

Summary of Findings on Coso-Panamint History

3-28-72
Prepared at
request of OO
"Tell me
all about"

FOREWORD

Indiscriminate use of the word "Coso" for locations within the Coso Mountains and basin poses some problems for the reader. In all references to the geothermal area, the writer has used "Coso Hot Springs". The other references concern the mining village of Coso southeast of Silver and Coso Peaks. This site is called "Old Coso" or "Coso Village" locally. The U. S. G. S. 1911 quadrangle names it "Fort Coso".

In searching the literature only specific references to the Coso Hot Springs area were interpreted as applying to the geothermal area.

Inundation of Haiwee Meadow by the present reservoir of the Los Angeles City Department of Water and Power, doubtless eradicated substantial evidence of the use or non-use of the region by Indians. It is logical to assume that encampments of any size would have been on or peripheral to the meadow. The only other source of fresh water close to the Hot Springs is Haiwee Springs, about six miles north. The springs are in a steep narrow gorge and although milling stones and petroglyphs are found in the area, it is a doubtful campsite for large gatherings.

Summary of Findings on Coso-Panamint History

1. Range of the Coso-Panamint Indians

There is no evidence of distinct political boundaries between the pre-historic Indians of east-central California. Range of the Coso-Panamints is assumed to have extended from the crest of the Sierra Nevada on the west and from Owens Lake on the north across the desert to the south and east. Neighbors to the south were the Kawaiisu and Chemeheuvi who occupied similar desert habitats. No distinct boundaries are known between these groups.

In 1891, a Death Valley expedition encountered only a few Coso-Panamints living in four locations. Two of these were within Death Valley on the west slopes of the Panamint Mountains; another, in Panamint Valley on the west side of the Panamints; and the fourth was on the west side of Saline Valley at the foot of the Inyo Mountains.

2. Population estimates

In 1883, an estimate of the number of Coso-Panamint Indians was 150; in 1891, less than 100. These figures are from U. S. Army estimates of Indian populations in eastern California.

As noted above, Frederick Vernon Coleville, in 1891, saw only about 25 Coso-Panamint Indians during the Death Valley expedition for which he was the botanist.

The late Dr. A. L. Kroeber of the University of California at Berkeley, in his "Handbook of the Indians of California", originally published in 1925 by the Smithsonian Institution and reissued in 1953, states that although the range of the Coso was one of the largest of any of the California people it was also, perhaps, the most thinly populated and one of the least defined.

The best available figures on populations in the entire eastern California region are probably those quoted by W. A. Chalfant in his "Story of Inyo". This book was first copyrighted in 1922 and has undergone several reprintings. Reference is made to a Major H. C. Egbert who in 1870 reported 250 Indians in the Coso and other southeastern localities. In 1863 Indians of the Owens Valley and adjacent regions were rounded up and taken to Fort Tejon, 906 started from Camp Independence and Chalfant states the military commander thought there were probably about the same number left in the entire region.

3. Classification and linguistic affiliation of Coso-Panamint Indians

The Coso-Panamint Indians are classified as the westernmost of a wide ranging linguistic group that extended over 1,500 miles from the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada, beyond the Continental Divide into Wyoming as far as the headwaters of the Platte River, and south into Texas (Map No. 1. diagrams the distribution of this linguistic affiliation.). This division is the Shoshone-Comanche, a subdivision of the large Ute-Aztecan language-related family of peoples distributed from Panama to Idaho and Montana (Map No. 2.).

That there is a linguistic affinity between the Aztecs and the Indians of the Coso basin does not infer any historically recent connections. It was the ancestors of the Mexican Nahuatl and the California Shoshoneans thousands of years ago who were associated, not their representatives of the last several centuries. Where this ancient association occurred, is not known.

4. Technology

Although the Cosos lived a different life from the San Joaquin Valley tribes, they share many implements with the Yokuts through contact of both peoples with the Tübatulabal of the Kern River. Whether these were carried from west to east or the reverse is not known.

