Yurok Today

The Voice of the Yurok People

Tribe battles grave looter

Felony dropped, new charge filed that the Tribe worked to put on the books. See story page 3

Maria Tripp

Chairperson

Aiy-yu-kwee'

For those of you unable to attend the Annual Meeting on Saturday, August 1st please call and request the Annual Report. It will provide you a snapshot of what the Tribal Council and staff have undertaken on your behalf throughout the year. As you read through the report please appreciate that any project may be in a conceptual, planning, budgetary, implementation or final phase. As the environment around us changes, project finances are also subject to change. A project may be downsized by square footage or we slow it until we acquire more funding.

Please note the Yurok Cultural Center recently finished Phase I of the planning phase. Phase II of the overall plan includes more tribal member discussion and cultural advice in the areas of traditional house building and canoe building etc. I'm sorry if you missed the architect's presentation and one-on-one discussion at their booth. They had a model of the building.

The Council and Economic Director are moving quickly through Phase I of the Yurok Tribal Fish Processing project. We've purchased land, ideally located on the 101 corridor on the river side. We are very excited about this project as we will be able to buy and process our own fish as well as many other products by Fall 2010.

The Commercial Salmon Fishery opened on August 14, 2009.

The Yurok Tribe is making great progress in all areas and stimulus funding is beginning to come in due to Council and staff teamwork. Come by the office and pick up an annual report, get a Tribal identification card if you don't have one. Please read the entire Annual report and call or e-mail should you need additional information.

With regards,
Maria Tripp

Contents

Page 6.....TRIBE PLANTS TREES FOR SALMON

Page 7.....YTEP HAULS TONS OF TRASH

Page 11.....YUROK TRADITIONAL FISHING RULES

Page 14.....STICKS IS MORE THAN JUST A GAME

On The Cover

The Yurok Tribe's former village and burial site, located in Patrick's Point State Park, at what is now known as Abalone Point. The village was used for hunting and gathering marine resources such as seaweed, sea lions, fish, clams and abalone.

Cover photo by Bob McConnell.

Tribe wants strong prosecution for looter

In a short video posted on Youtube, James Edward Truhls appears to rob from a Yurok burial site near Sue-meeg village.

"Look at this," Truhls says as he pulls an arrow point with his dirty hands. "I don't know what this is called, but it's going in the case," he concludes with a chuckle.

On December 16, 2008, Patrick's Point state park rangers arrested Truhls in Eureka on suspicion of looting sacred archeological items from the village site inside Patrick's Point State Park.

Following the arrest, the Yurok Tribe worked with the Humboldt County District Attorney's Office to ensure the most vigorous prosecution possible. Truhls was charged with a felony carrying jail time and a misdemeanor — both related to grave robbing.

Despite the damning video, Humboldt County Superior Court Judge Joyce Hinrichs threw out the felony at a preliminary hearing stating there was not sufficient evidence that Truhls was digging in a grave site. Following the loss of the felony charge, the Tribe worked aggressively to file a new and a stiffer misdemeanor count, which carries up to year in jail and and a fine of up to $50,000. The judge accepted the charge and the case is set for trial in late summer.

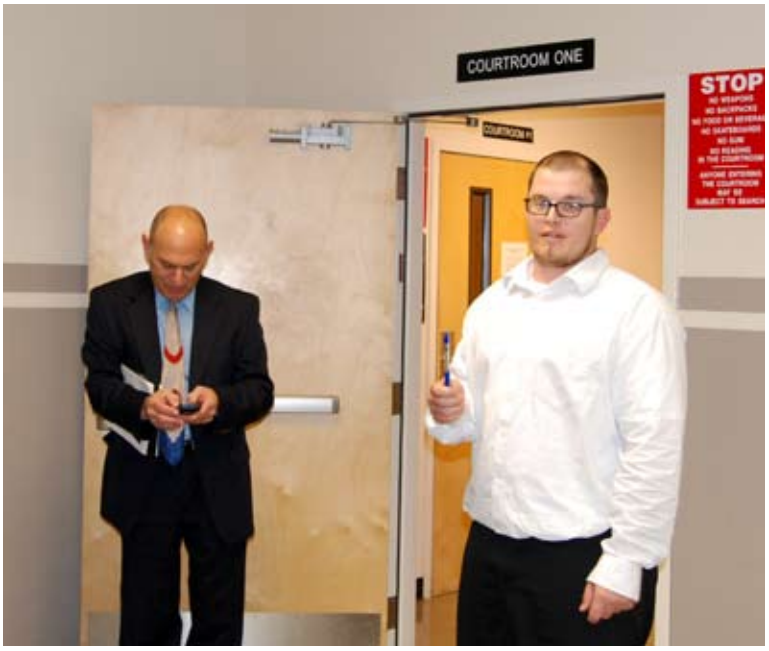
"The Tribe sees this hideous crime as a complete affront to our ancestors that has to stop now," said Yurok Tribal Chairperson Maria Tripp.

