

All Those Things that You're Liable To Read in the Ethnographic Literature They Ain't Necessarily So

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It has always been a mystery to me, how Kroeber could possibly...tell us so much about all the Indians of California. Such a tremendous task, particularly since communications were much slower in that era....Specifically, I wonder how he was able to correctly identify and classify a people (Wailaki/Keh-nehs-tah/Ko'ell or whatever they called themselves)...I find it unfortunate that his work is like a "bible" or an unshakeable truth in the eyes of some persons. (Personal communication from a Wailaki elder whose ancestors were classified as Lassik by ethnographers, summer of 1995.)

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Introduction

I first realized that there were problems with some of the ethnographers' conclusions related to social organization and territorial boundaries for some of the Athabascan groups inhabiting northwestern California in 1993 when I published an article questioning use of the term *Lassik* to classify a group of southern Athabascans inhabiting eastern portions of southeastern Humboldt and southwestern Trinity Counties (Keter 1993a). At that time, my research and interviews with local Native Americans and a review of the literature, including field notes from a number of ethnographers who worked in the region, led me to conclude that the term "Lassik" and the tribal boundaries as outlined in the ethnographic literature were not reflective of the reality of Native American social and "political" organization in this region.

There was a huge gap between how the local Native Americans I talked to perceived themselves and their tribal history as opposed to the conclusions related to territorial boundaries and tribal identity as summarized in the ethnographic literature. I found without exception that the Native Americans I interviewed who came from the area delineated as "Lassik" on the ethnographers' maps insisted that they were Wailaki not Lassik. Further, I found in the field notes and papers by some anthropologists working in this region (for example Frank Essene and A. L. Kroeber) that they classified some of their consultants as Lassik despite the fact that these consultants insisted they were Wailaki.

More recently I have been working with Native Americans from southern Humboldt County centered on the South Fork of the Eel River region. Despite the fact that some of the Wailaki elders can identify specific relatives buried in local rural cemeteries (I have visited one such cemetery with over a dozen graves) some anthropologists still insist that because of the ethnographic record these individuals are mistaken and that they must be Sinkyone or that they are Wailaki from the Round Valley Reservation or areas directly to the east who moved into the area after the atrocities of the historic period "wiped out" the local Native American population.

A similar problem related to tribal recognition and ethnographic territorial boundaries can be found to the northeast centered on the confluence of the South Fork Trinity River with the Trinity River several miles to the east of Willow Creek. In discussions with members of the Tsnungwe tribe whose territory is located just to the south of Hupa territory in eastern Humboldt and western Trinity Counties it became apparent that their documented tribal history is often in direct disagreement with the existing ethnographic literature. Information provided by tribal members makes it clear that the Tsnungwe were not simply the "South Fork Hupa" an offshoot of what might be termed the "greater Hupa tribe."

In Martin Baumhoff's influential publication *California Athabascan Groups* (1958) he reviewed the ethnographic literature and field notes of most of the ethnographers who had worked with the Athabascan speaking Indians of Northwestern California. He then undertook to reconcile the various disagreements and conflicting data in order to provide

what has become the definitive map for depicting what might be termed “tribal” or group territorial boundaries for the various Athabascan groups of northwestern California. His final conclusions were based on a critique and evaluation of the various ethnographers’ articles and field notes, the relative strength of their data, and his perceived reliability of their informants. Baumhoff did not visit the region nor did he interview any additional Native American consultants. Today the territorial boundaries as defined by Baumhoff (1958: Map 2) have become generally accepted within the anthropological community for the Athabascan groups of northwestern California (see for example Wallace 1978 and Elsasser 1978).

Despite the existing ethnographic record the Tsnungwe, through their own outstanding research efforts, have provided sufficient evidence to the Bureau of Indian Affairs BAR (Branch of Acknowledgement and Research) for the agency to determine, as they note in their response to the Tsnungwe, that there is a “reasonable basis to assume that when your petition is evaluated during ‘active consideration’ we will conclude that your ancestors were recognized as a tribe as late as 1864” (BIA letter to Tsnungwe Tribe December 4, 1995).

More recently, local Native Americans from southern Humboldt County have begun to organize and the Eel River Nation of Sovereign Wailaki is now incorporated and has signed an MOU with the Regional Clearinghouse Tribal Preservation Office and has established relationships with the BLM, Forest Service, CALTRANS, and other government agencies on issues related to their concerns regarding cultural resources in this region. The Native Americans who are organizing are centered on a region that on ethnographer’s maps has been classified as Sinkyone territory yet every individual in that organization with direct ancestral links to the area insists that they are Wailaki not Sinkyone.

The purpose of this paper is to not only provide a critical review of the existing ethnographic data for the Tsnungwe and Wailaki but also to document and recognize their efforts, knowledge, and the information they have collected that challenges some of the currently held views of the anthropological community related to tribal organization and territorial boundaries within their respective regions. It is clear after thirty years of working with the Athabascans of Humboldt, Mendocino, and Trinity Counties that some portions of the ethnographic record for this region are problematic. There is an immediacy and link to the past through strong family ties felt by many of the Native Americans from this region. They have a strong sense of place and a deep understanding of their history. Given the recent efforts by the Sovereign Nation of Eel River Wailaki and the Tsnungwe to assert their identities it is time for the anthropological community to listen.

Tribes, Bands, Tribelets, Groups, and Communities

The question related to how and why aboriginal peoples were classified by ethnographers into the various “tribes,” especially in northwestern California, is more than academic.

The failure of ethnographers to discern and document the social complexities and socio-cultural autonomy of Indian villages and communities and the complex interconnected web of kinship, linguistic, and cultural ties between the various communities that ultimately defined group identities in this region has resulted in problems with efforts to gain tribal recognition for Native Americans like the Tsnungwe and the Eel River Nation of Sovereign Wailaki.

A. L. Kroeber, C. Hart Merriam, and other ethnographers working in the region recognized that political autonomy often rested at the village level. The critical point is that unlike other regions of North America the inhabitants of northwestern California did not have well defined tribal organizations based on some form of political governance, rather, boundaries were somewhat more flexible and based on shared kinship, cultural, and linguistic factors. Given these facts it is not surprising that territorial boundaries and even the social organization of various clans and extended families would have been flexible and might have shifted as various relationships, alliances, and trade patterns changed over time.

Kroeber used the term “tribelet” to define a number of smaller villages or one large village that formed an autonomous group. Baumhoff (1958:159) defined the term tribe as it was applied to the Athabascans as:

A group of two or more tribelets—or occasionally one single group—with a single speech dialect, different from that of their neighbors. The tribe was culturally uniform, but not necessarily distinct from its neighbors in this respect. The similarity between people of a single tribe evidently gave them a feeling of community but had no further effect on their social or political organization.

Merriam referred to groupings of these villages as “bands.” In his field notes on the southern Athabascans he writes that, “in winter families of each band were scattered along the river in small rancherias each consisting of four to seven families, mostly blood relations, living together in two to three houses. Usually there were seven to eight people to each house.”

In northwestern California the highest level of socio-political organization was what I have termed the “community” (Keter 1993:38) avoiding the terms tribelet and tribe and their political connotations. A community consisted of a village or group of villages associated through language, kinship, geography, and the need to share and coordinate exploitation of a common subsistence resource base. Among the bonds that helped to maintain a sense of community among and between social groups were:

- * Kinship and exogamous marriage
- * The need to coordinate subsistence activities among families and villages
- * Sharing and distribution of subsistence resources
- * Proximity and spatial relationships of the various villages

- * The need for differing environments to secure a wide range of seasonal resources
- * Religious and social activities
- * Trade for needed or desired subsistence resources and material goods

What emerges from interviews with Native American consultants is of a shared common world view in which villages and communities were organized socially based on the people's relationship to the land, to their resource base, and to each other through extended families. Communities gathered together for celebrations, shared common traditions, and established formal bonds through marriage and kinship relations.

Efforts to challenge the historical ethnographic record are also being pursued in other regions of the state. In a book outlining the efforts of the Maidu of northeastern California to gain tribal recognition, *Quest for Tribal Acknowledgement California's Honey Lake Maidus*, Sara-Larus Tolley (1973) discusses the issue of community and tribal organization and the problems the ethnographic record has caused the Maidu and other California Indian tribes in pursuing tribal recognition.

Due to the efforts of the Tsnungwe, Wailaki, and other Native American groups who are fighting for tribal recognition (another nearby example is the Penutian speaking Wintu Wailaki tribe from western Trinity County), it is becoming clear that many of the subtleties and complexities regarding the social organization of the aboriginal peoples living in this region of the state prior to the historic period are missing from the current ethnographic record.

The Tsnungwe Tribe

Introduction

According to much of the current anthropological literature regarding the Indians of California, the Tsnungwe tribe does not exist. For example, a final conclusion on the fate of the Tsnungwe was decreed in 1978 in one of the more important and influential ethnographic studies of Native Americans --*Volume 8: California*--from the Smithsonian Institution's series the *Handbook of the Indians of North America*. In the section covering the Hupa the author of that chapter William J. Wallace (1978:177) writes; "Those South Fork Hupas remaining were taken to the Hoopa Reservation shortly after its founding in 1876. Here they merged with their compatriots." This statement is factually incorrect. The Hupa Reservation was founded in 1864. Further, the entire Tsnungwe population was forcibly removed from their homeland beginning in the late 1850s and early 1860s and by 1864 they were already living at the newly created Hupa Indian Reservation (personal communication D.A.).

Another example is found in the Cultural/Historical Overview produced by Six Rivers National Forest whose lands encompass a majority of Tsnungwe ancestral territory. The author of the overview (Theodoratus 1980:94) writes:

Closely related to the Hupa in language and culture are the South Fork Hupa. They lived along the South Fork of the Trinity River upriver to Grouse Creek. Stephen Powers believed they were a separate tribe which he called the Kelta (1976:89). Goddard more precisely described them as a division of the Hupa (1903:7).

Today, despite the conclusion of most anthropologists, the Tsnungwe have a vibrant culture and an active tribal organization with approximately 175 members. It is apparent after interviews with tribal members, the existence of an excellent Tsnungwe internet web site, numerous articles in the local media on tribal news and cultural activities, and strong working relationships with the Forest Service and other government agencies that the Tsnungwe are flourishing despite the “fact” according to the ethnographic literature that they have “merged with their compatriots.” It is clear, therefore, that the ethnographic record for this area is more than incomplete--it is erroneous and a reassessment and revision of the ethnographic record is long overdue.

Part of the answer to the question of how the Tsnungwe managed to survive the massive assault on their culture and way of life in the mid 19th century and continue to flourish today--despite conclusions by the anthropological community of their demise--is directly linked to the cultural and spiritual values of place and profound ties to the land that underlie Tsnungwe culture. This connection is evident in the contemporary use, beliefs, and concerns by the Tsnungwe for those traditional village sites and other areas of cultural significance that provide a direct link with their past as a culture and a people.

Ethnographic Research

To understand how and why the Tsnungwe in essence “disappeared” from history when they were forcibly removed to the Hupa Indian Reservation in the late nineteenth century it is necessary to review the theoretical orientation, field work, and conclusions of some of the ethnographers (and linguists) who first worked in this region. Without exception the work accomplished in this region with Athabascan groups has always been focused primarily on the Hupa (as opposed to their neighbors the Chillula, Whilkut, and Tsnungwe).

Stephen Powers, Pliny Goddard, Edward Curtis, Alfred Kroeber, and C. Hart Merriam are the principal and most influential ethnographers who worked with the Hupa and most relevant for this critique. Merriam and J.P. Harrington briefly worked in the region centered on Tsnungwe territory although the vast majority of their work remains unpublished. There were a number of other studies centered on the Hupa (for example, Edward Sapir 1927 and Harold Driver: 1939) focusing exclusively on linguistic, cultural, and religious practices.

It is primarily the journals, field notes, maps, and publications of these ethnographers that documented and defined what are today generally recognized by the anthropological community as the “tribal” or “group” territorial boundaries as they existed in

northwestern California prior to the beginning of the historic era. These ethnographers also classified and divided the various communities of Native Americans in the region into groups or “tribes” usually based on shared cultural and linguistic relationships. This work has been referenced as the primary ethnographic data by subsequent ethnographers studying and writing about this region (see for example Baumhoff 1958, Wallace 1978, and Theodoratus 1980).

