

# MANY CULTURES, ONE LAND: 5,000 YEARS OF HISTORY SHASTA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



The beginning of the World as told by the Achumawi of Shasta County:

*In the very beginning all was water. The sky, as far as one could see, was clear. It did not have any stars, or clouds, or anything in it. Then one day a cloud formed and it grew lumpy and turned into Coyote. Next a fog arose, grew lumpy and became Silver Fox. They became people...*

**In early 2008 a land slide along Highway 299 in Shasta County damaged a portion of an archaeological site. Caltrans responded immediately and brought in a team of archaeologists to assess the damage and recover important information from the area. The site—called CA-SHA-4410/H—is located in a region that has been home to a series of different cultures. The research and archaeology that came out of this project have added to the knowledge of how these cultures coexisted and collided near Round Mountain in the foothills of the Southern Cascades.**



# A Marriage of Cultures: Mary Ann Riley Fister 1857-1924

The first discovery at the site was made prior to the slide. The gravestone of Martin Fister who had died in 1881 was found near the highway. Research revealed that Mr. Fister was of German descent and came to America with his parents as a boy. He traveled to California and Shasta County as a miner and first appears on census rolls in 1860. Further research showed that he had married a local woman named Mary Ann Riley in 1872. Mary Ann was born in 1857 to an Irish father and an Indian mother from nearby Round Mountain. Census records list Mary's mother as Winton (Wintu). The Round Mountain area was a boundary land between many groups and at the time that Mary was born was home to Northern Yana (Noze), Pit River/Achumawi, Wintu, and White settlers. It is not known how Mary's Indian mother came to marry an Irishman, but Mary Anne Riley Fister epitomizes the meeting and mixing of vastly different cultures that happened through time in this part of Shasta County.



There are no known Photographs of Mary. This photo of an unidentified Indian Woman and her baskets was taken at Round Mountain—where Mary was from.



*Photo courtesy the Shasta Historical Society, Redding.*  
<http://www.shastahistorical.org/>

Mary always identified herself as Indian on census records and voter registrations. She outlived Mr. Fister, successfully patented a 160-acre homestead, married twice more, and had five children (all girls). Mary Ann Fister was often listed as farmer/head of household in public records and managed a home that included several of her adult children and their families. Archaeologists hoped to find some additional evidence of Mary's remarkable life at the site, but unfortunately, none was found. There were a few historic-era artifacts and there was evidence of Native Americans—perhaps Mary's ancestors—who had lived on the land for hundreds of years.



Rifle Cartridge



Glass Fragment



Marble



Bottle Stopper



Pocket Watch Case

## Historic-era Artifacts Found at the Site.

[\(Click here to learn more about Mary, her husbands, children, and grandchildren\)](#)

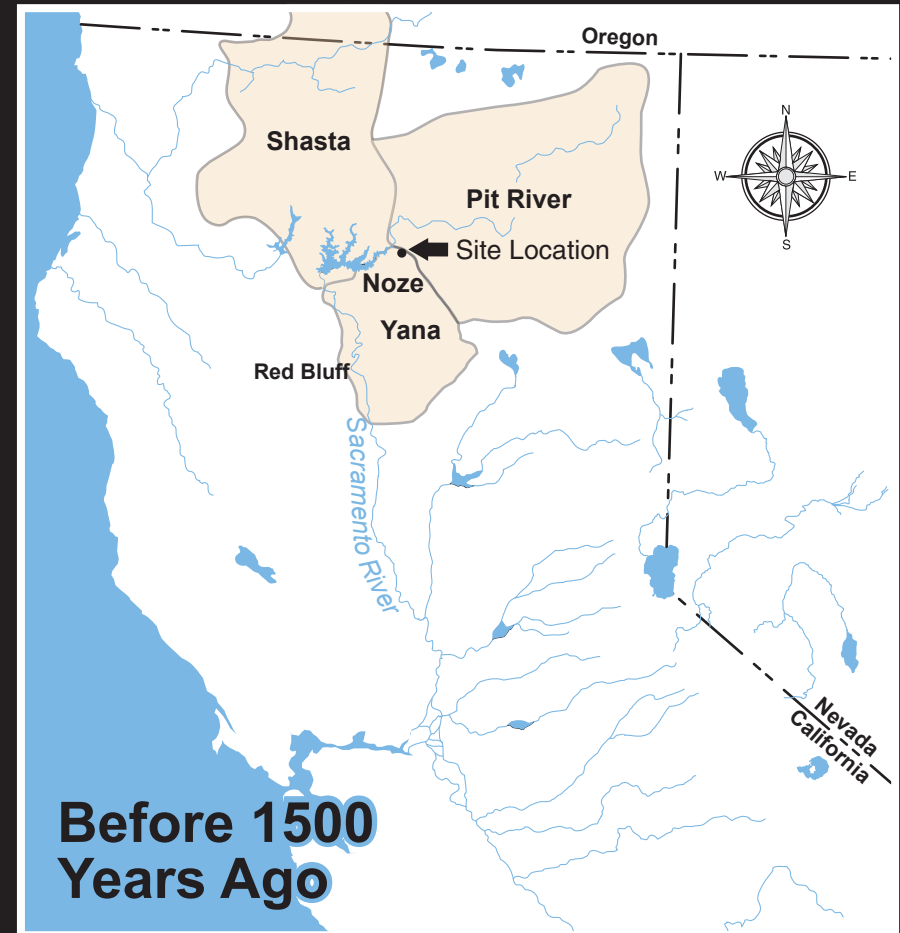
# Prehistoric California: Many Languages, Many Cultures

