

Ahwahnee Village

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Preface

Information for this web exhibit has been gathered from many sources. They are acknowledged in text or the references section. Photographs not credited were taken by me. I'd like to thank the Native Americans and historians that preserved the stories here, that made the Ahwahnee village exhibit possible. Isabelle Howard Jimenez, who died in 1996, translated the exhibit signs into Miwok.

—Dan Anderson, July 2005

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Introduction

Welcome — *h#k#ko* (*heekeko*) (Southern Miwok)



Map of Indian village exhibit "Ahwahnee"

The Miwok Village of Ahwahnee is located behind the Visitor Center and Yosemite Museum buildings in Yosemite Village, Yosemite Valley. A trail takes you through a re-constructed Yosemite Indian village of the 1870s. The largest Miwok village in Yosemite Valley, the village of Ahwahnee, was once in this area, just to the north of here. About 200-300 people lived in the village in Winter, then would spread out to camp sites in the summer. Signs along the path will introduce you to the structures in the village and the plants used by Native people.

Southern Sierra Miwok Sounds

Sierra Miwok is not a written language. The written alphabets used are phonetic and non-standard. The alphabet used on the interpretative signs is the same as in *The Miwok in Yosemite: Southern Miwok Life, History, and Language in the Yosemite Region* (Yosemite: Yosemite Association, 1996), by Craig D. Bates. To aid in approximate pronunciation, here are the Sierra Miwok vowels and constants.

Vowels

a	like the a in father
aa	like the a in father, but dragged out
e	like the e in met
ee	like the e in met, but dragged out
i	like the i in it
ii	like the ee in see
o	like the o in go
oo	like the o in cold, but dragged out
u	like the u in June
uu	like the u in June, but dragged out
# (inverted e)	like the e in places
## (inverted ee)	like the e in places, but dragged out

Consonants

'	(glottal stop) a clipped passage of air before a vowel and a catch at the end of a vowel
ch	like the ch in church, however, between vowels, ch sometimes sounds just like the j in just
h	like the h in house
k	like the k in keep, however, it may sound somewhat like a g when surrounded by vowels
l	like the l in leaf
m	like the m in man
# (ng)	like the ng in sing
p	like the p in pool
s	like the z in zebra between or after l, m, n, # (n dropped), w, or y. Elsewhere like the s in see.
š	like the sh in she
t	formed by pressing the tip of the tongue against the upper teeth without a puff of air
t.	formed by curling the tip of the tongue behind the alveolar ridge (behind the front teeth). Between vowels and after n, it will sound like the d in dog.
w	like the w in way
y	like the y in yellow

From Craig D. Bates, *The Miwok in Yosemite: Southern Miwok Life, History, and Language in the Yosemite Region* (Yosemite: Yosemite Association, 1996), p. 3.

Linguists may want to compare these sounds and alphabet with alphabet in Sylvia M. Broadbent's *The Southern Sierra Miwok Language* (1964) and the alphabet in L. S. Freeland and Sylvia M. Broadbent's *Central Sierra Miwok Dictionary* (1960). Words used on some exhibit signs uses Freeland & Broadbent's alphabet instead of the alphabet defined above.

History

usenhiime (Southern Miwok)

Indian people have lived in Yosemite for nearly 4000 years. Miwok legends tell of the creation of people here, and of events that took place long before the coming of non-Indians. By the late 18th century, it appears that most of Yosemite was populated by Southern Miwok people, with Central Miwok people utilizing the northern quarter of the park.

The lives of Indian people in the Sierra Nevada have changed greatly since the 1790s, when the first influences of non-Indians were felt. During the 19th century, Mono Lake Paiute people from east of the Sierra crest, former Mission Indians from the California coast, and Chukchansi Yokuts and Western Mono people came to live with the indigenous Southern Miwok People of the Yosemite region. [Web editor's note: many or most of Tenaya's band were Mono Paiutes and by first contact Mono Paiutes had also occupied Hetch-Hetchy Valley ("Notes on Hetch-Hetchy Valley" by Charles F. Hoffman, 1868) —dea]

The California Gold Rush of 1849 brought thousands of non-Indian miners to the Sierra Nevada. Many miners were ruthless in their search for gold, and thousands of Miwok people were killed or died of starvation. Yosemite Valley was first entered by non-Indians in 1851 by the Mariposa Battalion, a state-sponsored militia. The Battalion made two attempts to remove the Indian people to the Fresno River Reservation, but those attempts, along with a U.S. Army punitive expedition in 1852, were ultimately unsuccessful in removing the Indian people from the Yosemite region.

