

4

History-Social  
Science Standard  
4.2.1.



# California Indian Peoples and Management of Natural Resources

## **California Education and the Environment Initiative**

Approved by the California State Board of Education, 2010

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### **Office of Education and the Environment**

1001 I Street • Sacramento, California 95814 • (916) 341-6769

<http://www.CaliforniaEEI.org>

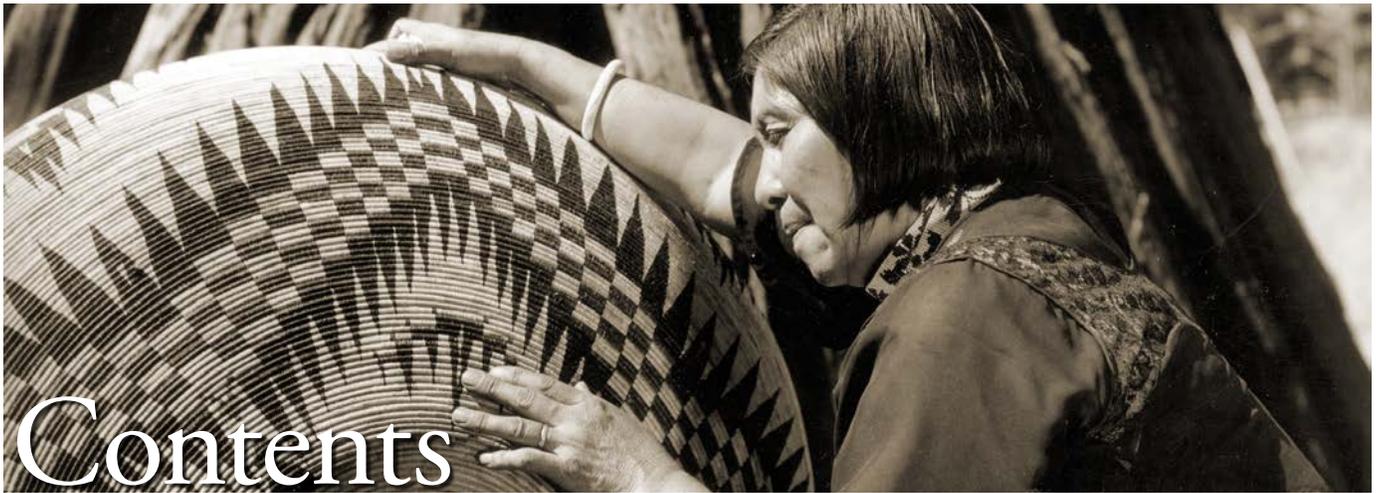
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None required for this lesson.

# Seashells in the Desert



It was a hot day in northern New Mexico. The year was 1915. A young man was on his knees, digging in the desert ground. He and his team were uncovering an ancient city. The man's name was Alfred Kidder. He was famous as one of the first archaeologists in the world. Kidder spent his life learning the stories of "lost" civilizations.

## Shining in the Sand

Alfred saw something in the sand. It was shiny and round. He pulled a soft brush from his pocket and used it to dust off a set of beads. The string holding them together had disappeared, but it seemed that all the beads were there. Alfred was amazed. The beads were probably part of an ancient necklace. They were made from seashells. Some of them were made from shiny, rainbow-colored shells. Other beads were made from small gray shells that looked like olives.

Alfred could see that the colorful beads were made from abalone



Sand dunes, New Mexico

shells. The abalone is a kind of sea snail. It clings to rocks near the shore. The small gray shells came from another kind of snail called *Olivella*. Both animals lived in the Pacific Ocean. That

ocean was more than 800 miles away from the place where Alfred was standing.

*How did these shells get from California to New Mexico so long ago?* Alfred wondered.

### Looking for Clues

Someone had worn the beads thousands of years earlier. They belonged to California Indians. People who lived near the ocean traded the beads with people who lived in the desert. Karuk people who lived in northern California traded seashell beads for red obsidian from eastern Oregon. Obsidian is a volcanic rock that looks like glass. The Karuk used obsidian to make large knives.

California is a very large state. It has tall mountains and wide deserts. It has foggy forests and vast grasslands. The beautiful ocean, coasts, rivers, and lakes are all part of California. California Indians gathered food from the land. Conifer forests had sweet berries. Tasty acorns were found in oak woodlands. The California Indians used the natural objects they found around them. In the grasslands, there were

many rabbits to hunt. Desert plants had strong fibers that could be used to make string.

### Gifts from Land and Sea

The people used the resources from the land, the rivers, and the ocean. They had more than they needed. They traded what they did not

use for things they could not find around them. People who lived in the oak woodlands gathered acorns. They ate some of them. They also traded acorns for juniper bows made by people from the high desert. They traded acorns for shell beads made by people from the coast, too.



Abalone shell

California Indians did more than gather, use, and trade the things around them. They dug up and planted bulbs for food. They learned to trim tree branches so that they would grow back long and straight. Then the people used the branches to build homes and to make animal traps and baskets. The California Indians hunted and fished in ways that kept them well fed year after year. By changing the way they did things, they changed the way they lived.

### Of Fire and Acorns

One of the tools they used was fire. More than anything else, fire changed their life and the land around them. The people knew how to make fires burn in a special way. They used fires to get rid of pests under oak trees, which made it easier to gather acorns. The people also lit fires to clear bushes so that



Acorns

grass would grow. Deer and rabbits came to eat the grass. The California Indians would then hunt those animals.

Still, there were times when the people did not have all the food they needed. Many California Indians depended on acorns. In some years, the oak trees in one area grew very few acorns. At the same time, the oak trees in another place grew more than enough. By trading acorns with each

other, people who had few could get acorns from people who had plenty.

### The Shell Trade

People in the villages used shells like money. They traded shells for acorns or other food. The Chumash people used many shells for trading. In fact, the name “Chumash” comes from an Indian word that means “makers of shell beads.”

People traveled many miles to trade shells.



Ancient trade routes

Different kinds of shells were traded in different parts of the state. People in the north used long white shells called *Dentalia* shells. These shells came from animals living in the ocean. They are still found today along the northwest coast of the United States and near Vancouver Island,

in Canada. The people made long strings of shells for trading. Some California Indians had tattoos on their arms. They used the tattoos to measure the shell strings!

The Washington clam is an animal that lives in the ocean just north of San Francisco. Thousands of

years ago, people who lived there gathered the clams. They made its shells into beads shaped like disks. The beads, today known as clamshell disk beads, were used for trading. They were also used for making necklaces and decorating clothing. People who lived near snowy Mount Shasta sewed the clamshell disk beads on hats. People near Mono Lake made bead necklaces.

