

# Hupa, Chilula, and Whilkut

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## HUPA

### Language, Environment, and Territory

Along the lower course of the Trinity River in northwestern California lived the Hupa (<sup>h</sup>hōōpu), a small ethnic group numbering about 1,000 when first reached by White Americans in 1850. They shared a distinctive way of life with the adjoining and more populous Yurok and Karok of the Klamath River with whom they had frequent contacts and close relations. Similar customs and institutions were shared by the Wiyot and Tolowa but the Hupa had little direct intercourse with them.

Nothing is known of the Hupa past, for no systematic archeology has been carried out in their territory. Their speech, one of several Athapaskan languages in northern California, indicates that they originally came from the north; but how and when they arrived remain matters of speculation. Application of the glotto-chronological method to the speech stock demonstrates a surprisingly low time depth for the arrival of Athapaskan speakers on the Pacific Coast. Lexicostatistical dating suggests that the Pacific Coast languages broke off from the common Athapaskan body in the north only about 1,300 years ago, and that their movement south began almost at once and was essentially completed within three centuries (Hojjer 1956:232). The Hupa divergences from the northern idioms fall within a time span of roughly 900-1,200 years ago—or, by other estimates, about 1,300 to 1,700 years ago (Hymes 1957). If the movement into their historic seat took place so recently, acculturation of the Hupa to the specialized northwestern California culture must have proceeded at a rapid pace.\*

Six-mile-long Hoopa Valley, sheltered and picturesque, formed the center of the Hupa homeland (fig. 1). Through it winds the swift-flowing Trinity River, the main tributary of the Klamath. Except for the level valley floor, one to two miles wide, the country is moun-

tainous and difficult of access. A moderate climate without lengthy periods of cold or heat prevails. Rain, totaling more than 40 inches annually, falls mainly between November and March. Ordinarily the remaining months are quite dry. Snow rarely reaches the valley floor though it often clothes the surrounding mountains during the winter months.

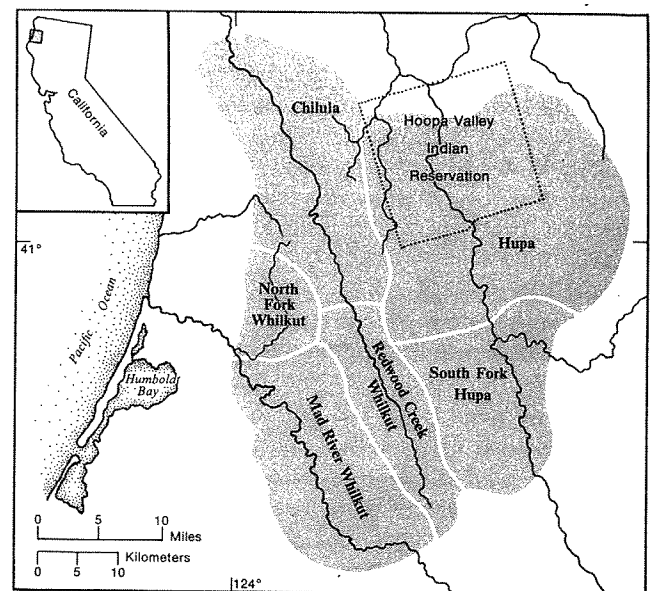


Fig. 1. Hupa, Chilula, and Whilkut territories.

Dense vegetation covers most of the region. Evergreen forests of pines, cedars, and Douglas firs overspread the mountain ridges and chaparral grows thickly on the lower slopes and in the less fertile sections of the valley. A varied and plentiful animal and bird life inhabits the region and the Trinity abounds with fish seasonally.

### Subsistence

Many natural foods were available to the Hupa. Of these, two—salmon and acorns—provided the bulk of the native diet.

Salmon thronged the Trinity each spring and fall to spawn in its upper reaches. At these times the year's supply was taken by a variety of efficient devices (Kroe-

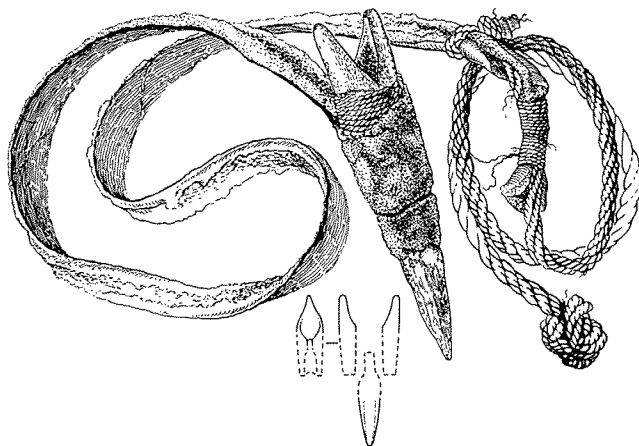
\* Italicized Hupa words have been respelled by Victor Golla in the orthography described for the Hupa language in vol. 17. He has also provided translations of most of the village names. The names of all the Hupa villages occurred in his collection of linguistic data; however, the transcriptions of most of the Chilula and Whilkut village names are only educated guesses (the more doubtful ones being indicated by parenthetical question marks). Those names for which no respelling could be suggested are given in roman type.

