

INDIANS OF THE HOWELL MT. AREA

(This material abstracted from a study made by Harold E. Driver at the Indian Reservation near Geyserville in 1932.)

## INDIANS OF THE HOWELL MT. AREA

This material is abstracted from a study made by Harold E. Driver at the Indian Reservation near Geyserville in 1932, where he got as much information as possible from three mature Wappo Indians who knew something of early day life, habits and customs of their people. These were John Tripo, Mary Eli and her son George Fish. Both Tripo and Eli lived in grass houses in the aboriginal community of Unutsawaholma noma (Toyon-berry-grove Town) on the Russian River north of Healdsburg.

The Wappo tribe apparently occupied a small territory directly north of San Francisco Bay about 50 miles long and 20 miles wide with a center about half way between the mouth of the Napa River and Clear Lake. They were closely allied in customs and habits to the Pomo tribes which occupied lands west to the coast and in the vicinity of Clear Lake. The land is mostly hilly or mountainous, but there are several fertile valleys in which most of the Indians lived.\*

Cultural Status. The aboriginal culture of the Wappo Indians was one of the simplest in North America or, for that matter, in the world. They were without writing, metals, agriculture, pottery, or domestic animals, even dogs. To us, their life was one of colorless simplicity. The chief food was the acorn, eaten as a rule in the form of mush. Small game undoubtedly furnished more of the diet than large game, although deer meat was an important food. These people did not hesitate to eat rats, mice, grasshoppers, snails, and such undelectables.

Houses were mostly of grass thatch and could be constructed in a day or two. Dress was at the minimum, from stark nudity for the man to a short double apron for the woman. Only in cold weather did the Wappo attempt to cover most of his body with a skin or a woven tule cape. Basketry was the only art of any note, and in this the Wappo excelled. Their baskets, in variety of shape, size, weave, and decoration and in quality of workmanship, are comparable to those of the neighboring Pomo, who are sometimes said to have made the finest basketry in the world.

In social organization, the Wappo were without clans, real chiefs, or definite tribal unity. The small social unit was the bilateral group of kin, and the larger one was the whole town or village community, numbering at most two or three hundred but usually about one hundred persons. As a rule, these small communities were more friendly among themselves than they were with the Pomo, but there was no centralized authority binding them together, and whatever unity they possessed was felt rather than actually achieved.

Another indication of the low cultural status of the Wappo was the lack of any far-reaching division of labor. All men except "physicians" did some hunting and fishing, and all women gathered vegetable foods. Arrowhead makers and clamshell-bead makers were the only tradesmen giving most of their time to their special tasks. Even the so-called chiefs hunted and fished with the rest of the men.

Without writing, systematized knowledge was scant. The only records were bundles of sticks, which were mere mnemonic devices to mark the moons and the dates of events a few days in the future. They also used sticks to count their clamshell-bead money, each stick standing for ten beads. Compared with other equally primitive groups, they perhaps excelled in counting, but their method was definitely inferior to that of the neighboring Pomo.

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\*The name Wappo is an Americanization of Spanish quapo meaning brave.

Towns and Camps. They had permanent or winter towns and temporary summer camping places near the Russian River and other streams. They moved back to the waterproof grass houses when winter rains set in. Both winter and summer towns were named for local characteristics as were other place names. Some of these which are of interest are:

Permanent Towns

Kotico mota - Black Oak Hill - 2 sweat houses  
Nets-tul - Milkweed Valley - 40 houses, 1 sweat house  
Pipo-holma - White Oak Grove - 40 houses, 1 sweat house  
Tsi'mitu-tso-noma - Humming bird place town - "Small town"  
Oso'yuk-eju - Going-to-make-buckeye-mush creek - "Small town"  
Melka wa-hotso-noma - Salmon-Sweat-House Town - at present site  
of Middletown in Lake County.

