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THE TUKUDIKA OF BIG CREEK THE TUKUDIKA OF BIG CREEK

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The Tukudika of Big Creek

Nature has long ago erased the moccasin tracks left along the banks of Big Creek. However, the memories of the early inhabitants of this pristine land, the Tukudika or Sheepeater, have not been forgotten. The Tukudika people belong to a subgroup of the Shoshoni. The Shoshoni speak a language that has similarities to the central Numic sub-family of the Uto-Aztecan Indian languages. There are six Numic languages, which are divided into three sub-branches central, western, and southern (Fowler 1972).

About 4000 years ago the central Numic sub-branch family of the Shoshoni began to migrate north. Reasons for the migration are not clearly understood, and one can only speculate that it could have been for more adventurous trading, or in search of a better food source. The migration is understood to have originated from the Great Basin of Arizona: moving up to eastern California, through Nevada, into Oregon, across Idaho far north as the Salmon River, and along the Colorado plateau (Stewart 1965). During the northerly migration different groups broke off from the main group.

The first group was the Comanche who migrated east to the Great Plains. The southernmost band of the Comanche was the "Penateka," or "Honey Eaters." The middle group of the Comanche in Texas was the "Kucundika," or "Buffalo Eaters." Another group that broke off into the mountains was the "Tukudika" or "Meat Eaters of Bighorn Sheep" (Hultkrantz 1956). The Tukudika hunted bighorn sheep throughout the year, which was their primary source of food. The sheep were found in small bands and thus solitary hunting was preferred. As a consequence, Tukudika existed in small family hunting groups. However, larger groups of the Tukudika could be found north and south of present day Salmon, Idaho, who gathered at Pohorai "sage brush valley" for their winter quarter.

Although the Tukurika of Big Creek no longer exist, the mountains and streams of Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness remains the ancestral home of the Indians.

Tribal Life and Housepits

The Tukurika lived a predatory and wandering life in Big Creek, and came out mostly to trade with the Lemhi Indians (Murphy & Murphy 1957). They existed in small families. They lived in housepits that were comprised of a pit dug about one to four feet under the ground level. Above the pit, pole frames were constructed which converged to make a conical shape. The poles were then covered with branches, bark and brush (Kingsbury 1986).

The size of the pits has helped historians to ascertain that the Tukurika were small in stature. Remnants of these archaeological features of Plateau-like house depressions can still be seen in the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and along Big Creek. According to the excavations by Dr. F. Leonhardy, the Tukurika of Big Creek lived in dome shaped housepits that were inter-woven with Red Osier Dogwood and covered with hides. Furthermore, the Tukurika were experts at tanning hides. The old method (still done) is to smear pulverized brain on the raw hide. They used "2 brains per hide" during the tanning process...compared to 1 brain per hide done by other Indian tribes. By using 2 brains it increased the chemical reaction.

Tukurika subsistence living

Bighorn sheep meat comprised the major protein source for the Tukurika diet. Other foods included salmon, steelhead, deer, biscuit-root, cambium of ponderosa pine, bitterroot, riparian berries such as serviceberries, gooseberries, and hawthorn (Reddy 1993). The Tukurika and the Lemhi Shoshoni fished the Salmon River using jigs, spear, and weirs. The Tukurika lived off the land. Food harvested during the summer was dried and stored in caches for winter. Pottery fragments have been identified along the Middle

Folk. It is understood from radiocarbon dating that the Tukudika used coarse low-fired pottery dating back to 1450 AD (Stoddard 1996).

Transportation

It has been well documented that the Tukudika in Yellowstone country used dogs to carry their supplies. The dogs pulled a travois in an “A” frame, which was 45 inches at the base where they touched the ground. On average a dog could carry 50 pounds (Reddy 1996). It is not known if the Big Creek Tukudika used dogs to the same degree. The supplies that could have been carried by the dogs comprised of fish, meat, skins, and berries. The Tukudika also travelled with packs on their backs. This was more useful on the narrow trails in the steep rugged country typical of the Salmon River Mountains.