Stephen Powers

The first systematic ethnographic work in northwestern California was accomplished by Stephen Powers beginning in the summers of 1871 and 1872. In 1875 he was appointed by the Department of the Interior as a special Commissioner to collect ethnographic data on the Indians of Nevada and California for the Centennial Exhibition of 1876. His work was first published in the San Francisco Overland Monthly magazine and eventually as a book in 1877 under the title *The Tribes of California*.

Alfred Kroeber (1925: IX) recognized that because of Power’s lack of formal training and his ethnocentric perspective “[p]robably the majority of his statements are inaccurate, many are misleading, and a very fair proportion are without foundation or positively erroneous.” Kroeber (1925:IX), however, also recognized that despite these shortcomings that “for the broad outlines of the culture of the California Indian, for its values with all their highlights and shadows, he can still do no better than consult the book.”

During his field work Powers visited Hoopa Valley. While he focused primarily on the Hupa and Hoopa Valley Powers felt that several Athabascan speaking surrounding groups closely related to the Hupa despite similarities in language and culture deserved recognition as distinct entities. These groups included the Whilkut and the Chilula. Significantly, Powers also recognized as a separate group those communities centered at the mouth of the South Fork Trinity River. Powers (1876:89) notes:

The south fork of the Trinity is the home of the Kel’-ta (Khlēl’-ta). I know not if they ever had any tribal name of their own; if they ever had they have allowed it to be supplanted by the one above employed, bestowed on them by the Hupa.

What is clear from Powers’ work is that indeed a community or group of people resided in the region centered on the mouth of the South Fork Trinity River. Further, they were recognized by their neighbors and themselves as having a separate identity from the Hupa communities situated further to the north and centered on Hoopa Valley.

In 1883 Hubert Howe Bancroft published an extensive history of California. Apparently referencing Powers work, the publication contains a map (Image 1) that clearly delineates the *Kel’-ta* as occupying the lower South Fork Trinity River region (*The Native Races, Volume 1: Wild Tribes*).

Pliny Earl Goddard

The next notable ethnographer to spend time in this region was Pliny Goddard who published some of the most important and in-depth linguistic and ethnographic studies on the Hupa. He was the son of a minister in the Society of Friends and completed his MA by 1896. He was sent to Hoopa Valley by the Women's Indian Aid Association in March of 1897 where he worked as a lay missionary. Eventually, Goddard developed an interest in ethnography and linguistics. He worked there until 1900 when he went to UC Berkeley to study linguistics. He also studied at the University of Michigan where he received his PhD in 1909. Its subject was Hupa Grammar and was one of the first PhDs in linguistics ever granted by an American university. Goddard became conversant in the Hupa language and was recognized as one of the preeminent linguists in the country at the time of his death.

It is important to remember that Goddard's work in the region focused on the Hupa and was related primarily to linguistic studies although he did publish some more generalized ethnography on Hupa culture and some work on village names and place names. In his principal publication on the culture of the Hupa (Goddard 1903) there are 88 pages of text. In his only specific reference to the *Kel'-ta* (Tsnungwe) Goddard (1903:7) writes:

The language spoken at South fork differs but slightly from that used in Hupa valley. The village of Leldiñ [Hleldin] at South Fork figures prominently in the Hupa myths and it is said that the authority of the last head-man in Hupa extended to, and perhaps, above South Fork. The only important difference is in religious matters.

It appears that from his perspective as a linguist Goddard viewed the "South Fork Hupa" as merely an extension of the Hupa tribe and that he grouped the Tsnungwe with the Hupa primarily based on shared language and cultural characteristics.

Edward Curtis

Another individual who wrote a significant ethnography of the Hupa was Edward Curtis. He began his career as a photographer rather than an ethnographer. After becoming interested in the study of North American Indians around the turn-of-the-century, Curtis was given a chance to pursue his interests when J. P. Morgan (possibly the richest man in America at that time) offered him \$75,000 to produce a series on the North American Indian of 20 volumes containing 1,500 photographs. Morgan was to receive 25 sets and 500 original prints from Curtis as his method of repayment. Much of his study of the Hupa (in volume 13 published in the mid-1920s) seems to be based on the work of earlier ethnographers especially Goddard. The entire passage related to the Tsnungwe in his section on the Hupa is presented below (Curtis 1907-1930 13:3-4).

South of the Hupa, from the valley to South fork of the Trinity [R]iver, were another Athapascan group, closely related to them in culture and language. These have been so generally classed with the Hupa as to have

no name in ethnological literature. The Hupa, with whom they combined in war and in the Deerskin and Jumping dances, called them Hl̄l̄h̄w̄ (hl̄l̄ the convergence of two streams, /iw̄ the usual termination signifying people), and their principal settlement in the angle between the South fork and the Main stream, Hl̄tiñ .

Alfred L. Kroeber

The most influential anthropologist to study and write about the question of the “South Fork Hupa” and their relationship to the Hupa was Alfred Kroeber. He was considered in his time the most respected and knowledgeable scholar of California ethnology. Kroeber’s influence on ethnographers (among them many of his students) working in California during the first half of the 20th century, including the theoretical framework used for the collection and analysis of ethnographic field work, cannot be overstated. His hundreds of articles, reviews, and books (Julian Steward’s 1962 bibliography listing Kroeber’s work extends over 60 years and is 35 pages long) still form the bedrock of California ethnography and his theories on Culture Areas, diffusion, and the super organic still reverberate through current anthropological debates and theories.

Kroeber who came from an upper middle class family of German descent was raised in New York and began attending Columbia University at the age of sixteen in 1892. He received an MA in English in 1897. While working as a teaching assistant he took a course on anthropology from Franz Boas, the by then famous German geographer-turned-anthropologist, and became interested in the study of other cultures. In 1899 he accepted a fellowship in the PhD program at Columbia and received his doctorate in 1901 becoming the first individual to receive a PhD in anthropology in the United States.

Later that year he received an appointment to the University of California Berkeley to establish an anthropology program. Kroeber along with Goddard (fresh from Hoopa Valley) were appointed by the university as instructors in the newly created Department of Anthropology. Phoebe Hearst, a regent at the university and mother of newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, paid their \$1,200 salaries for the next five years as well as making significant contributions to the Museum of Anthropology and for much of the field work carried on by the university. In 1908 Samuel Barrett was awarded the university’s first PhD in anthropology.

During the summers Kroeber often traveled the state practicing what he termed “salvage ethnography.” Kroeber and others recognized that those Native Americans with knowledge of the precontact period were quickly disappearing due to old age. He felt that it was important, given this fact that ethnographers should focus on collecting as much information as possible from elderly Native Americans throughout California regarding their knowledge of the precontact cultures and languages.

In northwestern California Goddard worked primarily with the Hupa and the southern Athabascans while Kroeber worked extensively with the Yurok (he also worked briefly with the Hupa but not with the other Athabascans except for a brief trip through the area

in 1902). As Martin Baumhoff (1958:157) writes; Kroeber at that time suggested to Goddard that he study the Athabascans who “have been and still remain one of the least known groups in the State” (sic). The principal reason for this suggestion was that due to the scarcity of ethnographers in those years, Kroeber could not afford the time to work in the Athabaskan area (Baumhoff 1958:157).

In 1925 Kroeber published his monumental and influential study *Handbook of the Indians of California* (most field work for the book had been completed by about 1920 prior to any publication or use of data associated with Merriam’s field work). The first and most in-depth chapters in the book are on the Yurok (97 pages). This was not only a result of Kroeber’s field work among the Yurok but his theories related to cultural diffusion and the concept of Culture Areas (the Yurok at the confluence of the Klamath and Trinity Rivers were at the center or core of the California Northwest Coast Culture Area). The book (over 1000 pages) contains only nine pages of text regarding the Hupa and the contents are not much more than a cursory overview primarily based on Goddard’s work.

The following quote, probably referencing Powers’ work, is his only mention of the Tsnungwe. Referring to them as the “Kelta tribe,” Kroeber (1925: 129-130) writes that:

Still farther, at South Fork, where the river branches, was the town of Tlilding—whence the “Kelta tribe”—with subsidiary settlements about or above it. The farthest of these was Tl’okame, 5 miles up the South Fork. These southerly Hupa were almost out of touch with the Yurok and held intercourse with the Wintun and Chimariko. Their outlook on the world must have been quite different, and it is known that their religious practices were distinctive. In implements, mode of life, regulation of society, and speech they were, however, substantially identical with the better known people of Hupa Valley.

C. Hart Merriam

The ethnographer who unambiguously identified the Tsnungwe as being separate from the Hupa and clearly defined a distinct territorial boundary was biologist-turned-ethnographer C. Hart Merriam who began his ethnographic field work in northwestern California in 1910 and continued working in the region until a few years before his death in 1942. During this time he spent up to 6 months in the field almost every year. He was born in New York City in 1855. His father, Clinton Levi Merriam, was a U.S. congressman. He first studied biology and anatomy at Yale University and received a Medical Degree from Columbia Universtiy in 1879. He practiced medicine for several years before before giving into the urge to follow his desire to become a professional naturalist.

In 1886 at the age of thirty he took a positon as the first chief of the Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He is best known during this era as having developed the life zones concept to classify related vegetation associations in the mountains of the west (changes in vegetation communities

that occur with an increase in latitude at a constant elevation are similar to those changes seen with an increase in elevation at a constant latitude).

Eventually, towards the end of the 19th century, Merriam, already recognized as one of the preeminent naturalists in the country, became interested in the field of ethnology. Initially Merriam worked throughout the west interviewing Indians and recording cultural, linguistic, and geographical data. One of the reasons Merriam began to work with the Athabascans in northwestern California according to Baumhoff (1958:157) was at the suggestion of Kroeber (despite their rather tenuous relationship). This was due to the fact, as noted earlier, that California Athabascans were at that time and to this day remain some of the least studied aboriginal groups in the state. The precontact cultures of many of these Athabaskan groups including the Tsnungwe and the southern Athabascans remain largely undocumented.

During his later years Merriam resided in Marin County and spent the summers driving the back roads of Humboldt, Trinity, Mendocino, and Del Norte Counties interviewing elderly Native Americans. Merriam's largely unpublished data on the Athabascans consists of field notes, interviews, photographs, word lists, and geographic data documenting village names and locations. One of his primary interests was geography and he recorded a significant amount of data on territorial boundaries. His unpublished field notes also include a number of maps he labeled—by hand—identifying the various territorial boundaries provided to him by his informants. Today his extensive field notes, word lists, maps, and a large collection of photographs are located at the UC Berkeley Campus (some of his hand-written journals, edited word lists, and additional maps are archived at the Library of Congress Annex in Washington D.C.).

Merriam was principally a geographer and not as influenced by Kroeber and the theories related to Culture Areas or diffusion as was nearly every other ethnographer working in this region of California (including many of Kroeber's graduate students). More importantly he photographed and interviewed a number of Tsnungwe residents of the Burnt Ranch area in August of 1921 including members of the Chesbro family. A guide to Merriam's field notes, held at UC Berkeley, indicate that he took recorded vocabularies from James Chesbro in August (9-11) of 1921. According to the catalog Merriam recorded words for plants and animals and he also got information on the location of village sites including those on the South Fork of the Trinity.

It is clear from Merriam's map (Image 2) that he recognized that there was a community or group comprising a number of villages centered on the confluence of the main Trinity and the South Fork. His map clearly identifies *Ts' ă-nung-whă* territory as being separate from that of the Hupa.

J.P. Harrington

John Peabody Harrington was raised in Santa Barbara. He graduated from Stanford University, intending to make a career studying the languages of California Indians especially those tribes in southern California who were rapidly losing fluent speakers.

Eventually, in 1906, after returning from further studies in Germany, he took a job as a high school language teacher in southern California and spent most of his spare time documenting a number of Native American languages including Mohave, Yuma, and Diegueño. The high quality of his work caught the eye of professional anthropologists and in 1915 he was hired by the Bureau of American Ethnology as a Research Ethnologist. Until he retired in the 1950s he traveled widely and worked independently amassing a huge amount of linguistic and ethnographic data on numerous tribes throughout North America. Most of Harrington's work remains unpublished.

Harrington recorded important and relevant ethnographic data concerning the region. In September of 1928 he interviewed Saxey Kidd who is Tsnungwe (personal communication DA.). The delineation of specific territory is beyond the scope of this paper but Harrington's work will be critical in helping to clarify social and territorial relationships between the Tsnungwe and the Shastan and Wintu speakers living directly to the east.