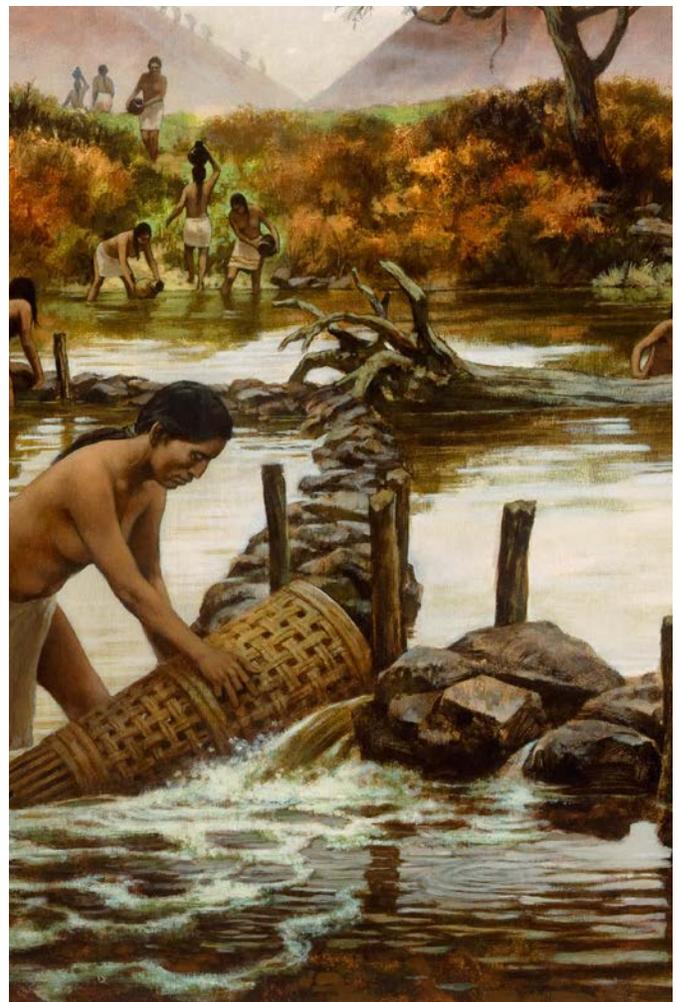
Seashell beads were sometimes traded far from the places they were found. The beads that traveled farthest were those made from abalone shells, like some of the beads Alfred Kidder found in New Mexico. How did those beads get to the desert? No one knows for sure. We are still learning about how early California Indians lived, worked, and traded goods thousands of years ago from the California Indians that practice the traditions of their ancestors today.

# Northwest Tribal Region: Towering Forests and Rushing Rivers

Northwestern California is cool and wet. Here, the mountains are covered with forests of pines and redwoods. Rivers rush between these mountains. Plants, such as hazelnuts and huckleberries, grow in the dark forests.

The California Indians that lived here had access to rivers and lakes, as well as the north coastal and conifer forest natural regions. They used the redwood trees for many things. Some people built large houses from redwood boards. They made canoes from redwood logs. They split the largest logs down the middle and used sharpened elk antlers to carve them out.

Elk are large relatives of deer that were very useful to California Indians. The people made their antlers into spoons, purses, and tools. They ate elk meat and made blankets and clothes from the skins. To help them hunt elk, the California Indians burned open areas. Those places grew patches of grass that attracted elk. Once the elk were in the open area, they were easy to hunt. Also, plants, such as salmonberry and thimbleberry, grew at the edge of the



Salmon weir (dam) for catching fish



Salmon

patches. Salmonberry and thimbleberry plants produce sweet, red berries. The people would gather and eat these berries when they were ripe.

Rivers were very important to people of the Northwest tribal region. They were the easiest way to travel. Rivers also provided fish and other foods. One of the most important fish to the people living here was salmon.

The Yurok people lived along the Klamath River. Every spring, they looked for the first salmon to swim upstream. When they spotted the salmon, they built a weir (dam) across the river. While the weirs were being

built, no one was allowed to catch or eat salmon. This allowed the salmon to swim upstream to lay eggs. When they finished the weirs, the Yurok left holes in them. They put their nets in these holes and caught almost every salmon that passed through the weir as they swam back downstream to the ocean.

The Yurok people would only fish like this for 10 days. During those 10 days, people gathered enough salmon to last all year. They dried and smoked the fish so that it would not spoil. By following these rules, the Yurok caught the salmon they needed, and made sure that there would be salmon to catch next spring.

# Northeast Tribal Region: Volcanoes and Blooming Meadows

The volcanoes of the Cascade Mountain Range tower above this region of California. The highest one is Mount Shasta, which wears a permanent cap of white ice. A rock called obsidian is found in this region. It is a kind of natural glass found near volcanoes.



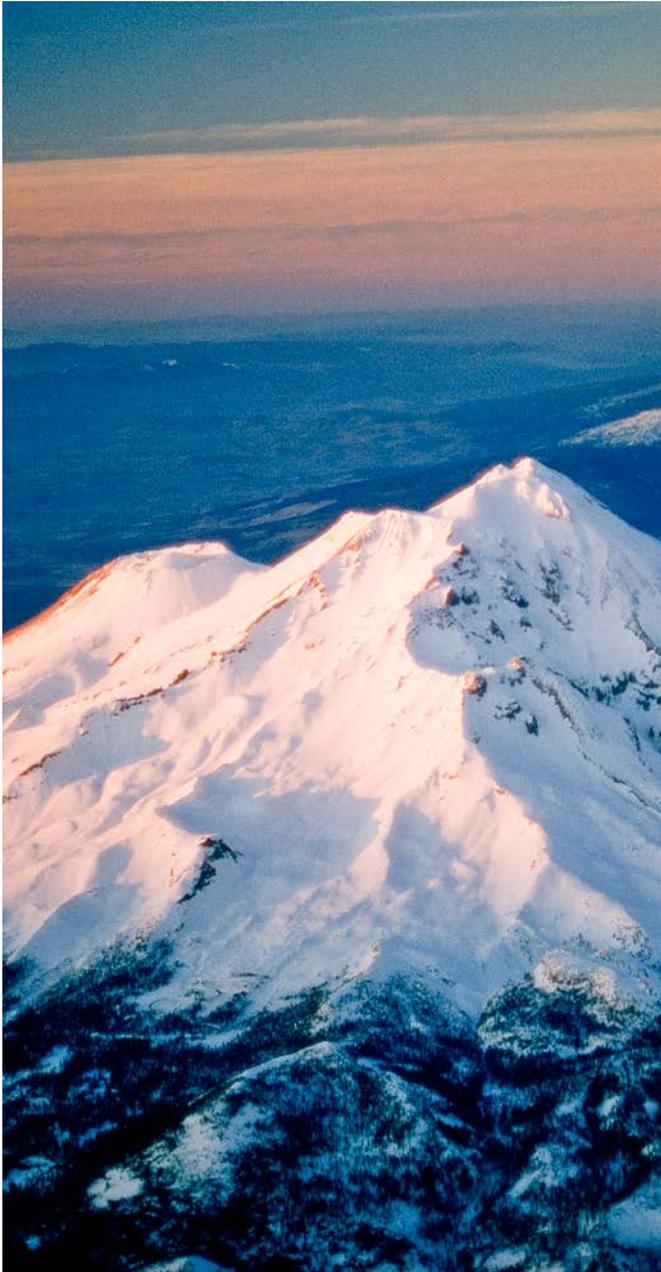
Achumawi woman, South Fork Pit River, 1926

Obsidian can be made into sharp knives and arrowheads. It was an important item collected and traded by the California Indians living here.

The Northeast region of California is cool and dry. Most of the water falls as snow in the winter. The mountains are covered with mixed evergreen forests. The drier Modoc Plateau is covered with sagebrush scrub and pinyon-juniper woodlands.