When non-Indians began settling in the Yosemite area, life changed drastically for the native residents. Euro-American clothing styles and foods were adopted. Men worked in a variety of jobs, including guides, wranglers and wood cutters for local non-Indians, and women provided childcare, housekeeping services, and wove baskets to sell to non-Indian residents and visitors.

After 1900, the number of Indian people living in Yosemite began to shrink. The older Indian Village was disbanded in the early 1930s and a group of cabins was established as a new Indian Village (with the National Park Service as landlord). With housing more difficult to obtain, fewer Indian people came to Yosemite for employment. The National Park Service gradually dismantled the new village, and the last homes there were razed in 1969.

Today, descendants of Yosemite's native people live both nearby and scattered throughout the world. In 1990 over 400 Indian people resided in Mariposa County and 500 in Tuolumne County.

[Web editor's note: The descendants of the original Yosemitees were taken to Mono Lake after the death of Chief Tenaya. The survivors of the Mono's attack were taken back to Mono Lake and absorbed into the Mono Paiute population. There was never any documentation of those few braves who escaped, but it is documented about the survivors being taken to Mono Lake (*Discovery of the Yosemite* Chapter 18, by Lafayette H. Bunnell, 1892). The majority of Indians of Mariposa and Tuolumne were not from Chief Tenaya's band, but were the Indians who signed the Fremont Treaty. The Majority of the Yosemite Natives ended up at Mono Lake, Bridgeport, Coleville and towns south of Mono Lake to Bishop. Some even ended up in Nevada. —dea]

Ahwahnee and Yosemite

Yosemite Valley was called *awahni* by the Southern Miwok. While this word has been the subject of many fanciful translations, Southern Miwok speakers contend that it means "place like a gaping mouth," likening the shape of Yosemite Valley to that of a huge mouth. The Miwok people living in Yosemite came to be known as *awahnichi*, "people who live in *awahni*."

Miwok residences west of Yosemite sometimes referred to the Native residents of Yosemite as *yohemite* or *yohometuk*. The word Yosemite is derived from these words, which translate "they are killers."



Sharing History and Culture

Many local native people working in this re-created Indian village have shared their knowledge since the 1920s. Their dedication has contributed to the preservation of their people's culture in the Yosemite region.

Acorn Granary

chakka (Southern and Central Miwok)



Acorn granary

Black oak acorns were a substantial part of the diet of California Indian people. When stored properly, acorns will keep indefinitely, so an effective storage house was developed.

The granaries were raised above the ground on a stump or large rock, and consisted of a nest-like container made from grapevines and buckbrush built between four upright poles. The cavity was lined with wormwood and then filled with acorns. The entire granary was then shingled with conifer boughs and capped at the top with layers of more boughs, cedar bark, and after the coming of non-Indians, canvas.

Acorn granaries were common until the turn of the century, but their use had died out by the 1920s. Today, Indian people store acorns in gunny sacks or boxes which are kept in their homes, garages or outbuildings.

Pounding Rock

soose' (Southern Miwok)

tschoseh (Central Miwok)