Martin A. Baumhoff

Martin Baumhoff did not undertake any field work in the area, nor did he interview any knowledgeable Athabascans. His conclusions related to territorial boundaries and social organization, however, have had an enormous influence. Baumhoff was a student at UC Berkeley and his study; *California Athabaskan Groups* published in 1958 was essentially his PhD dissertation. As noted earlier, his studies of the various Athabaskan groups included an analysis and critique of the strengths and weaknesses of the field work and conclusions of the various ethnographers who worked in the region. He focused primarily on the subjects of village locations and "tribal" or territorial boundaries.

He was the first researcher to have full access to Merriam's extensive collection of largely unpublished field notes on the Athabascans. In addition to Merriam, Baumhoff referred primarily to the field notes and publications of Kroeber and Goddard (and in the area relevant to this study, to a much lesser extent Powers). The boundaries outlined on his final map for the Hupa delineate as separate groups the Whilkut and Chilula while he concluded that the "South Fork Hupa" were merely a southern extension of the Hupa. Baumhoff (1958:159) wrote that:

Merriam distinguishes the South Fork Hupa as a distinct dialect division. The linguistic separation is not supported by Goddard or Kroeber and I have therefore included the South Fork Hupa under Hupa proper, but as a separate tribelet. This gives a total of 3 tribelets for the Hupa.

Thus while he is aware of and discusses the Merriam data on the Tsnungwe he clearly accepts Kroeber's conclusion on this question (refer to Baumhoff 1958: Maps 1, 2). Today most anthropologists defer to the general conclusions of Baumhoff on the question of territorial boundaries for the Athabascans. It is not surprising, therefore, that Wallace, Elsasser, Theodoratus, and most other anthropologists writing about this region have simply referenced Baumhoff's 1958 article and maps (see for example Elsasser's map in

the *Handbook of North American Indians* 1978: 191 Figure 1, *Six Rivers National Forest Overview* Theodoratus 1980: Map 2).

Hupa Tribal History

Although anthropologists have combined the Hupa and Tsnungwe into one group or tribe it is clear that not only the Tsnungwe but the Hupa clearly recognize that they were and are separate groups. *Our Home Forever a Hupa Tribal History*, a book published by the Hupa tribe in 1978, provides a description and location of the various communities and villages within Hupa territory. The villages were divided into two districts. The more southerly district ended with the village of *xaslindiñ* located on the flat known today as the Sugar Bowl several miles south of Hoopa Valley. The only reference to the Tsnungwe in the entire book is quoted below (Nelson 1978:23):

The group closely related to the Hupa were the people later called the Southern or South Fork Hupa, who lived along the South Fork of the Trinity River within the territory controlled by people of the valley. Their language belonged to the same family as the Hupa language, but they spoke a different dialect. Their people respected the authority of Hupa leaders, served as soldiers for the Hupa, and sometimes attended Hupa ceremonies, but were not considered a part of the valley people.

Tsnungwe Tribal Recognition Efforts

The Tsnungwe have made a significant effort to seek formal tribal recognition in order to empower themselves to deal more effectively with issues that concern the tribe. These issues range from protection of their ancient village sites and sensitive locations related to their cultural practices and traditions, to contemporary issues. Tribal recognition is also necessary in order to deal more effectively with the various government agencies (local, state, and federal) that affect their daily lives.

After reviewing the information provided by the Tsnungwe in their many briefs, letters to various agencies, tribal and family histories, viewing their informative internet web site, and in observing their efforts to maintain their cultural identity it is clear that the ethnographic record for this region is problematic. The following section of this study provides an overview of the data that the Tsnungwe have provided to question the current paradigm that they were not an independent community or tribe but merely a southern extension of the Hupa tribe.

One of the most significant steps taken by the Tsnungwe to gain tribal recognition is their effort to document their existence, historically, as a “tribal entity.” In July of 1995 the tribe provided supporting documentation to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) formally requesting “a determination of previous recognition by the federal government.” The request was submitted to the Bureau of Acknowledgement and Research (BAR), the agency responsible for determining tribal recognition. In the agency’s formal response

(December 4, 1995) they noted that the tribe was requesting the BAR to “determine whether documentation you have submitted provides evidence that your group, The Tsnungwe Council, was previously acknowledged as a tribal political entity by the Federal Government.”

Evidence provided by the Tsnungwe included information related to tribal members being signatories to the Treaty of 1851, an unsigned but negotiated treaty of 1864, and as being recognized as a tribal entity under the 1928 California Claims Act.

The Treaty of 1851

From April 1851 to August 1852 three treaty commissioners were appointed by President Millard Fillmore as authorized by the Senate in September of 1850 to negotiate treaties with the Indians of California essentially to place them on Indian reservations. The “Treaty Commissioner” appointed for northwestern California was Colonel Redick McKee. The McKee expedition made their way to Humboldt County and traveled east to the junction of the Klamath and Trinity Rivers in the fall of 1851 to negotiate treaties with the local Indian tribes. On October 6, 1851 Indian leaders from a number of tribes in the region signed the “Treaty at Camp Klamath,” one of the eighteen treaties negotiated by the Treaty Commissioners, submitted to the Senate in May of 1852.

The Indian tribes signing and agreeing to the treaties had virtually no understanding of their content or meaning. The treaties were vigorously opposed throughout California by the newly arrived miners, ranchers, and merchants since they believed the treaties “gave away” to the Indians lands that would be profitable for development or prospecting for gold. Due to this strong opposition and political influence the treaties were never honored. The Senate on July 8, 1852 refused to ratify them and they were filed under an injunction of secrecy. This injunction was not removed until January of 1905.

In making their application for federal recognition the Tsnungwe cited their participation in the signing of this treaty. The BAR did not support their conclusion and determined that the tribe had not “established a genealogical link to the 1851 treaty villages and, therefore, have not demonstrated ‘unambiguous’ Federal recognition of your ancestors as a tribal entity in 1851.”

Although a direct link was not established it should be noted that George Gibbs, a member of the McKee party, kept a journal (Gibbs ms.). Gibb’s identified the Hupa villages to the south along the Trinity River and then recorded the village of “*whts-puk*” as being located “above” the valley (to the south). In addition, Gibbs’ map of the region shows the village of *wietspek* at the confluence of the South Fork Trinity River and the Trinity River. This is the Yurok name for the important Tsnungwe village of *Jeldin* and is the same as that for a Yurok Village at the confluence of the Klamath and Trinity Rivers. Roughly translated it means where the rivers meet (see also Kroeber 1925:130). Gibbs writes “Of the Indians above the forks on the main Trinity River, or those on the south fork, we obtained no distinct information, except that they speak distinct languages and are both excessively hostile to the whites” (George Gibbs Journal).

Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1864

In 1864 a peace treaty was negotiated between the U.S. Government and the Hupa and their immediate neighbors including the Tsnungwe. The treaty was subtitled:

Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States government and the Hoopa, South Fork, Redwood, and Grouse Creek Indians

It authorized a number of actions including the creation of an Indian Reservation centered on Hupa Valley. An Indian agent (an agent had absolute authority over the Indians), a school, and medical care were also promised. This “Treaty of Peace” was never ratified by the Senate. That same year, however, Congress authorized creation of the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation essentially implementing the principal elements and conditions of the treaty. Subsequently many of the Indians who had been captured by the military in other areas including the South Fork Trinity River region and some individuals from as far away as southern Humboldt and northern Mendocino Counties were also placed on the reservation.

The Tsnungwe contended that they were parties to the unsigned treaty and therefore existed as a tribe in 1864. The BAR in response agreed and indicated that they would “accept this statement as proof that actual negotiations took place in which the Federal agent treated your ancestors as a tribal entity.”

The 1928 California Claims Act

In 1928 the California Claims Judicial Act was passed. This legislation passed by the state of California authorized the state attorney general to sue the federal government on behalf of Indian tribes whose lands were, in effect, essentially stolen as a result of the failure by the Senate to ratify the “Eighteen Treaties” of 1851.

Under this law payments of claims were to be awarded to all Indians residing in the state in 1852 and to their descendants still living in the state. The case was settled in 1944. The payments to individuals under this law took place for the most part in the 1950s, however, the last payment was made in 1974 (Tolley 1973:75). Significantly, this state law was not intended to recognize any tribal entities (a federal responsibility), but rather to settle claims with the descendants of Native Americans living in California in 1852. It is not surprising, therefore, that the BAR found;

Under the 1928 Act the Government dealt with your ancestors as individuals, not as a tribal entity. The 1928 Claims did not establish a government-to-government relationship with a tribal entity representing your ancestors. We must conclude, and then that this evidence does not meet the definition of previous Federal acknowledgement as set forth in the acknowledgement regulations in section 83.1. [BAR 1995:3]

Under the 1928 Claims Act the Tsnungwe registered as “Trinity County Hupa,” “Humboldt County Hupa,” or “Trinity & Humboldt County Hupa” (personal communication D.A.). In 1905-1906, C.E. Kelsey authored a report entitled *Census of Non-Reservation California Indians*. Eventually, as a result of the Claims Act, the BIA hired Kelsey to document the remaining tribes in the region who did have any reservation lands. As part of his report he produced a map. He identified the Tsnungwe and labeled his map with the notation “Trinity Tribe” along the South Fork Trinity River in Humboldt County near the Trinity County line (Kelsey 1913).

The BAR Decision Regarding the Tsnungwe Tribal Recognition Petition

It is clear subsequent to the BAR decision that the current anthropological paradigm related to the question of whether the Tsnungwe existed as a “separate tribal entity” is not only problematic it is inaccurate. The documentation that the Tsnungwe provided to the BAR regarding the treaty of 1864 clearly demonstrates that the tribe (community, tribelet, band or however it has been defined) existed prior to the Contact Period. The final decision of the BAR (BAR letter 1995:3) states that:

We find a reasonable basis to assume that when your written petition is evaluated during “active consideration” we will conclude that your ancestors were previously recognized as a tribe by the Federal Government as late as 1864....

You may, therefore complete the research and writing of your documented petition to meet the reduced burden of proof for previously recognized petitioners as set forth in section 83.8(d) of the acknowledgement regulations.

As an anthropologist, I feel it necessary to make an editorial comment that the entire case assembled and submitted to the BAR to successfully argue the existence of the Tsnungwe as a “separate tribal entity” was assembled by members of the tribe. That the Tsnungwe were successful in their efforts with the BAR was not because of, but rather despite anthropologist’s conclusions and the existing ethnographic record.

This problem with the ethnographic record in California is not limited to the Athabascans but is a relic of an ethnocentric past. For example, in *Quest for Tribal Acknowledgement California’s Honey Lake Maidus* (1973), Sara-Larus Tolley discusses the problems the Maidus are having in their efforts to become federally recognized. These difficulties, as with the Tsnungwe (and the Wailaki) can be linked directly to the interpretations and conclusions documented in the existing historical and ethnographic records. Tolley writes that the;

BAR demands that Indian people assemble anthropological and historical evidences, which means that they carry the burden of, and are marked in a real way, by the anthropologists pronouncements upon them. Self-

identification or identification by other Indians only comes last on the list. Anthropology's own and perhaps complicated and perhaps flawed history of the analysis of culture change is what is emphasized in the tribe's case. (Tolley 1973:71)

Historical Background

Prior to the Gold Rush the region of what is now Humboldt County and much of interior of northwestern California remained relatively isolated from the ongoing historic settlement and resulting destruction of the aboriginal way of life taking place throughout the Spanish and Mexican region to the south. The few visitors to this region included some Russian and American fur traders and hunters working along the Pacific coast and a number of parties of fur trappers in search of beavers, including large expeditions from the Hudson Bay Company, and explorers like James Fremont who passed far to the east through the Sacramento Valley on their way to Oregon. The few exceptions to this isolation include the Jedediah Smith party in 1825 passing through Tsnungwe territory while traveling to the coast and a few parties of trappers working in the general region in the 1820s and 1830s.

The isolation for the people inhabiting the remote Klamath Mountains changed dramatically in 1848 with the discovery of gold near Douglas City along the Trinity River by Pearson B. (Major) Reading. Along with the discovery of gold in the Sierra foothills at Sutter's Mill that same year, the resulting "gold fever" not only in the eastern United States but throughout the world, resulted in the California Gold Rush of 1849. Almost overnight California's non-native population exploded growing from about 15,000 in 1848 to 224,000 in 1852. By 1849 there were already prospectors working along the Klamath and Trinity Rivers. This invasion of miners quickly led to the disruption and destruction of aboriginal settlements throughout the mining regions of California.