The California Indians living here hunted deer, rabbits, and other animals. Each spring, people set many small fires in the forest. These burned only low plants. They did not hurt the bigger trees. The fires encouraged fresh grass to grow. Burning also made it easier for people to see and hunt animals.

People also used fires to make the animals move into traps. The Achumawi



Mount Shasta

people from this region dug deep holes in the ground and covered them with branches. They then used fires to make animals, like deer, run to the areas where the holes were. The deer would

fall into the holes. Then the Achumawi would catch them. The Pit River got its name from the “pits” the Achumawi dug over the years. Some people call the Achumawi the “Pit River” people.

People ate deer meat fresh or dried it for later use. They prepared skins that were made into clothing or blankets. They used the deer tendons to make a strong string called *sinew*. Bones and antlers were used for needles, knives, and other tools. Deer hooves were made into rattles used in ceremonies and as toys.

Another important food for the California Indians in this region was a plant called *camas*. It grows in open fields. During spring, meadows burst with its beautiful flowers. Underground, it grows a round bulb that tastes like a sweet potato. The people of the Northeast tribal region used hard sticks to dig up the bulbs. But they had a rule to only take the largest bulbs. They replanted small bulbs which allowed them to continue to grow. By following this rule, the people got enough camas to eat and made sure there would be camas bulbs to harvest next year. The people also burned fields where the camas plant grows. Burning helped make the soil better for camas plants. It also kept these areas from becoming forests.

# North Central Tribal Region: Hills, Valleys, and Coasts

This large region has many different natural regions in it. North coastal forests grow near the cool and wet coast. Grasslands cover the dry Sacramento Valley. Oak woodlands, scrublands, chaparral, and mixed evergreen forests grow on the hills and mountains here.

The California Indians living in this region used the ocean, coast, rivers, and lakes, as well as the land areas. These people are called the “Pomo,” but they know themselves by many other names. The Kashaya people are one group of the Pomo from this region.

The people in this region gathered many resources. They hunted animals, such as deer, rabbits, quail, and ground squirrels. They gathered grass seeds, pine nuts, and acorns. They fished in fresh and salt water. They ate shellfish, such as abalone, mussels, and clams. The people traded dried meat and shells with California Indians from other areas.

Some of the finest baskets in the world were made by the California Indians in this region. One of the most famous types is called a gift basket. A Pomo gift basket is made of many different materials. The base of the basket is made from willow. Willow trees grow



Pomo woman cooking, Russian River, 1905

along rivers. Normally, they have many small branches. People cut these trees at their base in the winter. In spring, the branches grew long and straight. The



Russian River

next year, the branches were ready to be harvested and woven into baskets.

The Pomo wound roots from a plant called sedge around the willow branches. Sedge plants grow along rivers. They usually have many small roots. Pomo basket makers tended the plants so that they grew long, straight roots. Sometimes, it took many years of care for the roots to grow as people wanted. Growing sedge plants in this way not only helped basket makers, it also allowed the roots of the plants to hold the soil together. This kept the banks of rivers that flooded, like the Russian River, from washing away.

Pomo gift baskets were decorated with many things. Some had red feathers from acorn woodpeckers. Other baskets had green feathers from mallard ducks. Yellow feathers came from meadowlarks or orioles. Basket makers also used curly feathers from the heads of California quail.

The baskets made by the California Indians of the North Central tribal region were often decorated with shells. Abalone shells from the coast were made into shiny beads. White disks made from clamshells were sewn onto the baskets. Pomo basket weavers still create these beautiful works of art today.

# South Central Tribal Region: Oaks, Grasses, and Pines

This large region has many different natural regions in it. The temperature ranges from cool near the coast to hot and dry in the Central Valley. The California Indians living in this tribal region gathered clams, abalone, and mussels along the coast.

Oak woodlands and coastal forests grew in the Coast Ranges. Mixed evergreen forests grew in the Sierra foothills. These woodlands and forests offered the people abundant food. Scrubland and chaparral grew above the dry grasslands of the Central Valley.

Many different kinds of animals lived in the scrubland and grasslands and provided people with meat and skins. These animals included deer, rabbits, and ground squirrels.

One of the most important and useful plants to the people living in this region was the tule reed. It grows wherever there is slow-moving fresh water. People, such as the Southern Valley Yokuts, twisted its leaves into ropes and wove them into mats and baskets. Tule reed was made into toys and duck decoys. It was laid on top of willow branches to create dome-shaped homes. Tule reed was also tied in large



Yokut woman, Madera County, 1902

bundles to make boats. The Yokut people used tule boats to fish and move from place to place on the lakes and in the ocean.

There was a large lake in the southern San Joaquin Valley when Europeans arrived in California. It was called Tulare Lake because many tule reeds grew



Tule

around it. The Southern Valley Yokuts hunted ducks and gathered eggs there. They also fished in the shallow lake. Tulare Lake is much smaller today, and may one day disappear completely.

California Indians in this region gathered grass seeds in late summer and fall. They placed baskets on the ground in a field of grass. Then they hit the grasses with a tool called a seed beater. The seed beater was shaped like a paddle. Most of the grass seeds would fall into the baskets. People stored the seeds to eat throughout the year.

After harvesting the seeds from a field of grass, the people would set those

areas on fire. Burning stopped bushes from growing in the fields. It also helped the grass plants sprout and make seeds the next year. The grassy fields also attracted many animals to graze, making the grasslands the best place to hunt.

The California Indians who lived in the South Central tribal region moved around the region as the season changed. They moved up and down the mountains when the weather warmed or cooled. In the summer, they moved up the mountains to hunt food and collect berries and bulbs. In the winter, they moved to valleys where there was no snow.

# Eastern Tribal Region: Cold Winds and Scents of Sagebrush

The Eastern tribal region has some of the most extreme weather in the state. It is freezing cold in the winter. In the summer, the temperature can reach more than 100° F (38° C). Very little rain falls here. Much of this region is covered by sagebrush scrub and pinyon-juniper woodland. There are also high and low deserts in which California Indians lived.



Paiute Indian wearing rabbit skin blanket

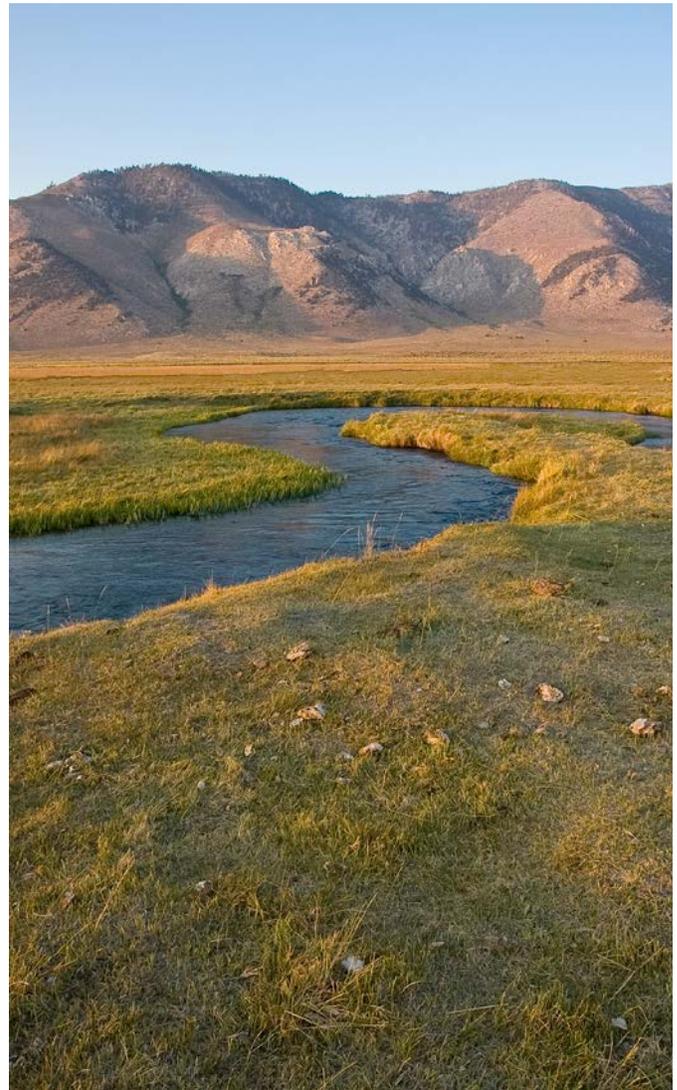
The people who lived here knew the best places and times of year to gather resources. They moved over large distances. They followed animals and gathered many different plants. People in this region enjoyed a food called *kutsavi*. These were crunchy snacks made from insects that lived in salty water. They were gathered from the Owens and Mono lakes at just the right time of year.

