

THE DIGGERS--WHAT THEY LIVED ON  
AND HOW THEY GOT IT

--From notes by H. C. Bailey.

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In attempting to write about the Indian life and habits and all that appertains to them, I find it hard to condense in 600 words a record entitled to at least double that number to make it full.

The Sacramento Valley was by its natural products an Indian Paradise. It abounded in food supplies. Game and fish and supplies for their domestics were abundant and easy of access.

For a house they scooped out the dirt about 18 inches deep in a circular form; made a frame work of logs and poles about three feet high on the outer rim, and eight in the center; cone shaped with a hole at the peak; covered the frame with tule and that with the dirt, with a hole two by three feet for a door. They were warm, dry and well perfumed, after a way peculiarly their own.

For food they had endless fields of wild oats; and number of seed bearing plants that yielded unlimited supplies. The gathering season extended through several months.

When the seed season was past, the acorn season began and lasted indefinitely. Many tons were gathered and stored for future use.

All this variety of food was ground in a mortar burned into an oak log, eight or ten inches in diameter and six to eight inches deep, with a stone pestle pointed at both ends; one more pointed than the other. In it they ground their acorns, flour, and oat meal.

They hulled the acorns with their teeth, pounded them into a coarse flour, soaked them in their baskets till the tannin was well absorbed.

They then put the soupy batter in excavated holes in the sand, to drain off the water and let the cakes dry hard.

I have seen their cakes about the size of a five quart milk pan, three inches thick, a rich yellow color, looking rather appetising. In many respects it resembled pound cake. But there the likeness ended. Prepared after this style it was good for any length of time.

The oats and other seeds were prepared the same way and made into a thick mush and eaten with fingers or a mussle shell.

When the spring came and the wild clover was a few inches high, they would go out to graze. The quantities they could eat was marvelous. They also ate large quantities of the white part of the tule tocks. In all their chief food.

At the right season they gathered vast quantities of birds eggs and had birds and eggs at the same meal. The more bird there was in the eggs, the better they were pleased. It did not take long to gather half a bushel of eggs in the tules in bird season.

Another inexhaustible food supply, when on the river, was the fresh water mussels. It took only a short time to dive to the bottom and bring up half a bushel; pile some brush over them, and have a clam bake.

From the last of February till May, they feasted on wild geese. They caught vast quantities with a very ingenious net. I am confident I have seen at one time more than 500 geese in one train of bucks on the way to the rancheria. I never counted a pack, but have seen a train nearly 400 yards long and every buck loaded.

When an Indian eats goose he always takes them in pairs. He has one



one off the fire while he feeds off the other. He keeps changing until both are gone. He never draws them or does any unnecessary picking--leaves that for the fire.

During the salmon run (March and April) they caught them in abundance and some times sturgeon. We could buy a 25 pound salmon for a quart of flour. They were the finest fish I ever tasted.

In the fall when the tule lands were drying the waters were full of fish of all sizes from ten pounds down. They could be caught in any quantity with the hands with but little trouble. Then the rancherias all moved onto the fishing grounds two miles from our home to dry fish. And such quantities of *size* I never expect to see again.

Like the geese, they had to be estimated by the acre and then two figures used. All the willow brush was hung full; all the open space was covered, every place that would accommodate a fish was utilized.

With probably 500 Indians hard at work seven days in a week, with no trouble to catch them, a goodly number of fish could be cared for.

The smaller ones they dried whole; the larger they split in the back. The Mahalas were quite expert. Squating on the ground, they would take a four pound fish in the left hand, hold it down with the big toe, and with one slash open the fish.

The lint they used for all their nets and clothing grew wild along the edges of the tule--a species of hemp that bore a fine quality and fair quantity of lint. They gathered the stalks about four feet tall and crushed them with the front teeth; then separated the lint with the thumb nail. It was very strong and out of it they made all their twine and ropes used for all

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purposes. I have seen many squaws whose teeth were worn to the gums from breaking hemp.