

EAGLE EYE OF THE NORTHERN SHOSHONE

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EAGLE EYE, was probably the last non-reservation chief of the Northern Shoshone speaking Indians. Euroamerican immigrants knew these Northern Shoshone as the "Sheep eaters" (Wells 1980:1). Anthropologists have referred to the Sheep eaters in the literature by their Indian name "Tukudika," meaning "eaters of mountain sheep" (Dominick 1964:131). Dominick (1964:131) suggests that "Tukudika" can probably be interpreted to mean "eaters of meat."

Eagle Eye and his people have also been referred to as "Weiser Shoshoni," (Corless 1990:24). Corless states that the Weiser Shoshoni were isolated in the mountain valleys and that there is no record of the group living elsewhere. He goes on to say that the Indians were free to travel, hunt and fish along the tributaries of the Payette and Weiser Rivers. They visited their favorite hunting and fishing places at the Payette Lakes and on the South Fork of the Salmon River (Corless 1990:24).

The story of Eagle Eye and his people is significant because they were able to live free in the Idaho Territory long after most other Indian Bands were forced onto Reservations. They were also one of the only Bands able to avoid conflict with the United States military during General George Crook's Snake War campaigns, and to avoid capture during Idaho's last Indian war, the 1879 Sheep eater Campaign.

As early as January of 1868, Eagle Eye and his band were wintering in close proximity to the Little Weiser River of Indian Valley, in west-central Idaho. His band consisted of about 10 men and 18 women and children. Colonel James B. Sinclair, commander of Fort Boise, recognized Eagle Eye as the chief of his band of people. During January of 1869, Sinclair sent Thomas Singleton, Interpreter and Chief of Scouts, with two soldiers and three Indian scouts to search for Eagle Eye and his people. They were located at "South East Creek and the Weiser River, about forty miles from Crain Creek," (National Archives, Letter dated January 31, 1869).

The area of the Little Weiser River was rich in animal and plant food resources which could be easily secured by Eagle Eye's band. Salmon, now extinct, were then abundant in the Little Weiser River. There are reports of "dog salmon" seen in the Little Weiser River each fall (Evermann 1895:276). Evermann, an early biologist in the area, said this of the Little Weiser River:

The upper portion of the Weiser River and its tributaries appear to have excellent water and all suitable conditions for salmon spawning-grounds (Evermann 1895:276)

In addition, Evermann reported that throughout the 1890's "regular salmon, salmon trout and dog salmon," were caught in the Weiser River of the Council Valley (Evermann 1895:276).

According to Dr. David Burns, Fisheries Biologist for the USDA Payette National Forest, Idaho, the reference to "salmon trout" actually refers to steelhead. He also stated that...

Virtually all references to "dog salmon" in Idaho, included in Evermann's reports, are for spawning chinook. Usually the reference is to fall chinook, but some are likely to be spawning summer chinook (personal communication 2-25-98).

With the seasonal availability of chinook and steelhead, procuring fish protein, process it and preserving it, provided Eagle Eye's band with a dependable food source for the winter. Besides fish, fur bearing animals provided additional food protein as well as clothing for the Indians.

In the spring and early summer, wild roots, bulbs and greens were utilized as vegetable food sources. As the season warmed up, these edible plants ripened later in the higher elevations in the West Mountains and would be utilized by the Indians well into summer. Payette National Forest archaeologists have found prehistoric archaeological sites associated with edible plants including camas lily bulbs, sego, bitterroot, and kows, also called bisquit root. These plants are still gathered and eaten by Indians in Idaho today. It is assumed that the prehistoric archaeological sites associated with edible plants are root digging areas where Indians have camped for thousands of years.

In order to obtain these food sources as they matured and became available, Eagle Eye's people had to follow a seasonal subsistence cycle. This hunter-gather lifestyle led them to the lower river valleys during the spring and early summer to gather plants and roots. In the summer they would begin to travel up to higher county following spawning fish species and plant availability. In the fall they would hunt large game animals and gather fall plants in the mountains. By late fall they would be moving back into the lower elevations to fish for salmon and chinook. When winter moved in they would gather in the lower river valleys where there was less snow and live on surpluses they had stockpiled and animals that migrated to the lower elevations as well. This seasonal migration resulted in them utilizing an overall home range of hundreds of square miles.

