try and end eighty years of water disputes.

Ely, a descendent of Natchez, grew up at Pyramid Lake and is a graduate of Pyramid Lake High School. He lives in Nixon at the south end of Pyramid Lake. Ely was selected Native Nevadan of the Year by a panel of Native American people. His leadership and willingness to fight for his tribe and beliefs have brought positive changes for the Northern Paiutes.

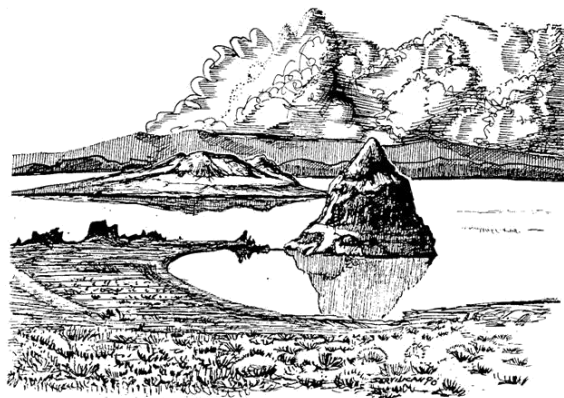
## NELLIE SHAW HARNER

Nellie Shaw Harner wrote the published *Indians of Coo-Yu-Ee-Pah*, which is the history of the Pyramid Lake Indians from 1843 to 1959. The book also had an added supplement of early Pyramid Lake tribal history dating back to 1825.

Mrs. Harner was born in Wadsworth on the Pyramid Lake Reservation. One of nine children her childhood was filled with the activities of a large family and attending day school. Memorable pastimes were excursions to the Truckee River to swim, fish, gather berries, and play. Another favorite pastime was listening to the male elders sing songs and tell stories as they made their rabbit skin bluffs fishnets and moccasins.

Mrs. Harner attended school at the Carson Indian School in Stewart, Nevada. She graduated from Carson City High School and the Normal Training Course at Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. She obtained a Bachelor's Degree from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona and a MA Degree from the University of Nevada, Reno.

She was a teacher and counselor for 37 years in Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools.





## ROSS HARDIN

Ross Edgar Hardin was born on December 27, 1900 on the Fort McDermitt Paiute/Shoshone Reservation, which had been established in the 1800s. He was the youngest son of Jack and Daisy Pavazo Hardin.

Ross started school on the reservation. After completing grade school he was sent to the Stewart Indian School which was, at that time, a military school. Upon graduation from Stewart, he enrolled at the Haskell Institute at Lawrence, Kansas. His main concern, upon completing school, was to help his people back on the reservation.

After finishing at Haskell, he returned to the reservation and devoted his time to helping his people. Around this time he began his own family. He continued to be involved in community and tribal affairs.

Ross was hired as a policeman in 1924-25. He served as the tribal secretary from 1923-1940 and, at the same time became the tribal interpreter. He entered the government services in 1927. Here he was known as a “jack of all trades.” He was a fanner, carpenter and gardener. When the day school was started on the reservation he had fresh milk, vegetables, and fruit for the school children’s hot lunches. Ross also served as the school’s substitute teacher. When the town of McDermitt established a school he drove the bus for a period of time.

Ross held several official positions throughout his life. These included chairman and councilman, Secretary of the Stockmen’s Association, Community Coordinator, Chairman of the Education Committee and a member of the Development Corporation Board for the Fort McDermitt Paiute/Shoshone Tribe.

Ross also represented the Fort McDermitt Paiute/Shoshone Tribe on numerous occasions at national meetings and hearings on Indian rights throughout the United States. He was one of the original petitioners of the Northern Paiute Claims.