

Testimony of Frank Temoke
Hereditary Chief of the Western Shoshone

The following testimony is not written in Frank Temoke's own words, but rather as I interpret his meaning. Keep in mind that Frank was raised in a period when whites and Indians communicated in simple terms, a language often referred to as pigeon English.

Having been raised among the native Shoshone People and having them as my playmates during my growing years, I must say that I am as comfortable with such language as any English, and believe that the following is very close to the language Frank would use if he had command of modern English.

Cliff Jones

For the purpose of passing along testimony of how I remember things as they happened during my lifetime, and things told me by people who have gone before me, I am having the following put in writing.

For background it is important that it's understood that although I was not born until 1903, many of the old ways remained during much of my lifetime. My people worked at jobs provided on ranches and mines, and even the railroad, but only for short periods. Much of the time we spent living in our old way.

School to Indians seemed unimportant and neither my wife, Theresa, nor I ever learned to read. But not being educated has not stopped us from doing what we have felt was right, and learning all we could during our lives. I am proud that before I retired in 1972, I managed the Circle Bar Ranch for Charles and Peggy Evans here in Ruby Valley.

We Indians, those that lived in Ruby Valley were called Wat-a-duca, because we used the seeds from a weed we Indians call Wat. Wat, which turns red in late summer and black in the fall, grows on the flats and islands on the east side of Franklin and Ruby Lakes was only used to supplement or mix with pinenuts and other foods to make (wat-a-gravy) foods go further, especially on dry years.

A story told much among our people was of the first time Old Temoke, my Great Grandfather saw a party of white men, they ask for water, or where water was. Old Temoke and those with him thought the whites wanted "wat", so offered some to them, but the white men would not take it.

I think we Wat-a-duca people have been as fair as anyone could possibly be with our white neighbors since that time. During the 1860's, when the Goshutes to the East, and the White Knives and Piutes to the West, were causing problems for the white immigrants we did our best to not take any part in such warfare. In fact, the leaders here in Ruby did their best to help resolve such conflicts.

On the other hand, we Wat-a-duca's have felt that the whites have not been completely honest and fair with us. Even before the Ruby Valley Treaty of 1863, our people were told that there would be a place set aside for us to live north of Be-a-o-gitch (Big Creek), or Overland Creek. Because of the constant pressure from my father and others, we were able to acquire about 120 acres just

North of Overland, but nothing to the extent we were promised.

In 1865 the soldiers gave we Indians 500 cattle and encouraged us to become agriculturists and herdsman. My people ran the cattle on Ducha-loy (Snow Mountains - Ruby Mountains) in summer and then on the east side of the valley near Wat-a-bah (Medicine Springs) in the winter.

Then in 1874, after the white man created a reservation near Carlin, some white men and some White Knife Indians came and took our cattle. Ruby Jack and Ruby Johnson were with the cattle and tried to stop them while another rode to get Old Temoke. By the time Old Temoke and others caught up to them, they had tied up Ruby Jack and Ruby Johnson and made it as far as Harrison Pass.

Old Temoke told them to turn the cattle loose or he would get the soldiers. Then, after arguing for some time, the Carlin Indians left about 50 cattle and took the rest.

They (government officials) wanted Temoke and his band to move to Carlin, but Old Temoke said, "no, reservation supposed to be in Ruby Valley, not in Carlin. "This is my country, not Carlin."

Then after that, after an incident where the Indians at Carlin derailed a train by taking spikes out of the tracks, the whites created another reservation in Duck Valley which was actually out of Shoshone country.

Again they met with Chief Temoke and tried to get him to move to Duck Valley. The meeting, as told to me, was up under the Big Trees on Overland Creek. Old Temoke said, "No, this is where we get our reservation, six miles square. This is my country, the deer for our food is on the mountains, we have ducks on the lakes for food, on the other side of the valley and in those hills and mountains are antelope, the pinenuts we need for winter are close to us. This is my country, if you pick this country up and move it over there then I will go with it, but if you can't move our country, then we stay here."

When we made agreements with the white man we didn't know that more and more would be taken from us. We understood, and I'm speaking for all the Shoshone people, there would be mines, railroads, towns, and ranches, but never knew we would not be able to hunt where and when we wanted. We never agreed to having to get a tag or licence to hunt. In fact, we never agreed to the white man being able to hunt just as he wanted. We never gave up our rights to harvest what wood we needed or pinenuts or other foods we needed.

We never agreed to the establishment of the Forest Reserves, or the BLM, nor the designation of wilderness areas. Nor did we understand that the reservations would actually be controlled and owned by the U.S. Government. We thought the reservations were supposed to be ours to do with as best fit our people. We didn't know we couldn't run livestock as time went on. More and more we have less and less.

When the soldiers gave us the 500 cattle we understood that if we gave up our roving life and learned to farm that we would have six miles square near Overland Creek for us to raise food and keep our saddle horses. But the whites never kept their word. We are still waiting for the six mile square parcel to be granted to us.

My family lost most of the cattle the government gave us during the hard winter of 1888 and 89, but someone in my family has always run cattle or horses on the mountain in the summer and on the flats in winter. Either Billy Long, or Johnny Long, my sister, Alice Dick, and since 1972, myself and my sons Gordon Temoke and Frank Temoke Jr. have run some of the cattle as well as my grandson Rocky Roa.