The new misdemeanor charge is actually the fruit of a past Yurok tribal endeavor. In 2002, the Tribe worked with then State Senator, Wes Chesbro, to create a law with more fitting penalties for those who illegally dig in Native American graves. The Tribe pursued the new legislation after a looter was caught and convicted of brazenly looting a Yurok grave at Stone Lagoon, only to receive 30 days in jail and community service.

"The Truhls case is a perfect example of why the Tribe wanted better laws to protect our burial sites," Tripp said.

A search warrant served at Truhls' home turned up dozens of Native American cultural items, including the ones removed from the burial ground at Patrick's Point.

In addition to the arrowheads and an awl, Trulhs had dozens of other Native American cultural items from the Eastern Sierra Nevada region. In a separate video, also posted on Youtube, Truhls describes his "itch" for the same kind of activity he was involved in at Patrick's Point.



James Truhls stands with his attorney Steven Schectman inside of the Humboldt County Superior Court prior to a hearning.

This case is the second case to go in front of a judge in the last three years. However, there is evidence that grave robbing is going on all over Yurok Country. Many grave robbers sell the culturally significant items on the black market for high sums of money.

In March of 2007, Taylor Cornejo, an Arcata resident, was convicted in Humboldt County Superior Court on a charge of unlawfully injuring, disfiguring, defacing or destroying an object or thing of archeological or historical value. He was found digging in burial grounds in the village of the Tsurai. The village of Tsurai is located just south of Trinidad head.

Disturbing burial sites is considered one of the most offensive crimes committed against Yurok ancestors. Yuroks are commonly buried with items that represented the personality of deceased, while he or she was alive. These items follow them into the afterlife.

Yuroks believe that the deceased and what is buried with them should not ever be moved from their place of burial.

The Tribe has numerous cultural and ceremonial sites throughout Yurok ancestral territory and is working to protect them all.

Celebrating balance

Ralph Simon

Executive Director

It's time for the 2009 Salmon Festival. This year's theme is "Celebrating Balance." Balance in our lives and in our environment. We celebrate the salmon that has provided sustenance to so many generations of Yurok and we dedicate our work to ensure that salmon will feed many future generations of Yurok. Bringing the environment into balance is why the tribe focuses so much of its resources on securing good water quality and healthy forests. Dams need to be taken out, and a multi-species native forest must be actively managed with sustainable practices. The health of the forests and the river is connected, making it necessary to ensure balance in both environments. This community is fortunate to have a strong Yurok tribal leadership and dedicated highly skilled employees who make and implement the right decisions to protect the environment. And, we thank each of you for your contributions and assistance in the tribe's efforts to maintain this balance. We hope you enjoyed the Festival.

The beginning of the tribal commercial fishing season is here. As was the case last year, we expect heightened interest and participation in local commercial and sport fishing due to the closure or severe limitation on salmon fishing in other areas of West Coast. While the income generated by this activity is very important to the tribal members, commercial fishing is also important to the tribe for its contributions toward maintaining traditions. With the increased fishing pressure, we encourage all fishermen to show respect and courtesy to each other. Traditionally, certain rules applied to tribal fishing and we include an article on some of those traditions as recounted by tribal elders whose fishing experience and knowledge span many decades.