Summer Camp Sites

Holko-mota - Pounding Basket Hill - 1 sweat house  
Hut-mitul - Coyote Valley  
Huya-hotso - Sand Sweat House  
Tcanc-naynuk - Manzanita Bush  
Tsausc-tul - Willow Valley

Other Names

Mela wa-tul - Crazy Dance Valley  
Kopa-me-nan - Bullfrog Water Well  
Lelhumotuk - Rock Pile  
Metsa-mota - Arrow Mountain - now Fitch Mt.  
Mitico-opaus - Hazel Tree One  
Tcuya-mota - House Mountain  
Tiko-nusuk - Tree-lying-down  
Tso-eju - Redwood Creek  
Pipi - Quail  
Tsibidokdok - Robin  
Ctukulu - Owl

Food. Like other central California peoples, the Wappo depended more on vegetable than on animal food. The acorn, perhaps the most important single food source, was supplemented by various grass seeds, roots, and nuts. The deer was the chief game animal although small game such as rabbits, squirrels, rats, birds, and grasshoppers probably provided more food the year round than did the deer. Fish were regularly caught, but were apparently a less important food than land animals or plants, and certainly constituted a smaller part of the diet than they did among the Pomo around Clear Lake. Sea food was eaten only occasionally when trips were made to the coast.

Small animals and fish were caught by hand or killed with sticks; sometimes dams and wicker fish traps were used and on land, brush fences, hand nets and the bow and arrow were used.

The following birds and animals were considered dangerous or sacred and were never eaten and rarely killed. Feathers used if found on ground.

Buzzard	Coyote
Eagle	Skunk
Roadrunner	Frogs
Crow	Toad
Raven	Lizard
Hawks	Snakes

Food Preparation. Meat was always roasted, never boiled; held over fire on stick, laid on coals or cooked in earth oven. Deer meat cut in strips, dried either in or outside house as were fish and mussels; then stored in baskets inside house. Small animals eaten almost entirely, rabbits pounded, bones, loose entrals, ears and all and roasted. Deer sometimes similarly prepared. Grasshoppers, caterpillars, squirrels, rats, mice, and gophers picked up from field burned to obtain such small game. Snails picked from ground or water and roasted.

#### Plant Food

Acorn, mel, many kinds: tan oak, tcetic, best; black oak, kotic, most plentiful; white oak, pip; post oak, mel; iron oak, picmela; live oak, hicic; unidentified oaks, tsokic, holmel. Method of gathering and preparing acorns like that of Maidu, except for following differences or additions: Both men and women carried acorns to village in burden baskets. Kernels were dried in sun but also indoors on twined willow rack suspended from roof ca. 7 ft. above floor. Mortar basket, holko, pestle, tc'ola, and stone base, lelpa'ya, same as those of Pomo, always used for grinding; woman sat with legs on top of hopper to hold it steady. Meal sifted through open-bowl basket with openwork bottom designed for purpose, or through twined seedbeater, wanma; not tapped in winnowing basket. Leached in cold water. Boiled in large coiled baskets. Boiling stone cleaned with moss, now rinsed in extra basket of water, Patwin fashion. Mush or soup drunk from small basket or eaten with unworked mussel or clamshell not with fingers. Some persons perforated such shells, always wore them around their necks. Acorn bread like that of Patwin and Maidu, except "Indian baking powder," tso tsipe (dirt red), mixed with batter. Granary height of man, 4 or 5 ft. wide; built on stone base ca. 2 ft. high to keep out water; willow or hazel stick vertical warp, with smaller shoots twined in to sustain it, roof grass-thatched. Acorns with hulls on stored in granary; kernels and flour kept indoors in baskets. No underground storage.

You will find at least two locations close to Las Posadas 4-H camp with pot holes in the rocks where the Indians ground acorns in this way.

Pinole, wa'ate. Made from seeds gathered with seedbeater and basket; seeds roasted, pounded, sifted, eaten dry with fingers.