In 1881, Norman B. Willey sent the following article to The Nez Perce News, published in Lewiston, Idaho Territory:

May 24, 1881: Thos. Clay, mail carrier on the Indian Valley route from here [Warren], brought us news yesterday of a ripple of Indian excitement in Little Salmon and Long Valley last week. A man named Wilson, who traps in that region, while making his daily rounds in the lower end of Long Valley, saw a couple of Indian boys nearby. He himself was not observed, and he watched their motions; they were endeavoring to catch birds along the river, and when out of sight, he made a bee-line for the settlement in Little Salmon [New Meadows], some 25 miles distant. The famil[ies] were gathered in the most central place, and the next day the able bodied men of the neighborhood who had sufficient arms, returned to the scene. They found the camp, but the Indians had left, taking the Indian trail across the divide that

separates Long Valley and Indian Valley...The party apparently consists of three bucks, two squaws, the two boys, and a child. A visit to their camp indicated that they are entirely destitute of ammunition. They had peeled bark from a great many trees and had been scraping and apparently living on the soft portions of it, but there was not a bone or feather to be found, although game was plenty thereabouts. They are supposed to be [with] a well known indian named Andy Johnson (June 9, 1881 issue).

The editor of The Nez Perce News, Aaron Parker, added this postscript to Willey's article, "Andy Johnson is, or was, a subchief of the Weiser Indians, and a brother-in-law of Eagle Eye, chief of the same band..."

An interesting aspect of Willey's 1881 statement to The Nez Perce News, "[t]hey had peeled bark from a great many trees and had been scraping and apparently living on the soft portions of it..." is that Ponderosa pine trees, scarred by Indians, have been found at a number of locations on the Payette National Forest. They have been located near the East Fork of the Weiser River, on the southwest edge of Payette Lake, and along the South Fork of the Salmon River. These scarred Ponderosa pine trees are also called "cambium peeled trees." Some of these trees stand alone, whereas in some places there are whole groves of cambium peeled pine trees (Reddy 1993:2). The cambium peeled Ponderosa pine trees indicate a former gathering area of the Indians.

In the June 23, 1881 issue, The Nez Perce News, Willey added:

Nothing has been heard of the Indians seen lately in Long Valley. There is a large section of unoccupied hills and mountains between Long Valley, Indian Creek, Crane's Creek, and Willow Creek where they range all summer.

Sometime in the 1880's, Eagle Eye's people settled in the Dry Buck Valley. This is an isolated valley located about 5 miles west of Banks, Idaho. Here Eagle Eye and his band continued living quiet, isolated lives. They constructed log homes and planted gardens and an orchard. Anthropologist Sven Liljeblad (1972), wrote of Eagle Eye and his people:

As far back in time as their memories reached, the valley from the bend of the [Payette] river to Payette Lake had been their summer range where they gathered food, fished, and hunted deer...As long as their headman [Eagle Eye] had lived, highly esteemed by both settlers and officials, the Indians had stubbornly refused to leave their village. After his death [in 1896], the intimidated Indians, rather to be safe than sorry, decided to move to Fort Lemhi where they had relatives. One day in early summer sometime about the turn of the century, they left their little farmsteads where the apple trees had just shed their blossoms, never to be seen again. As they wanted to avoid traveling over public roads and much frequented trails, it took them the whole summer to cross the mountains. Although the loss these immigrants had suffered in having to give up their native ground...must have been appalling to them all, some of them and their children in time became citizens with great prestige in their new community."

Idaho historian Merle Wells told of visiting Eagle Eye's farm in Dry Buck basin in 1963 with Dr. Liljeblad and members of Eagle Eye's family. The trip was taken in response to a request to visit the area by Josephine Thorpe, Eagle Eye's granddaughter:

This group [on the expedition] included a number of Eagle Eye's descendants: his great grandson (and Mrs. Thorpe's son) Frank, as well as some great-great-grand children. Mrs. Thorpe who had attended Eagle Eye's funeral on top of Timber Butte, wished to return to her grandfather's grave, and I promised to find them a practical route to the site. On the way, we toured Dry Buck basin, where Eagle Eye and his people had worked in a sawmill when Mrs. Thorpe was a child. There we found some of Eagle Eye's apple trees (or their descendants) that Mrs. Thorpe remembered (Wells 1980).

Dry Buck provided a secluded home for the last of Idaho's non-reservation Indian bands. Eagle Eye led a prominent group of Northern Shoshone from at least the time of the Snake War of 1866 - 1868 through the remainder of the 19th century. After Eagle Eye's death and burial, his band relocated to Fort Lemhi, and later to Fort Hall where his granddaughter [Josephine Thorpe] became a successful rancher on Lincoln Creek. Today, descendants of Eagle Eye reside with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes at Fort Hall, Idaho, and with the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes at Duck Valley, Owyhee, Nevada.

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