Pounding rock

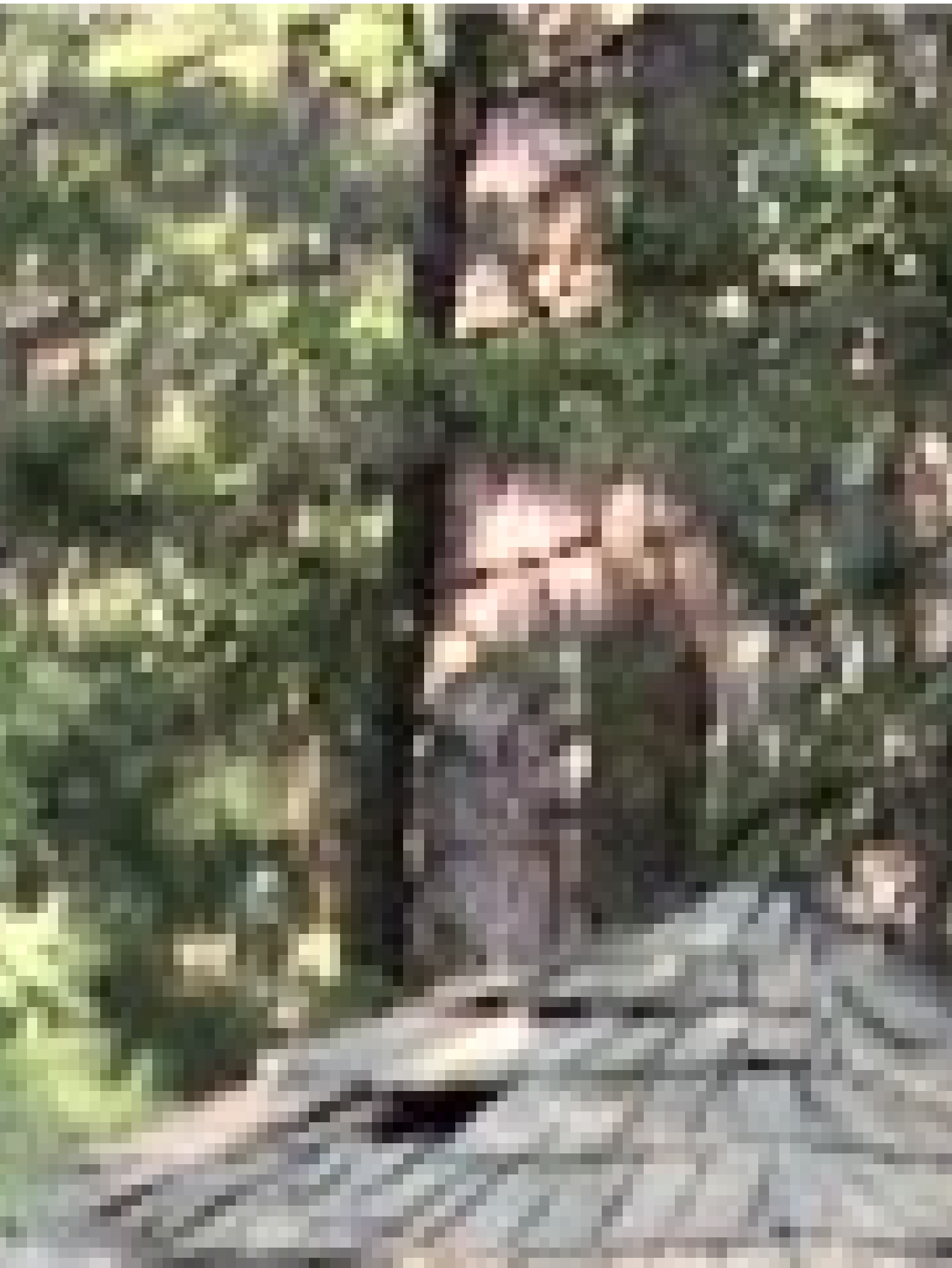
Women had distinct preferences for how deep mortar holes should be for pounding different types of foods. This pounding rock is ideal for pounding acorns. Shallow mortar holes, like these, were preferred for processing black oak acorns, while deeper holes (6" (15 cm.) or more in depth) were used for manzanita berries.

As acorns are pounded into flour, about a gallon of acorns are mounded up over the shallow hole. They are repeatedly pounded with a pestle (weighing from 5-12 pounds (2-5.5 kg.)), which eventually reduces the dried, cleaned, acorn-nut meat into a coarse meal. The meal is sifted with a special basket and only the finest flour is kept aside; the coarser meal is again pounded with more nut-meats, and the process is continued.

After pounding, the acorn flour is placed in a sand basin and the bitter tannin compounds are removed by repeated applications of water. The resultant dough is mixed with water and boiled in watertight baskets by placing and stirring red-hot stones directly in the mush.