Conflicts between the Indians of eastern Humboldt County and Trinity County and the newly arrived miners and the settlers and ranchers who closely followed them climaxed in 1862 resulting in the "Two Years War". The "California Volunteers and Mountaineers," a military unit commanded by military officers and made up of local volunteers due to the lack of military personnel as a result of the Civil War, was active throughout the region. Many of these volunteers were local settlers and backwoods men who knew the mountainous county well and had a special enmity for those Indians who had still managed to avoid being killed or captured. Those Indians who were captured and not killed, starved, or kidnapped were sent to one of the reservations in the region with most going to Round Valley or the Smith River Indian Reservations.

A. J. Bledsoe writes that in May and June of 1864 the military was operating above Hoopa Valley in Tsnungwe territory. On May 23 Company A of the Mountaineer Battalion in a "skirmish with the Indians on Grouse Creek killed nine and captured four" (Bledsoe 1885:190). By the end of May according to Bledsoe the military was "able to

report but few hostile Indians remaining in that territory” (Bledsoe 1885:190 [referencing War of the Rebellion records no.105:254-256]).

As the “Indian wars” were drawing to a close some of the most effective Indian resistance was centered on Hoopa Valley where over 75 well-armed warriors were easily able to out maneuver the military in their home territory. Attempting to avert further bloodshed Austin Wiley (California Superintendent of Indian Affairs) in June of 1864 traveled to Hoopa Valley in an effort to negotiate an end to the conflict (Herbert n.d.:62). Wiley negotiated a treaty that set aside Hoopa Valley and the surrounding area for exclusive use of the Hupa, South Fork (Tsnungwe), Redwood, and Grouse Creek Indians. As part of the agreement white settlers in the valley were to be compensated for their property and removed. The Treaty of 1864 was never passed by the Senate, however, due to an act of Congress, in 1864 Hoopa Valley was designated an Indian Reservation.

Within a few years all Tsnungwe families still residing within their homeland territory were forcibly removed and placed on the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation. Although there was an end to the violence, conditions on the Hoopa Valley Reservation were deplorable. A longing for home during this difficult time and the squalid living conditions moved many Tsnungwe to quietly return to their homelands. Fortunately, the Tsnungwe met little resistance. Among the families forcibly removed to the Hoopa Reservation were the Saxey, Pete, Dartt, and Campbell families.

Tsnungwe Tribal History

The Tsnungwe have compiled a number of important and useful documents on their tribal history including an overview of their struggle to maintain their cultural identity during the last 150 years (Tsnungwe Council 1990: 1-12). The overview is well documented and demonstrates that there is a clear and unbroken link to the prehistoric period of specific family groups who comprised the Tsnungwe during the ethnographic period. What is also apparent is that the Tsnungwe people did not in essence “disappear” into the pages of history when they were forcibly removed to Hoopa Valley but, rather, that they managed successfully to maintain their unique cultural and community identity despite the traumatic events surrounding the displacement from their homeland by violent means in the 1850s and 1860s.

It is beyond the scope of this study to review all of the cultural and historical data that the Tsnungwe have documented as part of their tribal history. What follows is a brief summary referencing the cultural and historical data the Tsnungwe have assembled on what took place subsequent to 1876 when as anthropologists have concluded they “merged with their compatriots.” The story of the return of Tsnungwe families to their homeland area subsequent to their internment at Hupa Valley is not unusual in this region. Many of the Indians sent to reservations from more distant locations left (or more correctly—escaped) and returned to their homelands. This was true not only for the Tsnungwe but also the Wailaki as will be discussed in the next chapter. Often those families returning would move to an area unoccupied by whites near their original village

site. Although Indians had no civil rights they often were left alone as long as they presented no potential problem or conflict to the neighboring whites. Indians were often hired to work for whites in various capacities. In sheep country men made excellent sheep herders and were familiar with the backcountry. It was not uncommon for Indian women to work as a cook or as a domestic worker.

The following paragraphs can be found on the Tsnungwe internet web site. They outline the story of how the Tsnungwe returned to their homeland and how they were able to maintain their cultural identity despite the traumatic events that had befallen them. With permission I have quoted at length a Tsnungwe produced document that traces their cultural history in order to let the Tsnungwe speak for themselves. The following passage begins with the coming of Euro-Americans to their homeland. [The entire document can be found on the tsnungwe web site.]

This period would have meant the end of a weaker people but strong family and leadership traditions allowed the Tsnungwe to work together and hold onto the values. As in days of old, the Tsnungwe lived in extended families. Traditionally, family units resided in separate villages. Generations lived together: grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, brothers and sisters, and children. Each community was governed with one or two people who were looked to for leadership in dealing with other villages and in ceremonies, trade, warfare, and shared territory for hunting, fishing, and gathering. Community leaders were typically men who had achieved high social status. Our villages were destroyed, but the family-based leadership remained intact.

To illustrate our governing system, the leadership in one of our family units, the Saxey family, will serve as an example. We will begin with Saxey Kidd, who led his family back to the homeland in the late 1800s. The family leadership was passed from him through the generations first to James Chesbro, then Ray White, followed by Wes, Charles, Phillip, and John Ammon who are active in the elders council of our modern, organized tribal government.

Saxey Kidd was born at Hleldin before the Gold Rush and grew up at the mouth of South Fork during the years of white/Indian conflict. Although he was relocated to the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation in the late 1850s, he later returned to his home with his family. At his ranch along the South Fork, he successfully raised a large, extended family on the Saxey Ranch. He was an influential religious, political, and cultural leader. Around the turn of the century, the anthropologist Pliny Goddard wrote of Saxey's religious leadership in the Hupa ceremonies, and also recorded a number of stories from Saxey that appear in "Hupa Texts." An example of his social leadership was joint ownership of our fishing hole where Madden Creek meets the South Fork. This ownership could be purchased, exchanged, and passed on to family members.

After re-establishing the Tsnungwe community in our homeland, the Bureau of Indian Affairs recognized our tribe as one of the "landless bands and tribes of California". C.E. Kelsey, Secretary for the Northern California Indian Association, recognized the Tsnungwe in his 1905-1906 list of landless bands and tribes as the "Trinity" tribe of Humboldt County...

...During the 1920s, a Tsnungwe chapter of Frederick G. Collett's Indian Board of Co-Operation was established in our territory. Chapter meetings were regularly held from this time through the 1950s. Our tribal members were very active during this period in inter-tribal, state and national politics mainly concerning payment for the lands of California....

...The Tsnungwe community was faced with a very serious situation during 1987 and 1988 when a bridge was built over the mouth of the South Fork, at the site of our old village of Hleldin.

As "most likely descendants", people from our community worked as "Indian observers" to protect what remained of the Hleldin site. We worked with Cal-Trans and the Native American Heritage Commission in their efforts to complete the new bridge while preserving our ancestral lands. Upon completion of the bridge, it was dedicated as a memorial to the village of Hleldin...

...As well as providing strength for the Tsnungwe community to persist, our traditional family based governance system and continuous Indian identity demonstrate that we meet many of the requirements by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to be granted status as a federally recognized tribe....

...We have spent countless hours and traveled many miles in working to restore our federally recognized status. Our people were murdered; our land was stolen; our tribal rights have been taken away; our treaties were never ratified. And yet, we are still here, living on our homeland as we have done for countless generations. We deserve the respect as the people of our land ... and we ask for that recognition.

The Wailaki and the Southern Athabascans

Introduction

This portion of the study focuses on the region inhabited by the groups or "tribes" that ethnographers classified as the Sinkyone, Wailaki, and Lassik (Image 3). Over the last three decades I have interviewed or communicated with numerous Wailaki elders and other long-time local residents in Humboldt, Mendocino, and Trinity Counties who knew

personally or were directly related to many of the individuals interviewed at Round Valley by Frank Essene and along the coast by Gladys Nomland and earlier in the South Fork Eel River region and Trinity County by C. Hart Merriam and Pliny Goddard; including direct descendants of Lucy Young, Fred Major, Mary Major, Nancy Dolby, Bill Dobbins, Good Boy Jack, and Sally Bell.

More recently, I have been working with a group of Native Americans of southern Athabascan descent centered on the South Fork Eel River Valley in the Garberville/Redway region. This group has members currently residing throughout Humboldt, northern Mendocino, and southwestern Trinity Counties (including the Round Valley Indian Reservation). Their organization has now been incorporated as the Sovereign Nation of Eel River Wailaki.

The families with ancestral links to southern Humboldt County area who claim Wailaki descent can trace their heritage to a considerable time-depth, to specific geographic areas, and often to specific village sites and cemeteries where their ancestors are buried. I have not worked with a number of other Athabascan groups including the Bear River, Matole, or Cahto tribes, nor in the region ethnographers classified as Nongatl territory, that is adjacent and to the north of what I have termed in this paper the “greater Wailaki cultural region.” Although there are virtually no ethnographic studies of the Nongatl it is likely that at some level, in addition to sharing a common dialect, they were also directly related through kinship and closely linked by shared cultural values with the Wailaki cultural region.

It was the strong bonds between villages and communities based on kinship ties, shared cultural values, and a common language that set the southern Athabascans apart from their Yukian and Penutian speaking neighbors, as well as the Hupa and other groups to the north. This commonality of language and culture, a sense of place, and a shared history of the last 150 years of their collective human experience facing oppression and discrimination links the many Native Americans from this region that I have interviewed and gives them a common sense of community and tribal identity.

It would be fair to assume that work with knowledgeable Native Americans and groups or tribes located outside of, but with an interest in, this region might provide a different perspective on specific boundaries and social organization. That would not be unusual in this region of California--especially given the lack of ethnographical studies and historical documentation. Moreover, territorial boundaries were not political in nature but were somewhat flexible changing over time based on community and personal relationships and kinship ties.

The purpose of this study is not to question claims by individuals or other tribal organizations related to territorial boundaries or social organization. Rather, it is to document that the Wailaki living in southern Humboldt County--like the Tsnungwe to the northeast--have recorded a significant amount of historical and ethnographical data that is not found in the anthropological literature--including family histories and genealogies. This information makes it clear that social organization was (and still is) at the family or

community level for individuals organizing as the Sovereign Nation of Eel River Wailaki. It has, therefore, rendered such ethnographic constructs as “Sinkyone Territory”, “Lassik Territory”, or “Wailaki Territory” (or “Nongatl territory” for that matter) meaningless. It was (and still is) the bonds of kinship, the shared language, and cultural values that linked the people of the greater Wailaki cultural region and many of these connections remain. Like the Tsnungwe, the Wailaki have a strong sense of place directly linked to their cultural and spiritual values. This connection to place is evident in their oral histories and genealogies.

Interestingly, while there has been strong support within the local southern Humboldt Indian and non-Indian communities (including well-attended fund raising events) for the Wailaki to organize and seek recognition there has been some outside opposition. Not surprisingly some of this opposition has come from some anthropologists and historians (*Redwood Times*, 2/19/2008) based on the ethnographic record. More surprising has been the objection from some Native Americans living outside the region much of it again based on information found in the ethnographic record (*Redwood Times* 12/23/2008). Both groups contend that the Indians trying to organize may be Wailaki but that they must come from regions lying to the east of Sinkyone territory and that it is likely they or their ancestors moved into the area after most of the local “Sinkyone” residents were either killed, kidnapped, or sent to Indian reservations.

This opposition is primarily based on two objections. The objection from anthropologists seems to be related to the fact that the Wailaki who are organizing are including Sinkyone territory within the boundaries of what they consider their homeland area and this does not agree with Kroeber’s, Baumhoff’s, and other ethnographer’s maps and data. Some Native Americans from outside the area object to the Wailaki claims of territory concerned that the Wailaki are trying to claim what they consider to be traditional Sinkyone territory.

There is no reason to doubt that today some individuals consider themselves to be Sinkyone. One such individual, a member of the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians, claims Sinkyone descent and has familial ties with the “Coast Pomo, Coast Yuki, Sinkyone, Wailaki, and Wintu” (*Redwood Times* 04/08/2008) and has direct kinship ties to the Native American Sutherland and Bell families who resided in southwestern Humboldt and northwestern Mendocino Counties at the time of historic contact. Merriam and Nomland both interviewed Sally Bell, and other members of her extended family and the closely related Sutherland family. Recently, I have talked to other directly related family members who insist that their relatives were and that they themselves are Wailaki.

It is quite possible a number of Native Americans descended from families with ancestral links to this region consider themselves to be Sinkyone or part-Sinkyone. It is not the purpose of this study to question the credibility of their claim. The goal of this study is to provide a critique of the ethnographers who worked in the region and to document the efforts of members of the Wailaki Indian community who are working to gain tribal recognition as the Eel River Nation of Sovereign Wailaki.

