

2. REGIONAL LIFEWAYS

Anthropologists find it convenient to think of California Indian cultures in terms of areas where a particular kind or style of culture was characteristic to the extent that it can be distinguished from other such areas.

The map (fig. 7) shows the distribution of the six main culture areas of aboriginal California as they were defined by A. L. Kroeber. Although culture areas can be geographically delineated, they are more than mere geographic areas, for in each one there lived a series of tribes that shared among themselves a way of life distinctively different from that prevailing in the neighboring culture areas. The features that set off one culture area from another were often direct reflections of the potentiality of the environment and the ways in which people learned to utilize it. An area with numerous salmon streams would hold populations that had developed a number of devices (harpoons, nets, traps, weirs) for catching fish. An area that did not contain salmon streams and was rich in oak trees would lack much fishing gear and have a material culture that emphasized appliances and techniques for collecting, storing, and preparing acorns for food. Such differences in the economic base and the activities surrounding the securing of food helped to shape the whole pattern of life. Where there was food the year round that could be gathered and stored, habitation was permanent. In less productive areas the village group would have to move to different areas at particular times of the year to find the food necessary for survival.

Terrain, climate, available water, plants, and animals had direct effects on the human population. Different patterns of settlement (compact towns, dispersed villages with only a



FIGURE 7 Culture areas of California.

few houses in each) and population numbers that varied in response to the amount and kinds of food available were therefore direct adjustments to the natural environment by the human population. Today we are much less dependent for food upon the immediate California environment in which we live. We can buy almost any fresh vegetables we desire in a supermarket that draws its produce from all over the United States and at times from other countries. We can insulate our houses in cold mountainous regions and install air conditioning in areas that would otherwise be uncomfortable to live in. The California Indian, who did not possess such amenities, was satisfied with a comparatively

limited variety in his diet, and alternately shivered or was too hot, according to the season.

Culture provides the anthropologist with a ready means of pointing out regional differences in tools, dress, food-gathering methods, and house types, which can be used to identify the several culture areas within the state. Beyond the material are the nonmaterial aspects of culture. California Indian religions, for example, varied from simple shamanism, in which a man or a woman became a curing doctor because he or she had secured in a dream some supernatural sanction or "power" to cure the sick, to highly complex and organized cult religions in which many people participated and for which there were officials and a complex mythology underlying the cult. How did these practices come about? Nobody knows, because their origin lies far back in time—hundreds and in some cases perhaps even thousands of years—and there is no longer any way to discover that unwritten history.

Six culture areas have been agreed upon by researchers for native California: Northwestern, Northeastern, Central, Great Basin, Southern, and Colorado River.

NORTHWESTERN CALIFORNIA

Participating in the Northwestern culture were the Tolowa, Shasta, Karok, Yurok, Hupa, and Wiyot tribes and the Wailaki group south of the Hupa. The Yurok were the "hearth" tribe in which the climax development was reached. The Northwestern subculture was distinctive in many ways. Ecologically, it was closely adapted to the rain-forest environment, with its settlements situated along river banks and the ocean coast at stream mouths, lagoons, or bays. The dugout canoe was the most important means of travel, routes being along rivers and the ocean shore. There were trails for foot travel, and these were used to visit neighboring villages; but the canoe remained the best means for traveling any distance and for crossing the Klamath River, which over much of its course is wide, fast-flowing, and deep.

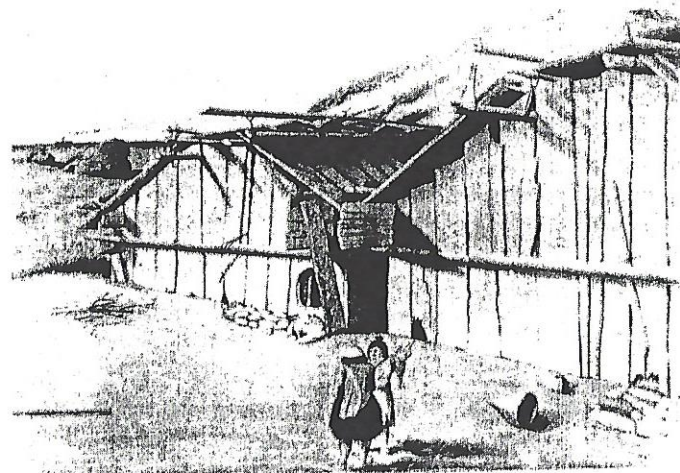


FIGURE 8 Indian village, Trinidad Bay, Humboldt County, from a drawing by J. G. Bruff, 1850 (Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California)

The primary construction and craft material was wood, especially the soft, straight-grained Coast Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*). Trees were felled by controlled burning at the base and were split into planks with long elk-antler wedges pounded with bell-shaped stone mauls. A mussel-shell adze blade lashed to a curved stone handle was used to smooth rough spots on planks and to excavate the interior of the big, shallow-draft, redwood canoes. Northwestern houses were rectangular, gabled structures (fig. 8) with roofs and walls made of planks, especially of redwood where it was available, but most often otherwise of cedar. Basketry, in a wide variety of shapes adapted to special uses (for example, mush-cooking baskets, acorn-storage baskets, hats, and cradles), was made only with the twined technique (figs. 9 and 10). Coiling, so common in Central and Southern California, was here not employed as a basket-making technique.