The Paiute people lived in the Eastern tribal region. They used nets to catch large numbers of rabbits. The Paiute hunted rabbits in November, when the animals would have a lot of meat from eating all summer. This was also the time when the rabbits had the longest fur. The people made rabbit skins into warm blankets.

The pinyon pines that grow in the Eastern tribal region have delicious seeds. The Paiute gathered the seeds in the late summer, before the cones opened naturally. They opened the cones by toasting them over a fire. This allowed the people to gather the seeds before animals, such as squirrels and pinyon jays, could eat them.

The Paiute who lived in the Owens Valley grew crops. They dug channels along the Owens River to water other plants growing in the area that they used. Two of these plants were yellow nut grass and wild hyacinth. The people grew yellow nut grass for its seeds and grew the hyacinth for its bulb that grew underground. Both the seeds and bulbs were popular foods.

People in this region made bows and arrows from juniper wood. The process of making a juniper bow started with selecting a special tree. Then, the bark was removed from the trunk. If the wood underneath the bark was strong and straight, long cuts were made into the trunk to stop the wood from growing on that part of the tree. Then the tree was left alone for several years. When it was time, the parts of the tree that had been cut would be removed. After several years, new wood would grow back in that place on the tree. The people visited some of the best trees again and



Owens River

again to get wood for their bows and arrows. Some trees were used by the people for hundreds of years!

The Paiute used the bow and arrow to hunt large animals, such as bighorn sheep. The people of the Eastern tribal region also traded the bows and arrows they made with people from other tribal regions.

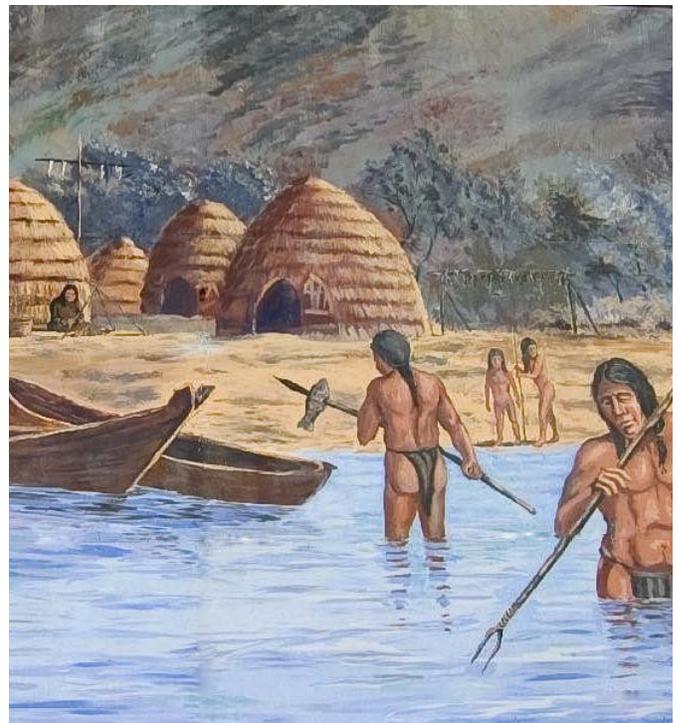
# Southwest Tribal Region: Sunny Beaches and Burning Bushes

This region has some of the best weather in the state. It is cool and wet in the winter and warm in the summer. Ocean breezes keep the weather mild near the coast. The California Indians living here found many resources in this region.

They gathered acorns in oak woodlands. They collected seeds and bulbs in grasslands. They hunted animals and gathered plants in scrubland and chaparral. The people gathered goods from ocean, coastal, and freshwater habitats.

California Indians in this tribal region made strong boats. They carved boards from wood that washed up on the beaches. The people sewed the boards together with ropes. Then they coated the boats with tar to make them waterproof. The boats, a type of canoe called *tomol*, helped the people to travel to and settle on the Channel Islands.

The Chumash lived in this tribal region. They were excellent fishermen. They caught sardines, sharks, black sea bass, rockfish, and halibut. They baked and ate kelp and made it into flexible ropes. The Chumash gathered small gray



Chumash Indians fishing

shells from the *Olivella* snail. They cut disks made from the shells and used them as beads. These beads were one of the most widely traded items among California Indians. The Chumash hunted



Brush fire

sea lions for their meat and hides. They also used the hard sea lion whiskers to drill holes in shell beads.

The people also made use of the scrubland and chaparral plants. Strong-

smelling herbs, such as yarrow and black sage, were used as medicine. They used the wood from manzanita and chamise as firewood or torches. They ate seeds from red maids, chia, and tarweed.

The California Indians of the Southwest tribal region burned chaparral and scrubland sometimes. When plants were still moist in the early winter, people chose places to be burned. Holding torches, they formed a circle in the brush. Then they set plants on fire and drove the fire inward. Once the fire went out, the people cleared away the ash, and an open space was left behind. After rain fell in the winter, fresh grass would grow in the open space. The grass attracted animals, such as deer, rabbits, and quail. The people hid in the bushes around the open space and hunted the animals with arrows or nets.

The people only burned brush when there was no chance that fires would get out of control. They burned different areas every year. This allowed plants of many different ages to grow in the Southwest. The mix of young and old plants provided food and shelter for more kinds of animals. It also kept the area from getting too many dry leaves and branches that could lead to large, dangerous fires.

# Southeast Tribal Region: River Farms and Palm Oases

This region is hot and dry in the summer and cold and dry in the winter. Most of it is made up of high and low desert. There is very little rain. There are many freshwater springs and oases, though. The California Indians in this tribal region settled around these water sources, using the water and the living things that came to the water, too.

The Cahuilla people lived in the Southeast tribal region. One of the most important plants to the Cahuilla people was the mesquite tree. It was so important that the people based their calendar on the growth of the mesquite tree. It grows where water flows underground. Wherever the Cahuilla saw mesquite, they knew there was water there. Mesquite seeds grow in pods that look like long beans. The Cahuilla ate the sweet outer covering of the seeds. They also ground the seeds into flour which they made into bread and soup.

