

APAUTAWILU

North of present-day Glencoe and Highway 26, and west of Lower Dorrway Road the land makes a steep descent toward the Mokelumne River. Today many people know this area as Alabama Gulch. This was the location of one of Calaveras County's last Miwok villages, Apautawilu.

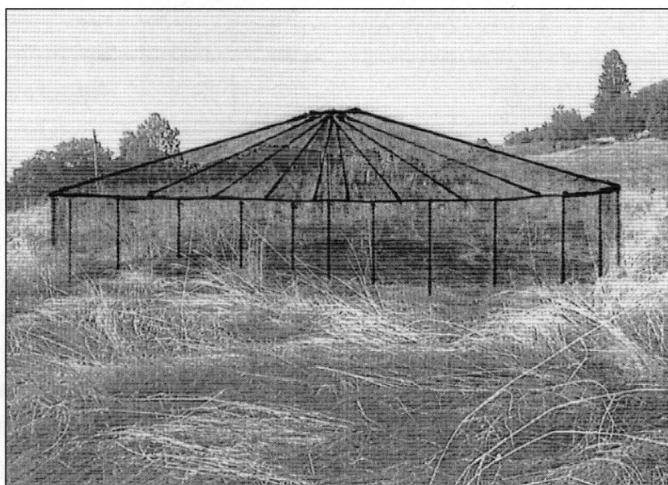
The village was included in the land homesteaded by Dr. Adolph Hoerchner. He later gained prominence in the young county by contracting in 1858 to provide medical care in his private hospital located in Pleasant Springs (see *Las Calaveras*, January 1982, April 1982). The ranch land was later owned by George McKisson, who witnessed many native American rituals and customs while the Miwok still lived there.

Lloyd Ames is a life-long resident of Glencoe and is intimately familiar with the hills around his home. He has collected various materials about Apautawilu, from the people who actually observed or recorded the society and its ceremonies, and assembled this issue of *Las Calaveras*.

The introduction is excerpted from a paper prepared by noted local historian Judith Marvin. She presented the paper in 1985 to the first California Indian Conference at the University of California at Berkeley.

Charles Grunsky came to our county in 1849 and wrote letters home to Germany describing his surroundings and the people who were here first. John Doble kept a diary in 1852 about the things he saw while he was here mining. The Doble diary proved to be a wealth of eye witness information to Ames and Marvin. Robert McKisson, who later owned the land of the Apautawilu site, was interviewed in 1982 by Paula Leitzell of the Mokelumne Hill History Society.

Las Calaveras is grateful to Lloyd Ames for assembling this collection of first-hand accounts of life at the Miwok village, Apautawilu. All of the photographs herein, except as noted, are from his personal experience.



Roundhouse depression still evident today at the Apautawilu village. Drawing indicates likely size the roundhouse occupied.

APAUTAWILU

A MIWOK VILLAGE IN CALAVERAS COUNTY

by Judith Marvin

Introduction

Apautawilu is the name of a village site that was occupied by local Miwok at the time of the Gold Rush. It is located between Mokelumne Hill and Glencoe, surrounding the historic site of Pleasant Springs.

By 1900, the old village at Pleasant Springs was the only Miwok village in the area that was still in use. Two noted California ethnographers visited the region and recorded the village. In 1905, C. Hart Merriam (1977) identified the village site as Ahp-pan-tow-we-lah, while Alfred