Use of eagle down and other feathers for ceremonial or ornamental attire as well as styles of basketry, indicate contact through trade or other channels.

A study of trade routes and economic exchange among the Indians of California published in 1961 by the University of California Archaeological Society, traces a reciprocal trade route from the region west of the Sierra Nevada, through Owens Valley, into the general territory established as the home range of the Coso-Panamint Indians.

It is generally accepted among ethnographers and anthropologists that cultural exchanges via trade exercised a great deal of influence on the technology of primitives. Hence, no pure cultural aspects for the Coso-Panamints can be derived from ethnological research. Rather, they appear to have selected eclectically, features of other cultures, compatible with their requirements and, in turn, may have contributed to other cultures.

5. Specific information on Indian uses of Coso Hot Springs and Devil's Kitchen

Specific references by native informants during the 1920's and 30's, when ethnological research was being conducted extensively in the east central valleys of California, shed no light on the uses and occupancy of the immediate vicinity of Coso Hot Springs or Devil's Kitchen by Indians.

Dr. Julian Steward, who conducted research during the summers of 1927 and 1928, augmented by a brief visit in December, 1931, makes only one reference to Coso Hot Springs. He mentions that a yellow mineral, "mo'ata", from near Coso Springs, was daubed on the points of arrows to poison them.

On his ethnographic map of the entire area of east central California, Dr. Steward keys Coso Hot Springs as "Koso, fire, springs, held jointly by Paiute and Shoshoni for medicinal purposes."

It should be noted that Dr. Steward's research, like that of most of the professional observers, was conducted in 1927 and 1928, many years after the first contact of the native peoples with whiteman.

In 1875, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers made a monumental survey of the United States west of the 100th meridian. Although this report mentions Coso Hot Springs and the mineral content of the waters, no mention is made of encountering Indians at the site.

Oliver Roberts de la Fontaine, whose recollections of the area from Darwin, Knight Canyon, and the Wild Rose area of the Panamints were privately published in 1933 as "The Great Understander", is alleged to have ventured into the Darwin Mine camps via Mountain Springs Canyon around 1875 when he was a teenage boy. In Knight Canyon he operated a charcoal camp that supplied the Modoc Mines at Lookout and the mines at Darwin. Roberts de la Fontaine's account of the Indians of the Panamints is flamboyant. He describes a great deal of mischief perpetrated by the Indians and a gruesome burning at the stake of an Indian girl who was courted by a whiteman in Darwin.

Although "The Great Understander" contains many colorful vignettes of the area during the late 1870's, the narrative is rambling and vague about dates and locations so it cannot be accepted as a wholly objective account of the times. One cannot help but wonder if the author transferred some of the stories and customs of the Plains Indians to the Panamints when he writes of the beat of tom toms, Indians on the warpath, tomahawks, scalps and such. Nowhere in the scientific research of the 1920's and 30's is there mention of such customs.

Other authors such as W. A. Chalfant and William Carruthers differ widely in their description of the Indians of the Coso and Panamint areas. Chalfant's recollections are larded with noble redman nostalgia while Carruthers subscribes to the red devil attitude with such morsels as husbands being allowed to kill their mothers-in-law, hearts of valiant enemies being eaten raw or made into soup.

H. H. Bancroft in "The Native Races of the Pacific States" (1886) describes the Panamints "...of all men are lowest, lying in a state of semi-torpor in holes in the ground in winter and in spring, crawling forth and eating grass on their hands and knees until able to regain their feet...living in filth..."

Remy and Benchley's Journal of 1861 describes the Shoshoneans they met as "very rigid in their morals. Honest and trustworthy but dirty and lazy."

William Manly who was responsible for the rescue of the hapless Death Valley Bennet-Arcane party noted in his account of the 1849 trip that the Indians were extremely shy.