About 90 languages were spoken in what is now California when the first European explorers arrived in the 1700s. The area had one of the most diverse groups of languages in the world, and some were as different as Chinese is from English. Even the most similar languages were about as different as Spanish and French. Today many of the Native languages of California are considered extinct or endangered, with only a handful of elder speakers left. Many Native American groups are working to preserve their languages, record them, and teach them to younger tribal members.

## The Northern Yana (Noze)

The Northern Yana (and their neighbors the Pit River/Achumawi and Shasta) are members of the Hokan language group, which is one of the most ancient in California. The Yana lived in the Sacramento River Valley and in the hills of the Southern Cascade Range for thousands of years.

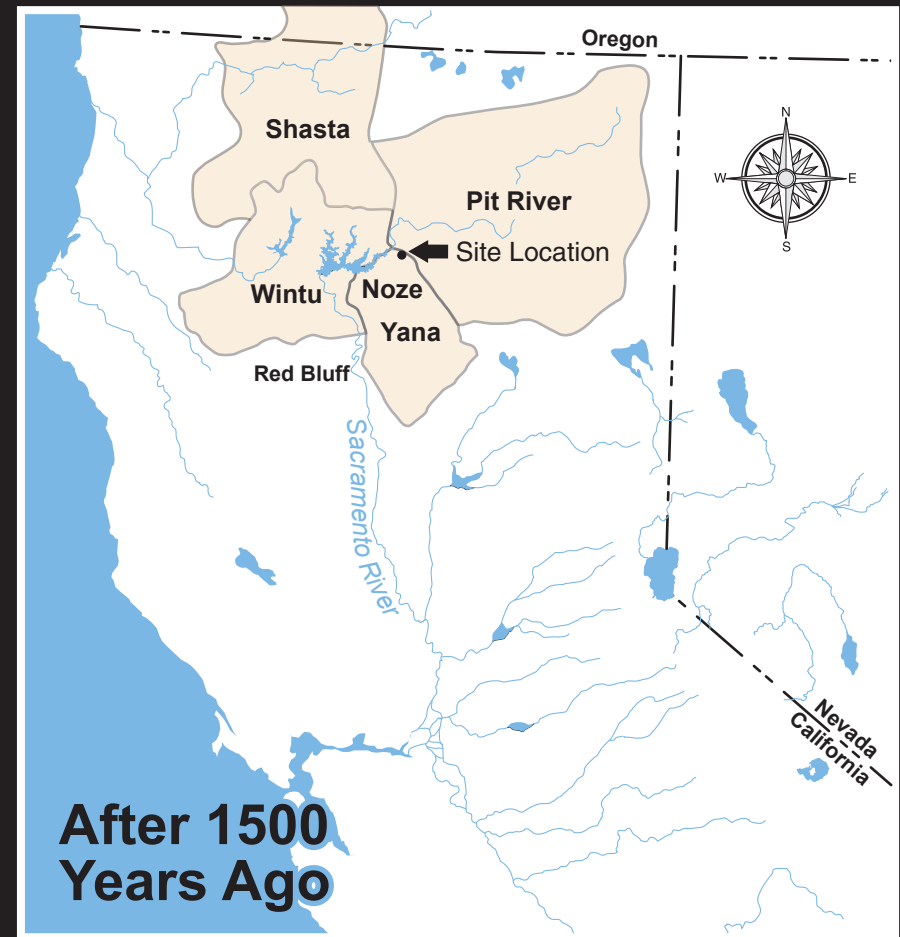
By the time Mary's mother was born (about 1840), the Yana had been reduced to a very small group, barely surviving in a diminishing territory in the rugged hills and canyons east of Red Bluff and Redding. Their numbers had been decimated by disease and conflict with neighboring Indian groups, European and American trappers, explorers, miners, and settlers.