My father, Machoch, ran more horses than cattle. When I was a boy, he and others would run mustangs in Butte Valley and Long Valley. Then he would sale all but the best ones which he ran on the Ruby Mountains. Sometimes as many as 300 horses would be run on the Ruby's. We did not believe we needed a permit. Now the Forest Service said we need a permit. It is the Forest Service that should need to get a permit from we Indians.

We have many concerns. First, we never agreed to let any of our use on all this land, not used for ranching and farming, go. Second, the area on the mountains where we run our cattle, by agreement was supposed to be part of the six miles square, and third, the government encouraged us to run livestock and become agriculturists. We understood we did not need a permit, that had we had a traditional right.

We Indians have kept our part of agreements, but the white man has not kept theirs. It's time they did.

The story told me by Indians older than I was that once when my great grandfather (Old Temoke) was in Wyoming at a big Indian gathering he brought home a little boy.

Hundreds of Indians were at the gathering, the kind that only happen maybe every ten or twenty years. Temoke (Temoke means rope) was one of the last to leave. As he was leaving he found a small boy standing on a fresh grave, all alone. So Temoke picked the boy up and put him on the horse and brought him back to the Wat-a-duca country. It took several weeks of travel, for he passed through country he did not know and feared ambush by Indians he did not know so traveled only at night.

Old Temoke raised the boy as one of his own. When the boy grew up he was called Billy Long. The name Long was taken for a white man that Billy worked for. Two of Billy's children were Johnny Long and Burt Moon's wife.

My father told me that the Temoke's were related to Washakee, the great chief of the northern Shoshone's, but just how I didn't know.

When I was a small boy, the Indians used to winter between Ruby Valley and Ely. Once the old Indians showed me the place where the white soldiers from Fort Ruby killed all the Goshute Indians, men, women, and kids over near Ely. Some of the Ruby Valley Indians scouted for the soldiers, and these Indians snuck into the Goshute camp the night before the massacre and warned the Mose family and Knight families, who were staying with the Goshutes so they could leave that night and not get killed. Many of the bones of the people were still there at the time I was shown the spot.

Deer were very hard to find in any of the mountains of Northern Nevada in my father's time, or even back to my grandfather's time. Indians might kill two deer a year in Ruby. Every two years some of our people, either from Ruby Valley or Clover Valley, would go north for the summer to Boda-githi (Tree Mountains), which are the mountains southeast of Twin Falls, Idaho which are now called the South Hills.

The Indians would spend the summer there, hunting deer and drying meat, but more important tanning much-needed buckskins. They would also bring back some lodge-pole-pine poles for lodges.

After the white man came and Indians worked on ranches, we would tan the hides of the small calves that died. Deer skin was very precious and hard to come by until deer began to get thick in the 1940's.

When asked if sage hens were thick Frank said, "Oh hell yeah! 1940, lot of them over at Murphy well. Lot of sage hen, country look white with sage hen, make lots of noise too." Frank went on to explain that the Indians hunted sage hens in march, at the very time the cocks were strutting and drumming. The reason being that sage hens got fat during winter. As Frank explained it, if there was lots of snow the sage hen would stand on the snow during winter and eat the best sage leaves, but on dry winters the sage hens were not fat in the spring. Frank went on to say, "Now I go there, isn't any. All gone."

For the native Indians, fat on wildlife was very important. Even during my life, the Indians my age always talked in terms of how fat the game was.

I never knew them to shoot a buck after the middle of October, only does. They said the bucks were no good, too thin, they preferred to kill deer in late Aug., just as the deer were turning gray, or beginning to grow their winter coat.

Rabbits were hunted in winter, preferably in December, after the rabbits had become fat from eating rabbit brush.

(Cliff Gardner now speaking) I can remember the big kettles of stew (ground hamburger was unheard of at that time and poorer cuts of meat were put in stews) that my mother and grandmother would fix for the hay crews. Where we whites preferred the lean meat, I have watched many times as the Indian men would pick the fattiest chunks. Apparently the traditional Indian diet was long on protean and short on carbohydrates, and fat was a main source of carbohydrates for them. Then too, their ability to survive in the harsh climates of the Great Basin greatly depended on putting on fat during summer so as to better survive the long winters. I can remember Oscar Knight saying "If Indian work hard, put lot of pinenuts in ground, then stay fat all time. If not much food, die pretty easy. He told of his family being snowed in one winter and of one of his brothers dying.

When I ask Frank if he thought high numbers of crows as exist now were hard on sage hen, he related what Bronco Charlie (Bronco Charlie was a Shoshone Medicine Man that lived during my Grandfather's time) had told him. "Bronco Charlie say crow push sage hen off nest with head, then eat eggs. Sage hen no fight. Ducks same way, ran away. Mud hens (Coots) fight."

It was then that I began to understand why as we experienced a build up in predators during the 1960's and 70's, that coot numbers had seemed to remain constant while duck and sage grouse numbers declined.

I ask Frank if he ever saw coyotes eat calves alive, "Oh hell yea, lot of times, when I worked for Roger Smith, in spring, hind quarter all eaten up, calf still alive."

"Lot of lion now, too many, kill to many deer. Kill deer, never eat much, never come back, just kill another one, no good."

Frank went on to tell of one winter, 1920, when he was still a kid, 16 or 17 years old. He was with Johnny Dick, Frank Steel, and Bob Temoke wintering in the Medicine Range across from Ruby Valley. A big snow came, three feet deep or more on the level. About all they had to eat was mountain lion that Johnny Dick was able to tree. Frank said he remembered eating four lions and a coyote before they were able to get back to the Indian camp in Ruby Valley.