M. H. Farley, a prospector during the Coso silver excitement of 1860 commented on the Indians of the region. After describing the country as sterile and waterless except for boiling springs, he stated: "A few scattered Indians (the Coso tribe) live on herbs, roots and worms. They run swiftly away on seeing the whites. About 20 miles to the south-

ward of Silver Mountain, the party visited an active volcano. On some of the cliffs of the neighborhood were found sculptured and painted figures, the latter colored with some pigment, perhaps cinnabar. These were evidently the work of a former race, for the intelligence necessary to produce them does not exist among the squalid creatures now inhabiting that country."

The mining village of Coso is about 12 miles due north of the hot springs. It is conceivable that the fumaroles constituted Farley's "active volcano." Petroglyphs can be found north of the hot springs around Haiwee spring but if Farley found no water in the area other than the "boiling water" it is unlikely that he visited Haiwee.

No ethnological study of the Coso-Panamint Indians has been made. Apparently as early as the 1920's and 30's when considerable research was conducted on the Indians of Owens Valley and adjacent regions the Coso-Panamints were either indistinguishable from other bands, extinct, or inter-married with Paiutes, Tubatulabal, Kawaiisu or other nearby Indian groups.

This conclusion is based on:

1. Scarcity of mention of the Coso-Panamint Indians
 2. Rare references to Coso Hot Springs
 3. Lack of mention of a large conspicuous outcrop of obsidian (arrow point and tool making material) in the immediate vicinity of the Coso Hot Springs
6. Chronology of early whiteman exploration and activity in the Owens Valley and adjacent areas

Franciscan missionaries did not cross the Sierra Nevada range. Garces, in 1775, journeyed from Tucson, Arizona, across the Mojave Desert. He recorded contact with Beneme (Vanyume) Indians whose habitat extended into present day Inyo County. No record exists of his actually having come into Inyo County.

Jedediah Smith and trappers traversed eastern California. There is some controversy whether this trip was in 1825 or a few years earlier or later. Consensus is that his route was through present day Walker Pass.

In 1833, Joseph Reddeford (or Ruddeford) Walker made his way through Owens Valley and Walker Pass to Monterey according to early historical maps of California.

A party originating in Independence, Missouri, led by Joseph B. Chiles was guided by Walker from Fort Laramie through Owens Valley to Gilroy in 1843.

John C. Fremont led his first expedition through Owens Valley in 1844 and in 1845 gave the Owens River and the Kern River their names. On the 1845 trip Fremont was in contact with Joe Walker. On the earlier trip Kit Carson was a member of Fremont's command.

Next travelers of record were members of the ill-advised Death Valley '49er party, guided out of their predicament by Manly and Rogers.

During the following years, Mormons seeking to establish an outpost at San Bernardino came through the southeastern corner of Inyo County on the "old Spanish trail." In 1854, Mormons are reputed to have discovered the first gold mine in the desert.

In 1855, a survey of the public lands east of the Sierras and south of Mono Lake was undertaken. The surveyor, A. W. Von Schmidt's field notes report Owens Valley worthless to whiteman both in soil and climate. He estimates a population of about 1,000 Indians of what he called the Mono tribe in the valley.

In 1859, the Indian population of Owens Valley was increased by fugitives from the Tule River area. Settlers in Visalia were conducting severe reprisals against marauding Indians. Indians from southern California, unwilling to accept domination of the mission regime, also filtered into Owens Valley. Raiding of ranches for horses for food was a continual aggravation to early settlers. In 1859, a military expedition was organized at Fort Tejon to investigate stories that Owens Valley was a stronghold of the horsethief Indians.

In 1859, gold finds along the southern Sierras and Inyo Mountains brought many prospectors through Owens Valley to camps such as Aurora and Monoville.

In 1860, Dr. Darwin French, pursuing the legend of the Lost Gun-sight Mine of '49er days discovered the ledges of Coso. During the following year Coso and its offshoot camps were the chief places of population in Inyo County south of Mono Lake. It is difficult to sort legend from fact in stories of the Coso mines. Assays as rich as \$1,226.59 in silver (at \$1.34 per ounce) and gold worth \$20.45 per ton were claimed for the Coso mines.