Tukudika Bows

The Tukudika were well known for their craftsmanship in making bows from bighorn sheep horns for hunting. The bows were made from the long horns of older rams. The bows were a highly sought after commodity when it came to trading and particularly prized for buffalo hunting. The horns were heated over coals to straighten the curls. Each horn would average 18 to 24 inches long. Heat was applied again to make the horn semi-plastic and then pounded with a round stone. A five-inch piece of bone was used for the riser. The bows averaged 44” in length. Wet rawhide was used to join the three pieces together. Sinew was glued at the back of the upper and lower limbs for strength. The glue was made out of boiled shavings from the hoof and bits of neck skin. The scum formed was skimmed off and used for glue (Dominick 1964). The arrow shafts were made from red osier dogwood or *Syringa*. Obsidian or chert were used for projectile points. The Tukudika hunted mostly from blinds. These blinds were built along game trails and mostly on talus (Kingsbury 2003). Even today the bighorn sheep use the trails where these blinds were built.

The Tukudika and the Miners

The discovery of gold in 1862 in Warren and Boise, Idaho, and falsification of reporting by the Idaho Statesman newspaper, sealed the fate of the Tukudika, who were not liked by the settlers. Both entities brought an influx of more settlers to Idaho in search of instant riches. The gold miners pushed the Indians off their prime hunting areas and settled on their sacred grounds. The settlers did not understand the ways of the Indians when they travelled in bands from Council to Camas prairie near Fairfield, Idaho, for the winter. The settlers felt threatened by the congregation of Indians. The hostilities grew to what soon became the Sheepeater Campaign of 1879.

Sheepeater Campaign of 1879

The Sheepeater campaign was brought about mostly to round up the Tukudika and place them onto a reservation so that the settlers would feel secure. To settle their insecurities, the settlers blamed every problem they had on the Indians, especially murder incidents. Private Hoffner, a participatory in the campaign, had this to say about the settler problems: "From my observation I conclude that it is very convenient to have some Indians in one's neighbourhood in case of a crime being committed. It gives one a chance to shift the blame on the Indians" (Carrey & Conley 1980). Before long it was the Tukudika who needed protection from the settlers more than the white settler from the Indian. Below is a list of the accounts of the campaign.

Sheepeater Campaign of 1879

Outline of major events in the Sheepeater Campaign of 1879

February 12, 1879	Five Chinese miners are killed at loon Creek near Or Grande and Tukudika are blamed for the deaths.
April	Hugh Johnson and Peter Dorsey are murdered on Loon Creek. Tukudika are blamed.
May 1	Gen. O.O. Howard receives orders to apprehend the murderers.
May 31	Capt. Reuben Bernard leaves Boise barracks with troops.
June 4	Lt. Catley's detachment leaves Camp Howard Grangeville
July 7	Lt. Farrow's scouts leave Umatilla agency, Oregon
July 29	Catley's command attacked by the Tukudika on Big Creek
July 30	Catley's command trapped on Vinegar Hill between Cabin Creek and Cave Creek but escapes during the night
August 20	Bernard's pack train attacked by Tukudika on Soldier Bar. One soldier killed.
September 17	Sheepeater camp surprised by Farrow's scouts
September 25	Tamanmo (War Jack) surrenders to Farrows
October 1	Tamanmo brings in 33 other Tukudika

Table 1 by Roberts 1983

After surrendering to Farrows' troops, the Tukudika were moved to Vancouver, Washington, then to Fort Hall, Idaho, the following summer. A private in the army summed the campaign in these words, "So ends the never-to-be-forgotten campaign of 1879. A number of animals made useless, and men badly used up" (Roberts 1983).

Unfortunately, very little of the Tukudika oral history and cultural attributes were recorded, so information on the ways of the Tukudika and their language remains limited.

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