

Karok Names

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THE KAROK are an American Indian tribe living along the middle course of the Klamath River in northwestern California. Along with neighboring tribes, they participate in a distinctive culture which has been studied most thoroughly among the Yurok and Hupa. In the field of names, Yurok customs have been described in detail by Waterman, who gives information on personal as well as geographical names.¹ Karok names have been noted at less length, principally by Kroeber.² Recent linguistic work³ now provides an opportunity for further study of Karok naming patterns.

An intense feeling for geographical location has been repeatedly noted by students of northwestern Californian culture; thus Kroeber and Gifford speak of "an impulse toward localization which pervades . . . the whole culture."⁴ One manifestation of this is the abundance of place names in use; names are given not only to mountains, ridges, streams, ponds, fishing-spots, acorn-groves, and villages, but also to sections of villages, to sweat-houses, to dwelling-houses, and to large numbers of mere rocks, hardly noticeable to an outsider. It seems to be no longer possible to collect Karok place-names in the quantities which Waterman published for Yurok. Even so, names for about 275 places were recorded in the process of linguistic study.⁵

¹ T. T. Waterman, *Yurok Geography*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 16:5, Berkeley, 1920.

² A. L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 78, Washington, 1925; *Karok Towns*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 35:4, Berkeley, 1936.

³ William Bright, *The Karok Language*, University of California Publications in Linguistics, vol. 13, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957.

⁴ A. L. Kroeber and E. W. Gifford, *World Renewal*, Anthropological Records 15:2, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955, p. 31.

⁵ All place names listed in the anthropological literature were tested with my informants. Those which they did not recognize are not included in the present study, as most of them could not be phonemically retranscribed or accurately analyzed.

The bulk of these names designate settled spots of some type — villages or parts of villages. In regard to their linguistic analysis, names of Karok settlements fall into three classes: 1) those which cannot be analyzed into meaningful parts — which “mean nothing” to the native speaker; 2) those which can be partially or doubtfully analyzed; and 3) those which can be readily analyzed, both by the linguist and by the native.

Names are available for a total of 117 Karok villages; since two sites are named *'ini-nač*,⁶ there are 116 names for analysis. Of these, 30 are unanalyzable or nearly so. Those which offer no clue to analysis at all include such names as *kú-yiv*, *pasirú'u-vre* (English “Presidio Bar”, probably by folk etymology), *pípta-s*, *tí-h* (English “Tea Bar”), and *'útké*. Others contain recognizable suffixes, but unidentifiable stems: the diminutive *-ič* or *-ač* in *'axváhič*, *kasán-nukič*, *'išipišihavní-nač*, and *pikvé-nač*; the locative ending *-ni-k* in *kasánni-k*, *kasaxánni-k*, and *tišánni-k*; the locative *-hirak* in *káttiphirak* and *tiša-nhirak*. The name *káttiphirak* should mean “where **káttip* is”, and nouns ending in *-ip* are generally names of trees or bushes; but no **káttip* tree is known. The names *tišánni-k* and *tiša-nhirak* seem to contain the same stem **tiša-n*, but such a stem is not found elsewhere. For still other names, one might invent analyses which, however, are improbable in the light of Karok grammar. E. g., *vunxáarak* might be said to contain *vun-* “flow”, *-xára* “long”, and the locative suffix *-k*; but such a combination of verb, adjective, and nominal suffix is highly unlikely. In all such names, then, neither the linguist nor the native speaker can offer a valid analysis. It may be conjectured that some such names stem from a language other than Karok, but nothing of this nature is proven at present.

Another 20 village-names can be partially or doubtfully analyzed. Examples of partial analysis are *'ivrattírih*, from **'ivrat* (unidentifiable) plus *tírih* “wide”; and *puriθ'ípxuv*, from *puriθ* “huckleberry” plus **'ípxuv* (unidentifiable). A case of doubtful analysis is *'akvattí-v*; this is said by some informants to mean “raccoon-ear”, from *'akva-t* “raccoon” and *tí-v* “ear”; but such a combination would normally have penultimate accent, *'akvátí-v*. The native analysis may there-

⁶ Karok words are here cited in phonemic transcription, as in the Appendix, “Karok Village Sites”, to *The Karok Language*. The transcription used in the Lexicon section of the same work is not phonemic, but morphophonemic.

fore be a folk etymology. Informants tend to disagree on whether such names as these "mean something" or not.