Chief's House

hayaapo# 'uuchu (*hayaapong 'uuchu*) (Southern Miwok)



Chief's House

Miwok leaders had large homes than others in the village, for they often hosted dinners and events for large groups of people. By the turn of the century many Miwok people built structures like this one: they were based on Miwok homes, but built using Euro-American technology.

One, built in the 1920s near today's Yosemite Medical Clinic, belonged to Mary Wilson, a Miwok leader. It was probably destroyed after Wilson's death in 1930. After the Yosemite Indian Village was moved in the 1930s, Wilson's daughter, Phoebe Hogan, had a similar structure built near her home, just west of Sunnyside Campground. It was razed in the 1960s when the last Indian village was removed from Yosemite Valley.

Ceremonial Roundhouse

hangngi' (Southern and Central Miwok)



Ceremonial Roundhouse



Inside ceremonial roundhouse

The roundhouse, or *hangngi'* (*hangngi'*), was the center of village religious activities and the focal point of large, affluent villages. Most Miwok roundhouses were earth-covered, but after contact with non-Indians the majority were built with split-wood shake roofs, as they were easier to maintain.

This roundhouse has a roof of incense cedar bark, a roof-style that probably did not occur before contact with non-Indians. The main entrance is on the southeast, facing the morning sun.

Four big oak posts support the roundhouse, which needs reconstruction every dozen years or so. Built in 1992, it replaced one that was built on this site in 1973. The 1992 construction was a cooperative effort of the National Park Service, the American Indian Council of Mariposa County, the Youth Conservation Corps and the Yosemite Fund.

The roundhouse is used for ceremonial activities by members of the local Indian community at various times of the year. Typically, four men dance around a fire to the beat of a chanter.

Further Information

- “Earth Lodge,” *Miwok Material Culture* by Barrett and Gifford (1938)
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Bark House

'ummuucha (Southern and Central Miwok)



Bark house

Bark-covered homes were used by Miwok people living in Yosemite Valley. Built on a framework of pine or incense cedar poles lashed with grapevines, they were long-lasting. Today many people think of them as the only kind of Miwok house, but this was not the case. Only brush-covered, dome-shaped dwellings appear in the earliest-known photographs of Miwok people. When bark-covered structures are first evident in photos of Yosemite, they were simple shelters which provided protection from summer sun and thunderstorms rather than for year-round use.

The construction of a incense cedar-bark home required a number of old-growth incense cedar trees which had been dead for at least two years (allowing the bark to loosen). Incense cedar bark was easier to obtain after the start of Euro-American lumbering operations. Most photographs of Miwok bark homes taken at the turn of the century show commercial lumber also used in the houses' construction.

When the materials were readily available, bark homes were relatively easy to build and lasted a number of years. It is more difficult to make brush shelters that effectively shed rain and snow, and they frequently need re-building.

Sweathouse *chap#* (*chape*) (Southern Miwok)

tcapu'ya (Southern and Central Miwok)



Sweathouse

The sweathouse, heated by an oak-wood fire, was used by men before hunting and for curative purposes. After one to three hours in the sweathouse, the deer hunter would emerge and bathe himself in a nearby pool of water. He then rubbed himself with wormwood or another aromatic plant to remove human scent, which would allow the hunter to get closer to his quarry. A sweatmaster guards the entrance, which faces the morning sun. Only people in good standing with the tribe are allowed inside.

This sweathouse replaced several earlier sweathouses that stood on this site. The first was built in the 1930s by Chris Brown (“Chief Lemee”), as part of the re-created Indian Village constructed here in the late 1920s.

This sweathouse is built on a framework of four incense cedar poles covered with successive layers of buckbrush, wormwood, pine needles, cedar bark, and earth.

Miwok Cabin

chinnimi 'uuchu (Southern Miwok)

kotcha (Central Miwok)



Miwok cabin

Soon after non-Indians settled in Yosemite in the 1850s, local Indian people began emulating the building styles of these Euro-Americans. Cabins such as this one were in use of residences in this area until the 1920s. Built directly on the ground, they often had a central fire pit and a smoke hole in the roof, blending elements of traditional Miwok architecture with those of Euro-Americans.