ber and Barrett 1960). During the spring run fishermen, standing on platforms erected over suitable pools and eddies, dipped out the salmon with long-handled nets. When the river was low in the fall, a weir of poles and withes was built across it (fig. 2). Fish swarming against the obstruction were scooped up by men strategically positioned on small platforms along its top. The weir was constructed communally and placed in alternate years near one of two principal settlements. Other methods of capturing salmon included gill nets set in still pools and long dragnets hauled by groups of fishermen. Where water conditions permitted, salmon were impaled with bone-pointed harpoons (fig. 3).



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Fig. 2. Hupa salmon weir below Mill Creek. Photograph by Pliny E. Goddard, 1906.



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Fig. 3. Toggle-head for salmon harpoon, Hupa. Made from deer horn, wound with fiber thread and sealed with pitch, attached with elk hide leather strap to Indian-made rope. In use it is attached to a sapling. Inset shows construction of toggle-head. Length of head 9.0 cm, collected before 1928.

Quantities of salmon flesh, sliced thin and smoke-dried, were preserved for winter use. In this state it lasted for a considerable time. The commonest method of cooking fresh salmon was broiling on pointed sticks propped up before the fire.

Another fish of importance consisted of the steelhead, a sea-running trout that returned to the river to spawn. Sturgeon, valued not only for their mass of flesh but also for the glue obtained from their heads, were caught in fewer numbers. Lamprey eels, migrating upstream in the spring, were much relished. Surplus stocks of all three were preserved for future consumption by drying in the smoke of fires. Trout and other varieties of small fish present in the Trinity and its tributaries throughout the year were sometimes taken with hook and line. The river's swift current ruled out drugging.

Women harvested acorns when they began to drop from the trees in the fall of the year. Most esteemed were those of the tan oak, but in the event of a short crop, those of other species were collected. Gathered in conical baskets, each large enough to hold a bushel or two, the nuts were prepared for storage and eating (fig. 4) in the regular California Indian manner (Goddard 1903-1904:27-28). Acorn meal, cooked by heated stones and stirred about with a carved wooden paddle two to four feet long, was customarily served as a thin mush. Less often, dampened flour was baked into a cake on a hot stone. A wide range of other plant foods—nuts, seeds, berries, fruits, roots, and greens—gave variety to the diet.

Although their land was rich in game, the Hupa did not exploit this source of food extensively. Deer and elk were stalked in the forests, driven by trained dogs to waiting huntsmen, or forced into the river by shouting men and barking dogs, and then pursued in canoes. At times, a hunter disguised with deerhead and skin simulated movements of the animal in order to get within bowshot. A short, sinew-lined bow (fig. 5) with stone-tipped arrows was the standard weapon of the chase (Mason 1889:227-229). Nooses of strong iris-fiber rope were frequently placed along trails followed by deer or elk. Little attention was paid to lesser game. Rabbits, squirrels, and birds were shot with a simple bow and arrows lacking stone heads, or captured in snares or traps. Meat was roasted on coals, broiled on skewers, or stone-boiled. That not needed for immediate consumption was cut in strips and cured over a fire.

Not all potential food resources were exploited. The flesh of several species of birds and animals was not eaten because of religious taboos. All reptiles and amphibians except the turtle were shunned. The Hupa showed much repugnance to the idea of eating insects and larvae, delicacies to many native Californians.

Normally the Indians had plenty to eat; and sizable stores of dried salmon, acorns, and other foodstuffs guaranteed against want. But there were occasional lean



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Fig. 4. Mrs. Freddie, Hupa, pouring water from a basket cup into acorn meal being leached in a hollow in the sand. To her right is an acorn-collecting basket. Photograph by Pliny E. Goddard, 1902.

years when the yield of salmon and acorns was not up to expectations. At such times the people knew hunger, though probably never famine.

