



## KOYOOOE TUKADU: PYRAMID LAKE PAIUTE KIT



### ◆ WE ARE ALL PEOPLE OF THIS EARTH

January and February in the Great Basin Desert was a quiet time. Snow covered the nuts stashes, the ice prevented fishing on the lakes and marshes. Rodents and other mammals were in hibernation forcing man and coyote to fight over the jackrabbit who was also struggling to find its own food. The natives prepared all year to have enough food preserved for these harsh winter months.

Sometimes in January trout would swim upstream to spawn. Groups of men got together and built a net across the river to delay the fish on their journey. The men would sit on the top, scooping up the struggling fish with hand-held nets.

The hunting became slightly better when the skinny ground squirrels came out of hibernation in February. The hunters would catch the squirrels by blocking off all but one of the exits of their burrows, where the men would wait patiently until the squirrel came out. Since some arrows were made with greasewood or rosewood shafts, the squirrels were only stunned by the arrow until the hunter got closer to kill it. By early summer the squirrels were fat enough to be caught by swift runners.

The blackening skies and loud squawking of birds returning to the marshes from the south signaled that spring had arrived. With these birds came the new shoots of cattail in the marshes that housed the birds' nests. The women would wade in the marsh and reach down into the cold winter water to get some fresh green food for their hungry children. The natives would compete with the jackrabbit for the new growth on the hills, both eating it raw. The women and children searched for roots and cabbage that could be boiled and eaten. Men would maneuver their tule and cattail boats around the marshes in search of eggs, while the women wove bags out of tule to carry them home in. Ducks were trapped in the marshes by nets set up and watched by the men.

May was fishing season. Trout, cui-ui, and other fish began their spawning run up the Truckee River. Paiutes from all different bands would join the Kooyooe Tukadu at Pyramid Lake to fish. Fish runs were dictated by the temperature and the amount of fresh water flowing from the river into the lake. Sometimes almost no fish could be seen while other times the river would be so thick with them that the men caught them by the hundreds and the children could grab the fish in their arms. The women would visit with each other while cutting and laying the fish out to dry. Fish was cooked on a fire made out of driftwood allowing everyone to feast on the plentiful fish for days.



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In June the seeds of the desert would be ripe for gathering. Mustard seed and mentzelia seed, given to the elderly when they were sick, were beaten and carried in finely-woven baskets. As word traveled about a food source that was plentiful in an area, the bands would pack up and head to that area before the animals ate all of the food. The men set traps that would catch the creatures of the night to supplement their diet. When the crop was harvested the Numu took their belongings and moved onto the next area. June was a good time to hunt the jackrabbit. As a young mans' first kill the animal was presented to his old aunt or grandmother who boiled, chewed, and rubbed the meat on the young hunter. The rest of the family enjoyed the meat, but hunters did not eat the meat of their first kill.

By summertime the ducklings in the marshes were getting fat, and the old ducks had begun molting their flight feathers. Men on boats would drive the helpless birds out of the water, where they would be captured, killed on the shore, and eaten or preserved.

In July, the rice grass was gathered so that the seed could be taken out and husked to make meal for gruel. Pollen from the cattail was collected and baked in between its' leaves on hot coals.

By August, the buck berry trees were found in groves forming thorny thickets covering thousands of acres in the river bottoms. The buck berry trees provided the most abundant berry in the Great Basin. The natives beat the branches so the berries would fall into their baskets. The berries were then hand-pressed through a basketry sieve into a sugarless sauce. The berries left on the sieve were then sun-dried for winter use. These buck berry groves were wonderful places to hide from the summer sun.

The fall brought the pine nut festival, allowing the Numu an abundant supply of pine nuts. November was time for the rabbit drive. This community event was head by the rabbit-hunt captain who found the site and built a fire to help families find their way from the mountains. While waiting for the others to join them some Numu sang, played games, and courted. The families brought their two-inch mesh nets that were three feet high to be strung across the desert between the bushes. The men would drive the rabbits into these vertical nets while the women stayed behind gambling at camp. Night brought the smell of sagebrush smoke, roasted meat, and the sounds of song and laughter. After the rabbit drive, the families moved back to the hills where the skilled hands of the old were left to gather and feast on the nutritious nuts with the growing children.

When the snow came it was time to bury the nuts and move back to the valley. The women prepared their homes and gathered their food supplies for the winter. The men would hunt anything that moved except the coyote, magpie, and crow. During the storms, families huddled close to the small fire in their shelter as the elders slept. Usually one meal a day was eaten. Soups were cooked in water tight baskets with stones from the fire. Wintertime was spent gathering willow, making baskets, and telling stories that could only be told when the rattlesnake was in hibernation.