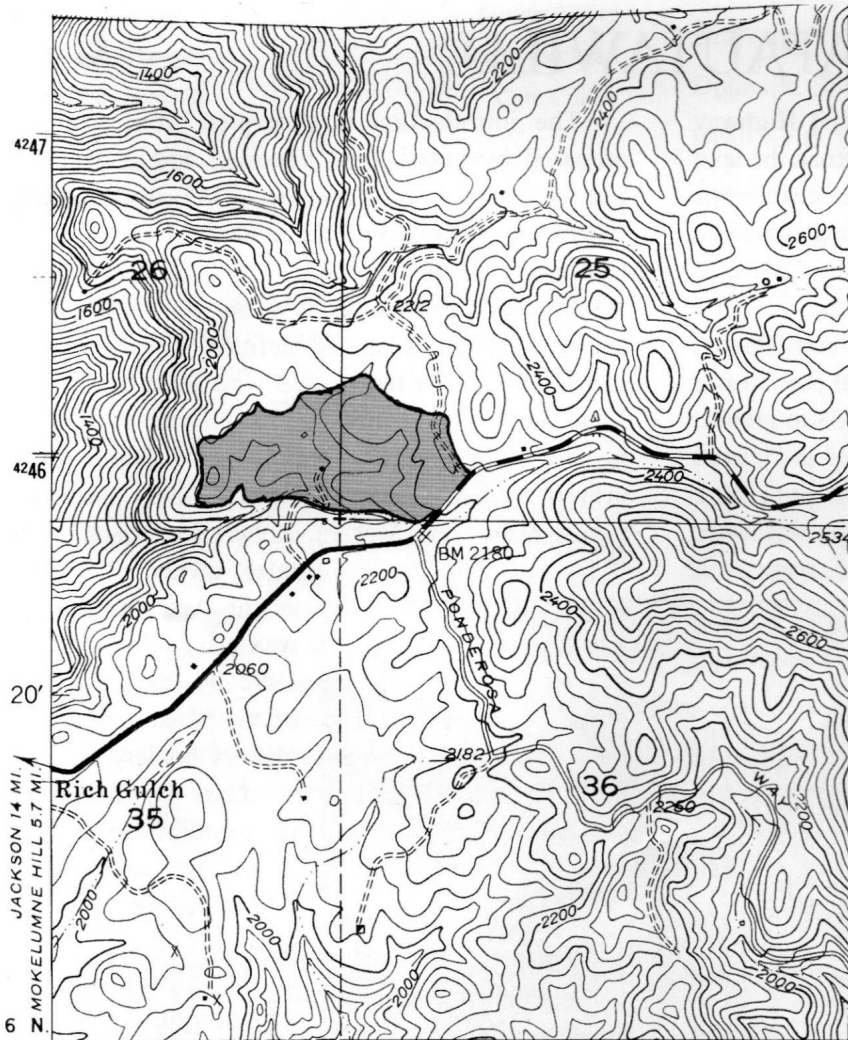
Kroeber (1925) later recorded the village name as Apautawilu. During the early 20th century, various scattered references provide information on the last Miwok residents at this site. The most informative, perhaps, being the memories of Robert F. McKisson, who was born on the ranch in 1897.

In 1848, gold was discovered near the American River at Sutter's mill, setting off the greatest mass migration in human history. Some of the earliest to discover gold in the nearby gulches was the Eutaw party of Alabamans, who

named Alabama Hill and Gulch. By the fall of 1949, one of these miners, Charles Grunsky, has established a store alongside the gulch, which bisected Apautawilu. In late 1850, he sold out to another member of the party, D. L. Angier.

Dr. Hoerchner, from Germany, arrived in the Pleasant Springs area in 1849 with the initial party of Alabamans. In July of 1853, Dr. Hoerchner purchased the store and other property from Angier for \$11,500; four months later he filed a Land Claim on 160 acres that included the site of Pleasant Springs and the store, as well as Apautawilu.

The Pleasant Springs property apparently remained in the ownership of the Hoerchner family until 1879. After several transactions, the property was deeded to George A. McKisson. On January 17, 1887, the McKisson family began their seventy-five year tenancy at Pleasant Springs Ranch.



USGS Topographical map with area of Apautawilu site outlined near Glencoe, north of Highway 26.

Diaries and Letters
Charles and Clotilde
Grunsky
1823-1891

Pleasant Springs, July 24, 1850

"Pleasant Springs is a beautiful spot. Do not imagine large and attractive buildings or handsome gardens. There are none. I still live in a tent whose walls, however, are made firm by means of a dozen or more hewn timbers. What I am praising is the beautiful scenery.

The air is unusually clean, to which fact the healthfulness of the climate may be attributed. Even when it is very warm, 110 to 115 degrees F., it is not oppressive as in other countries, because the air is dry. For days at a time there is not a cloud in the sky, which is beautifully blue as far as the eye can see. We are favored with light breezes, which contribute much to make the heat of summer days bearable. We have no dew during summer. Nights are wonderful, cool and very pleasant. There is no harm in sleeping the open, which I frequently do, particularly when the moon is in the sky.