## The Wintu Arrival and Conflict

Mary's mother is believed to have been Wintu. The Wintu are members of the Penutian language group and linguists (scientists who study language) and archaeologists believe that they came into northern California from Oregon about 1,500 years ago. This pushed the Yana and other groups out of the Sacramento Valley and into the surrounding hills. Not only did the newcomers speak a very different language, but their entire way of life was different. Archaeological evidence shows that the Yana and other older cultures of the Sacramento Valley had lived in small family groups that were very mobile. These groups moved often to follow the animals they hunted and to collect the plant foods as they became ripe for the picking. By contrast, the larger Wintu population established more permanent villages along the river and had specialized tools to exploit the fish and birds they found there. They defended their new land and resources from others who moved through the Valley. They also came into conflict with their neighbors during the spring and summer months, when some Wintu moved to temporary camps in the hills to fish, gather various plant foods, and hunt deer and rabbits.



## Artifacts that Define Different Cultures

How can archaeologists tell the difference between sites used by the Yana and the Wintu, and tell who lived at the site along Highway 299? Groups all over the world often go to great length to distinguish themselves from other groups. Scientists call this process *ethnogenesis*. Ethnogenesis is the accumulation of markers of group identity by which a group of people understand themselves to be distinct from others. They might dress differently, wear their hair differently, or cover their faces and bodies with different tattoos. They may speak differently or follow different religions. Importantly for archaeologist, they may also make their tools and ceremonial items differently—these are the things that are often well preserved in archaeological sites.

Archaeologists have defined a group of artifacts that they call the “**Shasta Complex**.” These artifacts are associated with the Wintu and are between 200 and 1,500 years old. Shasta Complex artifacts are generally found at large sites and include elaborate fishing tools such as harpoons and fish hooks, shell beads, shell pendants, bone pendants, bone gambling pieces, mortars and pestles, and stone arrowheads. Their arrow heads are distinct from the styles made by other groups, and archaeologists have named them **Gunther Barbed points** and “**Redding**” subtype **Desert Side-notched points**.

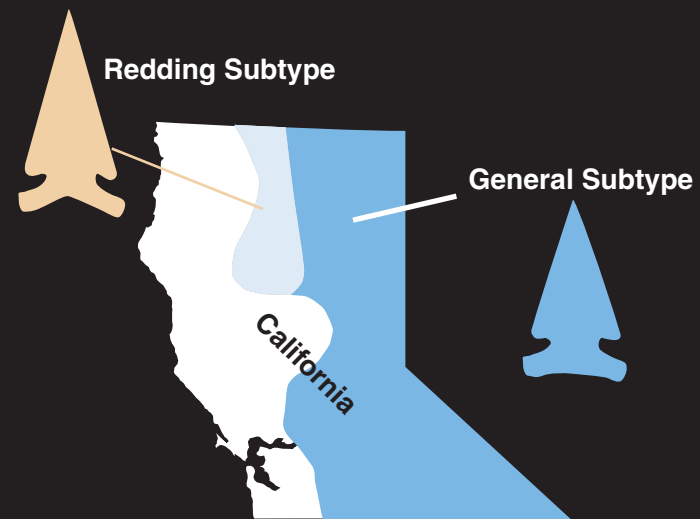
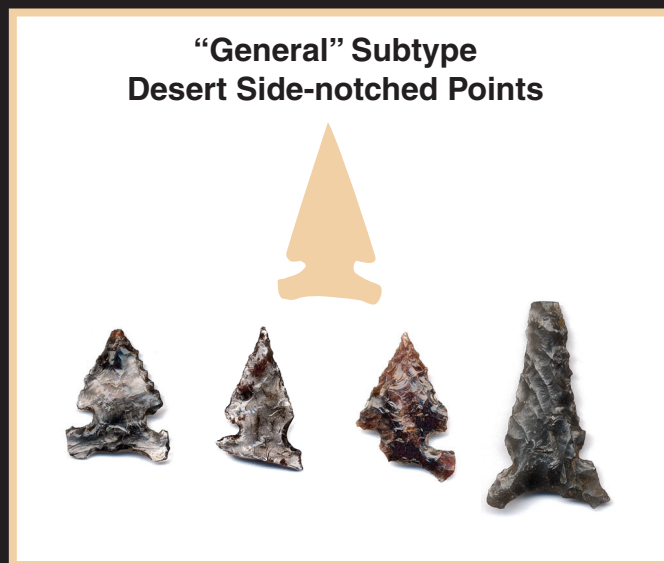
Gunther Barbed Points