In the excitement of the first strikes at Coso, plans for a toll road from Visalia and other ambitious schemes flourished.

Renewal of Indian warfare in Owens Valley temporarily put Coso out of operation. In 1862, the camp was deserted by miners when military aid was unavailable. Upon their return everything had been demolished except the machinery of the Hitchens and Munroe steam mill.

After a brief promise of prosperity in 1862, financial troubles as well as Indians beset the mine operators at Coso. The mill was burned during one of the periods of Indian-scare abandonment. An unsuccessful effort was made to collect \$250,000 from the government for damage done by the Indians. A doubt lingered whether the burning was, in fact, Indian depredation or arson.

By 1867, American miners had left the Coso mines and Mexican miners took over. The locality then became known as the "Spanish mines." A record book of the Coso district contains minutes of a reorganization meeting held in March, 1868. It is written in Spanish and signed by 18 Mexican names. Mexicans continued to work the Coso mines for many years.

It was in 1861 and 1862 that ranchers and cattlemen began to move into the Owens Valley and the surrounding areas. Indians of the valley were openly hostile to loss of their home ranges and their gathering grounds for seeds and pinyon nuts. Local Indians were aided by Nevada and San Joaquin Valley bands. Skirmishes and retaliation were initiated by Indians and whites alike. Whites were leaving the valley with their cattle and sheep.

As a result of this disorder, Fort Independence was staffed on July 4, 1862 by a detachment of U. S. Cavalry. Ultimately, conferences between whites and Indians produced tentative agreements for establishment of a reservation. Six townships were laid off for Indians and whites respected the temporary reservation. Nothing came of a bill introduced into the Congress for implementation of this reservation plan.

Peace was short lived and guerilla warfare soon broke out again. In the spring of 1863 a massacre of Indians in Kernville fired tempers on both sides.

In July of 1863, 906 Indians from Owens Valley and adjacent regions were taken to San Sebastian Reservation near Fort Tejon. With only about half the Indian population rounded up for the internment, and many escapees and stragglers returning to the valley, settlers sent an invitation to the exiles to return.

Indian troubles continued until 1867 when the desert Indians raided the "Spanish mines" at Coso. The trouble spilled over to ranches around Owens Lake and a detachment of cavalry from Fort Independence with a volunteer force of settlers. It was expected the Indians would be found at Coso Hot Springs. They were trailed to "Rainy Springs Canyon" about 20 miles away (Location of this is undetermined. It is described as a rancheria surrounded by large pine trees and may possibly be a site on the eastern slopes of Coso Peak.).

Both sides lost heavily in the skirmish but the whites were able to kill the Indian leader and several other men. This confrontation was the last recorded for the southern portion of the Owens Valley and adjacent areas.

Continued prospecting of the Inyo Mountains and the Sierra Nevadas brought additional miners to the area. Good grazing lands and fertile soils attracted stockmen and ranchers.

Inyo County had its full share of violence, gun fights, and fugitives from the law during these years. Drifters from the northern gold fields and adventurers of all kinds kept law enforcement in the region lively.

The remaining Indians lived in small rancherias and worked as hands on the nearby ranches.

Originally possessing little in the way of formal culture, the Indians of the Owens Valley took on whiteman ways once they decided to accept settlers in their home ranges.