Today, Miwok and Paiute people live in houses, apartments and mobile homes, just like other Americans. While some people have built traditional dwellings for demonstration purposes, living in old-style houses is a thing of the past.

Plant Use

Miwok elders tell us that by the early 1900s most Miwok people no longer lived the old lifestyle and used fewer native plants. By then, Miwok people were employed by non-Indians and brought supplies at local stores instead of only gathering natural food and herbal medicines.

Today, some Indian people continue to use herbal medicines, and prepare native foods (such as acorn mush) for family gatherings and celebrations. A few people occasionally gather plants for food, baskets, and other uses.

Few tribal elders know how to gather and use all of the native plants, but since the 1970s, a small number of Indian and non-Indian people have been attempting to re-learn these ancient skills.

- Manzanita
 - Spicebush
 - Mock Orange
 - Black Oak
 - Mistletoe
 - Creek Dogwood
 - Incense Cedar
 - Canyon Live Oak
 - California Buckeye
-

Manzanita

Archostaphylos viscida ssp. *mariposa*
'eye (Southern Miwok)

e'ye (Southern Miwok)



Manzanita

Manzanita is the hardest wood in the Sierra Nevada, and was preferred for fires used to heat stones for cooking acorn mush, and to heat underground ovens. Manzanita leaves were sometimes sucked by Miwok people to quench thirst, as saliva production was stimulated.

Dried manzanita berries were picked in late summer. They were cleaned and pounded into a coarse meal and placed on a closely woven winnowing basket. Cold water was poured over the meal and the resulting cider was caught in a watertight basket or carved oak bowl. The cider was prepared as a special treat for large gatherings, where it was sucked from a small brush made of grass or Cooper's hawk tail feathers.

Today, a few people prepare manzanita cider for ceremonial gatherings, and others, using modern techniques, made manzanita-cider jelly and syrup.

Spicebush

Calycanthus occidentalis

hokhokot (Southern Miwok)

so'ksokotu (Central Miwok)