The residue of 66 village-names yield readily to analysis. They may be classified according to their meaning into the following categories:⁷

1) Terms referring to the physical characteristics of a site. Most of these mention physiographical features, for example:

rocks (*'as*): *'asavúrik* "flowing in under a rock".

cliffs (*'áxxa-*): *'axa-vúrik* "flowing in under a cliff".

clearings (*tíšra-m*): *'asivtíšra-m* "cave-clearing".

deerlicks (*'išra-m*): *'išra-mhírak* "where there is a deerlick".

rapids (*'i-n*): *'i-npi-t* "new rapids".

ponds (*'úkra-m*): *'ukram'ippan* "pond-end".

All the above features occur in more than one village name; there are isolated cases of reference to a meadow, a gap, a knoll, a peninsula, and an island. It is interesting that there is no specific mention of creeks or of the Klamath River (*'ískê-š*), near which all the Karok villages were situated. There are, however, several occurrences of the verb "to flow", *vur* or *vun* (as in the examples above.)

This category also contains a few references to man-made constructions, e. g. *'asape-č'ippan* "end of a rock wall". Finally, there are several references to plants; e. g., *kusripiš'amáyav* "delicious madrone berries", *xavišti-m* "arrowwood-edge".

2) Terms referring to human activities carried on at a site. Examples are: *'ikčúnna-m* "grinding place", *'imθatváram* "shinny field", *'iní-nač* "little river-crossing", *'ipu-nváram* "resting place", *'inna-m* "World Renewal celebrating place", *sak'iripirak* "flint-digging place", *sarum'ihvu-nvírak* "pine-root digging place".

3) Terms of historical or mythological reference. The only clear case is *'ame-kyá-ra-m* "salmon-making place", referring to the mythic origin of salmon.⁸ A term of possible historical reference is *'e-pákkunih* "tree falling down".

4) Directional terms. These contain the elements *ma-* "uphill", *sa-* "downhill", *ka-* "upriver", and *yu-* "downriver", which the

⁷ This attempt at classification is suggested by, though not identical with, the scheme offered by Madison Beeler, "On Etymologizing Indian Place-Names," *Names*, V (1957), pp. 236-40.

⁸ *The Karok Language*, Text No. 17, pp. 204-7.

Karok use instead of "north, south, east, west". Some of these place-names are without any stated point of reference: *káro-kam* "uphill upriver", *sárukhinva* "somewhat downhill". Others mention a base point: *samvaro-ka'kúkam* "a little upriver from a creek", *tihkáro-m* "uphill upriver from *tí-h'*", *íhyurukam* "uphill downriver from *tí-h'*", *xavnamnihičθufyú-θ* "downriver across-stream from Wilson Creek".

Besides the above, there are a number of names for which the linguistic meaning is clear, but the broader meaning-reference is not. Examples are *'ačvi-vhírak* "where there is a bird" (or ". . . are birds"), *'ássipak* "in a basket", *či-vniššukač* "little peeking-out", *'impúrak* "in flour", *pikváhač* "little plume", *samsríhirak* "shining place", and *sihtrih* "broad awl". It is not clear whether these are references to physical features, or historical and mythological references. Some, of course, may be formations of folk-etymology, whose apparent linguistic structure does not reflect their true origin.

Besides names of villages, the data include 18 names for sections or wards of the larger towns. These fall into much the same categories as above: four completely unanalyzable, two partly analyzable, and the rest with the following types of meanings: Referring to physical characteristics, as *'axa-íppan* "cliff-top". Referring to human activities, as *'apurwánni-k* "sorcerer-place" (the residents of which had a reputation for witchcraft). Directional, as *sa'várih* "downhillward" and *yuhti-mič* "little downriver edge".

