Clear Lake’s First People

Approximately 10,000 years ago, California became home to migrating groups of native people. Carbon dated artifacts have validated tribes’ occupation in the Clear Lake region from 4,000 to 8,000 years old. Therefore by at least 6,000 BC, early Native Americans inhabited the Clear Lake region.

The earliest evidence of human use of the Clear Lake Basin is represented by 6 sites turning in dates older than 11,000 BP (before present). Three were near the Borax Lake obsidian flow, one in Clear Lake Oaks, and two in the Anderson Marsh State Historic Park. These sites along with one down Cache Creek indicate the period of first use of the Lake Basin as well as the direction from which the first inhabitants came. It is not surprising that the Borax Lake obsidian flow appears to be a key area. Stone tools are critical to prehistoric economies and obsidian is the easiest of all stones to work. Along with the stone resource, the productive tule marsh areas at the eastern and southern arms of the lake would have provided abundant food resources. By 6,000 BP the human population in the Lake Basin had grown to the point that the entire lakeshore was being used. Large villages, evenly spaced around the lakeshore, suggest that they had been partitioned into community territories (Clear Lake Observer 2005).

At 1800 in California there were 70 Pomo tribes using 7 languages with an estimated population of between 10,000 and 18,000. The total aboriginal population of the Northern Pomo was about 350. Pomo tribes lived in valleys near rivers and streams. The Upper Lake Pomo belonged to the Northern and Eastern Pomo language group (McLendon & Lowy 1978:306) (Stewart 1943:42-43).

Clear Lake Pomo were involved in long distance trading networks. Pomo people traded with the Coast Miwok for clamshells and other shells. These would be used for beads and basket embellishments. Magnesite and obsidian, prevalent in the Lake County area from ancient volcanic activity, were traded in exchange. The Pomo are famous for their feathered and beaded baskets. For more information, see Historical Timeline below.

In 1976, tribal groups, Wovenek, Danoxa, Yobotui and Kapi-Matulki joined together and communally purchased 90 acres of land and established a traditional community called Habematolel in Upper Lake.

In 1977 federal government established a Rancheria for the Tribe. An adjacent parcel of land in Upper Lake was set aside which the Tribe then occupied. The Rancheria grew from 90 to 564 acres through a series of federal acquisitions.

In 1999, federal government passed legislation terminating the Tribe’s status as a federally recognized Indian Tribe and disestablished the Rancheria. Their land was lost.

The Tribe received and continues to receive federal funding to provide programs and services such as environmental conservation, housing assistance for low income members, educational programs - on-site tutorial, computer literacy, cultural arts, and GED preparation and higher education. Judicial advocacy is also provided on behalf of tribal Youth in adoption or placement in foster care and/or group homes.

2000 - Tribe requested a Secretary’s Election with the BIA to adopt its proposed Constitution.
2004 - Secretary’s Election ended. Tribes Constitution ratified by BIA. An election was held and a seven-member Executive Council was seated.
2005 - Tribe purchased a site in its aboriginal territory to restore its land lost in 1959 due to termination.

The Tribe is engaged in a federal process to restore its tribal land. Under Federal Law, the Tribe has the right to offer gaming on its restored tribal lands under Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.
Upper Lake Pomo lived in an amalgamation of four pre-contact tribes whose territories together constituted its aboriginal sacred territory. Here its ancestors, lived, hunted, fished and practiced sacred religious rituals and dances (the Ghost Dance) at the Roundhouse that was located at Begahe village. The Roundhouse later burned in 1906. Its ancestors and other visiting neighboring tribes attended great ceremonies. Natives came from as far west as the coast and as far east as the Sacramento Delta. Its people spoke a dialect that was a combination of Eastern and Northern Pomo.

The 1800s

In 1810, Pomo who were given refuge in other villages in Ukiah (Vokala) Valley migrated east, some of the families established a settlement named Komül in Eight-mile Valley, while others moved on to Scotts Valley with the Boalke.

In 1850 a terrible massacre, ancestors and neighboring tribes, mostly innocent women and children were murdered at Bloody Island (Bo-No-Po-Tí). Act committed by the 1st Dragons, US Calvary.

In 1856 Pomo in Lake County were rounded up and forced to live on the newly established Nome Cali Indian Farm in Round Valley Northern Mendocino County, which later became Round Valley Indian Reservation.

In 1866, town site of Upper Pomo decided upon.

In 1879 the Upper Lake Indian community formed, and its members of the former villages-communities communally purchased 90 acres north of Upper Lake at Habematol.