

edition

early indian hunters

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The early Indian residents of Tulare county were expert hunters despite their lack of what then was ~~considered~~ considered "modern" hunting equipment. The bow and arrow was the only weapon, the bow being made of mahogany or ash, strengthened by the laying over it of the backbone of a ~~deer~~ deer. Arrows were constructed in three different manners, according to the purpose for which they were to be used. For warfare and large game, they were flint tipped.

An intermediate weapon was made of button-willow to which a hard wood point was spliced. For birds and other small game, a peculiar construction was employed. These were about three feet long with a blunt point. About half an inch from the end four cross bars, each about an inch long, were fastened. Two of these were at right angles to the other two and four projecting points thus were formed, rendering accurate shooting less essential.

In gathering salt, the Indians employed an unusual method. In the mornings when the salt grass was wet with dew, a squaw would go forth armed with a long smooth stick. This she would ply back and forth through the wet grass and wave in the air. The result was a deposit of salt a quarter of an inch thick on the stick. This salt then was scraped off.

Wild pigeons added to the Indian's larder and the methods which were employed in their capture are of interest.

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It seems that the pigeons preferred mineral water, whether it be effervescent from soda, or salty, sulphurous or combining the tonic properties of iron and arsenic, to the ordinary spring water of the mountains. ^{To} ~~At~~ all mineral springs, pigeons came in flocks. The crafty brave who held first place among those who made snares, ~~and~~ taking advantage of this trait of the birds, made his preparations accordingly.

In front of the spring a large smooth low mound was heaped. Next the mound, directly facing it, was dug a trench of the size and depth to accomodate a man lying down. The front of this trench toward the mound was open but screened with grasses; the top was covered. In this, the Indian lay in wait. A willow stick, at its end a little noose of sinew, lay on the mound.

When the pigeons congregated an unobserved motion of the wrist, a little raise of the stick sufficed to place the loop over the head of a bird. Silently the bird was drawn to the trench, the head jerked off and shortly another and yet another fell victim until sufficient pigeon meat for the band was obtained.

To insure another flight and alighting at the same place for the following day, should occasion require, a few of the birds were kept alive and picketed out as decoys.

In the taking of ~~the~~ fish, the use of the hook and line was not known to the ~~Indian~~ Indians but they had three effective methods of gathering finny food.

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In the narrow streams, which were numerous in the valley, weirs were constructed by driving a row of willow sticks diagonally across the stream and interlacing the fence thus formed with tules. On the upper side of this structure, near one bank, a semi-circular trap of similar construction was built. The fish going down stream, finding their way blocked by this barrier, worked along it until they found their way into the trap through a small opening. A larger door which included this opening allowed the entrance of the fisherman to obtain the spoil.

In the pools or sloughs or other places where water was confined to holes without outlets, balls of a certain type of weed were thrown, exerting a stupefying effect on the fish. They sickened and would rise to the surface when they were easily taken.

In the fall of the year when the water in the main Kaweah river was low, and long still pools were formed having shallow outlets, still another method was employed. After damming the outlet, mullen weed was thrown in until the water was so roiled that the fish, unable to see, could be caught by hand.

The late Jason Barton once described Indian hunting methods as follows after pointing out that the white man never was able to master the bow and arrow sufficiently to become proficient in its use:

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"We would wait early, say at the edge of a mountain meadow, watching the huntsman, bow in hand. When the wary buck came for his morning browse, his keen-flashing vision included naught of danger for nothing moved. A peculiarity of grazing deer is that while at short intervals he throws up his head to see or smell anything that may warn of danger, he precedes this by a flick of his tail.

"As he grazes, the Indian advances a step, perhaps two steps, without a sound; the tail twitches and he is frozen into immobility. There is not a flicker of an eye lash. Assured of safety, the deer once more grazes and once more his enemy takes a step. An hour, perhaps two hours, go by and the hunter is within bow-shot.

"The arrow is loosed and the aim is true, but the deer does not fall dead in its tracks. This is beyond the capacity of the weapon. The shot is for the groin where eventually, trouble must ensue for the deer and he is forced to lie down. That is enough for the Indian who, after an arduous pursuit lasting perhaps a day, takes his quarry."

Covered entanglements of tules were formed in Tulare lake by the Indians into which ducks were herded and taken.

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ad four indian hunters.

In approaching a squirrel, great caution was exercised by the Indian. With bow bent, arrow set and aimed, the hunter would take his stand and without the slightest movement except that of a gradual advance, would apparently so hold the squirrel's attention in a sort of trance that a distance near enough from which to speed the arrow with accuracy was gained.