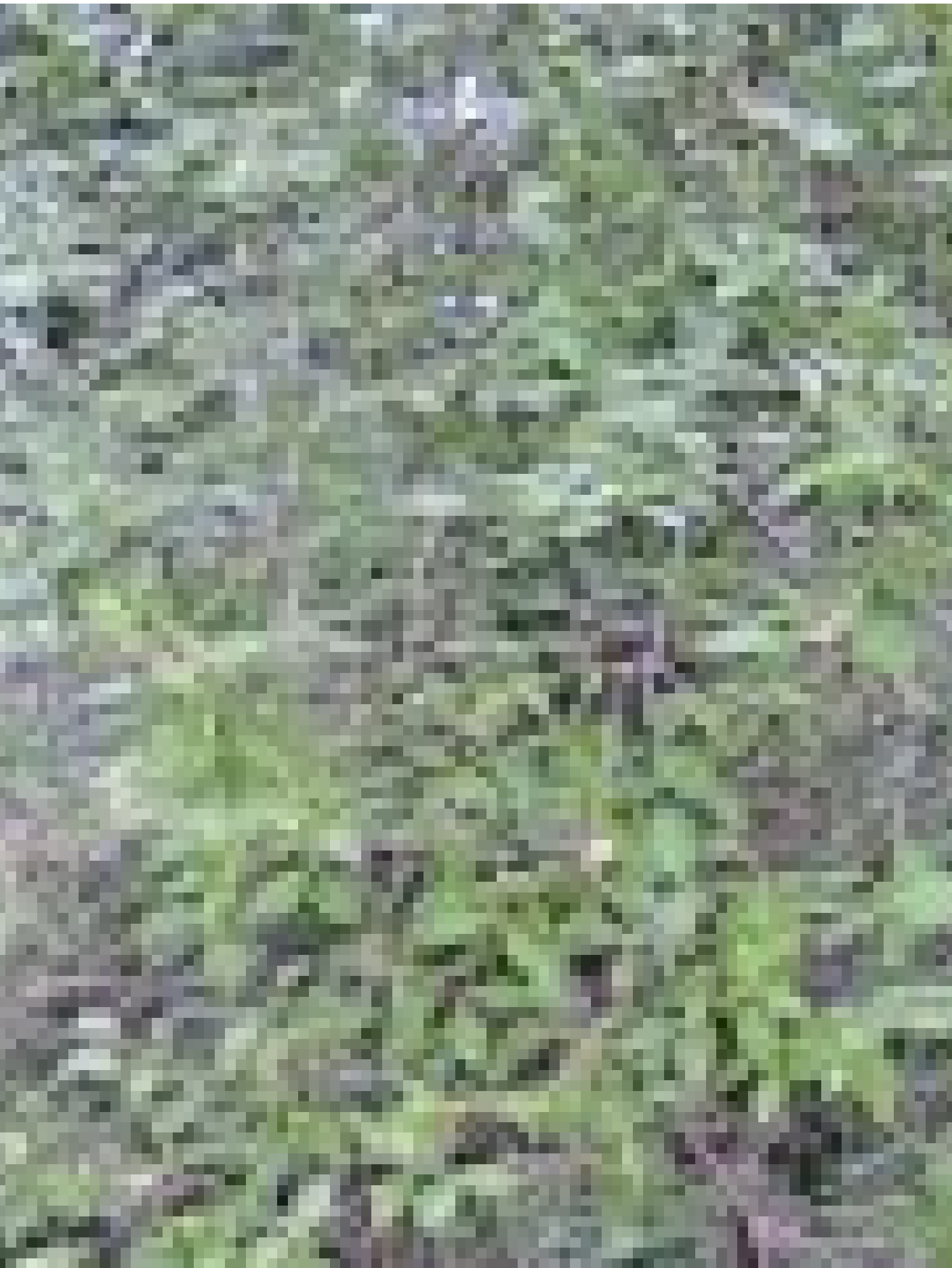
Spicebush

Spicebush leaves and bark release an aromatic, citrus-like smell when they are bruised. Straight, second-year shoots which grow out of dense spicebush thickets were used by the Miwok for arrow shafts. The shafts produced were somewhat softer and less durable than those made from mock orange, but spicebush shafts were highly regarded for their light weight. but

By 1900, Yosemite Indian people were no longer using or making bows and arrows, though Chris Brown (“Chief Lemee”) demonstrated arrow making in Yosemite between 1930 and 1950. In the 1950s, Lloyd Parker, a Miwok-Paiute resident of Yosemite, cut spicebush shafts for his grandsons to shoot with their toy bows, in lieu of finished arrows. Today, only a few Indian and non-Indian people make arrows from this plant.

Mock Orange

Philadelphus lewisii Lee (Southern Miwok)



Mock Orange

The straight, second-year shoots of mock orange bushes were used by the Miwok to make arrows. The dense wood is tough and resilient, but surrounds a white, pithy center, making a lightweight finished arrow.

Miwok arrows from the mid-19th century were highly valued and renowned for their excellent workmanship. Indian Canyon (*mata'*), northeast of you (to the right of Yosemite Falls and Lost Arrow Spire), known for its supply of this arrow wood, was also called *leemameti* by the Miwok, meaning “mock orange place.”

By the end of the 19th century few Miwok people made or used bows and arrows, as rifles were preferred for hunting.

Black Oak

Quercus kelloggii

teleeli (Southern Miwok)



Black Oak

One of the most important plant foods was acorn mush. Black oak acorns were preferred over other oaks by Miwok, Mono Lake Paiute and Western Mono peoples. Black oaks don't consistently produce good crops of acorns; in good years, each family might collect and store about 2000 pounds of acorn for use over the next several years.

Acorns were gathered in the autumn, dried, and stored until needed. Before they were eaten, the nuts were cracked, the peanut-like skin removed, and they were pounded to a fine flour. To remove bitter tannins, the flour was leached, placed carefully in a sand basin, and water poured over it for several hours. The leached flour was then mixed with water in a watertight cooking basket. Special, red-hot stones were placed in the basket, stirred consistently, and after about 20 minutes, the acorn mush boiled, thickened, and was fully cooked. The mush was called *n#ppa* by the Central Miwok, or sometimes *n#ppati* (*neppati*) by the Southern Miwok. The Miwok also made 'ule', a jelled loaf of thick acorn mush.