We are finally seeing some of the federal government's stimulus funding (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act "ARRA") finding its way to the reservation. The tribe has applied for well over $10 million in ARRA funding for various projects and has been awarded around $3 million to date. We still have numerous grant applications pending and more to be filed. Grants received range from $620,000 for a fisheries restoration project on the Lower Klamath tributaries to $147,000 for renewable energy equipment that will be placed on our Weitchpec office building. One grant application that we were unsuccessful on was a ferry boat transit system on the Klamath River. Our $5.8 million grant application made it to the final stages reached by only a select few but was denied along with all other applications in favor of awarding the sole grant to the Sausalito Ferry Project. In another case, our score was right below the cut off line for funds to hire additional police officers, where thousands of grant applications were filed (Oakland scored a perfect 100%). These grants demonstrate that a major factor affecting the amount of stimulus funding to be received by the tribe is the amount of

The tribe has has been awarded over $3 million in ARRA funding to date and numerous applications are still pending.

competition for these funds. Usually the grants are awarded to the entities whose applications score the highest based upon various rating factors. With thousands or hundreds of grant applications filed for the funds that we are interested in, an application has to score higher than usual to have a shot at being funded. In some cases, while our need is great, the rating factors don't favor the tribe and so we may miss out on the grant award by just a few points.

One example of a highly sought after funding opportunity is to provide broadband infrastructure. Broadband, particularly via fiber optic, is far superior to other forms used to provide telecommunication. For example, with broadband service the tribe could implement a program to broadcast its meetings into the homes of tribal members, or have video conferencing for meetings so that tribal employees could stay at their usual place of work and participate in a meeting rather than travel many hours to attend the meeting in a far off location. Broadband service could in some cases allow you to receive top notch medical care without traveling long distances to a doctor's office as well. The possibilities provided by broadband are nearly limitless and the Yurok Tribe is supporting a project that could bring broadband to the Reservation in the near future. The tribe has agreed in principle to join with other interested area tribes to apply for ARRA funding to build and operate a fiber optic broadband system along Highway 101 from Garberville to Brookings, OR. Not only would this project bring this vital service to our communities, but there is a high likelihood of making a reasonable profit in this venture. A primary focus of this funding is to bring broadband into underserved and unserved areas. The planned route perfectly fits that focus. While our chances of obtaining this funding are good based on need, again, the competition will be fierce as thousands of communities vie for these precious funds. In order to make great strides in these areas, we must be willing to think big, and reach beyond what is guaranteed so that sometimes we can attain what many believe was only a dream. Such bold action requires strong leadership, capable staff, and the support of the community. Thank you for your support.

Camp success

Yurok Language Specialist, James Gensaw, paddles campers around the Klamath Estuary.

This year's summer camp: The camp was held at Weyhl-kwel Village (the Brush Dance site at the mouth or the river). The 65 youth tribal member campers received a good dose of cultural reinforcement education and activities that teach ways to have healthy fun.

The kids were immersed in Yurok language while participating in workshops on traditional canoe paddling, knowing about local trees and what they can be made into (bows, dip nets, sticks for the stick game, other items), Brush Dance Ceremonial protocol, water safety, the geography of knowing Yurok village sites, getting to know Es-Pew village or the Gold Bluffs area), traditional foods, and native plant life as well as other Yurok traditional lessons. This year's camp was a big success. Campers also received useful school supply items, such as backpacks, binders, alarm clocks, memory sticks, water bottles all funded by the Yurok TANF program. The camp was also supported by a grant from the Wild Rivers Foundation and the Yurok JOM Program.

Special thanks should goes to all the help: Walt Lara Sr., The Yurok Tribal Council, Bob McConnell, Elsie McLaughlin-Feliz, Robert R. Kinney (Little Robert), Roxann Dowd, Dave Severns, All Camp Counselors and peer counselors, Chris McQuillen, James Gensaw, Barbra McQuillen, Merrily Earhart, Sean O'Neil, Dale Webster, Victoria Carlson, Annalea Norris, Daniel McQuillen, The Yurok Roads staff, UIHS, The Yurok H.R. Department, the Yurok TANF program, U.S Coastguard, and all others.

Trees = Salmon

Yurok tribal member Duane Davis's work day begins with loading 400 trees on his back to bring down a lengthy game trail into the Terwer Creek watershed.

It's not yet spring and the creek is still high and frigid, which means Davis, wearing waders, has to cross it--trees in-tow. That's the first trip of at least three that he and fellow crew members make each day.

"It's beautiful out here," Davis said as a pair of osprey circle over head, likely looking for breakfast.

After taking a second to admire the two spey-gee, the crew begin the hard work of planting trees in the riparian area paralleling the creek.

"We only plant trees where they are going go grow big," said Yurok Tribal member and supervisor Aldaron McCovey. Trees historically grew bigger near the creek because of thousands of years of decomposition, whether it is decaying spawned out salmon or dead tree parts. Yurok Fisheries tree planting goals include reestablishing riparian stands with native conifers that will provide a continual source of large wood to stream and forest habitats. Instream wood forms and maintains critically important fish habitat including pools and spawning beds, and promotes riparian forest health.