### Material Culture

As with most aboriginal groups who were above all fishermen, the Hupa occupied permanent houses for a large part of the year. They lived in substantial rectangular structures built wholly of cedar planks. Overlapping boards covered the three-pitched roof. The interior contained an excavated pit, its sides retained by planks set on edge, with an elevated earthen shelf left between it and the house walls. Near the center of the pit lay a shallow depression bordered with stones for the fire. The doorway, at one corner, consisted of a circular hole just large enough to squeeze through; a notched plank served as a stairway down into the dug-out portion. Of-

ten a neat cobble pavement covered the ground in front of the residence.

Customarily a dwelling housed a single family. Here its members assembled for meals and here the women and children slept. Space on the earthen shelf next to the walls was utilized for storing stocks of food, firewood, and family possessions. Only briefly during the autumn acorn-gathering season did the family residence stand empty. When in the countryside for the harvest the families took to roofless brush shelters or camped in the open.

In addition to the family houses, every Hupa village contained several sweathouses. Smaller than the dwellings, these structures were built around a rectangular pit about four feet deep and lined with planks to prevent a cave-in. Only the pitched roof and the surrounding stone pavement were visible above ground. Entrance was through an opening in the roof with descent into the pit



Calif. State U., Humboldt.

Fig. 5. Big Willis, Hupa, with hunting equipment. He wears a breechclout of cloth instead of the traditional deerskin and a waistband of dentalium shells and perforated coins. Photograph by A.W. Ericson, 1890s.

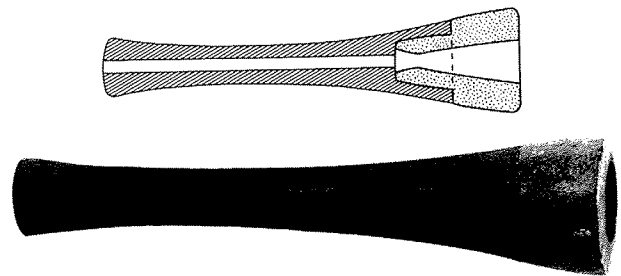
by means of a plank with cut footholds. Generally a sudatory was built and used by a group of men related to one another through the male line. It served not only for daily sweating but also as workshop, clubhouse, and sleeping quarters for men and older boys.

The generally mild climate made heavy clothing unnecessary. A breechclout of deerskin or of several smaller animal skins sewed together formed the only article of dress worn daily by males (fig. 5), and elderly men lounging about the sweathouse or wandering around the village commonly dispensed with even this. Female garb was more elaborate, comprising a two-piece buckskin skirt, extending from the waist to below the knees. The larger section, its border fringed, covered the back and hips, whereas a narrow piece, consisting of many strips attached to a belt, concealed the front of the body. For added warmth, men and women alike threw robes of deer or other animal skins over their shoulders or wrapped them around the body. Footgear was rarely worn, buckskin moccasins being put on only when departing on a long journey. Hunters and travelers passing through brushy country covered their thighs with knee-length leggings of the same material. Close-fitting, bowl-shaped basketry caps (fig. 4), designed to afford protection from the carrying strap of burden baskets and baby cradles, were worn almost constantly by women.

Both sexes wore the hair long. Males tied theirs in two bunches, which hung in front of the shoulders, or in a

single one behind. Females arranged the hair in two rolls, each held together with a thong. Women had three broad vertical bands tattooed on their chins (fig. 4) and sometimes marks were added to the corner of the mouth (Sapir 1936). The earlobes of all individuals were punctured for the insertion of shell ornaments.

Woodworking and basketweaving constituted the most important industries. Hupa men manufactured house planks, chests for the storage of ceremonial regalia, platters and bowls, low stools, and sweathouse headrests from cedar, a soft and easily worked material. Other articles, such as bows and tobacco pipes (fig. 6), were fashioned from harder varieties. The woodworkers achieved excellent results with a limited stock of tools.



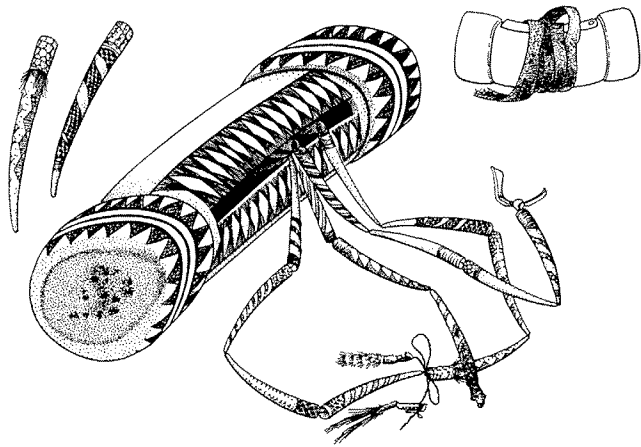
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Fig. 6. Hupa wooden pipe with steatite bowl. Inset shows construction. Length 11.0 cm, collected before 1913.

