



Nez Perce

TRIBAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

P.O. Box 305 • LAPWAI, IDAHO 83540 • (208) 843-2253

February 28, 2000

Francis P. McManamon  
Chief, Archaeology & Ethnography Program  
National Park Service  
Suite 340  
800 North Capitol Street, NW  
Washington D.C. 20001

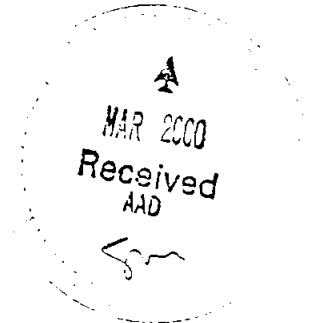
Dear Mr. McManamon:

Attached to this letter you will find comments pertaining to the cultural affiliation studies prepared by contractors of the Department of Interior. These technical comments have been compiled by the Nez Perce Tribe and are intended to help clarify some of the issues and points we feel require additional information regarding the cultural affiliation studies. The comments are not intended as critiques of the reports, but rather as an attempt to clarify and bolster areas which we feel require additional information.

We thank you for your consideration of the Nez Perce Tribe's comments pertaining to the determination of cultural affiliation of the Ancient One. If you have any questions regarding the attached comments please contact Jason Lyon, Archaeologist at (208) 843-7400 or e-mail [jasonl@nezperce.org](mailto:jasonl@nezperce.org).

Sincerely,

*for: Samuel N. Penney*  
for: Samuel N. Penney, Chairman  
Nez Perce Tribe



JR - I think this is new. Please distribute copies to CM, MAK, JP, SK, and AR. Also to me.

Tx Jm

DOI 07304

Nez Perce Tribe Review  
of  
DOI Cultural Affiliation Studies for the Ancient One

The following information has been prepared in response to Nez Perce Tribal review of the cultural affiliation studies prepared under contract for the Department of Interior (DOI) for the Ancient One. The studies address four main issues surrounding the Ancient One remains. These include a review of the ethnographic information by Daniel Boxberger, a review of the linguistic information by Eugene Hunn, a review of the archaeological information by Ken Ames, and a review of the bio-archaeological information by Steve Hackenberger. All four primary authors chosen to produce this work are extremely well qualified and have done an overall good job of accurately reflecting the existing body of knowledge surrounding the Ancient One on a relatively short time schedule.

Rather than provide an in depth critical review of the draft reports, the following information is intended as additional information that we feel may be helpful in addressing cultural affiliation. We also have included suggestions for additional questions or conclusions that we feel can be drawn from the data where applicable.

**Cultural Affiliation Study of the Kennewick Human Remains: Review of Traditional Historical and Ethnographic Information.** Prepared by Daniel L. Boxberger, Ph.D.

One important connection we feel this report needs to stress is the known oral histories that exist among the Nez Perce, and other Columbia Plateau Tribes, that may give an idea of how long we have been in this land. One such example of this can be found in *Noon Nee Mee Poo* by Allen P. Slickpoo, Sr (1973:5). Slickpoo states:

“Some of our legends may describe this earlier age. For example, elderly Nez Perces relate the time when the *tah-seeh* was hunted in the area. The *tah-seeh* was a huge, hairy animal resembling the musk ox, which may have been around here during the last days of the ice age. Others describe giant elk of the size that fed the Marmes man.” (This is in reference to the partial human skeletal remains recovered from Marmes Rockshelter. Remains of an extremely large elk were also recovered from this site.)

“Some of our elders also relate traditional stories of huge birds that could pick up and fly away with a human being. These huge birds were called *khoo-sa* ....”

The fact that these stories relate information pertaining to animals that are not found within the Northwest today, nor have they been found here throughout the holocene, are important. It is difficult to ascertain for sure if the creatures discussed in the legends above do actually describe human interaction with late pleistocene megafauna. However, we do know these stories discuss human/animal interaction and this interaction was frequent enough and common enough for these non-modern creatures to be given specific Nez Perce names which are

still known today.

Aside from oral traditions surrounding human/animal interaction, there are also stories among the Nez Perce, as well as other Columbia Plateau Tribes, which describe geologic events. Like the traditions discussed above, these stories generally carry moral teachings about life within a specific tribal culture. However, these same oral traditions may also provide us with a look into the time depth of occupation for the region.

