



Singing Voice

TO THE WEAVERS

CALIFORNIA INIDAN
BASKETWEAVERS ASSOCIATION



by
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CALIFORNIA NATIVES' PRAYER-FILLED GATHERINGS FOR FLORA AND FAUNA have long shown the importance and strength of basketweaving as an oral, spiritual, and cultural

ritual—a familial system of deep connections to each season. Indigenous basketweavers live the sacred tenets of respect for nature by asking permission, waiting for an answer, and giving gratitude after the taking. These principles manifest in their artistic creations: producing baskets hardy and practical, yet aesthetically beautiful and heritage quality. “Washoe basketweaver Dat-so-la-lee began selling her baskets at Tahoe City’s Cohn’s Emporium Co. for \$2.50. Now the same baskets are worth as much as a home,” reported Stuart Thornton for the Marion Steinbach Indian Basket Museum in Tahoe City.

The California Indian Basketweavers Association (CIBA) is a nonprofit organization with 450 active weavers/members and has been active for more than a quarter of a century—not as old as time but indeed a tradition since time immemorial for all of the California tribes. Only Native Californians are eligible to become a CIBA voting member, with dues of twenty-five dollars. Lifetime elders have a suggested donation of five

dollars; an inclusive youth ambassador membership for ages thirteen to seventeen and a child membership for ages five to twelve are also available. Non-Native communities are encouraged to join and assist with safeguarding CIBA.

Chairperson Alice B. Lincoln-Cook (Karuk) said, “CIBA gives voice for weavers. Historically, there has been a long battle with gathering on land easements and our [traditional] burning programs that are necessary for managing growth and pesticides. [Non-Native] people are really afraid of fire.” Ms. Lincoln-Cook’s specialty is a baby rattle made from sticks, roots, and bark from the willow tree. “Willow is nature’s aspirin, so it helps with teething and is non-toxic,” Ms. Lincoln-Cook said. “My daughter has taken on the role of teaching others now.” Sometimes, she offers this unique item at the Klamath River Book Nook, but mainly she offers variations of her delicate handcrafted beaded earrings with abalone shells. Ms. Lincoln-Cook co-owns the bookstore on the Karuk reservation with chief Judge Abby Abinanti (Yurok) of the Yurok Tribal Court. Judge Abby is renowned as the first California Native woman to pass the State Bar of California.

“Because of COVID, we have been teaching youth to gather and save [the materials] for the elders who can’t gather to keep them safe. Through Zoom, we filmed a how-to-gather video for classes,” Ms. Lincoln-Cook continued. “When lockdown opens up, we can schedule groups of families for safe gatherings at different intervals. We’re also working on videos at the college level to educate incoming agricultural, [ethnobotany], and forestry students about Following the Smoke.”

Following the Smoke (FTS) was a successful weekend immersion within the Passport in Time program offered through the US Forest Service (USFS). Kathy Heffner, a tribal program manager with the Six Rivers National Forest, came up with the term “Following the Smoke.” It refers to the basketweavers who studied the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) maps of burned areas. Gatherers would then collect in that area the following year.

“My mother, LaVerne Glaze, along with Ken Wilson came up with the idea for Following the Smoke. It was an annual event held each year here in Orleans. The idea was to bring folks together mainly to educate them on the need for land managers to burn quality basket materials for the weavers,” Renée Stauffer said.

Ms. Stauffer is a Karuk Tribal Council member, past vice-chair of CIBA, and an active founding member. “My sister [Deanna Marshall] is the basketweaver in the family now that Mom is gone. We want to hold a weekend camp for local basketweavers.”

Ken Wilson, now retired from BLM, where he was state archeologist and tribal liaison for the state of California, said, “Basketweavers are our national treasure. I met LaVerne Glaze (Karuk) in 1976, and in 1997, we created Following the Smoke to educate the public about restoration and basketweaving. We invited 25 people from 150 applications submitted. It grew so much that the same people wanted to come back, but we wanted to teach new people. It was so much fun with a lot of laughing—it was like inviting people to come into your home and waking up to the sound of laughter coming from the kitchen.”

“We camped, caught salmon, and cooked it the traditional way, and people helped gather the materials with the basketweavers. They learned how much work went into making a basket,”

Mr. Wilson continued. “It was controversial at first because I had to convince my peers in cultural, historic preservation groups that working with the basketweavers was historic preservation. It was so popular it became the number one pet project in the US; it won the Governor’s Historic Preservation Award and the National Advisory Council for Historic Preservation Award in 2004.”

Usually, Native women maintain the role of weavers, creating the tight-weave baskets by utilizing hazel, hardy enough to hold water and cook food over heated rocks. Some men would make loose-weave baskets for fishing. Asked if he ever made a basket, Mr. Wilson laughed and said, “The ladies told me my penis would fall off if I did. So I said, well then, I ain’t weaving no basket!”

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The global pandemic lockdown thwarted the planned gathering of FTS II in March 2020. Its new goal is to develop partnerships between tribes, traditional basketweavers, and government land agencies.

The program does not require a fee, “but donations on the CIBA website are always appreciated,” Ms. Lincoln-Cook said. “We really want to give a shout out to the BLM–Arcata Field Office, CAL-TRANS (California Department of Transportation), California State Parks, Redwood North District, US Forest Service, Trinidad Rancheria, and Ken Wilson—they have all been so supportive and helpful. Ken brought me to the program; he’s a phenomenal guy and has been a rock for me to lean on. He’s been such a solid supporter of CIBA and has helped behind the scenes in many ways.”

“CIBA wants to create three FTS II events a year, seasons permitting, and move it south [to other tribes in the Los Angeles region],” Ms. Lincoln-Cook continued. “This will help public agencies in other areas to understand traditional land practices and traditional cultural practices like prescribed burns.

Also, improving the knowledge of plant gathering areas and the need for access is critical for future resourcing.”

“The good news is Forest Service folks are now asking us where we would like them to burn so they can put it into their plans. Following the Smoke accomplished the goal,” Ms. Stauffer said. “We just have to be diligent with our relationships with the land managers. We now have tribal fire crews and programs that we didn’t have when Following the Smoke began.”

CIBA’s Native basketweavers are earth’s original conservationists who support each other with an unbroken circle of joyful friendships. Friends of the forest and river also—they always leave enough for the forest and the river to regenerate, which feeds the wildlife, which provides sustenance for their people. It is a belief and practice which is the primordial cycle of life. Their perception of earth’s love in the form of healthy non-human kinfolk (plants and animals) is a religion. Only the highest intentions of goodwill and good humor are allowed while weaving. Every basket holds his or her story.

Let the gathering commence.