

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 (^hhōōpu), 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-

* 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.

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.

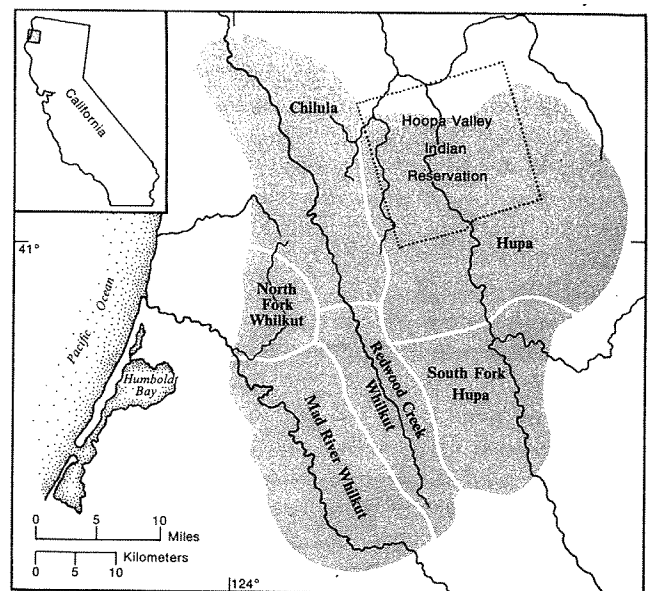


Fig. 1. Hupa, Chilula, and Whilkut territories.

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.

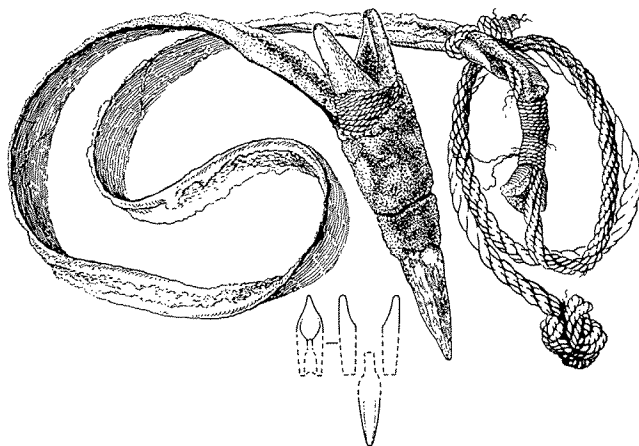
Salmon thronged the Trinity each spring and fall to spawn in its upper reaches. At these times the year's supply was taken by a variety of efficient devices (Kroe-

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).



Lowie Mus., U. of Calif., Berkeley.

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



Dept. of Anthr., Smithsonian: 341274.

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