As with other Indian tribes, the medicine man was a person of great importance among Tulare county's ~~saxax~~ red men, but woe unto him if he failed to effect a cure. A few instances of death following his treatment was cause for summary execution.

Treatment in the sweathouse usually was prescribed but but also was common. An incision was made, either at the temples or the forehead, and the medicine man sucked the blood and spat it out.

The dress of the medicine man was grand. The foundation of the robe was a netting made of the inner barks of trees. Through the meshes of this was interwoven the brightest colored feathers of many varieties of birds, together with topknots, fox and coyote tails and rabbit ears.

At a death there were chants from dusk until dawn. The corpse was usually buried in a high and dry place in a round hole in a sitting position, the ankles tied to the thighs. All personal ~~belongings~~ belongings were buried with the body. Members of the family of the dead man smeared their faces black in mourning.

Indian traditions
edition

There were two distinct races of Indians when the white man first came to the San Joaquin valley, one called the Yokuts, more than 20 tribes of which ranged the country between the Fresno river and the Tejon Pass; the other, a Piute branch of several ~~tribes~~ sub-tribes living on Mill creek and in Eshom valley.

Among the former were the Ta-chi in the Tulare lake district, the ~~Ta-lum-ne~~ Ta-lum-ne of Visalia, the Wik-tsum-ne, near Lemon Cove and other settlements were on Poso creek, Tule river, Deer creek, one near Porterville, one near the forks of the ~~river~~ Tule river, one on the Indian ~~res~~ reservation and still others at Three Rivers, Dry creek, Woodlake, the Yokohl valley, Outside creek, etc.

The Piute tribes were the Wuk-sa-chi of Eshom valley, the Wo-po-noich and the En-dim-bits. Residences of the Indians were far from permanent. In the hot summer they lived in the high Sierras, hunting deer, eating strawberries and enjoying the climate; in the fall, the harvest season for acorns, the Indians were to be found either in the foothills or the oak belt of the plains, according to the crop; in the winter, duck hunting by the lake provided food and good sport.

Among these Indians, no traditions of migration existed, according to a "history of Tulare and Kings Counties," by Eugene L. Menefee and Fred A. Dodge.

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ad one indian traditions

The history states:

"They believed themselves aborigines--the tradition as to their origin was that man was created by the joint effort of the wolf and the eagle, and brought forth from the mountain peaks. The Watchummas point to Homer's Nose, on the south fork of the Kaweah, as the place of their origin, while the Kaweahs point to the foothill ~~xxx~~ peak near Red Banks as the cradle of their tribe. These Indians believed that the eagle made it his especial care to guard the welfare of the human race and the eagle on our coin is accepted as evidence that the whites recognized the sacred character of the bird.

"The wolf is held to have ~~repented~~ repented the part he took in the reproduction of man and to be constantly seeking the destruction of the race."

George W. Stewart obtained the following tradition in 1903 from Jim Herrington, an Indian then ill and now dead, of the Wukchamni or ~~Wk~~ Wiktsumne tribe of the Yokuts. This tribe lived in the vicinity of the present location of Lemon Cove:

"Long ago the whole world ~~was~~ was rock and there was neither fire nor light. The coyote (akiyu) sent his brother, the wolf ~~ixaxat~~ (ewayet, iweyit), into the mountains, telling him, 'Go upward until you come to a large lake where you will see fire. Then take some of it.' The wolf did as ordered by the coyote and, after some fighting, obtained a part of the fire. From this he made the moon and then the sun, and put them in the sky. Then it was light, and has been ever since.

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ad two indian traditions

"The eagle (tsohit, djokhid) kept the cayote at work and the latter made the panther ~~ixk~~ (wuhuset, wohoshit) and the wolf help him. The cayote made the springs and streams. He worked very hard to do this. Then he and the eagle made people. They also made deer and elk and antelope and all game animals and put fish into the water. They gave these animals to the people who went everywhere and killed the game for food.

"The cayote, the wolf and the panther said, 'In time there will be too many people and they will kill us.' Now the cayote was sorry he had helped the eagle make the people. The panther said, 'They will kill us if we do not go away.' 'Then go up,' the eagle told him. The panther answered, 'I have no feathers, I cannot go up, I can not fly.' 'Then go to the mountains,' said the eagle and to the cayote, 'Go ~~ixk~~ to the plains.' The three went where they were told and have lived there ever since."

The acorn was the staple of the diet of the Indians but it is a mistake to suppose that their diet was lacking in ~~xaxixxt~~ variety. In addition to game of all sorts and fish, there were various kinds of seeds, nuts, berries, roots and young shoots of the tule and clover.