Another twenty-four names designate not villages but, according to my principal informant, simply "places." Some of these are listed in Kroeber's *Karok Towns*, however, and were probably inhabited at one time. Of these, six are unanalyzable, four are partially analyzable, and the rest fall into the following categories: Referring to physical characteristics, as *'išra-m* "deerlick" and *'asaxxárahsa 'uvé-hrivírak* "where long rocks stand". Referring to human activities, as *ta-krípa-k* "at dip-netting". Mythological: two clear examples are *paθakhíram* "kneeling place" and *xá-x mukri-vruhvánnamič* "*xu-x*'s little rolling place". These derive from the myth of Duckhawk, who knelt at the former site to shoot his wife, the legendary monster *xu-x*, who in her death agonies rolled about in the latter.⁹ Directional terms include *θufkáro-m* "uphill upriver

⁹ *The Karok Language*, Texts 25–26, pp. 220–21.

from a creek", and *ko-č'ivkó-θkam* "across-stream upriver side of *kó-č'i.v.*" There are also some terms of unclear reference; one of them, *kitaxrihak* "at a wing", may fit Beeler's category of terms referring to body parts.¹⁰

Karok names of creeks invariably end in the word *θú.f* "creek", and usually refer to neighboring villages. Thus *'afčúfičθu.f* (English "Crawford Creek") is named for the village of *'afčú.fič*, *yuhnámθu.f* (English "Ukonom Creek") for the village *yuhna.m.* Of the exceptions, a few are unanalyzable, like *'imkanviráθθu.f* (English "Merrill Creek"); a few are directional, like *yurúkθu.f* "downriver creek" (English "Bluff Creek"); and at least one is mythological — *pihné.fθu.f* "coyote creek" (English "Wilder Gulch"), so named because the mythic Coyote had his fish-dam at its mouth.¹¹

The balance of Karok place-name data refers principally to mountains. Some of these names are unanalyzable, such as *'ú.niv* (English "Merrill Mountain.") Some are physically descriptive, such as *'asá'u.y* "rock mountain". An important religious or mythological reference is *'ikxariyáttu.yšip* "spirit mountain" (English "Offield Mt."), designating the sacred mountain of the Katimin world-renewal rite; people who live near this mountain, however, call it simply *'u.y* "The Hill". A possible mythological reference is *'ára 'u'ipamvá-natihirak* "where a person eats himself" (English "Medicine Mt."), though the myth involved is not known.

Besides names for Karok places, the Karok language has its own names for important towns of neighboring tribes. In this they follow the usage described for the Yurok by Waterman:

"They even assign Yurok names to all the important places in the territory of their neighbors. They are not peculiar in this, for the Hupa, to go no further, do exactly the same thing. Thus it happens that each important place inside Yurok territory and outside has a series of names, in three or four different languages. Sometimes these paraphrase each other, but often they seem to be totally independent in the different tongues."¹²

Most of the "foreign" village-names recorded in Karok refer to

¹⁰ Beeler, *op. cit.*, p. 239. English place names in the Karok area contain several examples: Bluenose, Head Camp, Nancy's Elbow.

¹¹ *The Karok Language*, Text No. 6, pp. 184–5.

¹² *Yurok Geography*, p. 186.

Yurok settlements; they bear no clear relation to the Yurok names either in sound or meaning. Examples are:

'*ansáfri-k* "place of '*ansaf*-' (meaning not known):

Yurok *weitspus* "confluence".

'*asvúffam* "water *'*vúffam*" (meaning not known):

Yurok *kenek* (no meaning given by Waterman).

'*á-vnay* (unanalyzable): Yurok *kepel* "house-pit".

firipámyu-sah (unanalyzable): Yurok *pekwan* (no meaning given).

'*itákkuk* (unanalyzable): Yurok *pekwtut* (no meaning given).

pahípri-k "pepperwood place": Yurok *rtrgr* (no meaning given).

tháffip "creek-tree" (doubtful analysis): Yurok *rekwoi* "creek-mouth".

Turning to personal names, the greatest amount of information for northwestern California is given by Waterman for the Yurok. According to this source,¹³ personal names were not given to children until the age of eight or nine years; these were usually, though not always, untranslatable, and certain names tended to run in particular families. At marriage, however, these names were discarded and never again used. Instead, descriptive names were applied. A man who owned a house would be regularly called by the name of the house. Other people would be called by terms expressing their marital status with reference to the houses in which they were born or into which they married. In addition, people were frequently called by nicknames referring to some trait of body or personality.

The brief accounts of Karok naming practice given by Kroeber¹⁴ and by Driver¹⁵ give a rather different picture. Kroeber stresses the taboos with which the Karok surround personal names: people are reluctant to tell their own names, or those of people close to them; addressing a person by his name is extremely impolite; and any mention of a dead person's name is a mortal offense.¹⁶ For

¹³ *Yurok Geography*, pp. 214-18.