As was documented in the section of this study on the Tsnungwe it is also clear that there are problems with the ethnographic record for the southern Athabascans. Despite the lack of empirical data sweeping generalizations have been made by some in the anthropological community that simply do not hold up to critical review. These “anthropological facts” are barriers to Indian groups like the Eel River Nation of Sovereign Wailaki (and Tsnungwe) who are trying to gain federal recognition and to reassert and revitalize their cultures.

[Portions of this section are summarized from Keter1990, 1993a.]

Ethnographic Studies

If the ethnographic data on the Hupa and Tsnungwe are considered to be lacking, data for the southern Athabascans is even more limited in extent Alfred Kroeber (1925:142-158) in his *Handbook* devotes only seventeen pages (two pages consist of photographs) to the southern Athabascans. That brief chapter, in effect, summarized all of the ethnographic data recorded for the region up to about 1920. Later work by Pliny Goddard, C. Hart Merriam, Gladys Nomland, Frank Essene, and a few others provides some additional ethnographic data and insights related to the region.

Based on linguistic traits and to a lesser extent the Culture Area paradigm, as postulated by Kroeber and others, the current ethnographical literature classifies the Athabascans of California into two divisions. The more northerly Hupa, Tsnungwe, Whilkut, and Chilula occupied the region that formed the southern boundary of the Northwestern Cultural Area (the Athabascan speaking Tolowa occupy the region to the north of the Yurok in Del Norte County and southwestern Oregon and are not discussed in this study see Keter 1993b). These groups shared similar cultural traits (such as an emphasis on wealth and a marine or riverine subsistence orientation) with tribes to the north.

The southern Athabascans inhabited the region immediately to the south and west in southern Humboldt, western Trinity and northern Mendocino Counties. They have been classified as occupying a somewhat unique position sharing some “cultural traits” characteristic of both what Kroeber classified as the Northwest Coast Culture Area to the north and the California Culture Area to the south. Ethnographers have further divided the southern Athabascans into subgroups that are generally recognized in the ethnographic literature: the Nongatl, Bear River, Mattole, the closely related North Fork Wailaki, Pitch Wailaki, Wailaki, the Sinkyone and the Cahto. The Sinkyone have often been further subdivided into two more somewhat distinct groups the Lolangkok Sinkyone and the Shelter Cove Sinkyone (Image 3).

According to Goddard, the main difference in the dialects of the southern Athabascans was related to the nouns employed with few differences in verbs or the roots of words. It is likely that no one in this region referred to themselves as Wailaki, Lassik, or Sinkyone prior to the beginning of the historic period. The people living in this region referred to

themselves collectively with some derivative of the term word *ken'-es-ti* (personal communication: F.C.D., Merriam field notes).

Since I am not a linguist I have avoided any linguistic analysis of the various southern Athabascan groups. Dr. Victor Golla, a linguist at Humboldt State University and an authority on the Athabascan language, has indicated that the southern Athabascan dialect was mutually intelligible to all of the groups ethnographers classify as southern Athabascan but not with the Hupa language. He places the Athabascans into the following linguistic groups based on mutually understandable dialects (personal communication 2009, B.S.).

- * Hupa, Chilula, Whilkut, Tsnungwe
- * Bear River, Matole
- * Wailaki, Sinkyone, Lassik, Nongatl
- * Cahto (with Pomo influences)

Sherbourne Cook reviewed the limited population data from ethnographers and other historical records regarding the region as part of his study; *The Aboriginal Population of the North Coast of California* (1956). He then estimated the precontact period population for each of the Athabascan groups in northwestern California. To place in context the amount of information that is recorded for the southern Athabascans as compared to that recorded for the more northerly Yurok and Athabascan groups it is useful to compare the relative size and population of each region prior to the Historic Period. Cook's figures are summarized in Table I.

Table I
Population and Territory estimates
[From S. F. Cook 1956]

	Approx area sq. mi	population
Northwest Culture Area		
Hupa/Tsnungwe	500*	2,000
Whilkut	250	1,300
Chilula	<u>210</u>	<u>800</u>
	960	4,100
Southern Athabascans		
Kato	270	1,100
Matole/Bear River	210	1,200
Wailaki (all subgroups)	575	3,350
Lassik	325	1,500
Nongatl	700	3,300
Sinkyone (both subgroups)	<u>615</u>	<u>2,900</u>
	2,695	13,350

* Cook published no estimate for Hupa/Tsnungwe territory. The above figure is estimated by the author.

As can be seen from Table I the estimated total population for the southern Athabascans is over three times that of the northern Athabascan groups. Moreover, the size of southern Athabascan territory is about three times larger. This lack of ethnographic data needs to be considered when making any generalizations regarding the southern Athabascans. For example, Nongatl territory (Image 3) as delineated by Baumhoff (1958: Maps 1-4), comprises over 25% of the population and territory of the southern Athabascans yet there is virtually no ethnographic information recorded for that entire region. Baumhoff (1958:181) writes of the Nongatl that:

Their culture is the least known of any group in northwestern California. Merriam evidently did not work in the area although he recorded a few of their words given him by George Burt's wife. George Burt was a Sinkiyone, but his wife was born and raised near Bridgeville.

The only other ethnographic data for the Nongatl consists of a list of village locations and names recorded in Goddard's field notes, some unpublished data recorded by Nomland from an unidentified consultant in 1928, and some notes from Frank Essene recorded at Round Valley related to the region around Blocksburg (Baumhoff 1958:181).

In addition to a lack of data, the classification of southern Athabascans into "tribes" was in-part based on linguistic differences or related to shared cultural characteristics that fit neatly into the Culture Area paradigm. As this study will document, anthropologists have often based their conclusions regarding social organization and territorial boundaries in this region on a very limited foundation of recorded ethnography provided by relatively few Indian consultants in order to make sweeping generalizations regarding an area inhabited by thousands of people with families living in hundreds of villages and communities spread across a region larger than the state of Delaware.

Historical Background

Given the size of the Wailaki cultural region and the tremendous variation in ecosystems and micro climates that provided a wide range of subsistence resources and the need for localized resource subsistence strategies, it is beyond the scope of this paper to document in detail a contextual historical overview of the entire area. What follows briefly summarizes historical development as it relates to the Wailaki (see Bledsoe 1885, Coy 1929, Carencro and Beard 1981, Keter 1990, 1991, 1995, 1996).

The first documented exploration of the South Fork Eel River region during the historic era was in late 1849 and early January of 1850 by members of the Josiah Gregg Party. They had left the Trinity mines in November and headed west hoping to discover a land route from the coast to the mines. After "discovering" Humboldt Bay, members of the Gregg Party (now having split into two factions traveling separately) passed through the South Fork Eel River region and after numerous hardships finally made it to the Sonoma settlements. Gregg died, in Lake County when "he fell from his horse...and died from starvation" (Coy 1929:43). Another early explorer who passed through the South Fork

watershed was Ben Kelsey (a leader of the Bear Flag Revolt). Some early maps have “Kelsey’s River” as the name for the South Fork of the Eel.

In 1851 the Redick McKee expedition passed through the region on their way north. Little effort was made to sign a treaty with the southern Athabascans. Not being in conflict with miners since there was no gold in the region and away from the settlers and merchants in the Humboldt Bay region, the Indians remained relatively isolated from the traumatic events related to the gold rush.

The McKee expedition followed a route blazed the previous year by the Gregg Party. This route, via Bell Springs, became the main overland trail (and later wagon road) linking Humboldt Bay with Sonoma County. The trail passed through Little Lake Valley and then into Long Valley. The trail continued north past Harris (Spruce Grove) and then dropped down to the west to about the present location of Garberville, following the South Fork of the Eel north to its confluence with the main Eel. Later, a new route was blazed that dropped down to the northeast from Harris to Alderpoint on the main Eel River. From here, the trail continued north to Bridgeville and Kneeland (avoiding the redwood forests) before dropping down to Humboldt Bay. By 1859, a wagon road connected Long Valley with the settlements to the south.

In 1854 brothers Pierce and Frank Asbill along with mountain man Jim Neafus wintered in Hettenshaw Valley at the headwaters of the Van Duzen River and the North Fork Eel River (Keter 1990). They spent the winter hunting deer in order to sell the hides the following spring in the Red Bluff area. Although there was no gold in the region miners and other explorers passing through immediately recognized the potential of grazing livestock on the nutrient-rich perennial grasses growing in the oak savanna woodlands of the “bald hills” of the North Coast Ranges that lie to the east of the redwood forests (Keter 1995). By the late 1850s ranchers and homesteaders were beginning to move into the region.

Unlike the mining regions to the north, the invasion of not only humans but their livestock was a subsistence resource procurement catastrophe for the southern Athabascans (Keter 1990). Once the gold was gone from an area, few miners remained to ranch or farm in the steep and more forested Klamath Mountains. In the bald hills region comprising much of southern Athabascan territory, however, the grazing of grasses and forbs by cattle and sheep and the destruction of their acorn crop by domesticated and wild pigs as well as the killing of thousands of deer by hide hunters directly affected the Indians ability to secure an adequate supply of subsistence resources (Keter 1990, Keter 1995)

As throughout much of the rest of northwestern California from 1860 until 1865 there was a period of intense conflict between the Indians and the new settlers. This conflict, actually a series of clashes (usually one-sided ambushes of unarmed Indian encampments, see Keter 1990 for a summary of military operations in Trinity County) between the Army led Mountaineer Battalions or armed vigilante groups with the Indians in this region, as noted earlier, has been termed the “Indian Wars of the Northwest”

(Bledsoe 1885). By January of 1865 nearly all of the Indians within the Wailaki cultural region had been killed or captured and taken to reservations.

Before the creation of the Round Valley Indian Reservation many Indians from this area were sent via ship from Humboldt Bay to the Smith River Reservation. Many of these individuals managed to escape and return to their homelands. Some southern Athabascans were also sent to Hoopa Valley after a reservation was established in 1864. In addition, Long Valley (at the end of the wagon road north from the Bay Area) became a center for the selling of Indian children to wealthy families in the Bay Area under the Indenture Act of 1850. Lucy Young one of the primary consultants for Merriam and Essene documented her capture in eastern Humboldt County and her escape and travel back to her homeland from Laytonville (Young 1941:355-356).

Captain Thomas Ketcham, while commanding a company of troops stationed at Fort Baker, reported (USWD 1897a:982):

I have been informed that there are quite a number of citizens who intend as soon as the snow goes off, to make a business of killing bucks whenever they can find them and selling the women and children into slavery. It is supposed that they will make their headquarters somewhere in the neighborhood of Fort Seward, taking their captives to Long Valley, there selling them to certain parties for \$37.50 per head, who put them in a covered wagon, to take them down to the settlements, and there dispose of them at very handsome profit.

Within the South Fork Eel River watershed there were numerous conflicts between the settlers and the Indians. For example, a number of homesteaders had settled in the vicinity of the present town of Garberville. In early 1861, Indians attacked one of the homesteads in the area owned by the Sproul brothers. The Indians were driven off but both brothers were seriously wounded. This incident was followed by an attack on a village near the present location of Briceland where many Indians were killed and the rest driven off.

It appears that by the end of 1864 most of the original inhabitants of the South Fork Eel River region had been killed, sold into slavery, or removed to Indian Reservations (Keter 1990, 1991, Corranco and Beard 1981). As in Tsnungwe territory, some of the southern Athabascans managed to remain or escaped from reservations and returned to their homeland areas to be employed on the various ranches or as laborers. It was also not uncommon for the settlers and ranchers moving into a region with virtually no white women to marry Indian women.

The Recording and Interpretation of Ethnographic Data

As traumatic as were the events that befell the Tsnungwe in the 1850s and 1860s, the depredations against the southern Athabascans were even more destructive to the social

fabric and culture of the people. Thus the reason for a lack of informants in the southern Humboldt, western Trinity, and northern Mendocino Counties and the paucity of ethnographic data is more than “an accident in the history of ethnology” as Baumhoff (1958:157) writes. Simply put, based on the historical record, one reason that there is a “lack of data” and so “few informants” is because the vast majority of southern Athabascans were killed during the “Indian Wars” of the 1850s and 1860s by local settlers, vigilante groups, or the military, and the survivors kidnapped and sold into slavery or rounded up and sent to Indian Reservations far from their homelands. [Today these kinds of atrocities are referred to as ethnic cleansing.]

