

CHIMARIKO TERRITORY

—by Trygve B. Stetland

PREHISTORIC CENTRAL TRINITY COUNTY

What we know about the prehistory of Trinity County results from two basic types of information: ethnographic and archaeological. The ethnographic data was collected after the aboriginal way of life was destroyed, but while it was still alive in the memories of those who had lived it. As a result of the violent nature of life during the gold rush, just a few members of the only Indian tribe whose territory was contained entirely within the boundaries of modern Trinity County—the Chimariko—remained to describe their prehistoric life-ways to the early ethnographers. The Chimariko were the smallest Indian nation in all of California when Euroamericans first arrived. Their territory lay within the area shown in Figure 1. It included the main Trinity River Canyon from the South Fork upstream to the North Fork, or perhaps as far as present day Junction City; the New River from the mouth up to the forks; and the South Fork Trinity from the mouth up to and including Hayfork Creek. By 1870, when the journalist Stephen Powers became the first Euroamerican to describe the Chimariko, only a half dozen remained from a population estimated at 250 to 500 people only twenty years earlier. Their way of life had been destroyed by 1865, if not by 1855. By 1910 there were only two fullbloods left; today they are extinct.

There is considerable evidence suggesting the Chimariko were already declining when "civilization" cut them off. They were under pressure from the downstream Hupa, who were

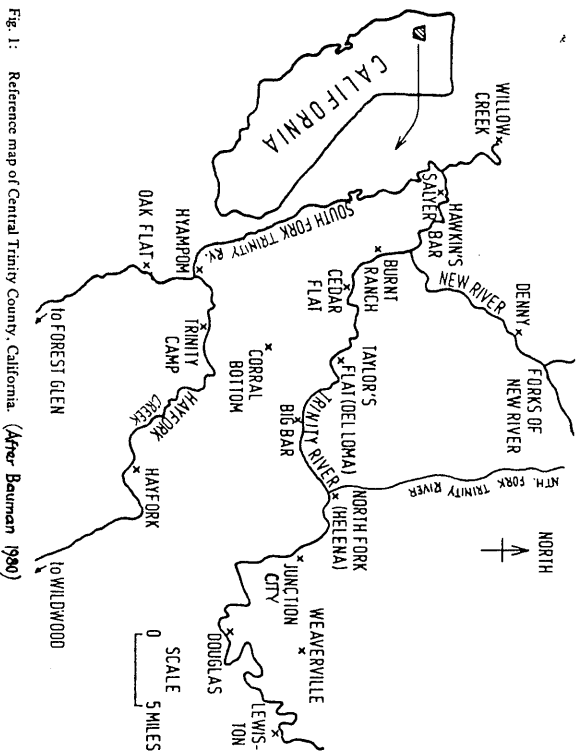


Fig. 1: Reference map of Central Trinity County, California. (After Bauman 1960)

exacting tribute of one deerskin per person per year. The Chimariko were on friendlier terms with the upstream Wintu, who were assimilating their culture and territory during the century before the gold rush.

Our knowledge of Chimariko culture is based upon ethnographic field work done between 1907 and 1926 by Roland Dixon, C. Hart Merriam, and J. P. Harrington. Studies of Harrington's notes, which are housed at the Smithsonian, have illuminated Chimariko prehistory. James Bauman, a linguist, has recently compared Hupa, Wintu and Chimariko place names from the Harrington Collection. By determining their relative age through linguistic techniques, he has been able to reconstruct tribal territorial boundaries through time. For example, although "Hyampom" is a Wintu name, it means "Chimariko ground". Bauman proposes that the bi-

lingualism apparent in the linguistic data indicates a stable political relationship between the Wintu and Chimariko. This possibility is also suggested by archaeological reconstruction of the obsidian trade between the two groups.

The Chimariko language derives from the Hokan stock. The Shasta to the north are the only other Hokan speakers nearby, suggesting a Chimariko migration from the north—thousands of years ago judging by comparisons to other Hokan languages. Athapaskan speakers were located to the northwest and west and Penutian speaking Wintun to the south and east.

The Chimariko also have more in common with the Shasta than their other neighbors in the topography of their land. Their territory was more rugged than that of the tribes up or down-river. It has been estimated that only about one percent of their former territory along the lower fifteen miles of the New River is habitable. The Shasta held the land upstream from there.

This steep canyon home strongly influenced Chimariko material culture, which in turn reflected their subsistence strategy. Their population was severely limited by the availability of vegetal foods—flats where oaks grow were few; consequently, they depended upon a more diverse diet than the Wintu in the wider valleys upstream. The taking of large quantities of salmon was no doubt of great importance to Chimariko subsistence, helping to explain their willingness to do battle with the 49'ers over the clouding of their rivers. This was the principal cause of the genocide that became their fate. Transportation was also limited by Chimariko geography—trips were made overland between Hyampom and Big Bar or Burnt Ranch rather than by river, as the canyons at various points

were nearly impassable. Transportation difficulties may also have affected the availability of imported obsidian, making it much scarcer in the Trinity River Canyon than upstream.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

The archaeological study of the prehistory of Trinity County began in 1958 with Adan E. Treganza's work in the Trinity Lake area. As a result of his excavations, Treganza proposed that the area had been inhabited only during the past thousand years. More dam surveys were conducted by Leonard and Charukoff downstream in 1968. They agreed that the archaeology of Trinity County appeared to possess little time depth.

Although archaeologists working less than one hundred miles south of the Trinities had identified basement cultures up to 8,000 years old as early as the 1930's, it was not until the 1980's that comparable antiquity was proposed for the human occupation of Trinity County. Recently, CalTrans (California Department of Transportation) has been responsible for the two largest archaeological excavations ever undertaken in the county. Both have resulted from bridge replacement projects: the first over the Trinity at Cedar Flat and the second over the North Fork Trinity at Helena.

As a result of Alan Garfinkel's excavation of the prehistoric village at Cedar Flat, the occupation of the area has been assigned to the past 1500 years. Known as the "Emergent", this late period is typified by the archaeological Shasta Complex and its characteristic artifacts: the hopper mortar base used with a bottomless basket to contain and grind acorn meal with a pestle, and the "Gunther Barbed" style and other small corner and side-notched arrow points. The use of hopper

Fig. 2: NORTH COAST RANGE PREHISTORIC PERIODS

YEARS BEFORE PRESENT	CULTURAL PERIOD		ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMPLEX		CHARACTERISTIC ARTIFACTS		INFERRED PRIMARY SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES	
	EMERGENT	SHASTA (HELENA III)	UPPER ARCHAIC (HELENA II)	MIDDLE ARCHAIC (HELENA I)	QUINTHER BARBED (DRAWING Nos. 1 & 2)	LARGE EXCEL-SIOR (5 & 6)	HOPPER MORTAR & PESTLE	ACORN GATHERING, FISHING, HUNTING WITH BOW & ARROW
1,000								
2,000								
3,000								
4,000								
5,000								
6,000								
7,000								
8,000								
9,000								
10,000								
11,000								
12,000								

mortar technology and the bow and arrow are believed to date only to the past 500 years and 1500 years respectively in California.

It was with the excavation of the archaeological site at the confluence of the North Fork and main Trinity Rivers that