Like many of the Columbia Plateau Tribes, the Nez Perce have an oral tradition relating to a great flood that came through the region. During this flood, the Nez Perce sought safety from the water at a place the Nez Perce call *Yamastas*. This place is commonly referred to today as Steptoe Butte. Standing a little over 3,600 ft asl, Steptoe Butte is a prominent pyramid shaped butte within southeastern Washington. In fact, it was originally referred to as "Pyramid Peak" by early settlers of the region, but was later renamed Steptoe after Colonel Steptoe who was involved in an Army/Indian conflict in this location in the 1850's.

The story concerning *Yamastas* varies somewhat in form but the essential elements are that a great flood occurred and the ancestors of the Nez Perce sought refuge at *Yamastas*. There are several detailed published versions of various flood stories of Northwest Tribes in the book titled *Indian Legends from the Pacific Northwest* by Ella E. Clark. Sections of the specific Nez Perce story referenced here can be found in *Indian Legends from the Northern Rockies* by Ella E. Clark.

An important aside to the Nez Perce flood story was related to Ella Clark by one of her Nez Perce informants, Lucy Armstrong Isaac, while she was preparing this collection of stories.

"The Nez Percés call the butte *Yamastas*, which means holy mountain. About 1910, I went by train to the Spokane Fair. As we approached Steptoe (Butte), the old people crowded to one side so that they could see *Yamastas*" (Clark 1966:52).

The importance of this story and the implications of the flood event as it relates to the Nez Perce is very real. Similar to many other Columbia Plateau Tribes, the physical landform associated with this event holds significance to the Nez Perce people. Not only did the geologic event discussed in this story effect the lives and beliefs of the ancient ancestors of the Nez Perce present during the flood, it continues to play an important role in Nez Perce lifeways today. This is plainly illustrated through the recorded excerpt from Lucy Issac presented above. Today, with the advent of cultural resource protection laws *Yamastas* is a recognized Nez Perce sacred site. However, it has not been formally recorded due to privacy concerns.

Another oral tradition that has been passed down through generations has to do with people that were fighting along the Columbia River. It basically states that they fought by grumbling and quarreling with each other. They grumbled so much the ground shook and their heads smoked. Eventually their fight elevated to throwing rocks and fire at each other. For years they fought until Coyote caught them and silenced their quarrels by turning them to stone. These sisters are now referred to as Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Hood, and Mt. Rainier three of the larger volcanoes that make up the Cascade range in Western Washington.

Like the flood stories, many of these oral traditions vary from tribe to tribe, but have some of the same essential elements. Occupation of the region over an extensive period of time

would be necessary for the people to witness volcanic eruptions from several different mountains within the Cascade range. There is a variation of this story in the book titled *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest* by Ella E. Clark that came from another Columbia Plateau Tribe.

In summation, some of the ancient oral traditions of the Nez Perce, and other Columbia Plateau Tribes, still exist today in both written and oral formats. Many of these oral traditions, especially those of greater antiquity associated with geologic events or ancient animals, can be commonly found throughout the Columbia Plateau Tribes. This is especially true with many of the Sahaptin Tribes of the southern Columbia Plateau.

**Cultural Affiliation Study of the Kennewick Human Remains: Review of Linguistic Information for the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.** Prepared by Eugene S. Hunn.

We offer the following comments concerning the linguistic study prepared by Dr. Hunn. We feel Hunn's report on the possible linguistic affiliation for Ancient One is a good, but conservative job of presenting the available evidence. His hypotheses are based upon a wealth of evidence and he does an excellent job of organizing this data with respect to its bearing on the Ancient One controversy.

Hunn concludes in his report that the evidence stands in favor of the hypothesis that the Ancient One spoke an early Penutian Language. Based on our review of the evidence we would say that actually the evidence is quite strongly in favor of this hypothesis. We would add to Hunn's discussion, the important question of the location of the Proto-Penutian homeland.

The earliest Penutian peoples had to have existed somewhere, and there is strong evidence that this homeland was not anywhere in California. California was at an earlier time the homeland of Hokan speakers. It is clear that the Penutian languages of California, particularly the Miwok languages, entered the state after the speakers of the Hokan languages had established their homelands. The influx of Penutian speakers caused many of the Hokan groups to be isolated from each other. This is analogous to the way that Basque must have been isolated when Celts and late Latin (becoming Spanish and French) speakers entered the Iberian Peninsula.