While these trees are on a private timber company's land, state and federal regulations prevent them from being harvested to protect habitat for a vast array of wildlife including, endangered coho salmon, northern spotted owl marbled murrelet and other culturally important species such as chinook salmon, steelhead trout, coastal cutthroat trout, elk and deer.

Terwer Creek is about 14 miles long and meets the Klamath just outside of Klamath Glen. In past decades, nearly the entire Terwer Creek watershed has been logged, damaging habitat for animals and fish. Despite the high flows the water is clear, no doubt due somewhat to the massive amount of restoration work the Tribe's Fisheries and Watershed Programs have accomplished over several years. The Watershed Program has been removing logging roads in the Terwer watershed for the last three years to reduce the amount of fine sediment delivered to the creek. Fisheries has been working in the riparian zone of lower Terwer for six years.

The trees the Fisheries crew plants are diverse, including bare root coastal redwood, sitka spruce, Douglas fir, big leaf maple, and black cottonwood.

Yurok tribal member and Fisheries Technician Duane Davis planted thousands of trees in the Terwer Creek Watershed.

"It is the Tribe's philosophy in regards to restoration work to bring back the forest to a self-sustaining state," said Dave Weskamp, Fisheries Biologist. "Planting diversely ensures that all of the indigenous, natural abundance can thrive."

What these trees do for fish and other wildlife will last for millennia if not longer. As the trees planted by the Fisheries crew grow, they will contribute to stream (and ultimately fish population) health in many ways, such as providing shade and moderating stream temperatures, tree roots will retain soil, minimizing sediment introduced to the stream, which can bury salmon and steelhead spawning beds and provide future (100's

to 1,000's of years) recruitment of large wood to the stream. The naturally felled trees create pools that act as safe zones for juvenile fish, as well as provide bank protection and a source of future wood recruitment to the stream and floodplains – in stream wood is critical for metering sediment, and forming and maintaining critical fish habitats, including pools and spawning beds.

While the creek is showing signs of being restored, there is still a lot of work to be done.

"Through the Tribe's commitment to the land this creek will one day look like it should, full of fish and teaming with wildlife," Weskamp concluded.

The Tribe's Fisheries Program is also planting trees in the McGarvey and Hunter Creek Watersheds using funding from the United State Fish Wildlife Service - Partners Program.

Tribe hauls tons of trash off Rez

The Yurok Tribe's Environmental Program will be doing two major clean-ups on the Reservation this summer.

The first was a car clean-up. YTEP has removed nearly 200 inoperable vehicles, which were crushed at no expense to the owners. The project and several other projects were funded by a $500,000 California Integrated Waste Management grant.

The nearest junk yard to the upper Reservation is in Eureka, making it an extremely expensive to tow terminally broken down vehicles to the disposal facility.

"That is why we decided to bring the crusher to the upper reservation community," said Kate Sloan, the Director of the Tribe's Environmental Program.

The crusher was stationed on the Tulley Creek side of the Martin's Ferry Bridge.

Aside from being an eyesore, abandoned and irreparable cars leak hydrocarbons into the ground that can get into ground water and affect drinking water supplies.

YTEP Technician Emery Mattz stands atop some of the inoperable vehicles.

YTEP will next be cleaning up a massive illegal dump off of Johnson's Road, also located on the eastern portion of the Reservation.

It should be noted that no tribal members live near this horribly destructive dump and it is suspected that it was generated by non-tribal members. The rubbish heap spills down a ravine for a couple hundred yards. This decades-old dumpsite grows every year. Monitors find freshly dumped hazardous waste every time they go out to see if more trash has been deposited.

"There is no way to know how much garbage is actually down there until we jump in and start loading

it to be taken away," said Ken Henderson, YTEP Assistant Director in charge of Waste Prevention.

There are many grave environmental problems associated with this dump, especially pertaining to birds of prey such as golden and bald eagles and other various raptors that call the Klamath Basin home.

"What can potentially happen is, toxins from the trash leach into the soil and can be consumed by plants. Small herbivores eat the plants and sequester the toxins in their bodies. Some of these herbivores are eaten by predators, such as eagles, and the toxins are transferred to them. As the toxins move up the food chain they get more concentrated," Henderson said. "It's a terrible cycle.