¹⁴ *Handbook of the Indians of California*, pp. 107-8.

¹⁵ Harold E. Driver, *Culture Element Distributions: X. Northwest California*. Anthropological Records 1:6, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1939. Pp. 351 and 408.

¹⁶ A special vocabulary exists for reference to the dead: *ko-hímmačko* "deceased father", '*ihku-s* "deceased mother", *xaká-nič* "deceased sibling", *xakan'inna-m* "deceased spouse", *kó-k* "any deceased person". Speaking the name of a dead person is an offense called *pitaxyárih*, translated by the Indians as "swearing"; for a text on this subject, see *The Karok Language*, pp. 142-4.

these reasons, says Kroeber, names referring to residence and marital status, as well as nicknames, are used by way of circumlocution.

The information of Driver states that a child might be named after either paternal or maternal kin; it also recognizes naming after villages and descriptive nicknames. Driver notes that a certain Karok man had three names, translated by him as "salmon heart", "salmon's tail drying", and "penis".¹⁷

The question remains: were the names given to the Karok in childhood used throughout their lives, only being replaced by circumlocutions when politeness required; or were the childhood names discarded at marriage, as described by Waterman for the Yurok? In a personal communication, Kroeber now writes: "The most characteristic thing about Yurok names is the reference to people by their marital status and house name - or, at a distance, village name . . . Waterman is essentially right on this, though not on personal names being 'never used after marriage.' . . . The Yurok told me the Karok also referred to people by spot and status, but I got almost no names from the Karok except child or nicknames." As my own collection of Karok personal names likewise involves very few "spot and status" terms, it seems likely that names given to Karok children were used all their lives, though nicknames might be given as well.

Out of 61 personal names recorded, nine men's and thirteen women's names are unanalyzable, except for an occasional diminutive suffix, *-ič* or *-ač* or *-iš*. Sample men's names of this type are *'é·hkan*, *kittifiš*, and *váskak*; women's are *'anihó·hič*, *hánu·n* and *sávak*. Such names as these, having no known meaning, seem unlikely to be nicknames and were probably bestowed in childhood. It may be noted that the name *'é·hkan* was approximated as "Ike" by the white settlers, which suggests that its bearer retained the name during his adult life.¹⁸

Partial analysis is possible for seven men's names - such as *'išriké·yav*, containing *yav* "good" - and two women's names - such as *ya·mačkáre*, containing *yá·mač* "pretty". These also are unlikely to be nicknames. Complete analysis is possible for 19 men's

¹⁷ The last is given as *süci'tihan*, probably phonemic *si·šhitihan* "having a penis".

¹⁸ The name has given rise to the English place-name "Ike's Falls" (Karok *yu'tim't-n*). In accordance with local usage, it also became the surname of *'é·hkan*'s wife (Mary Ike) and daughter (Emily Ike).

and ten women's names; some of these are undoubtedly nicknames. They fall into the following classes:

1) Nine men's and six women's names are nouns derived from verbs. Some indicate the doer of an action, e. g. *ka-rimčúpha-n* "bad talker" (man), *'á-pvanič* "little root-digger" (woman). Others indicate the action itself, e. g. *'ikrivráhuvrúk* "rolling down over" (man) and *pištú-krav* "picking into again" (woman). Two of these are known to be nicknames: *'e-θ'akúnva-n* "slug-hunter", referring to a certain man's habitual amusement as a child, and *mačndttač* "little flash", the name of a male sorcerer reputed to give off flashes of light in the dark.

2) A few names refer to physical characteristics, and seem likely to be nicknames: *'afišrihanxára* "tall young man" and *yáppipux* "eyeless" (a blind woman).

3) A few names refer to place of residence or origin: *pa'axa-ssúruk* "he of 'axa-ssúruk", *pasamvaró-tti-m* "he of the creek-edge". The only one giving status as well as age, in the Yurok manner, refers to the Yurok town of Kepel — *'amnaykú-tič* "little Kepel grandfather" (or "grandson"); it is not known whether the person so named was actually of Yurok origin.

4) A residue of names have miscellaneous types of reference: *či-pákpa-k* "robin" (a man), *ya-čkaní-č* "little daughter", *má-kič* "little Maggie". The woman's name *támčih* is said to be baby-talk for *tá né-mčak* "I'm burnt". The man's name *ta-ksikkih* "give me a spoon" may also derive from a childish utterance.

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