There is considerable evidence that at least a large proportion of the California Penutian peoples came from Central Oregon, when climactic change led to the desiccation of some large shallow lakes (Klamath Lake is one of these lakes that has survived). This lake culture would have provided an environment for the development of a significant population that had to move somewhere when the lakes dried up.

It very much appears that the Californian Penutian Languages arrived in their present homelands after Proto-Penutian was established elsewhere. Tsimshian on the coast of British Columbia is considered another Penutian group, but it must be an outlier. The B.C. coast cannot be considered a serious candidate for the Proto-Penutian homeland.

This leaves two alternatives -- the Columbia Basin and the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Several Penutian Languages were spoken in the Willamette, including Kalapuya and Takelma. It is difficult to choose between the two locations, but early Penutian speakers must have moved to the shallow lakes of Central Oregon quite early, even if Western Oregon was an earlier homeland for Penutian speakers.

However, the most logical homeland of the Proto-Penutian peoples seems to be the Columbia Basin. It is around this central geographical region that most Penutian Languages are found. These are the Chinookan languages (Columbia River), the Sahaptian languages (the northern Columbian Basin and Plateau), the Klamath-Modoc language (Southern Oregon), the Cayuse Language (Eastern C. Basin).

What must also be considered is the fact that the Penutian family is a very old one. The Indo-European family is at least 6,000 years old, and Penutian is more divergent than Indo-European. Even if one chooses the conservative Penutian grouping which excludes Mayan and Zuni, it has to be at least 8,000 years old. In fact, it may be more accurate to assume something on the order of 10,000 years, maybe older. These early Penutian speakers had to be somewhere, and the most likely candidate homeland is the Columbia Basin.

Our conclusion based on the linguistic evidence is that the territory the Ancient One was found in was most likely occupied by Penutian speaking peoples at that time.

**Cultural Affiliation Study of the Kennewick Human Remains: Review of the Archaeological Data.** Prepared by **Kenneth M. Ames.**

We believe that Ames has done a good job in pulling together an extensive list of reports and resources to base his work on, especially considering much of this information is unpublished or is limited in availability. The bibliography accompanying the report is very extensive and includes many of the more significant contributions to plateau archaeology.

However, we were a little concerned with the Discussion and Conclusions section at the end of the report. While we do agree with the basic premise that it is difficult to show continuity based solely on the archaeological record, we feel that continuity in a basic form is present throughout the archaeological record.

In the first sentence of the Discussion and Conclusions section Ames states, "Based on my review of the available evidence, the empirical discontinuities in the record precludes establishing cultural continuities or discontinuities, particularly before about 5,000 E.C." While the quantity and quality of the archaeological evidence currently available concerning pre-Mazama plateau archaeological resources is limited to some extent, this may be more a factor of population size and dynamics than one of a cultural discontinuity. Further, when one looks at the larger picture the presence of continual, with some minor data gaps, human occupation for at least the last 11,000 years within the region is evidence of at least some level of continuity. This becomes more apparent when taken in context with some of the oral traditions that may provide a link between these early times and the present day people. When these two lines of evidence,

archaeological and oral historical, are combined and used in conjunction with each other they help to provide a tangible link between the current peoples and the ancient archaeological remains of the past.

**Cultural Affiliation Study of the Kennewick Human Remains: Review of Bio-Archaeological Information.** Prepared by Steven Hackenberger, Ph.D.

In contrast to the other three reports discussed above, we feel this particular study is in need of further attention. The content of the report suffers from its minimal degree of organization and from the lack of summary and conclusions. We feel the study does an adequate job of inventorying all known projects and summarizing the results as provided by the original scholars. However, we would like to see more inferences drawn from the data. In addition, we feel that by not providing an “analysis of the data collected” as called for in the scope of work, this report does not meet the requirements set fourth by the DOI when the study was originally developed.

## Works Cited

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- Slickpoo, Allen P., Sr., and Deward E. Walker, Jr.  
1973 *Noon Nee-Me-Poo (We the Nez Percés)*. Lapwai: Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho.