

# THE TUKUDIKA

Indians of the Wilderness

By Sheila D. Reddy

Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service  
Regions 1 and 4 Heritage Program  
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Along the banks of the rivers and streams in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness are the remains of the homes of the American Indian people called the Tukudika, or Sheepeaters. The Tukudika were and are Northern Shoshone, members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe whose tribal offices are located on the Fort Hall Reservation near Pocatello, Idaho.

Northern Shoshone speakers are included within a larger related group identified by common elements in their language. The Northern Shoshone belong to the central branch of the Numic sub-family of the Uto-Aztecan family of American Indian languages.

Between one and four thousand years ago early ancestors of the Northern Shoshone were living a rhythmic life of seasonal hunting and gathering within the arid desert core of the Great Basin. In the surrounding country were tribal groups whose lifeways depended and focused on lake/marsh settings and riparian environments.

About 1,100 years ago an episode of climatic change resulted in a serious decline in seasonal rain and snowfall. Tree-ring, pollen, and sedimentary records indicate an extended period of drought that resulted in a more arid regional landscape.

Groups who depended on wetlands for food and other resources saw marshes, rivers, creeks and springs turn to dust and remain dry. Tribes and bands who were unable, or unwilling to adapt to the desert environment began migrating, abandoning dusty riparian camps, village sites, hunting and gathering areas.

Ancestors of the Shoshone were well adapted to living in a drier environment. With the threat of competing tribes lessened, Numic bands began moving north and east into abandoned areas. Within their formal traditions the Shoshone carried ancient knowledge and a vast memory of technical information that would prove successful in drought-affected environments.

One group, the Northern Shoshone, continued migrating north until they reached the Snake River Plain. Their tribe was made up of bands of hunters and gatherers, people who traveled in small groups over the landscape utilizing all resources as they became available.

They moved with the seasons. Each spring after warming winds dried the old trails, families traveled to harvest camas and other roots in wet mountain meadows. Later when

salmon and steelhead spawned, groups would gather with other families or bands at fishing camp sites on the lower Snake River, Salmon River or their tributaries to build weirs and fish traps. After catching and drying the fish the excess would be cached or stored for winter. After the aspen leaves began to leaf out, family bands returned to the mountains to hunt elk, deer and mountain sheep.

As the small fluid bands of Shoshone moved from one resource to another. They were named or identified by the food they were harvesting, or for a specific animal they hunted; one might say they became that food. For example, at Shoshone Falls on the Snake River, the bands fishing below the falls were referred to as "Salmon-eaters". If a group moved east and hunted buffalo, they were called "Buffalo-eaters." In the central Idaho wilderness a mountain band came to be identified as hunters of mountain sheep, the Tukudika or "Sheepeaters."

Bands of Tukudika often remained to winter along the banks of the Salmon River and its tributaries. Hunting, fishing and gathering through the warm seasons they cached dried meat, fish, berries, and roots near winter camp sites. Those families living along the Middle Fork of the Salmon River built semi-subterranean pit houses on sandy river terraces, collecting driftwood from the river's edge for their winter fires.

Even after explorers, fur trappers and traders, miners and farmers came into Idaho Territory, the Tukudika remained within their mountain stronghold. In Idaho's last Indian war, the Sheepeater Campaign of 1879, the quiet reclusive hunters of the mountain sheep were forced into battle. From spring to late fall they defended their ancient homeland. Only after months of flight and constant fighting, after their homes and winter caches of meat had been destroyed, only after autumn had faded and snow covered the ground did the Tukudika walked out of the trees toward the soldiers and the Indian scouts who had pursued them.

Along the Middle Fork of the Salmon River travelers can still see the remains of ancient fire hearths, pit houses, talus slope, talus slope hunting blinds, cache pits, pictographs (rock paintings). Out of respect for all people leave with empty hands, memories and photographs of the wilderness; remembering your footsteps mingled with those of the Tukudika within the wilderness.

## **YOUR ROLE IN PROTECTING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES**

Wilderness Archaeologists are currently working to preserve, protect and understand the prehistory of the ancient peoples who lived in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. As this prehistory is discovered and understood, they will share it with the public through educational monographs and other publications. You can help in this effort by leaving artifacts where they lie, and informing Forest Service wilderness managers of your discovery.

**Take Pride in our American heritage.**

**Take nothing but photographs.**

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