

INDIAN DOGS

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Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness
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The Tukudika, or Sheepeater band of the Northern Shoshone apparently found dogs carrying a pack more successful on the narrow trails in the steep, rugged mountain country. On August 28, 1834, trapper Osborne Russell recorded meeting a group of Tukudika using pack dogs while traveling through the Lamar Valley in the Yellowstone country. In his journal he wrote:

"The banks of the stream in the valley were low and skirted in many places with beautiful Cotton wood groves. Here we found a few Snake Indians comprising of 6 men 7 women and 8 or 10 children who were the only inhabitants of this lonely and secluded spot. They were all neatly clothed in dressed deer and Sheep skins of the best quality and seemed to be perfectly contented and happy. They were rather surprised at our approach and retreated to the heights where they might have a view of us without apprehending any danger, but having persuaded them to our pacific intentions we then succeeded in getting them to encamp with us. Their personal property consisted of one old butcher Knife nearly worn to the back[,] two old shattered fusees [guns] which had long since become useless for want of ammunition[,] a Small Stone pot and about 30 dogs on which they carried their skins, clothing, provisions etc. on their hunting excursions. They were well armed with bows and arrows pointed with obsidian[.] The bows were beautifully wrought from Sheep, Buffalo and Elk horn secured with Deer and Elk Sinews and ornamented with porcupine quills and generally about 3 feet long. We obtained a large number of Elk[,] Deer and Sheep skins from them of the finest quality and three large neatly dressed Panther skins in return for awls[,] axes[,] kettles[,] tobacco[,] ammunition etc. They would throw the skins at our feet and say "give us whatever you please for them and we are satisfied[.] We can get plenty of Skins but we do not often see the Tibuboes" (or People of the Sun). They said there had been a great many beaver on the branches of this stream but they had killed nearly all of them and being ignorant of the value of the fur had singed it off with fire in order to drip the meat more conveniently. They had seen some whites some years previous who had passed thro. the valley and left a horse behind but he had died during the first winter. They are never at a loss for fire which they produce by the friction of two pieces of wood which are rubbed together with a quick and steady motion[.] One of them drew a map of the country around us on a white Elk Skin with a piece of Charcoal after which he explained the direction of the different passes, streams etc[.] From them we

discovered that it was about one days travel in a SW direction to the direction of the outlet or northern extremity of Yellow Stone Lake" (Russell 1955).

Modern researchers have helped to answer another question. Was it more feasible for the dogs used by the Tukudika to pull a travois to carry goods in the mountains, or carry packs? A study published by Norman Henderson in 1994, points out that the poles of the travois forming the "A" frame legs span an average 115 centimeters, or 45 inches at the base where they touch ground. Mountain trails like those in the rugged terrain of the Wilderness are generally narrow, rocky and uneven, making travois travel impossible, particularly on steep hillsides.

The Henderson study indicated a load of 50 pounds was a reasonable packload for a dog to carry on his back. This is an important factor when considering the loads the Tukudika might have transported such as: dried fish; meat from large animal kills such as buffalo, deer, elk or mountain sheep; dried and dressed skins; plant foods such as dried camas or pine nuts; camp gear, personal and household goods such as leather coverings for lodges or wickiup, or trade goods. The thirty dogs mentioned earlier by Russell becomes a reasonable number.

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.