The people took care of mesquite trees. They cut branches off the trees to encourage seeds to grow. Cutting also made seeds easier to gather. People regularly burned the areas under the mesquite trees. Burning helped get rid of pests that would eat the beans or the wood of the trees.

Another tree that was important to the people was the California fan palm. These trees grew better when people



Cahuilla woman under palm tree



Mesquite tree

burned around them, too. Besides getting rid of pests, the burning caused the palms to make more seeds and fruit. The Cahuilla ate the palm fruits but saved the seeds.

People planted palm and mesquite seeds so that they would always have the trees to use. They used mesquite wood for making tools. The fibers of palm fronds were made into sandals and baskets. People also used the palm fronds to cover the walls and ceilings of their houses, making them shaded and cool.

The people hunted animals that came to the fresh water and trees. The animals included woodrats, chuckwallas

(large lizards), and desert tortoises. The meat was dried and stored for long periods of time before being eaten.

The Quechan, Halchidoma, and Mojave people grew crops along the Colorado River. These included corn, beans, and squash. Every year, the river would flood and bring rich soil to its banks. The people would plant the soil with the seeds of the plants they wanted to grow there.

The California Indians in this tribal region used pottery more than people in other parts of the state did. Baskets were often used for gathering food. Clay pots were used for cooking, serving food, and storing food and water.

# Coyote Creates the Ocean

## A Story of the California Kashaya Pomo

Coyote was creator of his people, watching over them and telling them what they should do. He guarded and guided them. One day, long before making human beings, Coyote went to the wilderness. It was burning hot, and there was no water. He grew hungry and thirsty. When he came to a grassy field with many grasshoppers, Coyote set fire to the grass. The fire herded the grasshoppers to one spot and roasted them. Coyote ate the grasshoppers, just like people used to do in the old days.

Coyote was still thirsty, but could find no water. He grabbed a manzanita stick and sharpened it with a stone. He began to dig a hole, and dug it deeper and deeper. Suddenly, water shot up from the hole so high that it hit the sky. Coyote ran up a nearby hill to watch. He saw the land fill with water. It soon became a great body of water. He named it, saying, “This will be ocean.” It became as he said, and remains so even to this day.



Coyote drank some of the water. It tasted salty because of the ashes from his fire, and it is why the ocean tastes salty today.

But the ocean did not move. Coyote took another stick and moved it through the water. The water moved up and down, then it splashed. Coyote commanded, “Do like this,” and the ocean lifted up in high waves. Other waves followed, never stopping. They still do that today, because Coyote told them to. The waves washed away the earth nearby, leaving behind rocks and sand. In this way, the beaches and rocks in the ocean came to be as we know them. Coyote next marked the boundaries of the ocean with his stick. “Go only this far, forever,” he called out.

But the ocean was empty. Coyote knew that when he made people, they would be hungry. “I will make food to put in the ocean for people to gather and eat.” He took different things from

the land and threw them into the ocean, naming each one. Each thing became what he called it. First, he threw an enormous log. He declared, “This will be whale,” and it became a whale. Water exploded into the air when it landed, which is why whales still spout water. He then gave whales a language, so they could talk to each other. He told them where to live and gave them rules to follow.

Coyote then made all the animals in the same way. A smaller log he named “porpoise,” and one from a different tree he named “seal.” A snake became “eel,” and a lizard became “sea trout.” After he finished with fish, he worked on things that could live on rocks and the bottom of the ocean. A turtle became “abalone,” gooseberries became “sea urchins,”

deer hooves became mussels, and acorn caps became limpets. After he made all the animals, he then made the plants. All the things we know about he made. He told them where to make their homes, and how they were to get along.

When he completed his work, Coyote climbed up on the hill and looked at his ocean. He looked at the waves, the boundaries, and all the animals and plants. He saw these things were as he intended them to be. They lived together, in the same ocean, but each thing had its own place, its own rule to live by, and its own language, just like people do. This was what Coyote intended, and so it should be today.

*Adapted from a story told to David W. Peri by Essie Parrish*



# How Dolphins Came to Be

## A Story of the California Chumash

A long time ago, there were no people living on Santa Cruz Island. Foxes, scrub jays, bald eagles, lizards, and many other animals lived on the mountains and in the valleys of this beautiful island. They drank clear, cool water from the streams and found food and shelter in the trees and grasses growing there. Sea birds made nests on the sandy beaches and seals lived in caves surrounding the island. But there were no people.

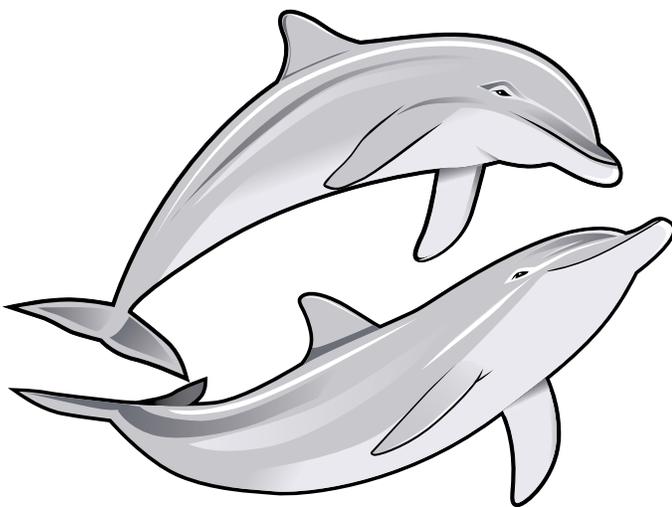
One day Hutash, the Earth Goddess, decided to make some people to live on this island. She took seeds from a magic plant and, with a soft breath and gentle whisper, invited the seeds to grow and become the first Chumash people. Hutash loved these people and promised to take care of them.