^u During harvest time, acorns were stored in cribs made of wovenwithes, usually placed on the top of a large stone and securely roofed with a ranproof mat. In making bread, the acorns after being shelled, were ground in a mortar and placed in water in a shallow bed of sand near a stream. Then water, running in and out of this depression, removed the bitterness. Placed then in water tight baskets, this gruel was cooked by means of hot rocks and formed a dish esteemed by whites as well as Indians.

ad three indian traditions

Roast caterpillar was among the rarer delicacies on the table of the Indian. When the type desired, a king of measuring worm, was not found near camp, long trips were made for the purpose of collecting them in quantities. A fire of fagots in a hole in the ground was allowed to burn down to coals. These removed and the hole nicely dusted with ashes, a few quarts of the juicy larvae were poured in, which quickly crisping, soon were ready to serve.

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The elements of humor and tragedy sometimes were mixed curiously in the early day adventures and associations of the white men and the Indians. There are however no other instances that quite equal the mixture of these two elements in the two misadventures that befell Fred Steinman.

The incident is related as follows in the "History of Kings and Tulare Counties" by Eugene L. Menefee and Fred A. Dodge:

"In 1854 or 1855, Steinman who lived southwesterly from Visalia a few miles, went on a hunting trip on what is now the location of the town of Corcoran. He was looking for deer, and the timbered country near Mahuran slough looking good to him, he tied his team and proceeded cautiously afoot. He had not traveled far when he espied five or six deer, whereupon he dodged into the slough and stealthily made his way to a point which he judged to be directly opposite them.

"Raising cautiously up, he ~~is~~ discovered one big buck within range, the rest being some distance beyond. He fired, and at the crack of his rifle, what was his horror and dismay to hear an Indian scream with agony. It was a dying shriek. The Indian himself was stalking deer, clothed in deer skin and carrying antlers. There was no more hunting for Steinman that trip.

"Fearful of revenge, he hurried home and kept exceedingly close for some time. Either, however, the Indians failed to learn the slayer's identity or were satisfied that the shooting was purely accidental, for no reprisal ever was attempted.

"Equally, or rather more, serious and at the same time more amusing, was his next trouble.

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ad one steinman

"Steinman was a bachelor and had peculiar habits. His house, which was within half a mile of the Indian rancheria, was of clapboards split and smoothed. Above his living room was a loft reached by a ladder. It was Steinman's custom on warm afternoons to repair to this loft, divest himself of all clothing and spend a few tranquil hours in smoking, meditation and repose.

"For some time, he had been missing articles from his cabin without a clue to the pilferer or his method. On one afternoon, however, while taking his ease in the loft in a state of nature, he heard noises, and looking down through a hole in the floor, saw two Indians enter. They had discovered some loose weather boards, and by removing the nails had made an opening which later could be closed and leave no sign.

"The table, on which was a variety of eatables, was directly below the hole in the ceiling and Steinman's anger rose as he watched the Indians make free with his grub and then examine the cabin for other articles of use. He determined to scare them into fits, and he jumped to the table, giving as he did so a wild yell.

"In stead of fleeing in consternation at the sight of this ~~man~~ apparition, as he had anticipated, the Indians grabbed knives and attacked him fire cely. Steinman, although severely wounded, managed to reach the fireplace, where he got hold of a long-handled shovel, with which he killed one of his antagonists and drove off the other.

"This time Steinman knew that only by immediate flight could he secure his safety. To his neighbor, Willis, he therefore went. A number of men were here employed making rails and these promised him protection. After consultation, it was decided that the best method to pursue would be to endeavor to square the matter with the chief

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ad two steinman

"All came to town and obtained the good offices of Horace Thomas, "Uncle Dan," to act as mediator. The result of the pow-wow was that in consideration of a beef, a horse and a number of trinkets, it was agreed there should be no harrassment of Steinman."

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fremont

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"Memoirs of My Life," by John C. Fremont, famous explorer of the middle nineteenth century contains ~~excellent~~ interesting and informative notes on the physical appearance of the San Joaquin valley and Tulare county in 1844.

Fremont who took an important part in the early history of California, passed through the San Joaquin valley on the return journey of his second expedition, leaving Sutter's Fort, on the American river, March 24, 1844.

Previously, he had come from Kansas across the central route via Salt Lake to the Columbia river country. From there he traveled southward over what was termed the Central Basin and on through the Sierra Nevadas, encountering cold and hardships. Reaching Sutter's Fort, he and his men were given a hearty welcome by Captain John Sutter, with whom they remained only a few days before starting south again, the actual trip through the valley taking 21 days.

Incidents included in Fremont's "Memoirs" include the following:

"March 24, 1844--Taking leave of Mr. Sutter, who with several gentlemen, accompanied us a few miles on our way, we traveled about 18 miles, and encamped on Rio de los Cosumnes, a stream receiving its name from the Indians who live in its valley. Our road was through a level country, admirably suited to cultivation, and covered with groves of oak trees, principally the evergreen type, and a large oak already mentioned, in form like those of the white oak.

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ad one fremont

"March 25--We traveled for 28 miles over the same delightful country as yesterday and halted in a beautiful bottom at the ford of the Rio de los Mokelumnes, receiving its name from another Indian tribe across the river. The bottoms on the stream are broad, rich and extremely fertile; and the uplands are shaded with oak trees.....On the 26, we halted at the Arroyo de las Calaveras, a tributary to the San Joaquin.... This place is beautiful, with open groves of oak....

"Near the river, and replacing the grass, are great quantities of amole (soap plant), the leaves of which are used in California for making, among other things, mats for saddle clothes.....

"A^pril 3--Today we touched several times the San Jo^uaquin river--here a fine looking, tranquil stream, with a slight current and apparently deep. It resembled the Missouri in color, with occasional points of white sand; and its banks, where steep, were a kind of sandy clay; its average depth appeared to be about 80 yards. In the bottoms are frequent ponds, where our approach disturbed multitudes of wild fowl, principally geese. S^tirting along the timber, we frequently started elk and large bands were seen during the day with antelope and wild horses.

"April 6--After having traveled 15 miles along the river, we made an early halt under the shade of sycamore trees. Here we found the San Jo^uaquin coming down from the Sierra with a westerly course and, checking our way, as all its tributaries had previously done....

"Columns of smoke were visible in the direction of the Tule lakes to the southward--probably kindled in the tulares by the Indians, as signals that there were strangers in the valley.

ad two fremont

"We made, on the 7th, a hard march in a cold, chilly rain from morning until night--the weather so thick that we traveled by compass. This was a traverse from the San Jo^uaquin to the waters of the ~~Estero~~ ~~El~~ Tule lakes and our road was over a very level ~~pr~~ prairie country.

"We saw wolves frequently during the day, prowling about after the young antelope which cannot run very fast. These were numerous during the day and two were caught by the people.....

"April 8--After a ride of two miles through brush and open groves we reached a large stream, called the River~~s~~ of the Lake, resembling in size the San Joaquin, and being about 100 yards broad. This is the principal tributary of the Tule lakes, which collect all the waters in the upper part of the valley. While we were searching for a ford, some Indians appeared on the opposite bank, and, having discovered that we were not Spanish soldiers, showed the way to a good ford several miles above.

"The Indians of the Sierra make frequent descents upon the settlements west of the Coast range which they keep constantly swept of horses; among them are many who are called C^hristian Indians, being refugees from Spanish missions. Several of these incursions occurred while we were at Halvetia. Occasionally, parties of soldiers follow them across the Coast range but never enter the Sierra.

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ad three fremont

"On the opposite side, we found some 40 or 50 Indians, who had come to meet us from the village below. We made them some small presents and invited them to accompany us to our encampment, which, after about three miles through fine oak groves, we made on the river. We made a fort, principally on account of our animals.

"The Indians brought otter skins and other kinds of fish, and made bread of acorns, to trade. Among them were several who had come to live among these Indians when the missions were ~~byways~~ broken up and who spoke Spanish fluently. They informed us that they were called by the Spaniards mansitos (tame), in distinction from the wilder tribes of the mountains; they, however, think themselves very insecure, not knowing at what unfortunate moment the sins of the latter may be visited upon them. They are dark-skinned but handsome and intelligent Indians and live principally on acorns and the root of the tule, of which also their huts are made.

"April 9---For several miles we had very bad traveling over what is called rotten ground, in which the horses were frequently up to their knees. Making toward a ~~timberline~~ line of timber, we found a small fordable stream, beyond which the country improved and the grass became excellent; and crossing a number of dry and timbered arroyos, we traveled until late through open oak groves and encamped among a collection of streams. These were running among ~~hazels~~ rushes and willows; and, as usual, flocks of blackbirds announced their approach to the water.

