

III. WASHO HABITATION SITES IN THE LAKE TAHOE AREA

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INTRODUCTION

Lake Tahoe and the rivers draining into it lie entirely within the aboriginal territory of the Washo. Starting in the spring and continuing into autumn several different species of fish run in these rivers. The Washo spent the summer months fishing in the streams around the lake, each family moving on to another river whenever it saw fit, but usually confining itself to a particular section of the lake's perimeter. This report is limited to a discussion of those aspects of Washo culture which are primarily concerned with exploiting the Lake Tahoe area and includes a list of camp sites around the lake.

There are three geographically determined groups of Washo: those living north of Carson City are called wElmElthi (wElmEl, north);¹ Washo living in the Carson Valley are called pauwalu (pau, valley); and the California Washo are called hañalElthi (hañalEl, south) with the present California-Nevada border being the approximate dividing line between the groups. There are no apparent cultural differences between these last two groups, but the wElmElthi are distinguished from the others by their slow manner of speech. In the spring, when the Washo moved up to Lake Tahoe, the wElmElthi camped mainly around the northern half of the lake from McKinney around to Glenbrook. The pauwalu fished the west side of the lake south of McKinney, and both hañalElthi and pauwalu camped around the southern and eastern lake shore from site No. 5 (see map) to Glenbrook. However all families were free to camp anywhere around the lake.

The Washo preferred to camp in clearings for they feared attack by hostile Indians and wild animals and therefore usually located in open spaces close to the lake shore. A camp might consist of five or six circular windbreaks (gado), each housing a family. If the family had wintered in the Pine Nut Mountains, only the able bodied men and women went to the lake for fishing. The rest of the family was left behind and, when the snow had gone from the Carson and Washo valleys, they would move down from the hills in search of roots, grass seeds, birds, birds' eggs, and berries. From time to time someone who had gone to the lake would carry a load of fish back to the valley to help feed those who had been left behind. On the other hand, if there was no pine nut crop, a family might choose to winter at the lake. In this case the entire family engaged in the spring and summer fishing and berrying.

A permanent bedrock mortar was located near each camping site.

This was used to pound meat, fish, acorns, and pine nuts. Before using the mortar the Washo women would sprinkle a little water on it and mumble a few words in prayer. Ghosts of dead persons could travel on such things as mortars and this rite protected the user from a malevolent ghost. There are still a number of these mortars to be found around Lake Tahoe. Portable property was scarce. The climb from the valley to the lake was difficult, and the Washo carried mainly bows and arrows, a mano and metate, a few necessary baskets, and their fish harpoons.

FISHING TECHNIQUES

Harpooning: The larger fish could be harpooned. The harpoon shaft was made of willow which was oiled with groundhog fat and then rubbed with charcoal in order to darken it. A white shaft might scare the fish. The point was made from the leg bone of a goose and was about one and one-half inches long.

Fish blind: The fish were speared from a fish blind. The blind lasted about a month and established a claim over that particular spot. As long as the blind was up only the person who had erected it, and his family, could fish from that hole. The rights for building a blind at a particular hole carried over from year to year.

Dam or weir: At a suitable place on a stream the Washo would build a stone dam fine enough to catch everything except small minnows. Upstream the Indians made a big bundle of willow branches large enough to reach almost from bank to bank. Men, women, and children pushed the bundle along the stream, keeping it as close to the bottom as possible. Men and women standing along the dam would catch the fish in their bare hands and throw them into conical burden baskets similar to those used for carrying pine nuts. If the fish were too large for the basket, they were killed and thrown out on the bank. Spearmen walked along the bank during the drive trying to spot fish they could harpoon. After the drive the Washo lifted the bundle of willows from the water and untied it. Sometimes they found minnows, suckers, and chubs trapped among the branches.

Stream diversion: Some streams could be diverted from their channels and fish picked off the bottom. Donner Creek was fished in this manner. A similar technique consisted of draining small ponds wherever the formation of the stream bed permitted.

Fish nets: The Washo used as a fish net the same kind of net used

in the fall rabbit drive. The net was strung across the river and pegged to the river bottom. Upstream they made a drive, splashing about and dirtying the water. The fish would hit the net and entangle their gills and tails. When a number of fish had been snared the Washo unhooked the net and dragged it into shallow water where they killed the fish right in the net so as not to lose any. This drive was only for large fish.

Basketry fish traps: The Washo made conical, basketry fish traps. The entrance to the trap was funnel-shaped, leading the fish through a small hole into the trap. The trap might be six feet wide and was anchored in a narrow spot in a river. Rocks were fixed on both sides of the trap to prevent the fish from swimming around it. The trap was left up all night and emptied in the morning.