It is likely that by the beginning of the twentieth century the number of surviving southern Athabascans in the Wailaki cultural region numbered around two hundred or so with a few more extended families residing at Round Valley (from a precontact period population of at least 12,000 people). There is a lack of consensus on this question but the number was not large (See Keter 1991 for a discussion of the 1890 census and Indian population dynamics for the eastern portion of the Wailaki cultural region).

For the most part ethnographers interviewed the same individuals. For example, for the entire South Fork Eel River basin and the Mendocino Peninsula to the west from northern Mendocino County to about Spanish Flat, the primary ethnographic data for a region of hundreds of square miles is based on information provided by George Burt, Sally Bell, Jack Woodman, Jenny Young (Woodman), Albert Smith, Sam Sudder, Polly Po, and Briceland Charlie.

For the inland Eel River region of southeastern Humboldt, northeastern Mendocino, and southwestern Trinity Counties the ethnographers interviewed about the same number of southern Athabascans as they did to the west (see Keter 1993a). Many of these consultants were located at the Round Valley Indian Reservation or in southwestern Trinity County. Therefore, the lack of ethnographic data on “tribal” boundaries and classification of various villages or communities as “tribal entities” is more than “an accident in the history of ethnology” it is also a result of the near extinction of the southern Athabaskan people.

Given the conflicting data (the entire reason for Baumhoff’s research) and the limited ethnographic record based on so few consultants, at this late date it is impossible to classify the precontact southern Athabaskan socio-political structure—into what anthropologists have termed “tribelets” or “bands” or “tribes”—or to delineate “territorial boundaries” with any reasonable degree of certainty. The central problem with the issue of territorial boundaries and social organization regarding the southern Athabascans is related to our western mind-set. To us it is inconceivable that the native peoples living in this region simply had no political or “tribal” boundaries. However, rather than political in nature, local inhabitants were related through common language, customs, beliefs, the need to maintain a broad resource subsistence base, and most importantly--kinship. Our lack of understanding results from our inability to recognize that extended families and kinship ties formed the basis for defining the southern Athabaskan world.

The Wailaki

The word Wailaki (Wylackie, Wilakke) is not Athabascan. It was first used to refer to all of the southern Athabascans in southern Humboldt, northern Mendocino, and western Trinity Counties in the 1850s and 1860s by the miners and settlers moving into the area (*Humboldt Times* various editions, Asbill MS, Bledsoe 1885, USWD 1897 [War of the Rebellion Records], Carranco and Beard 1981, Keter 1990, 1991, 1996). Later, this term was used by ethnographers to identify those southern Athabascans inhabiting the region of southeastern Humboldt, northeastern Mendocino, and southwestern Trinity Counties. Wailaki oral histories suggest it is also likely that it was during this era when the southern Athabascans across this region began to self-identify with the term (personal communication T.T., C.F.D.). Prior to the contact period all of the southern Athabascans recognized that they shared a common language (as opposed to their Yukian and Penutian speaking neighbors, and the more northerly Athabascans who spoke a different dialect).

Wailaki is a Wintun (Penutian) word roughly translated as “north language” (Kroeber 1925:151). The term Wailaki first entered the ethnographic literature after Powers published his work in the mid 1870s. Merriam’s publication *Ethnogeographic and Ethnosynonymic Data From Northern California* (in Heizer 1976:94) includes the following information he had recorded interviewing southern Athabascans on the meaning of the term “Wi-lak-ke”:

Wi-lak-ke. Name commonly applied locally and in the literature to a series of Athapaskan tribes in northern Mendocino, southern Humboldt, and southwestern Trinity counties, in Long and Jackson Valleys, all of whom call their people Ken-nes-te and their language Nung-kah-hl. Goddard (1907) **restricts the Wilakke to the region south of Kekewaka Creek.** [emphasis added]

Merriam (1923:276) noted that the word *nongatl* was used by the southern Athabascans to refer to their language.

In the course of my field work among the southern Athapaskan tribes of California, I have made particular inquiries about this word [*nongatl*], and in several cases have had it given to me without inquiry on my part. It proves to be a general or blanket name used by themselves for all the Southern Athapaskan tribes, from Iaqua and Yeager Creek on the north to the northern border of Round Valley on the south, thus including all the Athapaskan Wilakke.

Obviously therefore, instead of being restricted to a particular tribe or division, it is a supertribal name. The Southern Athabascans say it is the name of their nation –covering all the tribes between Round Valley and Iaqua.

During my research in the early 1990s I could not find a single Native American at that time who claimed to be all or part Lassik, nor could Kroeber, nor could any other ethnographer visiting the area. As Kroeber noted in his introduction to Essene's publication on Round Valley (Essene 1942):

There are indeed old people on the reservations **who are listed as Wailaki in agency records and who call themselves Wailaki**. Those of them who still had worth-while knowledge to dispense proved however to be Lassik. [emphasis added]

Southern Athabascans interred at the Round Valley Indian Reservation indicated to ethnographers that they considered themselves Wailaki or *ken'-es-ti* (Elsasser 1978:203). Use of this term would suggest that although there may very well have been some territorial, or what today are identified as group or "tribal", boundaries for the various southern Athabascan communities, there was also some sense of shared cultural values and practices and linguistic similarities that set them apart from the Indian people in other regions.

The Wailaki intermarried extensively with both the Yuki and the Wintu. It was not unusual for Athabascan speaking inhabitants of villages near Yuki or Wintu territory to be able to speak more than one language or for marriages to occur between these linguistically distinct villages and communities. Communication was the key to maintaining good relationships among neighboring groups. Goddard (1924:219) identified two separate mixed Wailaki/Yuki villages. One village identified itself closely with the Wailaki and the other with the Yuki. In both instances, the villages were located along the edges of Wailaki/Yuki territory. One of these villages was on Jesus Creek (Casoose Creek). At this village both Wailaki and Yuki were spoken. The Yuki and Wailaki also had trade relations and probably because of intermarriage and kinship, supported each other in disputes and wars (Tassin 1884:7).

The ability to understand several dialects of speech made it far easier to be successful in resource procurement efforts and trade. Since the seasonal round might involve a journey across the territory of several villages or communities who were often seeking the same resources, a method was needed to synchronize the collection of these resources. If effective communication did not take place, it might lead to violence, death, or war.

The "Lassik Tribe"

By the time Powers visited the region the term Lassik was also in use locally. Goddard thought that the term was brought into general anthropological use by ethnographers after Stephen Power's publication in 1877. In southwestern Trinity and southeastern Humboldt Counties the term in the early 1860s was a reference by settlers and ranchers to the followers of Chief Lassik (part Wintu) who was a leader of some villages around what is today Blocksburg. This group of Indians held out hiding in the rough and still wild Yolla Bolly country and in some instances even fought the white settlers and

military. Ethnographers (Baumhoff 1958:194) have classified Chief Lassik as belonging to the “Kittel’ tribe” and therefore Nongatl adding some confusion to this subject.

On November 16, 1861 Lieutenant Collins and a detachment were scouting near Kettenpom Valley when they encountered Chief Lassik’s band. Lt. Collins wrote:

This rancheria was occupied by Las-sic’s band, probably the most desperate and troublesome Indians in the mountains. They have frequently been engaged in murdering whites, burning houses, and killing horses and cattle....The attack was made near noon, and as the Indians were prepared for it many of them escaped through impassable bushes. (USWD 1897a:19).

Chief Lassik’s band of thirty-two survivors surrendered July 31, 1862 and on August 10 twelve more members of his group surrendered (USWD 1897a:63). Eventually Chief Lassik and his group were part of a group of 834 men, women, and children taken from the Humboldt Bay peninsula internment camp located across the bay from Fort Humboldt to the Smith River Indian Reservation. By September 24, over 400 Indians including Chief Lassik had escaped and made their way back to their homeland region. Eventually, sometime between April and July 1863 Chief Lassik and many of his followers were captured and then murdered by white settlers near Fort Seward.

Lucy Young (a niece of Chief Lassik) remembered this incident many years later (Young 1941:354).

I go on to the house. Everybody crying. Mother tell me: “All our men killed now.” She say white men there, others come from Round Valley, Humboldt County too, kill our old uncle, Chief Lassik, and all our men.

Stood up about forty Inyan in a row with a rope around neck. “What is this for” Chief Lassic askum. “To hang you dirty dogs,” white men tell it. Hanging, that’s a dog’s death,” Chief Lassik say. “We done nothing, to be hung for. Must we die, shoot us.

So they shot all our men.

Merriam may have been the first anthropologist to interview Lucy (Rogers) Young (Wailaki name *T’tcetsa*). On June 29 and 30, 1922 (some field notes also indicate July 1) he visited the Zenia area and interviewed her and another Indian man Jack French (also know as Yellowjacket). Smith (1990:70) who also reviewed the field data noted that Merriam spent very little time with Young and that besides some vocabularies, the remainder of his work “was crammed onto six scraps of paper.”

Merriam noted in his journal for June 29th and 30th, 1922:

....Spent both days working with southern “Wylakkes” Kenesta (Athapaskan) Indians whom I made this hard trip to find. The principal one is a fine old (full blood) woman by the (present) name of Mrs. Lucy Young....

Unlike Merriam, Alfred Kroeber classified Lucy Young, born at a village near Alderpoint, as Lassik. Lucy Young, however, always referred to herself as Wailaki and was listed on the Indian Rolls at the Round Valley Indian Reservation as Wailaki. I have been in contact with a number of Wailaki including direct descendants of Lucy Young, Mary Major, Bill Dobbins, Nancy Dolby, and Good Boy Jack, (personal communication F.C.D., T.T., L.H., Y.M.F.) and several others interviewed by ethnographers at Round Valley and in Trinity County who all insist that they are Wailaki and that there was no “Lassik tribe.”

Kroeber interviewed Lucy Young at Round Valley (where she resided with her half-Wintu husband Sam Young) on July 12, 1938. He wrote “though listed by the government as a Wailaki, she is what ethnologists call Lassik” and that the name the Lassik called themselves was not known (Kroeber: 1925:144). It appears that Merriam is the only ethnographer who recorded from Lucy Young the actual name of the community to which she belonged. She was born in the Alderpoint area and the people from this village were known as the blue (*sit-ten*) rock (*bid-en*) people (*keah*) (Merriam’s field notes at the Library of Congress have the word “blue” crossed out and replaced with “white” in his handwriting on a word list given to him by Lucy Young).

It is clear, however, that some individuals refuse to accept the obvious. In the basement of the Bancroft Library one can find the field notes of Frank Essene, a student of Kroeber’s at Berkeley. Essene traveled north to Round Valley in the late 1930s and interviewed a number of southern Athabascans. One of them was Lucy Young then nearly 100 years old and the last living individual with any memory of the precontact era. In Essene’s interview his handwritten field notes record that Lucy Young identified herself as “Wailaki”. In 1942, however, when Essene’s work was published (perhaps under the influence of Professor Kroeber), she was identified as being “Lassik” (with no indication she had ever told Essene that she was Wailaki).

BIA records clearly indicate that both of Essene’s “Lassik” informants Lucy Young (identified as Wailaki, enrollment #3618, Office of Indian Affairs) and Mary Major (born at Soldier Basin) were Wailaki. Nowhere in any field notes or other historical records (including her close friend Edith Murphey (Ms.)) does Lucy Young ever refer to herself as Lassik (see also Smith 1990:77). She indicated that her father was a Wailaki from Alderpoint and that her mother was a Wailaki from Soldier Basin (*tha-tah-che*).

At the time of her death at Round Valley, in 1944, the Ukiah newspaper (*Republic Press*: 1944:7) included an article on her passing under the headline “Rests in the Burial Ground of the Wylac-kie Tribesmen.” The article goes on to report that “Internment was made in

Pine Grove Cemetery in the Wylackie City of the Dead.” I recently discussed this subject with a direct descendant of Lucy Young. She told me that in being raised by her mother and grandmother (the small child in a well-known Merriam photo of Lucy Young and Yellowjacket taken at Zenia when he interviewed them in June of 1922) that they never referred to themselves as Lassik and she said that “I knew I was Wailaki before I knew I was Indian” (personal communication T.T.). I have also discussed this issue with a direct descendant of Mary Major who also insists that his great grandmother was Wailaki (personal communication, CFD 2008).