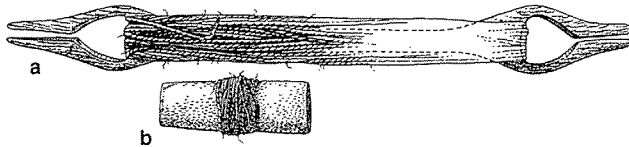
Basketweaving, carried on exclusively by females, provided most household utensils as well as storage containers, cradles, caps, and special dance appurtenances. The baskets were fashioned by one technique—twining. They were either closely woven so that the warps did not appear at all, or open, the twigs of the foundation being merely held in place by chains of wefts. Hazel shoots provided the warps for nearly all baskets; strong filaments from tree roots served as wefts. Ornamentation was achieved by overlaying with white bear grass and introducing geometric patterns in black maidenhair fern stems and giant fern stems, colored red with alder bark.

Men showed considerable proficiency in working horn, particularly elk. Large spoons were steamed and cut into shape. The spoons were used for eating solely by males; ordinary mussel shells sufficed for women. Additional horn and bone articles included money boxes (fig. 7), net-mesh measures, wedges, and stone-flaking tools. The men also manufactured arrowpoints and other weapons and tools of stone, braided rope and twine, wove nets (fig. 8), and tanned animal hides.

For water transport the Hupa employed canoes hollowed out of one-half of a redwood log. These were not made locally but obtained in trade from the Yurok. Such craft were capable of carrying five or six adults or sev-



Dept. of Anthr., Smithsonian: Purse, 126521; Dentalium money, 21322.  
 Fig. 7. Hupa elk-horn purse (money box) with contents of strung dentalium. Purse is decorated with incised triangles rubbed with black pigment and grooved lines painted red. The exposed porous end of the elk horn is also red. Length 16.1 cm, collected 1883. Upper right shows manner in which purse opening was covered by splint and secured by its buckskin wrapping. The splint is made from an ivory scale for a centigrade thermometer, manufactured on the East Coast. Left inset shows detail of decoration on two of the dentalia. The left one is incised, and both are wrapped in reptile skin. Length of each 5.2 cm, collected 1875.



Dept. of Anthr., Smithsonian: a, 131151; b, 341287.  
 Fig. 8. a, Hupa netting shuttle made of wood wrapped with length of two-ply fiber twine. Length of shuttle (needle) 39.7 cm, collected 1889. b, Hupa net winder, used for winding fish-net twine; made from section of rib bone wrapped with length of two-ply fiber twine. Same scale, collected before 1928.

eral thousand pounds of cargo. They were propelled with narrow-bladed, square-ended paddles.

Though water travel was the preferred form of transport, there was considerable foot traffic. Well-worn pathways linked the villages, and trading trails led across the mountains to the coast and elsewhere. Along the trails were traditional stopping places where passersby removed their packs and rested. Special trees into which arrows were shot for good luck and votive spots where a traveler dropped a stick or stone and offered a prayer for safety on his journey lay along the routes (Goddard 1913).

Exchanges of commodities took place chiefly with the Yurok inhabiting the coast near the mouth of the Klamath. In return for dried seaweed, which yielded salt, surf fish, and other marine products, the Hupa supplied

the coastal dwellers with acorns and additional inland foods. Considerably less trade was carried on with the riverine Yurok and Karok, because the products of these people were too much like those of the Hupa to allow for extensive bartering. Sporadic commerce was also conducted with other Indian groups.

Instead of bartering for them, products were sometimes purchased with dentalium shell money (fig. 7). Each of the thin, tubelike shells, which came from the waters off Vancouver Island, was evaluated according to its length, with examples less than an inch and one-half long not considered as currency. Standardized ways of measuring the dentalia included matching five strung shells of equal size with one of a series of marks tattooed on the inside of a man's left forearm (fig. 9).



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 Fig. 9. Mr. McCann, Hupa, measuring dentalium shell money against tattoo marks on his forearm. Photograph by Pliny E. Goddard, 1901.

### Social and Political Organization

A minimum of conventional organization characterized Hupa society. The family formed the fundamental unit. Typically this numbered six to seven persons and was composed of a man, his wife, their children, and an unattached relative or two; however, social ties extended beyond the immediate family and linked several patrilineally related households together into a larger informal grouping. The families resided near one another and cooperated in many activities. The men built and occupied a common sweathouse.

Generally several such groups of near kin shared a village site though the inhabitants of a smaller community were sometimes all blood relatives or nearly so. The village had no real solidarity and its members were likely