7. Conclusions regarding Coso-Panamint Indians

Extensive search of the ethnological literature on Indians of east central California brings little to light about the Coso-Panamints. Facts that can be accepted as definitive are:

1. The Coso-Panamints never existed in large numbers.
2. They ranged over an extensive and undefined territory from the crest of the Sierra Nevada as far north as Owens Lake and south and east across the desert.
3. Few mentions of Coso Hot Springs are found in research conducted during the late 1920's and early 30's.
4. The Coso-Panamints were considered to have lost their identity as a separate people sometime before 1922.
5. They carried on trade via the Indians of the Kern River Valley with the Yokuts of the San Joaquin Valley and participated in some degree of cultural exchange.
6. There is no evidence in available research materials to support a theory that either the Coso-Panamints or the Owens Valley Paiutes gathered in large encampments at the hot springs for ceremonial or therapeutic events.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Carruthers, W. Loafing Along Death Valley Trails. Death Valley Publishing Company, 1951.
- Chalfant, W. A. The Story of Inyo. Chalfant Press, 1922; Pinyon Press, reprint 1959.
- Coleville, F. V. "The Panamint Indians of California." American Anthropologist, Vol. V, 1892.
- Davis, J. T. "Trade Routes and Economic Exchange Among the Indians of California." University of California Archaeological Survey, No. 54, 1961.
- Heizer, R. F. & Whipple, M. A. The California Indians. University of California Press, 1951.
- Kroeber, A. L. "Handbook of the Indians of California." Bureau of Ethnology, The Smithsonian Institution, Bulletin 78, 1925; reprinted California Book Co. Ltd., 1953.
- Kroeber, T. L. & Heizer, R. F. Almost Ancestors. Sierra Club, 1968.
- Lee, W. S. Great Deserts of California. G. P. Putman's Sons, 1963.
- Lowie, Robert H. "The Cultural Connection of Californian and Plateau Shoshonean Tribes." University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. 20, 1923.
- MacGowan, K. Early Man in the New World. Macmillan Company, 1950.
- Park, W. Z. and others "Tribal Distribution in the Great Basin." American Anthropologist, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1938.
- Roberts, Oliver de la Fontaine The Great Understander. W. M. Walter, 1931.
- Steward, J. H. "Ethnography of the Owens Valley Paiute." University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. 33, No. 3, 1933.
- Steward, J. H. "Two Paiute Autobiographies." University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. 33, 1933.

Underhill, R. The Northern Paiute Indians of California and Nevada.
Branch of Education, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1941.

Voegelin, E. W. "Tubatulabal Ethnography." University of California
Anthropological Records, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1938.

Wheat, M. M. Survival Arts of the Primitive Paiutes. Reno: Univer-
sity Press, 1967.

Wheeler, G. M. Report upon Geographical and Geological Explorations
and Surveys West of the One Hundredth Meridian, Government Printing
Office, 1875.

Inquiries to museums, libraries, and individuals provided additional
background information.

