II. A NORTHERN PAIUTE ACCOUNT

OF AN EARLY GREAT BASIN EXPLORING EXPEDITION

William Wihr

In January, 1974, while searching for documentary materials pertaining to the Pyramid Lake Paiute I came upon a previously unpublished account listed as Ethnological Document number 37:3 of the Department and Museum of Anthropology. These materials are part of the University Archives and are stored in the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley. This account as well as two word lists was recorded at Burns, Oregon by Dr. W. L. Marsden in 1913 (see Marsden 1923, and Heizer, Hester and Nichols 1972 for more information on Dr. Marsden).

Numana or Captain Dave is believed to have been born near Unionville, Nevada, south of Mill City and not far from the Humboldt River, on April 14, 1828. His father was Yapahtaka, a son of Truckee, of Truckee River fame. In 1871 he was given the chieftainship of the Kuyuidokado Paiute Band at Pyramid Lake by the aging Numaga, also known as Young Winnemucca. In 1879 he was chosen in council to succeed his uncle Old Winnemucca, or Poito, as chief of all the Northern Paiute. He was the last individual to hold this position. In 1888 he journeyed to Washington, D. C., and was commissioned to head the Pyramid Lake Indian Police, a position he held until his death in 1919.

Numana's personal character seems to vary with the race of his biographer. While on a visit to San Francisco he was described by newspaper reporters as ".....one of the leading men of the Piute Nation.....a very intelligent Indian" (Hopkins 1888:96). Janet Woodruff, a Bureau of Indian Affairs field matron at Wadsworth, Nevada from 1908 through 1915, had this to say of Captain Dave:

Not all the Piutes held Captain Dave in the highest esteem. To the whites, he was a clever Indian, a loyal friend who was called to the white man's councils to plan for the subjugation of the resisting Piutes. To some older Indians he was known as Numana, the betrayer an object of execration to the children of those who had been sold for gold and power; to the younger generation, he was just Numana, an old Piute spending his last days somewhere in the region of Nixon (Woodruff 1939:162).

Also from Woodruff's account, an Indian known only as Joe was quoted as saying "Uh-huh! Long time gone. Somebody say Numana is snake in sagebrush. No good" (ibid.).
Sara Winnemucca in her *Life Among the Paiutes* (1883) had an even more derogatory opinion of Numana's character. In describing how an Indian Agent had extorted her people she had this to add:

There are unprincipled men in all tribes, as I suppose there are among all people, and the agent found one for his work. He is known as "Captain Dave". Twenty years ago I knew him to blow a young girl's brains out because she refused to marry him, and his behavior ever since has been in keeping with that. It is no secret among my people that he exposed his wife to bad white men for money. He is not a "leading man". No man can be a leading man among Indians, unless he is honorable and brave. Dave is neither. On the contrary, he has no character whatsoever, and could always be hired to do a wicked thing. He is my own cousin (Hopkins 1883:96, 98).

Numana claimed that Frémont, who was the first white man to visit Pyramid Lake, giving it that name on January 10, 1844, was not the first white person that he had seen. If so he may have seen the Bonneville-Walker expedition as they traveled through the Sink of the Humboldt River in September of 1833, or the Bartleson-Bidwell party in October of 1841. As there is no record of any other whites in the area during this period I believe the following account to perhaps be a composite of these events:

**Numana's Account**

Long time ago we lived at Winnemogga (1). We moved this way and camped in eight camps. For there we hunt rabbits. Somebody yell and said "Hide, the whitemen are coming." Then everybody hides in a deep canyon alongside a river.

The whiteman came and camped two miles below us. They had back (pack?) --horse (2). Then my father told all the people not to build any fire and the next ask no fire until late in the afternoon. "I tell you this because if you make fire the white man might see the smoke and they might come and kill all of us (3). But tomorrow late in the afternoon you get dry wood and make fire because at that time the white man cannot see the smoke in the east." So we made no fire and had nothing to eat until next day at noon.

I was small at that time so slept good (4), but perhaps some older people had no sleep that night. Early in the morning my father went out but nobody saw him go away. At daylight we saw him coming back and he carried something under his arm. When he came home somebody asked, "Where you been and what is that you carry."