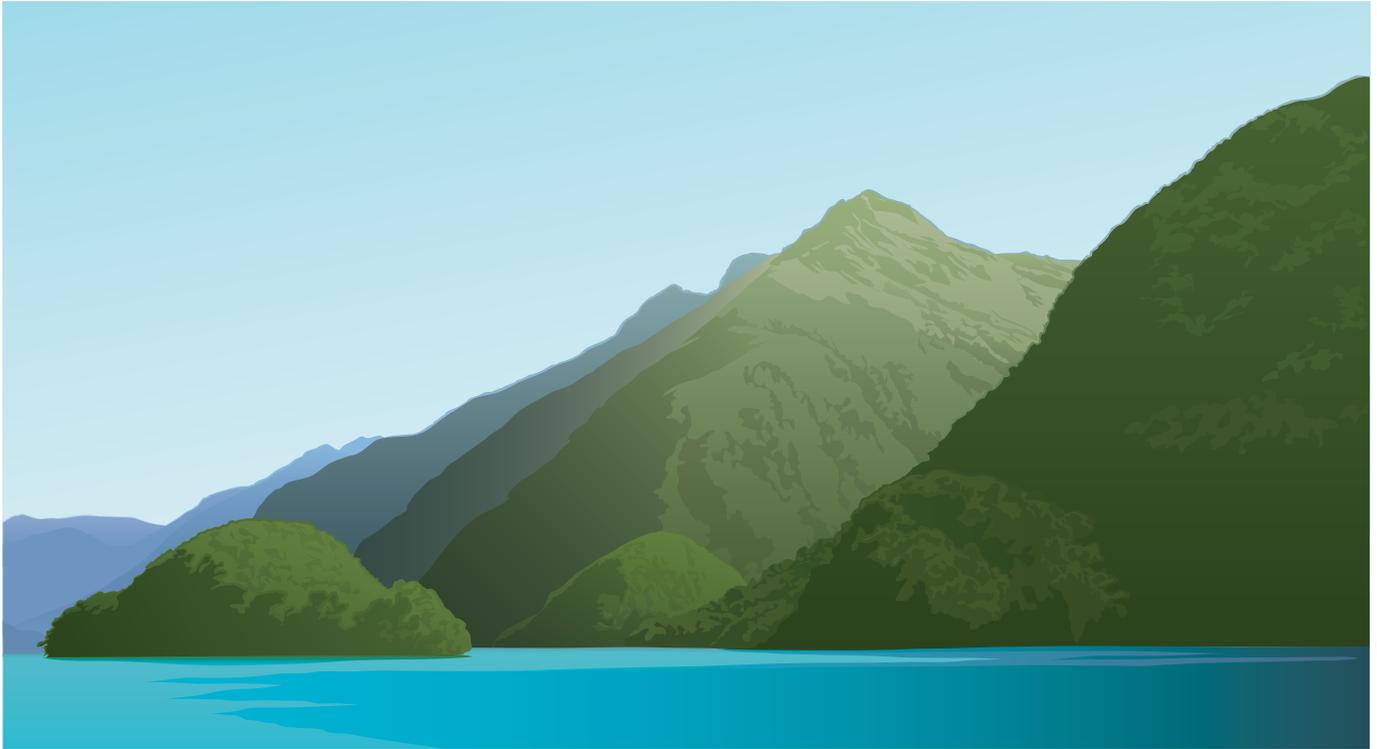
The animals and plants on the island shared their food and water with the

Chumash people. The people grew healthy and strong, and they loved their island home. At night, after the light of the Sun was no longer shining on the island, the people went to sleep on the ground.

Hutash saw that they were cold and went to Sky Snake to ask for help. Sky Snake—whose body was the Milky Way—sent a bolt of lightning to the island so the people would have fire. “Thank you, for this wonderful gift,” said the people. “We will keep the fire burning and will use it well.” And so they did. The people used the fire to cook their food and to stay warm at night.

The animals were surprised to see fire on the island. The Condor—who was white in those days—was especially curious. “What is this new





dancing light?” he wondered as he flew near the fire. He got too close and burned his feathers, making them black. That is why condors today are black with just patches of white under their wings.

The Chumash grew in numbers, and the island became crowded. Some people would have to move. There was land across the water, but how could people get there without drowning?

Hutash made a bridge for the people and painted it seven different glorious colors. She invited half of the people to cross this rainbow bridge and go to a new place far away on the other side of the water.

The rainbow bridge, stretching across the sky, was long and high. Some people lost their balance and fell into the sea. Hutash called to them. “I will not let you drown,” she said. “I will make you people of the sea.” And so she did.

The people who fell are now dolphins who live and play in the ocean water. They often jump up into the air to see the people of the land. Even though they live in the sea, the dolphins are still sisters and brothers of the Chumash.

*Adapted from a story presented by Audrey Wood in The Rainbow Bridge, 2000.*

# Eagle, Crow, and Duck Make the Land

## A Story of the California Yokut

Long, long ago, a great flood covered Earth and killed all living creatures on the land. The world was quiet and still. Then one day, an enormous Eagle with a black Crow riding on his back came to this place, looking for a spot to land.

Eagle discovered a huge tree stump projecting above the water, so he landed on it. The stump was big enough to give Eagle and Crow a place to roost. From the stump, greenish, gray water stretched as far as they could see. There was no sign of land. Just beneath the water, however, small fish were visible. Eagle and Crow took turns swooping down to catch a meal. They agreed to share equally all the fish they caught.

After many moons passed, Eagle said to Crow, “Is there any way that we can make land?”

“There must be land under the water,” Crow replied. But the two birds could not dive deep enough to find dirt, and the fish were of no help except as a source of food. Then one day, a duck suddenly appeared and swam around their stump. They watched as Duck



dove deep in the water, each time bringing a small fish to the surface. One time, Duck came up with more mud than fish in its mouth.

This gave Eagle an idea. “Maybe Duck can bring up enough mud for us to build land!”

“But how will Duck know that we need mud?” Crow asked.

Eagle said, “If we leave fish near the stump, maybe Duck will bring up mud to trade for the fish.”

It took a long time to teach Duck to trade mud for fish, but eventually they succeeded. Duck worked very hard, taking mud to each side of the stump to trade for the fish left for him by Eagle or Crow. Eagle and Crow caught more and more fish, and Duck brought more and more mud. The piles of mud grew larger and hardened in the sunshine. Eagle said, “Duck is helping us make a new world. We will share it equally.” No matter how much mud Duck brought, the piles grew evenly.

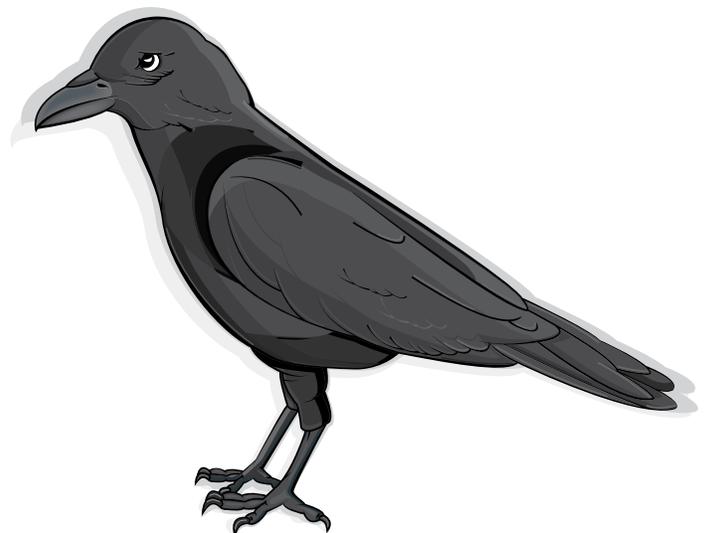
As the days passed, Eagle and Crow noticed that the water around the stump seemed to be lowering. “Surely, the flood must be ending,” Crow said. One day, Eagle flew high and far to see if this was true. When he returned, the Sun had set and darkness covered Earth. Next morning, he was surprised to see that the two piles were not the same height. While he had been gone, Crow had given himself twice as much mud as he gave Eagle.

They quarreled for many days, but Crow never admitted to cheating. Eagle decided he had to catch up, so he began catching two fish at a time. Duck brought twice as much mud to Eagle as he did to Crow. Crow did not seem to

notice, so before long, Eagle’s pile was almost twice as high as Crow’s.

The water continued to go down and, in time, most of it disappeared. The land between the two piles of mud formed a flat valley. Two big rivers are all that is left of the floodwater. Eagle’s pile became the mighty Sierra Nevada Mountains. Crow’s pile became the Coastal Mountains. To this day, people everywhere honor the strong eagle. Some people look upon Crow with scorn because of the trick he played on Eagle. Others think Crow is tricky and smart, but do not give him the same respect they give to Eagle.