It appears, therefore, that the *sit-ten bid-en* village or community situated along the Eel River was closely aligned through marriage and affinity relations with villages directly to the east. This included a winter village on the North Fork Eel River at Soldier Basin (*tha-tah-che*) and several villages along the Mad River in the vicinity of the old town of Ruth (now under the Ruth Reservoir). This alliance of closely aligned village or communities through extended families, cultural ties, and perhaps a shared sub-dialect is probably what Kroeber classified as the Lassik tribe.

Sinkyone

The term Sinkyone is also problematic and seems to have appeared long after the initial contact period given its lack of use in the early local histories and newspapers (*Humboldt Times* various editions), of that era. As noted earlier, the newly arrived ranchers and miners began to refer to the southern Athabascans as “Wylackie” during the late 1850s and early 1860s (Bledsoe 1885, Coy 1929, Keter 1990). The word Sinkyone was first applied to the southern Athabascans by anthropologists. Neither Kroeber, nor his students, as noted earlier, recorded that they had ever interviewed a Native American interred at the Round Valley Reservation who claimed to be Lassik or Sinkyone. They attributed this fact to the atrocities that took place in the region resulting in no survivors.

Merriam, in his field notes archived at the U.C. Berkeley Bancroft Library, indicates that he had never heard an Indian refer to the tribal name “Sinkyone,” nor could he find any such reference in Goddard’s original notes. Merriam rarely used the term Sinkyone for the southern Athabascans. He thought that Goddard “coined the term” himself to refer to those people living along the South Fork Eel River, for which the southern Athabaskan name is *Sin-ke'-kok*. On Merriam’s hand-labeled map (Merriam Map: Bancroft Library) outlining the various territorial boundaries for the southern Athabascans he has crossed out the term “Sinkyone” and written in “Lolangkok” for the northern portion of the region and “To-chó-be” for the area to the south and west outlined on Baumhoff’s map for the Shelter Cove Sinkyone.

The word Sinkyone first appears in Goddard’s field notebooks in 1903 (Sinkyone notebook 1: 1903) apparently as a designation for a local dialect of the Athabaskan language. He seems to have worked very little with George Burt. In 1903 he was interviewed very briefly and is only mentioned on the first page of Goddard’s field notes. The rest of the notebook contains information provided by Jack Woodman and Briceland Charlie. Goddard visited the southern Humboldt region a number of times. It appears

that Goddard's most important and most cited consultant in the area was Briceland Charlie. In an interview with Briceland Charlie on September 14, 1903 he told Goddard that "*sin ku na*" was a term that "Blocksburg calls us" (Goddard field notes notebook 1:37). Goddard again visited the area in 1908 and recorded in his field notes that Briceland Charlie told him (referencing people to the east) (Sinkyone notebook, 1908 No.4:40):

Non-gal call us sin kyo ni (sin-ke-nuk, Sin-ke-ni) [Goddard's parenthesis]
We don't call that way [Goddard underlined "we don't"]

Jenny Woodman Young told Goddard that her father was born on the South Fork of the Eel River at the village of "*sen.kya.Dun*" (Goddard's notation) not far from Bull Creek the village where George Burt was from. One local resident of southern Humboldt County provided the following possible reason for the use of the term Sinkyone (*Redwood Times* March 11, 2008).

...I understand the word "kok" to be the suffix for creek or river. As in Sink-ke-kok, the name the original inhabitants of this area had for South Fork Eel, or Lo-lahn-kok their name for Bull Creek. So, quite possibly there was no actual tribe called the Lo-lahn-kok. but maybe it was descriptive for a group of people or villages that inhabited the land where the Lo-lahn-kok flowed. I do know Wailakis are buried in the Bull Creek cemetery.

I have friends and neighbors who trace their descent from Daniel and Ellen Sutherland. Ellen was Sally Bell's sister. These people around Briceland were called the to-cho-be-keah. Ask anyone of them and they will tell you they are Wailaki.

Strongly supporting the previous statement are notes recorded by Merriam when he visited and interviewed Tom Bell (Yuki) and Sally Bell at Needle Rock in August of 1923. In a photograph of the couple taken by Merriam he records Sally Bell as being of the "To-cho'-be" tribe, or as Merriam classified them--band. Significantly that is the name of the village at Briceland recorded by ethnographers.

Kroeber interviewed Sally Bell and George Burt for his article *Sinkyone Tales* published in 1919. In his introduction Kroeber acknowledges the lack of ethnographic data for the entire region.

The present writer has carried on no investigation among the Sinkyone, except inquires put during a day or two in the course of a trip made in 1902 from Humboldt Bay to the head waters of the Eel River...concerning the general ethnological status and relations of the then practically unknown and nearly extinct Indians geographically intermediate between the two distinct native cultures represented by the Hupa, and the Wailaki of Round Valley (1919:346).

More research is need to confirm this hypothesis, but it is quite possible, given Kroeber's reliance on Goddard's field work (Merriam's work had not yet taken place), the fact the he interviewed the same two individuals as Goddard and then for only a few hours, his emphasis on classifying groups based on linguistics, and, as noted in the above quotation, his focus on the Culture Area paradigm, together suggest that his conclusions concerning the Sinkyone contained in his influential *Handbook* in 1925 led to the acceptance and common usage of the term Sinkyone in the anthropological literature.

All of Nomland's ethnographic data on the Sinkyone was the result of two brief visits to the area in 1928 and 1929. Being a graduate student, at that relatively late date, it is quite possible she was sent up to specifically interview a number of already identified "Sinkyone informants" since she did not interview any new subjects. Nomland (1940:149) wrote the notation "Information unreliable" in her article following a short description of each consultant's background for the majority of the individuals she interviewed. Given the relatively late date of her visits to the area her lack of confidence in the reliability of her informant's statements is probably due to their advanced age as it appears that Goddard and Merriam did not note any problems with the ethnographic data that they collected from these individuals.

Some of her conclusions are problematic. For example, Nomland writes (1940:151):

The Sinkyone intermarried freely with all the surrounding tribes (including the Yuki and Wiyot) except the treacherous Wailaki. To these last-named they felt great antipathy and charged then with wanton murder of traders who entered their territory.

Not only is this a synchronic view of inter-group social dynamics, but as the next section of this paper demonstrates, it in no way reflects group social dynamics as it relates to the southern Athabascans. Nomland does not document which consultant gave her that information. Given the late date of the interviews and the questionable reliability of some of her informants it would not be prudent to base any generalizations related to southern Athabaskan inter-group relations based solely on Nomland's limited work. In addition to problems with the reliability of some her data there is little to suggest that she made any serious attempt to record or clarify any conflicting information related to inter-group social organization or specific territorial boundaries.

I have discussed the question of tribal identity and the term Sinkyone as it relates to many of the individuals interviewed by the ethnographers with a number of direct descendants from the extended Young, Woodman, Sutherland and Bell families. These individuals without exception insist that their ancestors were and that they are Wailaki (KH, RH, Personal communication).

Southern Athabascan Social Organization

No doubt certain portions of their homeland or territory was well defined and likely defended. For example, ownership extended to the immediate area around a village. This might change, however, if another related village was in need of resources controlled by a particular village. Ownership therefore might be defined as a core territory defended by a particular village or community (possibly as large as a group of villages closely related in proximity) including areas that contained important subsistence resources (acorn groves, fishing locations, hunting areas).

It is also important to remember that boundaries were dynamic and changed over time based on kinship ties and the relations between and among individuals, and communities and--quite likely--changing environmental conditions affecting resource subsistence strategies. It is for this reason, as noted earlier, that Nomland's conclusions that the Sinkiyone and Wailaki were in a constant state of war is so problematic. The concept of "territory" was flexible providing communities with the ability to respond to changing environmental conditions, for example the failure of an acorn crop at a certain location, with ability to secure subsistence resources across a wide area. Boundaries between communities were, therefore, based on a number of variables including:

Resource Availability—when traditional or dependable nearby locations for securing subsistence resources were not available due to crop failure, drought, fire, etc, other more distant locations might be visited.

Procurement of Exotic Resources—the need to secure resources not available within one's own core territory through permission and/or cooperation of the group controlling the resource (for example the Wintu from the east collecting *Camas* in Kettenpom Valley).

Neutral Territory—some habitation sites may have been in territory claimed by several different villages or communities but were open to all for collecting or through the use of scheduling to avoidance of conflict (possible examples include the crest of South Fork Mountain)

Inter-Community Social Dynamics—changing alliances based on kinship, marriage, and social relationships between individuals, villages, and communities.

Hinterland Areas—some locations may have been utilized without anyone claiming territorial possession due to the remote location from a village or community (for example, the headwaters of the Middle Eel in the Yolla Bolly Mountains).

Special use areas-religious and spiritual locations—Religious or other cultural practices might result in travel well beyond what can be considered traditional core territory (trips by individuals from Lucy Young's village to North Yolla Bolly Mountain).

Trade Specific Locations—Areas that might have been visited for purposes of conducting trade with adjacent groups. (High Salt Ground on Pilot Ridge)

The names of the various “tribes” and the “territorial boundaries” confidently drawn on maps by ethnographers had little relationship to the world view held by the southern Athabascans. The difficulty of defining territorial boundaries in this region based on informant interviews is highlighted by Essene (1942:84) who noted “the territory the Lassik claim as their own is in part claimed by the Wailaki, Nongatl, Hayfork Wintu, Cottonwood Wintu, and the Nai’aitci.” In some instances the boundaries outlined on a map conflicted with an ethnographer’s own conclusions. For example, Baumhoff (1958:175) notes that the *sit-ten bid-en* name for Hettenshaw Valley is *ken-tes’-tung* and that it is in *sit-ten bid-en* or “Lassik” territory. On his map, however, (Baumhoff 1958: Map 1) he has placed Hettenshaw Valley in Nongatl territory.

The key to understanding territorial boundaries is in the socialization of the people inhabiting this region and the affinal ties between and among the various communities. Their concept of family and the extended nature of their kinship affiliations touched all aspects of their culture. None of the southern Athabaskan communities were self-sufficient. They relied on trade and community cooperation in obtaining subsistence resources that were both needed and desired. The only way such a vast region (with its numerous micro-climates and habitats) could be successfully inhabited and subsistence resources effectively and efficiently exploited was through effective communication and cooperation developed through extended kinship ties.

Marriages and Extended Community Relationships

Marriage agreements enhanced social interaction and community-to-community attachments. Marriages were usually arranged by fathers who would propose such a union out of friendship. An exchange of gifts between the two families would then occur (Curtis 1924:29-30). In describing marriage customs, E. M. Loeb (1932:94) explained that a couple would live with the wife’s people until the first birth, and then they alternated with the husband’s family until the second or third birth. At that time the couple would build their own home. If this was indeed the common practice, it is clear that strong attachments and affinity relationships would be established between the new wife’s and husband’s respective in-laws and extended families.

The interactions between communities and various social groups--however they are defined (bands, tribes, tribelets)--were therefore based on the family unit and kinship ties (one Wailaki consultant in Susman [1976:12-13] explained that ordinarily Indians “think a whole lot of relatives”). The same held true for larger groupings of villages or communities. For example, the village called “the blue ground people” on the west side of Chemise Creek visited the “Kekawaka people” because of their relations over there (Goddard field notes). The *kekawaka* went to the *ikodunbunya* village when acorns were in short supply because they had relatives by marriage there (Goddard 1923:101).

Marriage with relatives was strictly prohibited and marriage outside of one's village was preferred. Marriage was also prohibited among blood relations on both sides of the family. This prohibition on marriage with even distant relatives often made it necessary to marry into neighboring groups. Such marriages provided a mechanism for socialization and communication among villages and communities. Strong ties were felt with all relatives, and it appears, with close in-law relations. Members of a family were very close and were obligated to support any relative in feuds (Susman 1976:6). Relatives of the opposite sex were circumspect towards one another. Susman (1976:12-13) noted that:

...A man might marry two or more sisters, the second during or after, the lifetime of the first, providing he was a good husband and his relatives-in-laws approved of him. Relatives-in-laws out of one's own generation were regarded as blood relatives and one behaved accordingly. Sometimes a man would live with his wife's parents, or visit them frequently, and a woman often found her mother-in-law "like another mother".....

Marriages were often arranged between families in distant communities. For example, as noted earlier, Jenny Woodman Young's father was from a village in the vicinity of Bull Creek near the confluence of the South Fork and main Eel Rivers. Goddard recorded that her mother was from the region far to the south on the main Eel River "towards Round Valley." That region would be in the Alderpoint/Island Mountain region classified by ethnographers as Lassik or Wailaki territory.