By hand: In the early morning when whitefish were cold and sluggish, they could be flipped out of the water by hand.

Lowie (1939:329) reports that the Washo used to fish in the lake from rafts made of willows and tule. Such rafts were used for crossing rivers and small lakes, but my informants claimed they were not used in fishing. Originally, they said, all fishing was done in the rivers.

PREPARATION OF FISH

Minnows, suckers, chubs, and whitefish were not split for cleaning. Instead, the Washo pushed a sharp stick into the fish just below the gills and drew the guts out through the side. These fish could be cooked on a coarsely-woven, twined winnowing basket (dugAbāl) with charcoal and hot sand. Minnows were often cooked on charcoal. The Washo would build a big fire and let it burn down. Then they spread the minnows very thinly over the charcoal. Chubs, suckers, and whitefish were cooked in the same manner except that hot sand was spread over them. The larger fish were split open to be cleaned and were then cooked in hot sand. Occasionally they were cooked by hanging them on sticks in front of the fire. The guts of animals and fish were saved for the old people. However, the fish were not always cleaned before cooking.

The Washo dried fish for winter use. Dried fish could be cooked on a hot flat rock or by hanging on a stick in front of the fire. They were also ground into flour and eaten on trips into the mountains.

The Washo obtained fish eggs from all fish except whitefish and minnows. The eggs were dried, wrapped in sunflower leaves, and cooked in hot sand. The Washo often made soup with fish eggs.

LOCATIONS OF CAMP SITES ON LAKE TAHOE

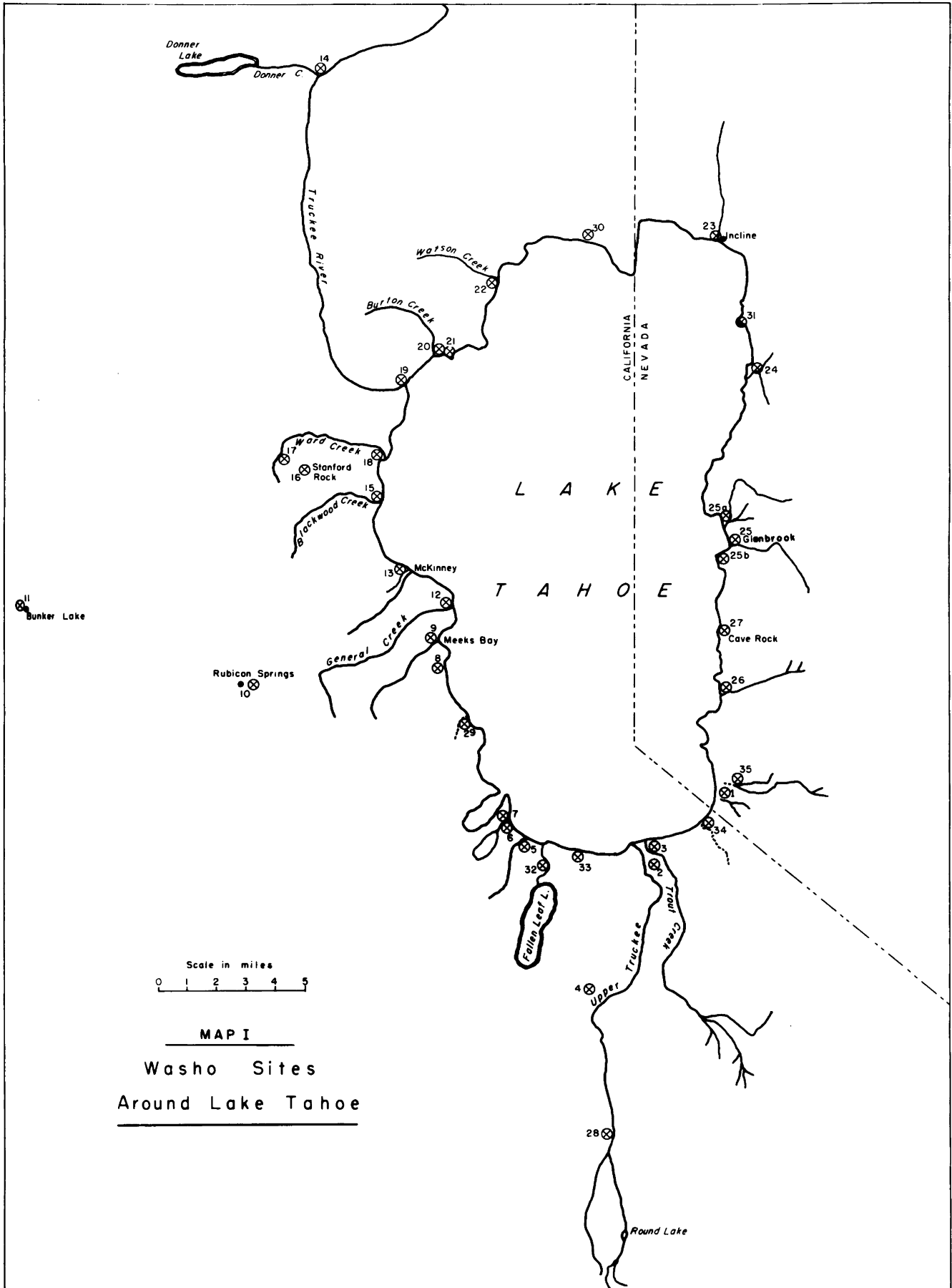
1. lamwO'tha (lam, mortar; wO'tha, river). A camp was located on this small stream which enters the lake near Edgewood. It was noted for fishing and berries. The women collected a berry called cu'wE'thUkh; two kinds of roots, ma'sakha and sEsmE'; and matsilOlo, which is apparently the name of a grass seed. Large berries were eaten raw and whole. The small ones—for example, porcupine berries—might be crushed through a dugAbāl. This treatment removed the skins and needles. The Washo ate this berry mush without further preparation. All berries except porcupine berries could be dried and stored. Before using the dry berries were soaked in water until soft, heated, and then made into mush.