*Adapted from a story told by Margot Edmonds and Ella E. Clark*



# The Moon Maiden

## A Story of the California Cahuilla

There was nothing but darkness when the creators of the world, Mukat and Témayawet, were born. In this darkness, they shaped people from mud. Témayawet made his people quickly and carelessly. They had webbed hands and feet, and two faces. Mukat took his time. He shaped hands that could weave baskets and feet that could stalk rabbits in the oak groves.

When they created the light, Témayawet saw his creatures were badly formed. He took them underground where they sometimes caused the earth to quake. Mukat's creations stayed in the light, with a beautiful maiden named Menil.

Menil took care of Mukat's creations. She brought the people to the water, and taught them how to dance and play games, to sing and to race. She taught the women how to bathe in the cool morning, before the men got up, and how to shake out their hair without getting it tangled.

One day, the people followed Menil home, laughing and dancing. Just inside the door of her palm-frond house was a huge rattlesnake that liked to curl himself up in the Sun. They danced on his nose, and the snake felt very badly treated.

Mukat felt sorry for the defenseless snake. The next morning, he found

two cactus thorns and put them in the snake's mouth. When the people came back, the snake was waiting to bite anyone who stepped on him. He bit one, but no harm was done at all.

The next day Mukat took sharp mesquite thorns and put them in the



snake's mouth. Again, the snake bit the first one that walked on him. But it was just the same as before—no harm done at all.

The next morning, Mukat put two hairs from his beard into the mouth of the snake. That evening the people came dancing, and stepped on the snake just as before. The snake bit the first one that danced on him. The people chased him, but he ran under the rocks and escaped. The one who was bit died of the bite.

The boy who died was named To-va-vish-niks-chum-al-mi-ik (“a bright, shining light”). He was always the first to come dancing. The people knew Mukat had helped the snake, and were angry at Mukat.

Menil grew sad. Mukat began to hang over her like a dark shadow. One night, she disappeared. She did not tell anyone she was leaving.

Next morning, the people could not find her anywhere. There was no trace of which way she went. The people went to Coyote and said, “Please, go all around

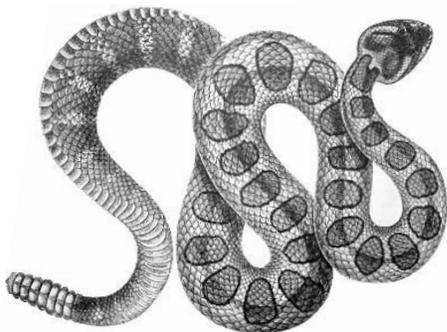
the world and look for our sister.” Coyote went across the land, through the groves of mesquite and palms, to the mountains with pines and mountain sheep looking for Menil. But he did not find her.

That evening, the people went to the bathing pool. Shining in the water, they saw Menil's face looking up at them. They yelled, “Here is our sister in the water!” and they all came and begged her to come out. But she would not come out.

They called Coyote. “Our brother, come and drink this water, and let our sister come out.” But no matter how much he drank, she still sat in the pool. Then they looked up and saw her in the sky. She was the bright round face of the moon.

The people were sad and begged her to come back. But Menil just looked down at them from the sky, forever smiling, forever silent.

Mukat sometimes caused trouble for the people. But he also taught the people laws, customs, and ceremonies. When Mukat died, his body was burned. Squash, chia, acorn, mesquite, and all the food of the people sprouted from these ashes.



*Adapted from Katherine Saubel's translation of the story as told by Perfecto Segundo in 1937. From, Deborah Dozier, The Heart is Fire: The World of the Cahuilla Indians of Southern California, 1998.*

# The First Rainbow

## A Story of the California Achumawi

One winter a long time ago, it rained for many days. The people could not hunt, or fish, or gather nuts and seeds for food. They were hungry and wondered when the rain would stop.

The people sang and danced, asking Old-Man-Above to stop the rain. But he did not hear them.

The people went to Coyote and explained the problem. “I will help you,” said Coyote, “but I can’t do it by myself. Maybe Spider Woman and her sons could spin a rope.”

“How will that help?” asked one of the Indians. “A rope can’t stop the rain.”

“Just wait,” said Coyote. “I have a plan, but we need others to make this work.”

Coyote asked Spider Woman for her two fastest-climbing sons. “Here we are!” cried Spinner One and Spinner Two. “We’re fast climbers, and we want to help.”

“Come with me,” said Coyote as he started walking along a mountain trail.

Weasel Man saw them walking and wanted to know where they were going.

“We’re going to the top of Mt. Shasta to ask Old-Man-Above to stop the rain,” explained Coyote. “Will you help us?”

“Oh, yes,” answered Weasel Man. “I would be happy to help.”

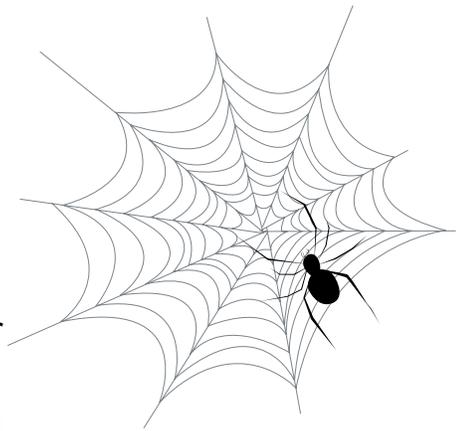
Red Fox Woman poked her head through the bushes and asked, “Can I help, too?”

“Sure,” said Coyote. “Come with us.” So Red Fox Woman joined the others on their march to the top of Mt. Shasta.

Rabbit Woman heard them talking and wanted to help, so she joined them, too.

Everyone was wondering what Coyote had planned. At the top of the mountain, he shared his idea with them.

First, two of the people’s best archers shot a hole in the sky. Then the Spider Brothers started to spin a rope. Everyone else blew as hard as they could. Their job was to blow the Spider Brothers through the hole in the sky so they could talk to Old-Man-Above.



## The First Rainbow

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Everyone had to work together and had to work very hard. If the Spider Brothers did not spin fast enough or the others did not blow hard enough, the Spider Brothers would fall to the ground.

But the plan worked! The Spider Brothers were soon in the sky, talking to Old-Man-Above. He listened carefully to their words and promised to help. “It is good to care for one another and to work together,” he said. “I will give you a sign, and the rain will stop.”

Old-Man-Above used the blue of the bluebird’s back, the red of the sunrise, the yellow of Coyote’s fur, and the green

of the grass. He added some white of the clouds and did some mixing of colors to make a beautiful rainbow. The people saw the rainbow in the sky and knew the rain would stop.

Old-Man-Above rewarded Spider Brothers in a special way, for they had worked very hard and even risked their lives. If you look closely on wet mornings, you can see tiny rainbows on spider webs as they glisten in the sunlight.

*Adapted from a story told by Anne B. Fisher in Stories California Indians Told, 1957.*

# How Thunder and Earthquake Made Ocean

## A Story of the California Yurok

Thunder and Earthquake were friends. As Thunder made the sky rumble above, so Earthquake made the ground rumble below.

Thunder lived at Sumig, a town on a cliff. One morning, Thunder came through the round door of his redwood house and looked off toward the west. From here, high on the cliff, he saw a vast prairie. This vast prairie stretched to the horizon. And as he looked upon this prairie that stretched to the horizon, he wondered how human beings would find enough to eat.