Marriage also established kinship links between communities enhancing trade relationships (see Loeb 1932:69). Thus coordination and cooperation in obtaining subsistence resources or valuable trade items like obsidian and in participating in celebrations extended well beyond the village level. For example, the village of *seltcikyok'at* (red rock large on) during the summer joined the village of *setatcaikaiya* that was located some six or seven miles down river (Goddard 1923:101) to coordinate resources subsistence activities. Sometimes, during a hunt, fifteen to twenty men of different neighboring camps would drive deer into snares (Loeb 1932:88).

The village or community held in common their immediate surrounding area as a hunting and gathering territory for its members. However, as noted earlier, relatives from other villages were welcome to hunt and gather there when they were in need. The literature and consultant interviews suggest that it was routine for related villages to camp together during summer months (sometimes for extended periods of time) gathering plant materials and hunting. For example, at Horse Creek Canyon (a tributary of Hull's Creek) there is a waterfall where fish were harvested each season by three distant villages (Goddard 1924:224).

Before a "Big Time" or celebration a large group of men would go out hunting to provide for a good meat supply (Susman 1976:4). Each year an Acorn Feast would occur, neighboring villages and distant relatives would be invited to the sponsoring village.

After the feast the remaining acorns would be divided among those who attended (Leob 1923:88). This sharing served to distribute an abundant crop from one village to those communities that may not have had an abundance of acorns that year. A dance was held each year in Hettenshaw Valley to celebrate the maturing camas crop and people from villages as far away as the Eel River and the Wintu from east of South Fork Mountain traveled there to participate in the celebration and to gather camas bulbs.

The Emic and the Etic

Many of the problems related to the boundaries and the names applied to the southern Athabascans by anthropologists are a result of cultural and semantic differences between the ethnographers and their subjects. Marvin Harris (1968:568-604) has discussed the concepts of emic and etic. Emic statements are “significant, real, accurate, or in some other fashion regarded as appropriate by the actors themselves.” Thus, in ethnography an emic approach to collection or interpretation of data is based on the assumption that between the subject and the observer, it is the subject who is better able to know his “inner state.” Etic statements are based upon distinctions and concepts (such as tribal boundaries and Culture Areas) judged appropriate by the observer.

The generalizations concerning territorial boundaries and social organization between and among various “tribes,” “bands,” or “tribelets” as summarized by ethnographers were often etic statements. The ethnographers did not bother to determine the role of the individuals that they interviewed within their native cultures and--given their social position within that culture--what types of cultural knowledge they might have. In addition to the lack of contextual ethnographic data, anthropologists of this era did not view native cultures as dynamic or flexible and data was collected using a synchronic methodology (one of the reasons Nomland’s data on tribal relations between the Sinkyone and Wailaki are so problematic). Cultural variation based on individual preferences and beliefs was thought irrelevant and was not recognized. Essential aspects of culture were sometimes ignored or considered “informant error.”

Some of the distinctions judged “appropriate” (the etic) by ethnographers were in fact not based on firm informant data that could support their conclusions. For example, Alfred Kroeber (UCPAAE 37(1936):71-74, in Smith (1990:62)) noted in his preface to one publication that the “Tinglit, Kwakiutl, Chinook, Pomo, Miwok never were actual cultural entities, but only **convenient conceptualizations**of the facts of culture” [emphasis added]. Also, Kroeber sometimes discarded certain answers given by informants responding to his Cultural Element Distribution lists that “appeared to be ‘unique’ to certain tribal groups by assigning them to informant error” (Smith 1990:62). As Smith (1990:62) notes:

Kroeber maintained that the correlation coefficient to each tribal community had an ‘acceptable order,’ i.e., that their order fit in with his assumptions about historical diffusion. Each Pomo community...had to resemble more closely its

adjacent neighbor than more distant communities; if not Kroeber **cleansed the data** to meet his theory of historical diffusion. [emphasis added]

During the first half of the twentieth century Kroeber, due to his position and influence, was a driving force in the methodologies used to collect and organize ethnographic data on California Indians. He in-turn was influenced by his mentor Professor Boas and his ethnographic methodology used for collecting cultural data referred to as Boasian historical particularism. This theory or paradigm influenced the way Kroeber (and many others including his students like Essence and Nomland) collected ethnographic data. The paradigm set forth the following criteria for collection of data;

- * Culture History could be separated both from the influence of individuals and the influence of time.
- * The role of individuals in a society as the bearers of cultural change could be ignored. This resulted in viewing conflicting cultural information by informants as somehow varying from the “pure culture” of an ethnic group.
- * The “carriers” of culture were less interesting than what they could relate that was relevant to a reconstruction of precontact aboriginal culture.

The methodology followed for the collecting of ethnographic data by Kroeber and others at that time may help to explain why they seemed to have displayed little or no interest in trying to document or understand how historic events were shaping and influencing the surviving Indians whom they interviewed. Kroeber (1925:vi) writes:

After some hesitation I have omitted all the directly historical treatment in the ordinary sense; that is, accounts of the relations of the natives with whites and of the events befalling them after such contact was established. It is not that this subject is unimportant or uninteresting, but I am not in a position to treat it adequately. It is also a matter that has comparatively slight relation to the aboriginal population.

This detachment from the Native Americans that they were interviewing was due to the fact that the main interest of ethnographers and anthropologists was studying the precontact or “pure” aboriginal cultures free of outside influences. As Smith notes (1990:53) in his review on the methodologies of the ethnographers working in California at that time:

Traditionally American anthropologists had paid little attention to the welfare of their subjects..... In general the federal government remained much more “activist” with respect to Native Americans than did academic anthropology. It employed anthropologists in the Soil Conservation Service and the Applied Anthropology Unit of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Because of the theoretical framework (the etic) used to collect ethnographic data throughout the critical period of the first half of the twentieth century, the Indians of California were queried intensively about certain aspects of their aboriginal cultures. However, questions concerning interpersonal relations, their position within the society, or how the individuals perceived themselves within the cultural context of their world (the emic) were not solicited (Kroeber's Cultural Element Lists are the penultimate culmination of this methodology).

Given the methodologies used to collect ethnographic data I believe that some of the confusion over the territorial boundaries of the southern Athabascans can be viewed in terms of the emic and etic. Both of these concepts have their use in interpreting and studying the past ethnographic record. The methodologies used in the collection and interpretation of the ethnographic record for the southern Athabascans, however, should provide a cautionary note to those individuals relying on the anthropological record to question the claims by the Wailaki and to those elsewhere who object to their efforts to organize under that name in southern Humboldt County.

Sovereign Nation of Eel River Wailaki

It is clear that the local Native Americans who are referring to themselves as Wailaki--and not the ethnographically coined term Sinkyone--have provided sufficient historical data and documentation to clearly demonstrate a historical link to the people residing in this area prior to the contact period. It is also clear that these individuals have a long history of using the term Wailaki for self identification—despite the etic constructs of ethnographers, historians, and others from outside the area.

One of the most important pieces of evidence related to the tradition of southern Athabascans using Wailaki as a term for self-identification is related to the registration of California Indians residing in the region under the 1928 California Claims Judicial Act. As noted earlier when the McKee expedition passed through this region in 1851 no negotiations were held and no treaties were signed with the southern Athabascans. Because, as noted earlier, recognition of a group as a tribal entity is a federal responsibility, under the Claims Act Indians had to make claims as individuals. However, Indians filing under the Claims Act still had to choose one tribe to which they linked their ancestry although that tribe did not have to be recognized as a tribal entity by the federal government. I have discussed this issue with a number of local Wailaki and it is clear that many of those individual's family members who were of southern Athabascan descent chose to register under the Claims Act as Waikiki. Further, those southern Athabascans who were members of the federally recognized "Round Valley Tribes" Reservation also chose to be classified as Wailaki in Agency records.

In 2008, the Wailaki negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with the North Coast Information Center. I worked with members of the tribe to put together materials needed to meet the intent of the agreement. This submission included a map outlining the region of their interest and concern and a brief justification letter outlining their cultural and

ancestral links to the region. The following statement submitted by the Wailaki to the NCIC summarizes the justification letter. [Used by permission of the Eel River Nation of Sovereign Wailaki.]

Our organization began in 2005 in southern Humboldt County centered on a number of Indian families living in the Harris/Alderpoint/Briceland/Garberville/Piercy area. Our goal was to reestablish our presence and revitalize our Wailaki culture within the larger southern Humboldt community. This original effort has grown over the years to include a large number of Indian families with extensive kinship associations to individuals with ancestral links to numerous Native American cultural properties throughout the region. This includes members of extended families from Round Valley, southwestern Trinity County, northern Mendocino County, the Hulls Creek region, and eastern Humboldt County in the Alderpoint and Harris areas.

All of these extended families have come together and in our oral family histories our identity has always been as Wailaki. We acknowledge that anthropologists and even some Native Americans from outside this area prefer the names given to our people by ethnographers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries but true to our oral histories, we still consider ourselves Wailaki.

...Immediately after settlers moved into southern Humboldt County there was conflict with the local Native American communities. These “Indian Wars” as they were referred to in the press at that time recognized the *kenesti* of southern Humboldt, Northern Mendocino, and southwestern Trinity Counties a one “tribe” whom they referred to as “Wylackies”....
...It must be remembered that the Round Valley Reservation is in Yuki territory and was not our homeland. We were only one of several tribes of Indians who were taken to the reservation. Therefore the Wailaki on the reservation never had any central unifying tribal organization rather we were simply one group among several tribes of Indians from very different cultures thrown together in what in many ways in the 19th century amounted to little more than a concentration camp. Therefore when the Wailaki tribe began to organize it became obvious that our group was the only organization that directly represented the traditions and culture of the Wailaki (*kenesti*). As word spread and we began to make efforts to revitalize our culture we began to enlarge our circle of members as extended families began reuniting and today our organization has over 65 members.

We challenge those who question our understanding of the past because it does not agree with their preconceived notions to open their minds to the possibility that we the Wailaki people know much about our past through

our oral history traditions that is not contained in the articles and field notes of the ethnographers who visited the region.

Conclusion

Etic constructs such as cultural diffusion, Culture Areas, or linguistic classification systems are useful and often needed by anthropologists to help order data and information into a comprehensible and useful form. It is unfortunate, however, that too often these “convenient conceptualizations ...of the facts of culture,” as Kroeber called them, have not proved to be as useful and helpful to Native Americans.

As noted earlier, it was research undertaken by members of the Tsnungwe tribe that resulted in the federal government recognizing that the Tsnungwe existed as a “tribal entity” at the beginning of the historic period. In southern Humboldt County, the Sovereign Nation of Eel River Wailaki have widespread community support and federal and state agencies now consult with the organization for projects undertaken within the region designated by the MOU they maintain with the North Coast Information Center.

It is time that anthropologists recognize that the methodologies used to collect ethnographic data for this region and the relatively limited amount of data gathered so long after the traumatic events that befell the Athabascans in the mid 19th century is an inadequate foundation upon which to base definitive conclusions or generalizations related to the social groupings (tribes, bands, tribelets, communities) or territorial boundaries for the ethnographic period. It should be clear that there were no carefully defined static political boundaries within the southern Athabascan region. Instead, in the southern Athabascan world territory was defined by a complex set of variables including community and village relations, kinship, trade relationships, language, environmental conditions, and a number of other factors.

On a more hopeful note, the Tsnungwe and the Wailaki of today have important and relevant ethnographic data (including photos, genealogies, and family histories, as well as the oral traditions of elders) concerning both the precontact period and the historic era of vital relevance to anthropologists trying to document and understand the region’s past. Efforts of Native Americans to empower themselves and revitalize their cultures should be welcomed and supported. What is needed to improve our understanding of the region’s past is a respectful and collaborative relationship between Native Americans and anthropologists. What I have learned from working with the native peoples of this area over the last three decades is that they have a deep and wide reservoir of cultural knowledge about their past that remains under-appreciated and unrecorded by the anthropological community. The desire to understand and to value the past may be different for the Native American and anthropological communities but our common interest in valuing, respecting, and preserving our collective human history gives us many reasons to work together.

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Consultants

I have not published the names of all consultants. I have identified individuals when permission was granted using their initials in the text and listing them below. I want to thank all of the Tsnungwe and Wailaki people who have generously shared their cultural histories, photos, and personal family genealogies and information with me. Any misstatement of facts or other errors are the responsibility of the author.

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Image 1



Bancroft 1883

(The Native Races, Volume 1 Wild Tribes). **“Kaitas Tribe”**

Image 2



Merriam Map of Tsungwe Territory
(Bancroft Library)

