



KOYOUE TUKADU:
PYRAMID LAKE PAIUTE KIT



◆ WE ARE ALL PEOPLE OF THIS EARTH

Pine Nut time was the most important for the Numu. It was a time where religion, play, work, and happiness were all meshed together. In August, a scout was sent out to locate the best crop for the year. The scout returned with a branch that held some immature cones. Now that the location had been determined plans were made for the annual prayer-dance.

Before sunup a small party of men and women left their camp in the valley and headed to the pine nut forest with their harvest baskets, water jugs, and a small amount of the most nourishing food - cattail seed. When they were settled in at the pine nut groves they waited until the next day to begin. Before the sun came up, the party prayed to the "Peoples Father" asking for good health and dug a fire pit. One Numu stayed behind to watch that the fire in the pit remained where it heated only the bottom and the rim of the dirt around it. The rest of the party went off to fill a few baskets of immature, unopened cones. The gatherers returned by midday. They removed the hot coals from the pit, dumped in the cones, pushed the hot earth over the nuts, and built a fire on top of the earth. An old woman with special powers asked the spirits not to bother the party since they were not here to do any harm. After roasting for 1-2 hours the green cones were opened and the nuts were removed. When the cones are mature the nuts were a lot easier to remove. When the party collected enough nuts for everyone at camp to take part of the ritual, they returned from the hills carrying a small tree for the formal ceremony.

At sundown the Numu, standing shoulder to shoulder, formed a circle around the tree. The man who was gifted with song began to sing while the rest slowly shuffled to the left. The Paiutes would use the great power of song and dance as a form of prayer. The Pine Nut Dance was for rain so the nuts would not dry up. They danced in a circle moving clockwise while an elder lady with a basket of water went in the opposite direction outside of the dancers. Believed to have the power to make rain a twig of sagebrush was dipped in water and sprinkled on the ground. She also scattered pine nuts around the circle as an offering for what was taken. At midnight the lady gave a small amount of nuts to the dancers while they rested before they continued to dance until the sun came up.

The Numu rested during the day and built fires at dusk to keep the insects away. They ate and played song filled hand games that often took days. The Numu went about their daily chores until the rose hips turned red in the valley signaling them to pack up and move to the hills where the pine nuts were now ripe.

Back in the cool hills they filled their water jugs for the mountain springs. They prayed to the cool water that was thought to be the cure to all ailments. The women built shelters while the men hunted and the children and elderly collected wood. Starting at the lower foothills, the Numu made their way up the slopes collecting, carrying, cleaning, roasting, and grinding the nuts. Unopened cones were left in grass-lined pits covered with grass, brush, and heavy stones so when the seeds burst in late spring they had an extra food supply.



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By now the pine nut forest was filled with natives harvesting their most delicious and nutritious food. Single-leaf pinions are the only nuts used by the native of the Great Basin area. These nuts are the size of an olive pit and lie in pairs behind each cone-scale. Boys climbed the pinions to shake out the pine cones, the men shook the trees with long poles while the old men tended to their traps.

Pine Nut Festival