Here at Pleasant Springs we have a general store for the convenience of miners. At Rich Gulch I have entrusted the management of the business to Mr. Kohlberg, but go down there myself several times each week.

It will seem strange for you to think of me as living at a spot in the mountains of California, all alone, with no one in the immediate vicinity.

The Indians are a very friendly people unless they are provoked. Unfortunately the Americans frequently treat them unfairly. There are not many of them left here. They have a good conception of right and wrong, are fairly moral, living in family groups. Several of these family groups, uniting, choose a captain or chief. Many of those in this neighborhood understand a little Spanish, in which language I can converse with them fairly well, except in figures and numbers and the most common conversational requirements. These I have acquired in their language. You may desire to know how the language sounds. I will give you a few examples:



Bedrock mortars at Aputawilu.

The numerals are: ludike 1, odihke 2, dolokeshe 3, oishe 4, masehoke 5, demske 6, kenekake 7, kauwinte 8, woie 9, na-atshe 10, ludik-shakena 11, odik-shakeha 12, etc.

They are short in stature, generally only four to five feet high, of reddish tint, but quite delicate and well formed. They have small hands and feet, particularly the women. They no longer go about half naked as originally, but wear all kinds of brilliantly colored clothing. They formerly depended on hunting, fishing, and the gathering of acorns. The latter here are as large as nuts and are obtained in great quantities. They are now beginning to work as laborers in the mines and purchase bread, flour, and especially meat."

The activities of the Miwok at Aputawilu were extensively described in the journal of miner John Doble, who worked the streams around Pleasant Springs in the winter and spring of 1852. From his account, we obtain our most vivid picture of the village inhabitants, as well as detailed descriptions of Miwok activities and rituals.

JOHN DOBLE, first entry describing Aputawilu occurred in February of 1852

Pleasant Springs Indians

"...(there was) a large camp of them about ¼ mile up the Gulch on a flat at the foot of the summit ridge of this Divide. This camp when I first came here consisted of 3 huts and a round or council house. The 3 huts are made by setting up sticks or poles in a circle of from 6 to 10 feet

in diameter and leaning the tops together and covering them with bark skins brush c

On February 14, 1852, Doble mentions Indians from other villages arriving for a "fandango":

"The Indians are going to have a big Fandango here, about 500 came in from other places to this camp today. They came in companies of from 20 to 50. They came in Indian file, the Men carrying their bows and arrows and the squaws the luggage in their conical shaped baskets suspended on their backs by a strap round over the forepart of their heads and them that had children carried them in the basket with the balance of the luggage.

Out about 200 yards from camp they had built a large fire and I supposed as I saw it as I came up to the camp that they were only amusing themselves at the fire there as the wood was all burned in the immediate vicinity of the camp. But as I was leaving the camp I saw that something else was going on so I went by the fire and I found that they were painting and feathering three of their number for their grand Dance. (I did not nor do I yet know what the dance was for only that it was one of their amusements had at such meetings.) I will try to describe the way they were painting and feathering.

The fire was built against a large oak log and by the fire was a number of Indians. 3

of the number were being painted black and feathered. The paint made of charcoal and water and they were entirely naked except the breche clout. After being painted they were dressed by the others in a coat of feathers as follows: on the head from the forehead to the back of the neck lay a red and white strap of quills. The feather end of the quill (which were the quill of the hawk and owl) sticking out horizontally each way fastened in this position by a band of small feathers round the head just above the ears, then below this band of feathers hung the hair which they all wear long (some of them have hair nearly two feet long but the squaws always cue their hair so it never hangs below the shoulders). Then across their faces was placed several rows of down the soft white down of the Owl and Hawk. The rows were placed over the face so as to encircle the nose mouth and eyes and to hide the ears. Then round their necks were many yards of beads decked with dangling pieces of the pearl Oyster shell which when they moved made a rattling noise. Then up and down and round their bodies arms legs were places [placed] lines and spots of the white down stuck on by a thin mixture of pitch and grease which was put on the places where the feathers were to be and the feathers then carefully places on it. When they were thus dressed they began to move towards the camp headed by the Master of Ceremonies. As they left the fire they began singing and the Feathered Gents Danced to the music which was kept up with the voice and each one of the singers which were 8 or 10 in number had a stick some 18 inches long split about 2/3 of the way so it would snap together when they shook in the right manner with these sticks they beat time to the music while any quantity of outsiders danced to the music also with frequent stops and turnings. They got to the camp and entered the round house so I could not see them any more."



