

## AN ESSAY ON NATIVE AMERICANS IN THE ROGUE RIVER AREA

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for the Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical  
Society

Native inhabitants date back as far as 10,000 years ago in this area. They lived in semi-permanent villages during the winter and then broke up into smaller bands during fall, spring and summer to hunt, fish and gather in the neighboring foothills. During their time away from their village, they lived in temporary camps in brush houses. I believe the Hugo area was the site of one of these temporary camps. It is alive with the preferred black acorn trees and close to both Mt. Sexton and Red Mountain where upland game is and was abundant. Also, numerous creeks are present here as a source of water. Not named then, but Bummer and Quartz creeks are two major perennial creeks in the Hugo area. The 1855 U.S. General Surveyor Office's map documents an Indian trail going straight through the Hugo area.

There were two main groups of Indians in the Rogue River area, the original Takelma Indians speaking Penatian and the Athapaskan speaking Da-ku-be-te-de and Tal-tuc-tun-te-de. The Athapascans migrated from Alaska and Canada about a thousand years ago. They moved into the areas not already inhabited by the Takelmas mainly along the Applegate River and Galice Creek.

The bloody Rogue River Wars of the 1850's, reduced these people from 9,500 to 2,000 in six years before they were removed from their homeland to the reservations in the north. Local Euro-American immigrants joined in groups known as "volunteers" with the sole purpose of exterminating the native Indians. David Sexton, longtime pioneer in the Hugo area was a leader of one of these groups of "volunteers". By 1856, the Taylor and Jumpoff Joe Creek band was comprised of 14 men, 27 women and 19 children.

The Takelma territory bordered in the east by the Cascades, to the south as far as Ashland, to the north just below the Umpqua River, and west to the Applegate River and Galice Creek areas. Our knowledge of these peoples comes from native informants and in large part from various archaeological studies of villages in the area. Agness Pilgrim is the oldest living Takelma in the area and daughter of the last Takelma chief.

The Takelma semi-subterranean houses found in their winter villages were rectangle in shape and partially built to a depth of from 1 – 1-½ feet below the ground. It was about 12 feet wide and 20 feet long

with a fire pit in the middle. The siding was made from cedar or sugar pine planks in an upright position.

The Applegate and Illinois people lived along the tributaries of the Rogue River, while the Takelmas lived along the main stem of the Rogue where fishing and hunting was better. There were three main villages along the Applegate: in the upper reaches of the river near present day Applegate Reservoir, at the confluence of Little Applegate with the main Applegate river and at the mouth where the Applegate joins the Rogue river. The Applegate Athapascans were known as the Da-ku-be-te-de.

The Galice Creek Athapascans known as the Tal-tuc-tun-tu-de lived where Galice Creek joins the Rogue River, their village lying on both sides of the river.

The Shasta Costa band of Tututni Indians occupied an area along the lower Illinois River, as well as adjacent to the Rogue River from Agness to Big Bend to the western boundary of Takelma territory near Grave Creek. There were 33 villages in their territory.

### USE OF FIRE

One of the most important tools for survival and subsistence was the use of fire by these native inhabitants. The reasons for the use of fire included game drives, gathering of acorns, hazel nuts, tarweed seeds, grass seeds, insects, root and berry propagation, procurement of sugar pine sap, snake control, preparation for tobacco planting, enhancement of basketry materials, warfare, communication and ceremonial purposes as well as cooking, warmth and light.

Fires were set during spring, summer and fall for various reasons in various locations. They were usually set by "fire specialists" who understood the importance of wind direction, temperature and what impact the fire would have on different plants and animals. They managed their environment by fire to obtain the best harvest and enhance their winter store of food.

- 1) The Takelma would light fires in the shape of a horseshoe to drive deer toward the bottom of the semi-circle where the women stood rattling deer bones and the men waited to shoot them. They also would use this method to drive the deer into elaborately constructed brush fences where they could be taken in snares. The Takelma also regularly burned their hunting area to produce better grass with which to attract wild game and maintain their habitat by reducing the underbrush.
- 2) Hillsides of the Rogue Valley were burned around oak groves to clear the underbrush and vegetation to protect the trees existence and make it easier to gather the fallen acorns. These fires also killed young conifers which if left alone would have grown taller than the oaks and overtopped them.
- 3) In midsummer when the hazelnuts were ripe, burning of these areas would hasten the nuts to drop and be roasted.

- The nuts were easier to collect without the competing vegetation.
- 4) The sowing of Indian oats or tarweed began in midsummer with the burning of the stalks. Yellow-flowered tarweed was very sticky and the burning would remove the pitchy substance. At night, 4 or 5 unmarried men standing at a distance of about 100 yards apart would set fire to the prairie. The next day, they would use long paddles to harvest the seeds by hitting the stalks, directing the falling seeds into shallow baskets.
  - 5) Grass fields on the valley floors were burned every summer and then the Takelma collected the grasshoppers and white larvae of yellowjackets. They were dried, ground and then mixed with grass seeds for eating.
  - 6) Berry and root collecting areas were burned after harvesting to not only fertilize the soil but eliminate competing vegetation. Roots were dug-up with long sticks. The Blue Camas was an important part of the Takelma diet. Berries grew in upper elevations and were valued greatly due to their sweet sugar taste. Both the berry and root gathering areas were best managed by seasonal burning.
  - 7) In the fall, the Takelma would burn the base of sugar pine trees to get the sap. The fires would also cause the pinecones to open so pine seeds could be collected. The sap was another fine source of sugar.
  - 8) During the summer months, snakes would move closer to the rivers where it was cooler so the Takelma burned the hillsides around their villages to control them.
  - 9) The only plant grown by seed by the Takelma was the tobacco plant. An area would be chosen and cleared of brush by burning which would leave a great bed of ashes in which to sow tobacco seeds.
  - 10) In order to obtain the best basketry materials, areas of beargrass, hazel shoots and iris were burned periodically. Beargrass was very important in making snare ropes and a valuable trading item among other Indians. Once again the practice of burning removed competing vegetation.
  - 11) With "volunteers" hot on their trail, Takelmas would set fires to not only cover their path but slow their pursuers down because of the heat and smoke. Smoke also made good cover through which to shoot arrows.
  - 12) Fires were set as a means of communicating or signaling. At the head of Galice Creek, the Galice would set fires on the mountaintops to warn of approaching enemies. Fires were also set as a signal that a hunter had made a big kill. The fire was an invite to come and share in the bounty.

- 13) For ceremonial reasons, the Tututni Indians set fires on the hills at the mouth of the Rogue River every spring and fall to invite salmon to enter the river.

In summary, the Takelma Indians were very skillful in their use of fire as an environmental management tool. Teamwork, planning and scheduling were essential facets to successful fishing, hunting and gathering activities.

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