2. ImgiwO'tha (Imgi, cutthroat trout [Salmo henshawi Gill and Jordan]; wO'tha, river). This camp was two hundred yards east of the Upper Truckee River and about one and one-fourth miles from the lake. As the name implies, it was important for trout fishing.

3. mathOcahuwO'tha (mathOcauwa', whitefish [Coregonus williamsoni Girard]; wO'tha, river). This was an important fall camp on Trout Creek. The Washo camped here for whitefish and late berries. Trout Creek was different from the other streams because here the people could live near their fish blinds. They did not have to camp together since there were no wild animals in the area at this time of year. This was the last camp on the lake. People prepared whitefish to take with them into the Pine Nut Mountains or into California, where they obtained acorns.

4. The next stopping place after No. 3 on the journey to procure acorns was near Myers Station on the Upper Truckee River. Minnows and suckers were caught there. This site was considered dangerous because of bears and the Washo camped close together. From here they followed the American River into California. This route was used mainly by the pauwalu. The hañalElthi got their acorns at Big Trees and the wElmElthi journeyed to the vicinity of Colfax. If there were no other acorns, the Washo collected white oak acorns or malñatsi (maluñ, acorn; atsi, small) which are described as resembling acorns and growing on bushes five or six feet high.

5. daugacacuwo'tha (translated as "clear water river"). This is



Scale in miles
0 1 2 3 4 5

MAP I
Washo Sites
Around Lake Tahoe

the first stream west of Camp Richardson and was visited from spring to the middle of summer. The Washo caught spotted trout in the river and collected birds' eggs in a nearby swamp.

6. There was a deposit of red clay near the lake. The Washo used it to decorate themselves and to paint their bows and arrows.

7. dEyEli'bukhwOnhu. The Washo occasionally caught Cui-ui (Chasmistes cujus Cope) here, but this was not a popular camping spot. This mention of Cui-ui in Lake Tahoe is surprising for it is believed that Cui-ui are restricted to Pyramid and Winnemucca lakes except during the spawning period when a short migration is made up the Truckee River (Snyder 1915:50). Snyder (1915:52) reports that Cui-ui never reached the swift water above Reno and he believed it would be a physical impossibility for the species to stem the rough water of the river canyon. There is, of course, the possibility that the Washo may have used the word Cui-ui for a different species than did the Paiute.

8. mugaulu'wO'tha. This small stream about one and one-half to two miles south of Meeks Bay provided excellent trout fishing. However the trout run did not last long. Bears fished this stream and the Washo had to keep an all night fire for protection.

9. ma'yalaW'0'tha (Meeks Bay Creek). This was a midsummer camping spot for fish, berries, and seeds. The camp was below the highway bridge.