The steep ravine flows directly into the Klamath River. When the torrential winter rains come the fluids from leaky toxic containers flow into the river, which is also a problem.

To get the job done, YTEP has trained 20 Yurok tribal members in Hazardous Waste and Emergency Response. Much of the crew worked on another illegal dumpsite last summer that netted more than 168 cubic tons of illegally dumped waste in only a week and half. That dump was also created by non-tribal members according to a pending Yurok Tribe Department of Public Safety investigation.

> *"This clean-up will have an immensely positive impact to the environment on the Reservation."*
>
> •Kate Sloan, YTEP Director

The Johnson's dump is expected to be much larger and take up to four weeks to remove.

Tribal members working on the clean-up had to complete additional training in rappelling to stay safe while working in the abrupt cant of ravine.

Just as with the Tulley Creek clean-up, the crew will be paid a living wage for participating in the training and clean-up effort.

"This clean-up will have an immensely positive impact to the environment on the Reservation," Sloan concluded.

YTEP would like to show its appreciation to Mark Warrer of Performance Excavators for removing an abandoned Chevy Blazer from Terwer Creek, free of charge.

Dedication nets Yurok a full-ride

There is no doubt that a disproportionate number of Yurok teens have a harder time getting into college.

Whether it is systematic unfair treatment in the county's school district, like in Del Norte County where the American Civil Liberties Union just settled a far-reaching discrimination case, or a cycle of intergenerational trauma teens seem to struggle. Intergenerational trauma is a common problem in all of Indian Country. The cycle was born during the colonization of indigenous communities all over North America. In addition to the attempted genocide, native children were also swept up and taken to boarding schools from the end of the 19th century well into the first quarter of the 20th century. At the state-run institutions native children were beaten for being who they were raised to be. Many Yurok kids faced repeated, egregious violence for speaking in their native tongue. Like abused children of any background, the trauma resulting from this inhumane treatment caused the many mistreated Native children to become more prone to downfalls like substance abuse and perpetuating the aggression they faced. However, it does not mean native kids and parents are destined to repeat the pattern — not by a long shot. Ask Rishondra Bates.

Bates, who comes from parents who struggled with alcohol abuse, recently received a full-ride scholarship to BYU-Hawaii. To achieve such a great success, the well-adjusted and outgoing 18-year-old held herself to one of the hardest-to-maintain motivators.

"I wanted to be a good example for my siblings and my cousin," Bates said.

An excellent role model she is. Her recipe for success can be summed up in one word: pragmatism.

"I figured if I wanted to do something useful I would have to get good grades," Bates explained a recent ceremony to honor students with GPAs 3.0 or higher. "I'd show up listen, do the work and answer the questions," Bates said.

In addition to carrying above a 3.0 throughout high school, Bates is also active in Yurok culture, participating in ceremonies. Now, both of her parents are on the path to recovery and celebrating their beautiful daughter's success.

Holding tight to her culture is another component of how Bates was able to cultivate success in school.

"It's where I get my strength," Bates said. "The dances take, dedication, hard work, a lot of thinking as well as physical strength. It's just like school."

Rishondra stands with her father Richard Bates after receiving an award from the Tribe for her G.P. A..

Rishondra has lived with her aunt, Vicky Bates, for the past 8 years.

"Rishondra is a good example of how an individual can utilize the Yurok culture and traditions for resiliency, strength and motivation," said Jim McQuillen, the Tribe's Education Director. "The Tribe's Education Department staff is very proud of Rishondra and so am I. She represents an example of how we can heal the hurts from the recent past and move on."

The Yurok Tribe's Education Department is proud to report that there are over 100 students thus far heading toward higher education for the fall term. In the last school year the Yurok Tribe assisted over 206 individual students in higher education. More than fifty at various universities in the United States, over one hundred Yurok Tribal members enrolled in various community colleges, and more than twenty in Vocational Technical schools. Nine members completed their college degrees this past year and more than sixty Yurok Tribal members have earned a college degree over the past three years. There are members attending far off schools like BYU-Hawaii, U.C. Davis, and Dartmouth University, and many students will be attending local schools like HSU and college of the Redwoods. We have also had many students successfully complete heavy equipment operator's school, truck driver's school, and a medical insurance billing certificate program. The Tribe is proud of all our members who are pursuing higher education.