Mistletoe

Phoradendron villosum

tintikla (Southern Miwok)

tintila (Central Miwok)

High above you in the black oak are bunches of dark green growth — this is mistletoe. Miwok people cut the root ball (from which the mistletoe grows) from the tree and carved it into a ball. The ball was used to play a rough game similar to field hockey.

Mistletoe leaves and berries are poisonous, yet Miwok people picked mistletoe leaves, boiled them and drank the resulting tea as a treatment for rheumatism, epilepsy, hysteria, and other nervous conditions, and to induce abortions.

Mistletoe has seldom, if ever, been used in recent times by local Native Americans for any of these purposes. Today, many local Indian people (like non-Indians) only use mistletoe to decorate their homes during the Christmas season.

Creek Dogwood

Cornus sericea ssp. *sericea*



Creek Dogwood

Creek dogwood was used in twined basketry by the Miwok. Some baskets were made with young, red, unpeeled, winter-gathered creek dogwood shoots (the bark of the creek dogwood turns bright red during winter months). Other twined baskets have yellow-green colored warp rods — these are creek dogwood shoots gathered in the spring or summer, or gathered in the winter and then soaked in water for more than a week, which causes the shoots to lose color.

One utilitarian basket commonly made of creek dogwood was a seed beater, used to beat grass seeds into burden baskets. Prepared in various ways, the grass seeds were made into mush or eaten as a snack similar to “trail mix.” Many native grasses have now been replaced by exotic grasses, and fields of native grasses are difficult to find. Large-scale processing of native grasses for food by local Indian people ceases around 1900.

Incense Cedar

Calocedrus decurrens

moonoku (Southern Miwok)

mo.nok-u, capa.ha (Central Miwok)

Incense cedar bark was used to cover Miwok *'umuucha* (bark houses). Finely-pounded cedar bark was used as tinder for starting fires. Small boughs were used to break the fall of water when leaching acorn flour and large ones used to thatch *chakka* (acorn granaries).

Miwok bow-makers used straight, close-grained, knot-free staves from the high branches of incense cedars. Finely made Miwok bows, backed with a layer of deer sinew applied with soaproot glue, were well-known among neighboring tribes. Sierra Miwok bows were traded to Yokuts people across the San Joaquin Valley.

At the turn of the century, Miwok people remembered *Kau'tcitti* (also known as Captain Lewis) as the last professional bowyer in the Yosemite area. By 1900, fine, sinew-backed bows were no longer being made; they had been replaced by firearms during the 19th century.

Canyon Live Oak

Quercus chrysolepis

hakaaha (Southern Miwok)

sakasa (Central Miwok)



Canyon Live Oak

The acorns of the canyon live oak were prepared just as black oak acorns were. Considered to be the “second-best” acorn (most people preferred black oak acorns) available to the Miwok, some people liked to mix live oak acorns in with those of the black oak.

Today, people occasionally gather live oak acorns, generally mixing them with black oak acorns in making acorn mush.

A number of local Indian people still make acorn mush for special occasions. Few still pound acorns with stone mortars and pestles; most use electric grinders. Some cook acorn mush in a pot on a conventional stove, but most contend that the mush tastes better then boiled with hot stones.

California Buckeye

Aesculus californica

'unno (Southern Miwok)

siw# (Central Miwok)



California Buckeye

Miwok people made tea from buckeye leaves and drank it to treat lung congestion. Buckeye nuts were crushed and applied as a poultice for hemorrhoids. While the nuts are poisonous, in times of scarcity they were put through a protracted process of roasting or boiling, mashing, and leaching. The resulting mush was eaten for sustenance.

A few Miwok people occasionally peeled and dried buckeye nuts and added several of them to black oak acorns. They were then pounded into flour, leached, cooked, and eaten.

Since buckeye was a less-desirable food for most miwok people, few have prepared it as food since the 1920s.

http://www.yosemite.ca.us/ahwahnee_village/



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