“Redding” Sub-type Desert Side-notched Points



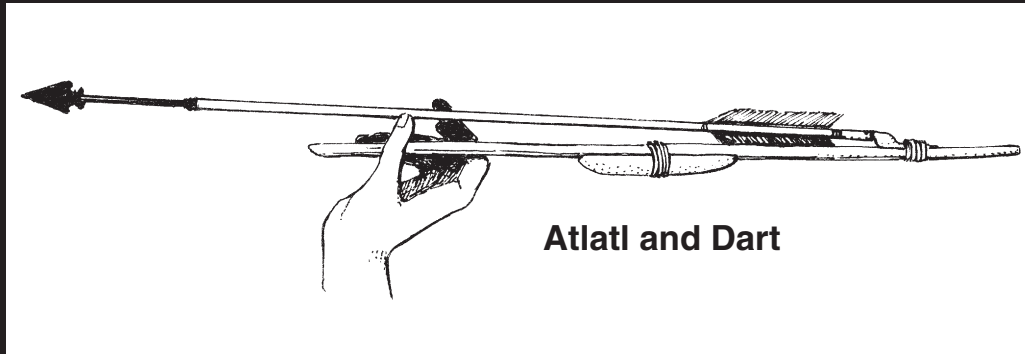
Archaeologists often find a different set of artifacts in the mountains surrounding the Sacramento Valley that were used at the same time as those in the Valley. They call this group of artifacts the “**Tehama Pattern.**” This group of artifacts is identified with the Yana and come from smaller sites that were used seasonally. The artifacts include flat millings and handstones, and arrowheads such as those called the “**General**” and “**Sierra**” subtypes of the **Desert Side-notched point.**



Desert Side-notched Point  
Distribution in  
Northern California

## Who Lived at CA-SHA-4410/H?

Archaeologists found numerous projectile points and other artifacts at the damaged site next to Highway 299. They show that the site was used over a very long period of time and by the Yana and the Wintu at different times as territorial boundaries changed. A limited number of projectile points found at the site are styles that are very old and date to about 3,300 years ago. These points (called darts) were attached to long wooden shafts and were thrown using an atlatl or throwing stick.



Atlatl and Dart

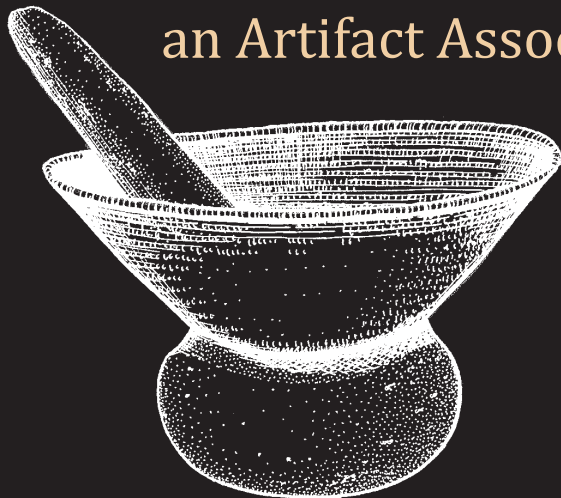
Fifty Gunther Barbed points and ten Redding subtype Desert Side-notched points were found at the site. These are “Shasta Complex” points and may signal a Wintu occupation sometime during the last 300 years and were used as arrows shot with a bow.

Fifteen other arrow points found at the site are the General subtype of the Desert Side-notched and these are “Tehama Pattern” arrow points that are associated with the Yana. Other artifacts found at the site also show that this site was used by both Wintu and Yana people at different times.