Fresh start

This fall, the Yurok Tribe will be opening a new building at the Margaret Keating School in Klamath to house its Head Start and Child Care Programs.

"The new location will provide one- stop shopping opportunity for families to have their children at one site, whether they have children in Child Care, Head Start or K-5," said Education Director Jim McQuillen. "We are very happy with the new building and the additional services we will be able to provide."

The new site is being leased from the Del Norte County Unified School District for $1 per year. The new facility will be able to accommodate 30 to 45 Head Start students and 22 in child care.

The $1.4 million facility was funded with $605,000 from a Community Development Block grant landed by the Tribe's Planning Department, $578,000 from the Yurok Tribal Council, $225,000 from federal Childcare grants and $11,000 from the Humboldt Area Foundation.

Tsunami ready

The National Weather Service's Troy Nicollini presents Labecca Nessier with a Community Leader Award.

The Yurok Tribe was recently recognized for making the Yurok Reservation and surrounding communities Tsunami ready according to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration standards.

During the 1964 Tsunami, two Yuroks were swept out into the ocean. Only one was able to be rescued.

This past March, after three years of hard work by the Tribe's Planning Department and Public Safety Department, NOAA deemed Klamath and surrounding communities tsunami ready. In order to become Tsunami Ready the Tribe purchased and installed warning sirens and educated residents about the impacts of a tsunamis and how to prepare for such a disaster.

The Redwood Coast Tsunami Work Group recently honored Labecca Nessier, the Yurok Tribe's Emergency Services Coordinator, with a Community Leader Award.

The Yurok Tribe also succeeded in accomplishing the largest tsunami evacuation drill ever conducted in California.

The Tribe's warning sirens are installed at the Requa Resort near the mouth of the Klamath, at the Klamath Townsite behind United Indian Health Services and the Klamath Glenn at the water pump station.

The Tribe also created evacuation routes, some of which are trails up into wooded hillsides.

The Tribe worked closely with the National Weather Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Del Norte Office of Emergency Services to develop this comprehensive plan.

Fishing: It's more than tradition

There is one rule that applies to Yurok fishing that far outranks any other:

"The first thing is you've got to have is respect. Fishing has a lot to do with respect," said Merk Oliver, a Yurok elder.

"Respect. It's a traditional Indian way," said Archie Thompson a 90-year-old Yurok elder.

"Have respect for one another," said Fred "Corky" Simms, another Yurok elder and lifetime fisher.

There were other important rules as well, that made the Yurok fishery run smoothly.

Yurok Tribal Member Fred "Corky" Simms hangs a net in his backyard.

Since the beginning, Yuroks have had rights to specific fishing places on the river. Most were passed down from family member to family member, but fishing places could also be exchanged to absolve a debt. There were and are still places that are open to all tribal members. If you fish in someone's fishing spot it is customary to give them something in return.

If a claimed spot is open, under traditional Yurok law, the hole could be fished with permission from the spot's holder.

"You had the courtesy to ask. If they said 'yes' you fished. To respect them, you gave them a fish, at least," Oliver said. "You have to respect other people's fishing places," Merk Oliver said.

Fishers did not set nets directly in front of others.

"I don't care if they are catching a lot fish, you don't go in front of anyone," Thompson said.

Thompson, who was an outstanding athlete in his younger days and climbed the ranks during his time in the military, describes himself as a very competitive person. However, when he fished he left that part of his personality on the bank. He did that because greed is not a Yurok traditional way.

> *"Respect. It's a traditional Indian way."*
> • Archie Thompson, a 90-year-old Yurok elder

"You catch what you catch. If you get lots of fish, share it. That's what you're supposed to do," Thompson said.

In order to make certain you did not affect another's ability to catch fish, common courtesy was to be mindful of other's space when fishing the open spots.

"Respect your distance from others," Corky Simms said, while he hung a new net under a tree, shading out the hot Hunter Creek sun. "Give everyone enough room to check their net."

Salmon fishing has been a part of Yurok culture since time immemorial. Fishing meant a livelihood and it meant food.

Merk Oliver lands a salmon with a dip net.

Fred Simms prepares a stugeon for the smoke house.

"Fishing allowed you to trade and barter. It allowed you to have things," Merk Oliver explained, while shaving down a redwood stick to cook salmon the old way. "Just like commercial fishing gives you money to buy clothes and food for your family."

Traditionally, Yuroks fished with dip nets, trigger nets and gill nets.