DISTRIBUTION OF MAJOR SHOSHONEAN LINGUISTIC
GROUPS IN CALIFORNIA AND THE GREAT BASIN

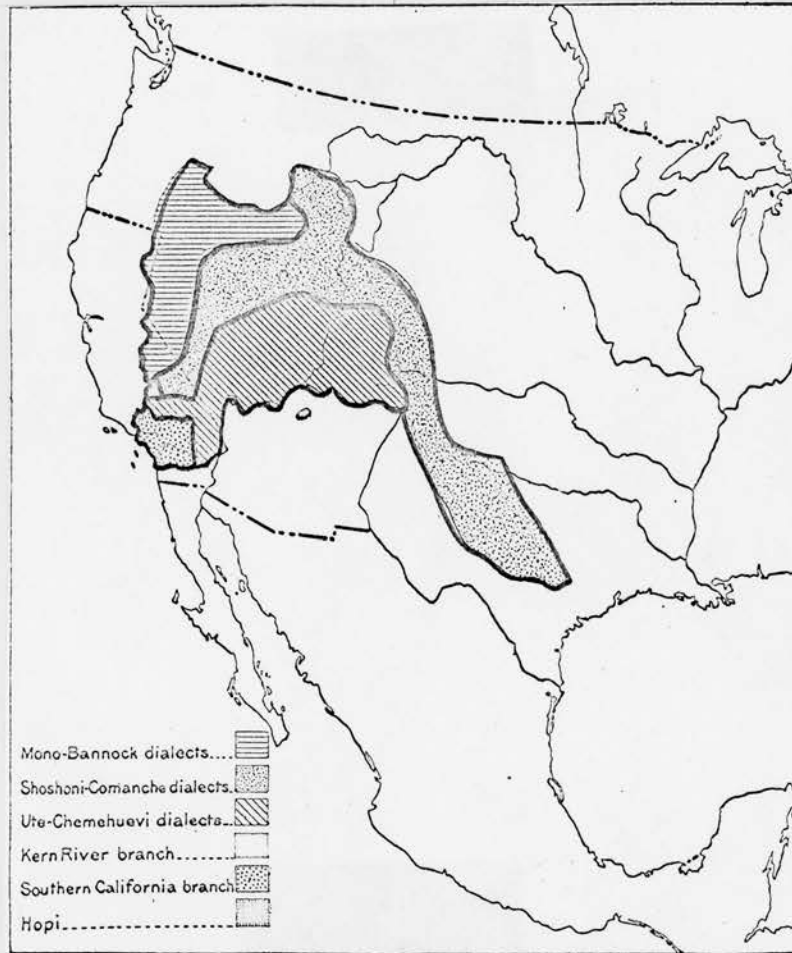


FIG. 52.—Clustering of Shoshonean divisions in California.

Map No. 1

from A. L. Kroeber - Handbook of California Indians

DISTRIBUTION OF UTO-AZTECAN FAMILY OF LINGUISTIC
AFFILIATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

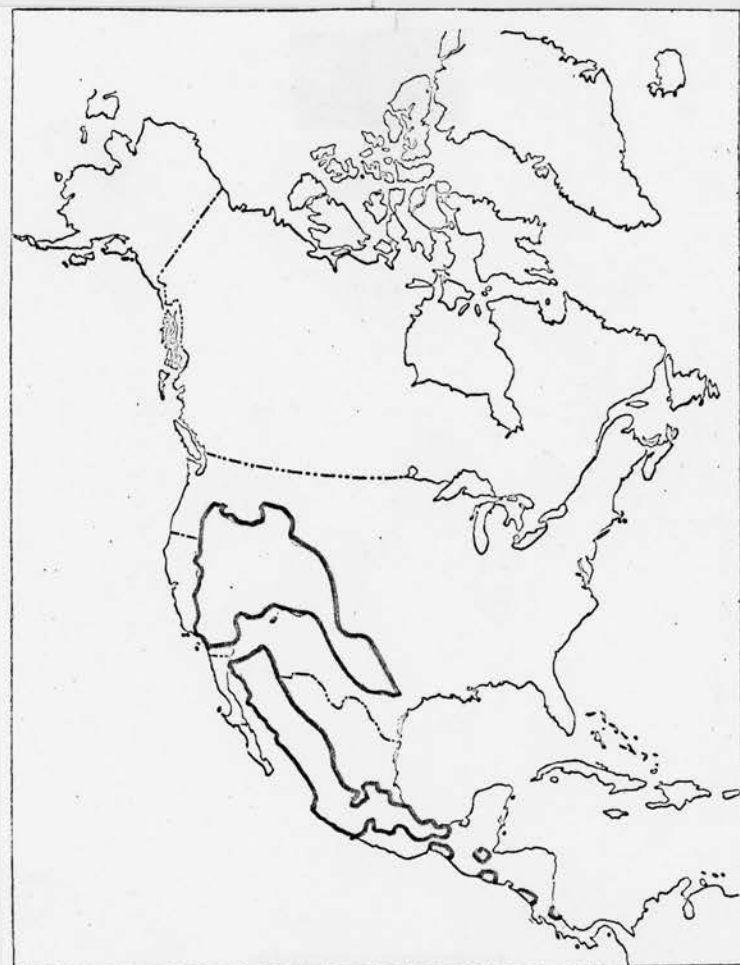


Fig. 50.—Uto-Aztecan family.

Map No. 2

from A. L. Kroeber - Handbook of the Indians of California