Pestle used for Grinding Acorns—  
an Artifact Associated with the Wintu



Stone Pestle, Basket and  
Stone Mortar

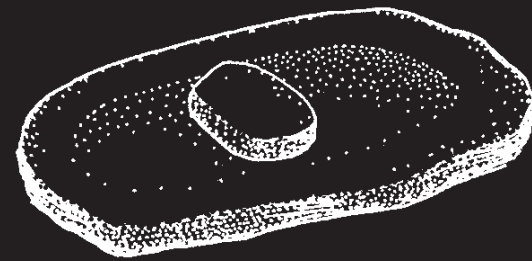


Blue Oak  
(*Quercus douglasii*)



Interior Live Oak  
(*Quercus wislizenii*)

Charred  
Acorn  
Kernels



Handstone  
and Millingslab

Handstone—  
an Artifact used for Grinding Small Seeds  
and Associated with the Yana

## Strangers Arrive with Devastating Results

When the first European explorers and fur trappers came into the area they brought diseases with them to which the Native Californians had no resistance. A Hudson's Bay Company expedition in 1830-1833 brought malaria into the Sacramento Valley and thousands of Indians died. Entire villages were wiped out. This epidemic probably killed about 75% of the Indians in the upper Sacramento Valley. Those who survived were often in conflict with the miners and settlers who flocked to northern California after gold was discovered in 1849. Settlers pushed the Indians of all tribes out of their traditional territories and ever farther into marginal lands with fewer resources. The White settlers also hunted the deer and other animals that were important sources of food for the Indians. Hunger forced the Indians to take cattle and livestock for food, which in turn led to numerous accounts of White vigilante groups killing whole camps of men, women, and children.

In 1881 author Joaquin Miller wrote in his book "Shadows of Shasta":

*"Why this book? Because last year, in the heart of the Sierras, I saw women and children chained together and marched down from their cool, healthy homes to degradation and death on the Reservation. At the side of this long, chained line, urged on and kept in order by bayonets, rode a young officer, splendid in gold and brass... These women and children were guilty of no crime; they were not even accused of wrong. But their fathers and brothers lay dead in battle-harness, on the mountain slopes and in the lava beds..."*

## A Transformed World

Anthropologist Alfred Kroeber estimated that in 1770 there were about 1,500 Yana and by the 1840's only a few hundred remained. Some Yana would go to work for or marry into White families, and become a part of a transformed world. In 1911 a Yahi Yana man walked out of the canyons into the town of Oroville and into history. Ishi would live in Berkeley with Kroeber and be forever remembered as the last of his tribe.

The Yana language was recorded by early linguists, but there are no speakers of the Yana language left today. The Pit River/Achumawi fared slightly better. Some took jobs in the new dominant society while trying to maintain their cultural traditions and identity. Alfred Kroeber estimated their tribal population to be about 3,000 in 1770, and only 1,100 remained by 1910. Native American Studies professor Frank LaPena estimates that in 1770 the Wintu population was more than 14,000 and by 1910 it had been reduced to only 1,000 individuals.

Today the Pit River Tribe (Ajumawi –Atsugewi Nation) has elected council members representing nine of the eleven bands: the Madesi, Ajumawi, Astarawi, Atsugewi, Atwamsini, Hammawi, Hewisedawi, Illmawi, and Itsatawi. The tribe has a population of around 1,800 with about 450 members voting in the last tribal elections. Today's Wintu people belong to many different tribal groups, including the Toyon-Wintu Tribe, the Nor-El Muk Nation, the Winnemen, and the Redding Rancheria Nation, which is a federally recognized sovereign nation that also includes members of Yana decent and Pit River people.

Some of Mary Ann Fister's family, no doubt, still live in northern California. Seven generations have been born and hundreds of people can claim her as their ancestor, but most are probably unaware that she was half Wintu and half Irish-American and was born and lived where cultures coexisted and collided in the boundary lands near Round Mountain California.

Learn more at:

<http://pitriverpeople.org>

<http://www.winnememwintu.us/>

<http://www.native-languages.org/wintu.htm>

<http://history.library.ucsf.edu/ishi.html>

<http://anthropology.si.edu/repatriation/projects/ishi.htm>

## Credits

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Tammara Ekness Norton  
Far Western Anthropological Research Group, Inc.  
Davis, California  
[www.farwestern.com](http://www.farwestern.com)**

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