My father said, "I went out to see those white men and when I come near the camp one man come towards me but I keep going to him. When he was yet far off he held out his hand. I also held out my hand. He took my hand and
pull it up and down and in Indian language he said to me, 'I come (from) the plains which is far, far away, and saw many people on my way but nobody ever come to me like you. You are my friend. That is the reason I shake your hand. I have been a long time coming and wherever I camp I put up a post and this I write; In this part of the country the Indians are my friends because they have made no trouble for me (5). I am going far out west to look over a country which lays along a big water. Now, because you are a good friend I'll give you a bay horse which I left not far behind. He is poor and is tired, but here there is good feed for him and he will soon be fat (6). I'll also give you this.' He give me his food and I eat and it is good.'

Then my father opened his roll. What we saw then we did not know, but now I know that it was a white shirt, a (pair of) pants, some biscuits, some bacon, a knife, a piece of steel for making fire, a long piece of wire which was to be made into awls and (which was) this wise broken into little pieces and was given to my fathers friends. But my father kept the knife.

That was the first time we ever tasted bread and bacon because everybody took a bite and everybody said it was good food.

Next my father send my oldest brother to find the horse. Not long afterwards the horse got fat and we had a nice time with him. My brother liked the horse very much. But one day when all of the men went out hunting, I, being small, was left with my mother, and there came a Paiute man from somewhere in the west. He had a long rope and he took the horse and led him away and my brother cried. When my father came back from the hunt he did not go after the strange man who took our horse because he thought the horse may be killed long ago (7).

Notes

(1) This refers to Winnemucca Lake, to the east of Pyramid Lake. This Lake in times past received overflow waters from Pyramid Lake and the Truckee River.

(2) The Bartleson-Bidwell group had been reduced from a wagon train to a pack train weeks before reaching the Sink of the Humboldt. By that time most of the thirty-two members were on foot to save their few remaining animals (Bidwell 1937:19-23). Both the Frémont and Walker parties without a doubt included pack horses.

(3) This fear was probably well founded as the Bonneville-Walker trapping expedition, fearing attack, shot and killed thirty-nine Indians (this number varies as high as seventy-five in some accounts) at the Sink of the Humboldt River in September of 1833 (Ewers 1959:71; see also Ellison 1937:33 for a similar account of this massacre). Numana's band had at least heard of, if not been victims of this act.
The ban on fires was also quite sensible as whites, coming from the plains, often mistook smoke for war signals.

(4) Numana would have been five years old in 1833 at the time of Walker's visit, twelve in 1841 with Bartleson and Bidwell, and fifteen in 1844 during Frémont's visit.

(5) There is no record of Frémont, Walker, Bartleson and Bidwell or any other persons observing this practice. It would be ridiculous as no Nevada Indians could read at this time. Numana says that the whiteman spoke to him "in Indian language". Presumably this would have been in either Paiute or Shoshone, but again it is unlikely that any whites at this date knew either of these tongues.

(6) Frémont in his Narratives (Frémont and Nevins 1956:335) notes on January second, 1844, leaving an exhausted horse along the trail, eight days prior to his arrival at Pyramid Lake. If this account is indeed that of the Kuyuidokado encounter with Frémont, this might be reference to that horse. As Frémont's progress had been considerably slowed by snow and a dense fog, the horse would not be very far behind.

Leonard (of the Bonneville-Walker party) makes no reference to any event of this nature. His party, short of food by this time, would probably have butchered an exhausted horse for meat (Ewers, op. cit.:74). The same is without doubt true for Bidwell also.

(7) Early use of the horse among the Northern Paiute and other Great Basin tribes was usually for food rather than transportation. Perhaps this is what Numana's father had conjectured, and why he saw no point in trying to recover the stolen bay.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bidwell, John

Ellison, William H., ed.

Ewers, John C., ed.

Frémont, John C., and Allan Nevins (ed.)

Heizer, Robert F., T. R. Hester and M. P. Nichols (eds.)
1972 Notes on Northern Paiute Ethnography: Kroeber and Marsden Records. Archaeological Research Facility, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

Hopkins, Sara Winnemucca

Marsden, W. L.

Woodruffe, Janette