**Basement of the Angiers Store at Pleasant Springs,
within Apautawilu.**

On Saturday, February 21st, 1852, Doble continues his narrative:

“The Indians I thought had quit their dance last Wednesday but this evening they are thicker than ever around and the Variety of dress with the increase of number is larger if possible than I have before noticed. A great many wear bands around their heads decked with shells and beads to keep the hair out of their faces though a Majority wear nothing while a few wear hats.

They had during the day got the ½ of a hollow log about 8 feet long and put it in the round house for the feathered hombres to dance on. This made a hollow noise when the bare feet of the Dancers came in contact with it with any force. They sung different songs. I could notice the change of words but could not understand anything said.

Robert McKisson Interview

INTERVIEWER: I’m talking today with Robert McKisson at his home in Stockton. This is November 17, 1982 and I am Paula Leitzell.

Something else that is very interesting up in that country was that there were Indians living up on the top of the hill, weren’t there?

McKISSON: Right up on the home ranch, Pleasant Springs.

I: Do you remember them when you were little?

M: Sure

I: Do you remember when McKenzie died?

M: Susie—both of them—went to both funerals. You know they have their own way. We stood and looked on. McKenzie was chief you know of the Miwok tribe. That whole neighborhood clear



Mortars, pestles, and tools of Aputawilu.

to Murphys, West Point, Rail Road Flat. He lived right on the upper end of the ranch.

I: Up where there is the depression from the roundhouse?

M: Have you been there?

I: Yes

M: Now there’s something. I used to set in there in the cold part of the winter and it was so warm.

I: They had it facing south.

M: It was a roundhouse—dug down. You went down in there.

I: How deep was it?

M: Oh, six feet I guess to the center. They had a little fire around there. And rocks setting around the fire—maybe half or three-quarters of it. They would get hot and stay hot for a long time.

I: And they lived right in there?

M: In the winter—in the summer they had little cabins and anywhere outside. There would be about—I’d say about twenty or twenty-five. The Indians as a rule didn’t stay too many in one place. They had that camp about three miles down at Buena Vista. Off of the Prindle Ranch, and let’s see what was that old fellow’s name—John Bell—John Bell lived right below Buena Vista.



Grinding mortars and pestles.

I: At the time that you say the Indians living up there, the women were using the grinding rock to grind acorn meal?

M: I've eaten their flour—not bad.

I: Yes, I've tasted it too.

M: Yes, there was three places there they would grind. They went down maybe 100 yards—half a block—in Alabama Gulch. And then further down and then way over on the other side of the ranch, right out in the open, no gulch. I've eaten tu-lah-see soup and the wild clover, mullen leaves.

I: Did they ever go down and live down below the house?

M: That's the graveyard. No.

I: There are some grinding rocks down there.

M: Yes.

I: But you don't ever remember seeing them living there by the graveyard?

M: No, I don't believe they ever did. Now whether the grinding rocks down below our house off to the side—now there were a couple of cabins there, but they were white men. Two different cabins. I think there's a kind of a fireplace out of rocks still standing. Two white people lived there. The Indians were good people.

I: They weren't understood by most of the white people though.

M: My grandmother told us kids to be good to the Indians because if it wasn't for the Indians you wouldn't be here—we'd never gotten across those plains if those Indians hadn't helped us.

You know, back to the Indian Roundhouse, I was pretty close to the Indians there. In the roundhouse, they would have rock around. For one half of it they dug channels underground, tunnels, you know, put the rocks in there and cover it over. That whole bank would be warm—because you now they just put their blankets down on the ground and lay there and it was just as warm all winter long. It was warmer in that roundhouse than it was in the school house.

I: Do you know the names of any other Indians that lived at the ranch besides Susie and McKenzie?

M: Doc, Manuella.

I: Manuella was up there too?

M: Yes, Mokolumne Hill. I knew her. Her hair was white as snow.

I: Do you have any idea about when she died?

M: No. I don't know what the year would be but I was small.

I: Did she die before or after McKenzie?

M: She took care of McKenzie—McKenzie and Susie both.

I: Susie died before McKenzie, didn't she?

M: Couldn't say for sure.