#### Body and Dress

Men went nude most of the time and women wore the usual double aprons, made ordinarily of buckskin. In winter both sexes sometimes wore capes of hide, feathers, or tule. Tattooing was rare. The ears were pierced but not the nose. Body decorations consisted of woodpecker-scalp belts, shell beads, and paint. There was no head covering of any kind and the feet were usually bare. The almost complete absence of tattooing among the Wappo sets them off from their neighbors.

Woodpecker-scalp belts worn by chiefs and wealthy at public festivals. These belts of woven vegetable fiber, not of skin with scalps glued on; reached around waist once only; from 3 to 4 in. to 6 in. wide; red favorite color, very expensive.

Both sexes painted bodies for dances, men for war. Three colors: red earth, tsipe (red); black charcoal, ts'el; white earth, walalis.

Both sexes wore clamshell beads, abalone shells, and a few magnesite cylinders around necks and wrists. Abalone shells sometimes substituted for yellowhammer headband on forehead.

### Houses

Wappo houses were typical of the area. The dwelling house was of grass thatch on a framework of poles stuck in the ground and bent over to form a dome. The ground plan was usually elliptical. The earth-covered semisubterranean house was used both as a men's sweat house and for the ceremonial activities of both sexes. In the summer camping season, people lived in simple brush structures and danced in a roofless circular brush enclosure.

The grass house was oval, never L shaped or rectangular and sometimes as much as 40 ft. long. Each family had separate space with door, fire and smoke hole. Beds were on ground with bunches of grass or roots for pillow.

The Hotsa was a combination sweat-club and dance house. Was dug into ground about 2 ft. with center pole and 5 side posts. Roof was brush and grass under dirt. Door faced south and one emergency exit north. Pit round and about 35 ft. in diameter. It had a flat cottonwood plank for foot-drum. The men sweated in the sweat house once or twice a day - then plunged in creek. Women bathed in creek and rubbed with angelica root. Used no towel - the wind dried them. Never sweated in the sweat house even for illness but applied hot rocks to pain.

### Weapons

The chief weapon was the bow and arrow, used with the primary arrow release. Bows were not made locally but obtained in trade from the north. The Wappo also used the spear, the sling, and a rude club. A detachable harpoon was used only for large fish. All weapons except the harpoon served both for hunting and for warfare.

The manzanita bow was best and most expensive, buckeye bow apparently next best. Both 4 ft. long backed with sinews and said to shoot arrows 200 yds. Bow-string of sinew. Arrows shaft of hazel or alder with flint points made by a few professionals from flint from the St. Helena area chipped with an antler flaker. Points were not poisoned but rubbed with angelica for luck.

A sling made of diamond shaped buckskin 4 x 2 inches and cords about 3 ft. long. A hole or pocket in center to hold stone. Loop in one cord around middle finger, knot in other cord held between thumb and index finger. This had a range longer than the bow and was used for war and hunting. A good slinger could hit a fence post at 75 yds. using stone missile, not clay balls.

### Textiles

Basketry was one of the arts of life in which the Wappo excelled. Their work was in every way comparable to that of the neighboring Pomo, who have been judged to be among the finest basketmakers in the world. This illustrates the principle that tribes generally low in culture may excel in some special feature. Besides baskets, rabbitskin blankets and capes of tule and feathers were woven. The loom used was nothing more than two poles in the ground between which the warp was stretched.

### Musical Instruments

Musical instruments were as simple as those in the rest of California, and consisted of the plank drum, cocoon rattle, split-stick clapper, bone whistle, and a kind of flute. They were used chiefly to play accompaniments for dancing, but the flute at least was played for amusement.

### Tools, Utensils

The technology of the Wappo was of the simplest. Tools and household utensils were undecorated, with the exception of baskets. Frequently natural shells, stones, and sticks were utilized. In this respect, central Californian tribes contrast with those of the lower Klamath river, who carved and decorated such things as horn spoons and wooden mush-stirrers, and even ground out symmetrically-shaped mauls and pestles of stone.

### Games and Athletic Contests

The Wappo games were almost the same as those of the Pomo. They included the grass or hand guessing game, sninny, split-stick dice, deer-knuckle dice, a guessing game played with about fifty sticks, hoop and pole, and several other minor diversions. Most of the games, or similar ones, were played over much of North America as well as in California, and had analogues in many other parts of the world.

Long distance shooting with bow and arrow  
Foot racing by either men or women  
Swimming  
Diving for length of time under water  
Pulling against each other, feet touching with cross stick  
Children had acorn tops to spin by hand  
Girls played with dolls of sticks, clay or flat rocks.

### Money

Wappo money, like that of the Pomo, was of the clamshell disk variety. This was to be expected since the source of the shells was Bodega Bay. There were no other strictly nonutilitarian forms of wealth, with the possible exception of wood-pecker-scalp belts and other ceremonial regalia. Such utilitarian things as rabbit nets and deer-head disguises were among the most highly valued possessions. The Wappo traveled occasionally to the coast or to Clear Lake and received trade objects such as their bows from greater distances.

### Property

As among other primitive peoples, a Wappo owned what he made and used himself. Anything made or used jointly was the common property of those concerned. Gathering tracts were apparently owned by indefinite groups of relatives, but hunting territory belonged to the whole tribelet. Incorporeal property scarcely existed, and there seems to have been no fixed rule of inheritance for any kind of property.

Property owned individually, jointly, tribeletally. Each person owned his clothes and body ornaments. A man owned his own weapons, musical instruments, pipe, etc.; doctors their outfits and possibly their songs, although latter uncertain; women their baskets and utensils, which they made. In general, anything made by a person and used exclusively or chiefly by him was his to do with as he wished.

Gathering tracts and acorn trees also owned jointly by groups of relatives. Others not allowed to molest them.

Title of house not vested in single person, but jointly in all adult occupants.

No fixed rules of inheritance of property. Bead money left to dead person's children and paternal and maternal nephews and nieces. Wife or older relative did dividing. Perhaps one-third or one-half of bead money thrown on funeral pyre.

### Chieftainship and Government

The so-called chief was little more than a natural leader, one with excellent physical, mental and moral qualifications. He had little authority over the rest of the group and no means of enforcing his commands or wishes other than his own physical prowess and that of his relatives and immediate following. Although the chief was the acknowledged leader and was supposed to be concerned with the welfare of everyone, punishment for a wrong as serious as murder was fixed by the relatives of the slain and the slayer, and not by any tribal police organization or court of arbitration. The men of the settlement sometimes met to discuss affairs of interest to the entire group, but no votes were cast and there was no governmental machinery for carrying out their decisions. Such a description would fit most tribes of Central California and many other peoples of the more primitive world.

### Warfare

Like the Pomo and other central California Indians, the Wappo did not glorify war. Small private raiding or avenging expeditions were probably more common than intersettlement battles. Even a large battle was likely to cease if a prominent man were killed, especially the one who was responsible for the outbreak. Scalps were not taken. There was no war for conquest, although Barrett tells of a Southern Pomo group, defeated by the Wappo which evacuated Alexander Valley in favor of their conquerors.

War causes, in order of probable frequency of occurrence: poaching, deliberate murder, poisoning.

Weapons: bow and arrows, spear, sling. Every warrior carried bow, arrows, and spear. War arrow flint-pointed. Spear had either wood or flint point. Sling same as that employed in hunting but stones larger than those used for birds. Bow and arrows and sling used when 2 sides lined up some distance apart. Spear chiefly for surprise night attack.

Warrior put black, white and red paint on upper part of body and striped these colors across face with fingers. In his hair, wore whole wing of eagle or other large bird, held on by hair net and hairpins. Loin cloth probably modern. No armor. No shield. Boys not taught to use quiver as shield.

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