"It used to take all winter long to make a (gill) net," said Neil Mckinnon, an 85-year-old Yurok elder. He still holds onto one of the old nets, of which there are very few left.

Yurok salmon fishermen who were successful at catching fish, generous and followed traditional fishing laws, were highly respected.

> ***"It's always been our way of life, fishing."***
>
> • Fred "Corky" Simms, a Yurok elder

"If I was man enough to catch a fish, I was a 'right on' man." Oliver explained.

Fishing was also a give and take. Yuroks took care of the fish population by monitoring the catch and took care of salmon habitat, which is why up until European contact, over a million salmon returned to the Klamath every year. Today, the Yurok Tribe focuses a lot of its effort and resources toward fisheries habitat restoration all over the Klamath Basin, not just on the Reservation.

For new fisherman it is important to know how to fish before your net hits the water. Knowing details like where you can set your net, how to set a net, how heavy your anchor should be, how deep your net is, and how to locate nets on the river so as not run them over are paramount ways to show respect for others fishing the river.

"Make sure you know what you're doing, help others out and give and take advice," Simms said.

Many Yuroks like Simms, McKinnon, Oliver and Thompson have fished the Klamath since they were youngsters. Even when Yuroks were banned from fishing the river where the Tribe has existed for millennia, they still fished.

"We never did stop fishing. It's always been our way of life, fishing," Simms concluded.

Running for our salmon

Yurok tribal members ran from the mouth of the Klamath to Somes Bar this May to bring awareness to the Tribe's struggle to remove four dams that block 300 miles of salmon habitat on the Klamath. The runners were honored by the presence of Yurok elders. Lena McCovey passed the fish off at the mouth and Bill Pearson, accompanied by his wife Barbara, walked the fish across the Weitchpec Bridge.

WALT "BLACK SNAKE" LARA SR.

YUROK ELDER

It is my privilege, as well as, my responsibility to share my experiences of the traditional Yurok Stick Game. First, I must apologize to all the families whose loved ones, ah wok, I must mention. Stick games are ancient to our people and I would be amiss not to mention the dedication, knowledge and skill these loved ones possessed. I was taught to play at a very young age by my grandfather, Jimmy Marks. Teachers and coaches such as Grizzly Ike McCovey, Oscar Taylor, Frank Douglas, Bill Crutchfield, Dewey George, Bill Minnow, Grover, Don and Glenn Moore. These men often idolized my grandfather's ability to play and shared that with me. So, for the last 70 years, I have taken great pride in the teachers I had, because they were the best and their knowledge came from their grandfather's dating back from the beginning of time. Grandfathers groomed their grandsons as stick players.

We were taught that sticks was a man's game. Individuals from villages often made medicine on their sticks. Training was consistent and perfected to develop discipline, strength, endurance and skill. Rules were strictly adhered to and there were spiritual locations where Yurok people trained.

The game is played on an open field, river bar or the beach, usually between 150 to 300 feet depending on the area. No special preparation to the area was necessary, other than to clear large debris. A team is made up of three players on the field, a center man, an anchor man, and a runner. Teams align themselves with their counterpart, anchor against runner, center against center and runner against anchor. Each grouping is approximately 50 feet or more from the next grouping. Spread along the field. The spectators circled the field and cheered on the players.

The stick, approximately 36" long with a 2" curve (3/4 angle), on the end, and approximately 1" in diameter is made of iron wood, hazel or mock orange. Tossels are 4" long, 2" diameter and tied together 5" apart with a buckskin strap. It is made of oak or manzanita wood.

To start the game there is a coin toss to see which center man gets the tossel. The tossel is then held in the mouth of the coin toss winner. The two end men would lock up wrist and arm, and stick in mouth. The two center men scratch the ground, marking an x in the dirt with their sticks carefully anticipating the drop of the tossel. Once it is dropped, the game is on. The centers will try to toss the tossel in the direction of their goal line. If he is fast he will run ahead of the other player and toss the tossel across the goal. Or, if the center doesn't think he can out run his opponent he can wrestle him down, hold on to him until his team mate can break free of his counterpart and get to the tossel. He can also drag the one holding him to one of his team mates to hold down. This will allow for him to break free and run for the tossel. Each counterpart will wrestle each other down, preventing participation of that player. Many times, I have had to hold two guys down so that my team mate could make the goal. The stick can be used as a tool to hold your counterpart down. It was not meant to be used to harm or disable your opponent.