I: After McKenzie died, were there any of the Indians living there or did they just go off?

M: No. They were the last burials. The graveyard was a round circle. When they dug the last graves they had a pile of bones that high (indicating several feet). I don't know how many must have wnet in that area. Then you know what they did for a full moon? Every evening they come down—you been there? Did you notice the dirt was all black? They come down and have their little fires. One full moon they have their little fires, every evening just as the sun went down



Queen Manuella panning for gold with her little black dog near Moke Hill, as depicted on a postcard; from the personal collection of Bonnie Miller.

they'd start their little fires. They burn for two or three hours, just a little pile of sticks—for one full moon.

I: As mourning after someone died.

M: After they were buried—they'd do it for one full moon. And they buried most every possession of any value when they buried Susie they had shells, beads and oh, I don't know what all went in there.

Additional notes off of the tape:

Indians: When they had celebrations, 100-200 Indians would come. He remembers seeing McKenzie speaking to the people, standing at the top of the hill and looking toward the sun. He would speak for hours and hours, until he was so hoarse he could no longer speak. People would come and go—stay and listen for a while. The fandangos lasted two to three days.

He helped Susie trap quail. She used a Figure Four trap built of Sticks. If she got four quail, she would keep two and let two go. The same when the men hunted deer. They would only shoot one deer at a time.

Pedro O'Connor: He remembers him. His uncle, Bill Burt, took him to the San Francisco Fair and put him on display. People stood around and marveled at him. Pedro commented: "Why you look and look, it just Pedro."

Pedro lived at Rail Road and Glencoe. He was given a white man suit when taken to San Francisco. From then on, that was all he would wear. He would do chores for the McKissons in exchange for the privilege of reading their books (he looked at the pictures).

Notes of Telephone Conversation with R. McKisson—11/23/82:

Roundhouse constructed of poles covered with hides, tin, etc. It came to a point at the center. He does not remember bark or slab construction but said he could not be certain it wasn't used.

Very few Indians stayed there in the summer. They had two board cabins—more like sheds—that they used. Also, a stone cabin down off the side of



Captain McKenzie standing next to some bedrock mortars and pestles near the Rich Gulch Hotel. Photo taken October 1906, courtesy Calaveras County Archives.

the hill toward Alabama Gulch. This structure had a stone platform (bed). The McKissons used the stones to build fences.

He could not recall any acorn granaries. He stated they used baskets to hold acorns. They would crack the acorns and then leach out the bitter flavor with water and ashes, "I think." They made bread, ta-lah-lee soup of the acorns. They ate mullein leaves (raw) and wild clover (like a salad).

He recalls the women making baskets, in fact, he used to help. He would hold the stems while they scraped them thin with pieces of glass or chert (arrowheads). They collected materials at two places in the gulch below the ranch.

He does not recall the Indians having a cast-iron stove.

Names: McKenzie, Susie, Doc (older), Ben (younger, a boy), Johnny and Freddie (boys, but probably not family members of the resident Indians)

An obituary in the Calaveras Prospect of August 1, 1908 reports that McKensie died July 25, 1908 and that his wife Susie had died three years earlier. According to Mr. McKisson, after the death of their chief, the remaining residents of Aputawilu left and went to live at other remaining villages around nearby Railroad Flat and West Point.

Another old Miwok village had disappeared.

Calaveras County Historical Society

30 No. Main Street P.O. Box 721 San Andreas, CA 95249

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The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museum while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com.

New Members

The Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

January 2007

Mary Lee Levy, Fresno
Ann Huberty Duncan, Culver City
Steve & Stephanie Diers, Glencoe
Elton Spreadborough, Angels Camp
Fred Mancuso, Arnold
Chester Murphy, Farmington

February 2007

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Joel D. Pitto, Valley Springs
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Donations

The Historical Society is grateful for the following donations:

January 2007

Book: "Cuslidge of Calaveras County," four salt shakers, boot spur—Carin & Ken Cuslidge, Stockton
Assorted photos, and Centennial Edition newspaper—Vada Whited Klingman, Lathrop
41 photos of WWI send-off Valley Springs & San Andreas—Jeffery Tuttle, Mokelumne Hill
Frank Geneochio calendar for 1931—Mary Jane Geneochio, Mokelumne Hill

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Two hardmount photographs—Betty Snyder, Valley Springs