"We have here approached considerably nearer to the eastern Sierra, which shows very plainly, still covered with masses of snow, which yesterday and today has also appeared

ad four fremont

"April 10--Today we made another journey of about 40 miles, through a country uninteresting and flat, with very little grass and a sandy soil, in which several branches we crossed had lost their water. In the evening, the face of the country became hilly; and, turning a few miles up toward the mountains, we found a good encampment on a pretty stream hidden among the hills, and handsomely timbered, principally with large cottonwoods. The seed-vessels of this tree are now just about bursting.

"Several Indians came down the river to see us in the evening; we gave them supper and cautioned them against stealing our horses, which they promised not to attempt.

"April 11--a broad trail along the river here taken oft among the hills--'buen camino' (good road), said one of the Indians, of whom we had inquired about the pass; and, following it accordingly, it conducted us beautifully through a very broken country, by an excellent way which, otherwise, we should have found extremely bad. Taken separately, the hills present smooth and graceful outlines, but together, make bad traveling ground.....

"The country had now assumed a character of aridity and the luxuriant green of these little streams, wooded with willow, oak, or sycamore, looked very refreshing among the sandy hills.

"In the evening we encamped on a large creek with abundant water. I noticed here, for the first time since leaving the Arkansas waters, the *mirabilis jalapa* in bloom.

"April 12--Along our road today the country was altogether sandy and vegetation meager.....Toward the close of the afternoon, we reached a tolerably large river, which empties into a small lake at the head of the valley; it is about 35 yards wide, with a stony and gravelly bed, and the swiftest stream we have crossed

ad five fremont

"The bottoms produced no grass though well timbered with willow and cottonwood; and, after ascending it for several miles, we made a late encampment on a little bottom with scanty grass. In greater part, the vegetation along our road consisted now of rare and unusual plants, among ~~them~~ which many were entirely new.....

"April 13--The water was low and a few miles above forded the river at a rapid, and marched in a southwesterly direction over a less broken country. The mountains were now very near, occasionally looming out through a fog. In a few hours, we reached the bottom of a creed without water, over which the sandy beds were dispersed in many branches.

"Immediately where we struck it, the timber terminated; and below, to the right, it was a broad bed of dry and bare sands. There were many tracks of Indians and horses imprinted in the sands, which, with other indications, informed us this was the creek issuing from the pass and which, on the map, we have called Pass creek.

"We ascended a trail for a few miles along the creek and suddenly found a stream of water, five feet wide, running with a lively current but losing itself almost immediately. This little stream showed plainly the manner in which the mountain waters lose themselves in sand at the eastern foot of the Sierra, leaving only a parched desert and arid plains beyond. The stream enlarged rapidly, and the timber became abundant as we ascended.

"A new species of pine made its appearance, with several kinds of oaks, and a variety of trees; and the country changing its appearance became suddenly and entirely, we found ourselves again traveling among the old orchard-like places.

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ad six fremont

"Here we selected a delightful encampment in a handsome, green-like hollow, where, among the open bolls of the trees, was an abundant sward of grass and pea-vines."

Fremont tells here of obtaining the aid of friendly Indians to guide him on his journey.

"April 14--Our guide joined us this morning on the trail; and, arriving in a short distance at an open bottom where the creek forked, we continued up the right-hand branch, which was enriched by a profusion of flowers, and handsomely wooded with sycamore, oaks, cottonwood and willow, with other trees and some shrubby plants. In its long strings of balls, this sycamore differs from that of the United States and is the *platamus occidentalis* of Hooker--a new species recently described among the plants collected in the voyage of the *S. lphur*. ~~the cottonwood~~

"the cottonwood varied its foliage with white tufts, and the feather seeds were flying plentifully through the air. Gooseberries, nearly ripe, were very abundant on the mountain; and as we passed the dividing grounds, which were entering a highly cultivated garden; and, instead of green, our pathway and the mountain sides were covered with fields of yellow flowers which here was the prevailing ~~flaxen~~ color.

"Our journey today was in the ~~midst~~ midst of an advanced spring, whose green and floral beauty offered a delightful contrast to the valley we had just left.

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ad seven fremont

"All the day snow was in sight on the buttes of the mountains, which frowned down upon us on the right; but we beheld it now with feelings of pleasant security, as we rode along between green trees and on flowers, ~~with~~ with humming-birds and other feathered friends of the traveler enlivening the serene spring air.

"As we reached the summit of this beautiful pass, and obtained a view into the eastern country, we saw at once that here was the place to take leave of all such pleasant scenes as those around us. The distant mountains were now bald rocks again; and below, the land had any color but green. Taking into consideration the nature of the Sierra Nevada, we found this pass an excellent one for horses; and with a little labor, or perhaps with a more perfect examination of the localities, it might be made sufficiently practicable for agons."

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