There is a coach for each team on the field. The coach might straighten out the tossel if it were tangled and preventing the stick from hooking the tossel smoothly. There is also a coach on each goal line to verify that the tossel crossed the line. A coach carries an extra stick just in case one of his players lost or broke a stick. A coach would hand it to his player. The old timers would make medicine on the sticks, if he left or dropped it an opponent may pick it up and steal his medicine. Skill and ability to wrestle and contain the opponent is a strategy but the goal of the game is get the tossel across the finish line.

The game is played in rounds. The rounds would last as long as it took to get the tossel over the finish line. The boys could be wrestling for hours. Whatever team won two-out-of-three rounds won the game.

You could say that the stick games were like the NBA but , instead of cities being represented villages and tribes were represented. Yurok villages played among themselves and the winning team would represent the tribe against other tribes. During this time a winning team may borrow a player from another village to play against another tribe.

Training as a young boy, Oscar would have me run the beach for miles, sometime twice a day. I learned to sling the tossel ahead of me as I ran. Don and Grover would wrestle with me around for hours at a time. They were big and tough and they wouldn't cut me much slack. That's how I learned to wrestle and to break free of their holds. My grandmother would say, "oh dear," every time she saw me coming in with dirty clothes. Later in life, Glenn would take me to Rockpile at the head of Ha-ah-mar creek; the

stick game training field. He would share the old stories of stick players that he knew had trained there. In my early teens, Grizzly took Ralph Downs and me to Kenek, the center of the Yurok world, where Woh-pek-o-mew and other spirit beings played sticks. Grizzly said this was a stick field where he trained.

Dewey had us train across the river from Sregon. He pointed out a tree up the hill. Then he had me fill my mouth with water and run up the hill to the tree. The run may be 3 to 5 minutes, maybe more, depending on how fast I could run. This was to strengthen my lungs and to teach me to breath through my nose.

(Left) Bigshot Nixon and Jim Proctor are locked up on the old stick field in Klamath.

My grandfather was around for all the games. He was much older then my coaches and liked to watch all the different kinds of training I went through. My grandfather seriously supported the efforts and medicine of my trainers. He didn't allow me around the dances and I had to keep my distance from women and strangers. Bill Minnow, Frank Douglas and Dewey were my elders and they were constantly going over the rules with me. There weren't any disputes of how the game should be played.

Sticks was and is today a sport, not done to settle conflicts or disputes among villages. We are an orderly people and have always had a very strict way in which to address a conflict. I grew up, trained and played along side guys like Ralph Downs, Ray Figueroa, Dale Sanderson, Charlie Frye and Butch Marks, ah wok, all gone now. I also played with Stanley Griffin, Jim Proctor Sr., Corky Simms, Jerry Patterson, Buster Owens, Merkie Oliver and Elliot Henry. These were my teammates. Our coaches taught us discipline and teamwork. We were told over and over, "the kind of man you were on the stick field was the kind of man you would be in life." We had a commonality among us, we listened, and played our hearts out. At different times we played Hoopa Champion teams. Guys like Big Shot Nixon, Ronnie Marshall, and Gene, Shradie Colegrove, Mike Ferris, Everett and Willie Colegrove. I was twenty 24 years old when my Grandfather passed away, but I played on. The last game I played in Hoopa, I was 54 years old. My team consisted of Willard Carlson Jr., Richard Martin and myself. We Won!

It is difficult to talk about these memories with so many of my mentors gone. I am proud to say that there are stick players today that are accomplished players who maintain the highest standards of the stick game. And then there are those who don't understand that stick's is a game that has been played from time immemorial. The training, the medicine, the respect and the discipline are spiritual requirements. Sticks are not only played here but in the spirit world by our ancestors.

Over the years, I have seen changes in the game, new rules or a different understanding for the purpose of a game. But if you were to ask me what I know about the game, I can testify to my experiences. I had the privilege to learn from the old timers, I myself am an old timer. Again, I apologize to the families of those who have crossed over but it is my hope to pass this knowledge on to the descendants of those mentioned.

Walt "Black Snake" Lara Sr. stands on the stick field circa 1950. Since before time, Yuroks played the Stick Game.

Address Service Requested

Yurok Today

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Yurok Today
190 Klamath Blvd.,
Klamath, CA 95548
Office: (707) 482-1350
mmais@yuroktribe.nsn.us
www.yuroktribe.org