10 and 11. Both of these sites were on one of the main routes leading into California. The mineral water at Rubicon Springs was good for internal complaints. The Washo might camp here for a night or two, then continue on to Bunker Lake and spend a few days deer hunting. They then proceeded west in the direction of Georgetown and, after a day's walk, entered the acorn country. This route was used primarily by wElmElthi.

12. dukhmE'EmwO'tha (General Creek). This was a good stream for fishing, but the Washo never camped here very long.

13. cu'wE'thUkhwO'tha (cu'wE'thUkh, a kind of berry; wO'tha, river). This is the small stream near Chambers Lodge. Besides fishing, the Washo collected cu'wE'thUkh, and the following medicinal plants: damukOkoi, whose use I do not know; and bEziEzIñthE'khi, which was used for eye trouble and also for sore throat. Another plant found in this region was mugaulu. The Washo believed that the root of this plant had

a magical efficacy in deer hunting when used in the proper manner—it put the deer to sleep. Only shamans collected this plant.

14. deiubeiyulElbEthi. This is the junction of Donner Creek and the Truckee River and is the place where wElmElthi got much of their fish and game. Donner Creek provided better fishing than the Truckee River because it was smaller and could be diverted.

15. Blackwood Creek. The camp site was on the south side of a small hill just north of the creek. The Washo trapped ground squirrels and woodchucks, and gathered porcupine berries and wild rhubarb. Cut-throat trout ran here early in the spring and were then followed by other fish.

16. There are caves at the foot of Stanford Rock where hunters sometimes stayed.

17. daugaiāca. A few acorn trees grew here and the Washo came over from the lake to get them. The camp was among the trees rather than in the open flat.

18. Ward Creek. The Washo stopped here for trout. The camp site was right on the lake although the bedrock mortar was a good distance upstream. The inlet just south of here was avoided for it was the home of a water baby (mEtsuñE').

19. daubayOdu'E' (translated as "running over"). This camp was on a small hill which has now been destroyed by the building of the highway. The Washo fished and collected grasshoppers which were roasted over hot coals. About a mile north of here on the lake shore was a cave where the Washo collected swallows' eggs. The camp site which was near this cave is now under water.

20. wO'thañamIñ (Burton Creek). Whitefish were taken in this creek and grasshoppers were collected in nearby meadows. The whitefish run here was earlier than on Trout Creek. Big green worms (probably army worms) that live on trees were collected and roasted in hot sand.

21. diphEkhwO'tha (diphEkh, white paint; wO'tha, river). Formerly there was a creek here. The Washo obtained fish, porcupine berries, sunflower seeds, cu'wE'thUkh, and white clay with which they decorated themselves.

22. masuñdauwO'tha (masuñ, slow; wO'tha, river). The camp site on Watson Creek was back a short distance from the lake. This was an

important camping ground for the Indians from around Carson City and Reno, who might spend the whole summer here. Besides fishing, the Washo hunted ground squirrels and woodchucks, and gathered several kinds of seeds (mA'sum, pigweed seed, cuglatsi, and sEsmE'). They also collected mushrooms, locusts, and a kind of berry called k'ila'tsim.

23. ma'goiyatwO'tha. This site is on the small creek just west of Incline. It was a favorite spot for the Indians from Washo Valley. Except for chokecherries, all Washo berries grew in the vicinity.

24. phagathsami. The little flat where the creek turns west was the camping site. This stream was considered good for fishing.

25. daumāladuphwO'tha. This was the main camping ground for the Washo from around Genoa. From here they walked to No. 25A for fish and to No. 25B for berries.

26. 'athabIcama. In addition to fishing there was a meadow close by where locusts could be gathered.

27. dE'Ekwadapoc (translated "gray rock"). The cave at Cave Rock was used as a shelter. About one hundred yards offshore from this rock was the nest of a mythical, man-eating bird ('aṅ).

28. There was a fishing camp on the west side of the river near a waterfall.

29. wO'thaṅamIṅā. This place was used only as a resting spot and not as a full-fledged camping site.

30. gumlE'phEl wO'tha. Used as No. 29 above.

31. This site was used in the same manner as No. 29 above.

32 (about one hundred yards from the river), 33, 34, and 35 were bedrock mortar sites mentioned by only one informant.

END NOTE

1. The pronunciation of phonetic symbols used in this paper is as follows:

a as in <u>father</u>	u as in do
ā as in cut	U as in put
A as in mat	c as in <u>shin</u>
E as in met	h after a consonant denotes aspiration
ei as in <u>day</u>	ñ as in <u>sing</u>
i as in see	' denotes a glottal stop
I as in mit	! after a consonant indicates glottalization
o as in low	
O as in law	

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