He said to his friend Earthquake:

“Let us bring the ocean here.

Let it cover the land with cold,  
green water.

Let us bring the ocean here.

Let it pulse with white foam.

Let us bring the ocean here.

Let it ring with the barks of sea lions  
and the calls of gulls.

Let us bring the ocean here.

Let it feed the people salmon and hake.”

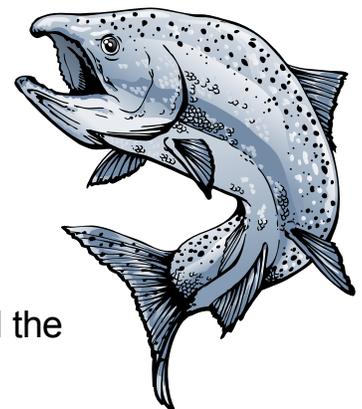
Earthquake thought. “I agree with you dear friend,” he said. “We will bring

the ocean here. In my wanderings I have seen it. It lies at the downstream end of Earth, where all rivers flow, in Pelekuk, where the land meets the sky.”

“Go,” said Thunder. “Take the small bird with the long bill we call the water panther, Pipur. He will help you carry the water.” As he sent them off, Thunder gave them two silvery abalone shells in which to carry the water.

“While you are gone, I will bend the trees and make the land ready,” said Thunder.

Pipur and Earthquake went to Pelekuk, the place where the land meets the sky. Finally, they reached the place covered with water, and at the end of the water they filled the abalone shells.



“Now we will go to the upstream end of the world, called Perwerhkuk,” said Earthquake. “We will go there to bring the water. We will carve a place for it, and fill it with wonderful creatures.”

When Pipir and Earthquake returned to Sumig, the cliff where Thunder lived, they saw he had broken down the trees to make the place ready.

Earthquake stepped and the ground shook. And as it shook, it sank. And as it sank, Pipir and Earthquake poured water from their abalone shells.

At Sumig, Pipir emptied his shell and filled the oceans halfway. “I hope we will have enough,” said Earthquake. He walked along the coast, and as he emptied his shell, the water flowed downstream and filled the oceans all the way to Pelehuk.

As the ocean poured out, creatures swarmed into the water. Seals came as if they were thrown in handfuls. Gardens of kelp waved with the tides. Earthquake sank the land deeper to make gullies where whales could swim, spouting salty mist. The salmon came running through the water into the rivers that rushed down from the mountains.

All the land animals, the deer and elk, foxes and minks, bears, and others came onto to the land and filled the

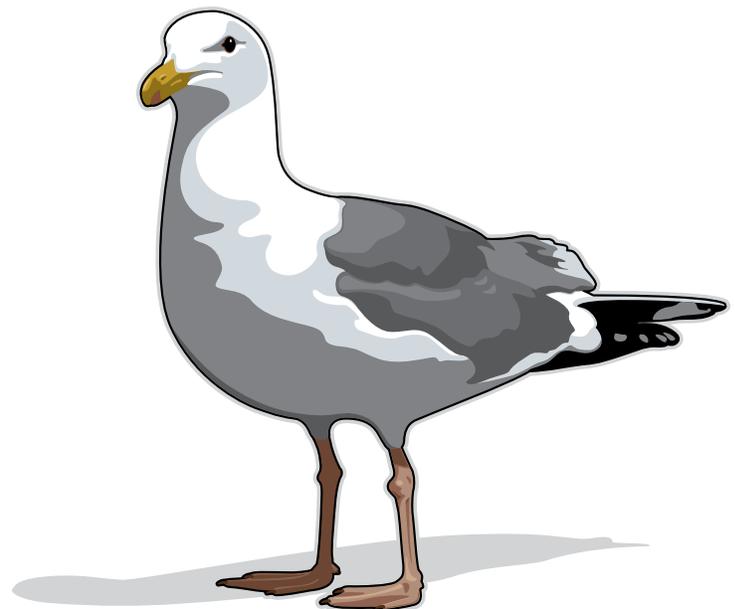
meadows and forests. Now, to the west was a vast, living ocean.

Pipir and Thunder and Earthquake looked over the water.

“This is enough,” They said. “Now the people will have all they need to live. Everything that is needed is on the land and in the water.”

So it is that the ocean and all its creatures came to the Yurok people. It is so because Thunder wished it so. It is so because Earthquake wished it so. With the help of PIPir they brought the ocean in abalone shells so all its creatures could come and give the people food.

*Adapted from a story told by Ann of Espeu to Alfred Kroeber in 1909.*



# Why the North Star Stands Still

## A Story of the California Paiute

Long ago, when the world was still young, the People of the Sky were restless. They traveled so much they made trails in the heavens, which we know as stars. There was only one star that could not travel—the North Star. A long time ago, the North Star was a brave and sure-footed mountain sheep called Na-gah. His father, Shinoh, was proud of him and loved him very much. Every day, Na-gah climbed the rugged mountains around him. One day, he found a sharp peak that reached up into the clouds. “What is up there?” he wondered. Na-gah decided to climb to the top of the mountain to find out.

As Na-gah walked around the mountain, he saw steep cliffs on all sides, and could not find a way up. He

had never seen a mountain that he could not climb, so he decided to find a way. His father would be proud to see him standing on top of such a peak.

At first, Na-gah tried to climb using cracks in the rocks, but he could only go so far. Then he found another crack that went down into the rock. When he reached the bottom of this crack, he found a cave that led him up the mountain. This made him very happy.

It was very dark in the cave, and Na-gah could not see. As he climbed, he slipped on loose rocks that rolled and crashed



to the bottom. Suddenly, he heard a huge rumble below him. Na-gah had never before seen a place so dark and dangerous. He was afraid and very tired.

Na-gah wanted to find a better way to the top of the mountain, but when he turned around, he found that fallen rocks had blocked his path. That was when Na-gah knew he had to keep climbing. Many hours later, he saw light at the top.

When he stepped out of the cave, Na-gah was breathless. He had found his way to the top of the peak! It was so high it made him dizzy; there was only a little space to stand, and there was no way down. "I must stay here until I die," he said. "But I have climbed my mountain at last!" He ate a little grass and drank some water from holes in the rocks. Then he felt better.

Meanwhile, Shinoh was worried about his son. He walked through the sky calling, "Na-gah! Na-gah!" Na-gah finally answered from the top of the mountain. When his father saw him there, he felt very sad. He knew that Na-gah could not climb down. "I will not let my brave son die," he said. "I will turn him into a star, so he can shine where everyone can see him. He shall be a guide for all living things on the earth or in the sky."

After that, the people could always find their way by finding Na-gah in the sky. He does not move around as other

stars do. Because he stays in the true north, our people call him Qui-am-i Wintook Poot-see. These words mean "the North Star."

Since that time, two other mountain sheep have found the great mountain. They are called "Big Dipper" and "Little Dipper." They saw Na-gah standing on top, and wanted to be with him. Shinoh also turned them into stars. They move around the high mountain, seeking the trail that leads upward to Na-gah, who stands on the top. He is still the North Star.

*Adapted from a story presented by Glenn Welker on IndigenousPeople.net, <http://www.indigenouspeople.net/northsta.htm>*











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