

Salt Journey

Contributed by Ben Schill of Phillipsville

Lucy Young gave this account of the annual journey by Indians to procure salt to Edith Van Allen Murphey as they traveled horseback through the Wilderness Area of Mendocino National Forest.



"There were certain salt springs in the neighborhood of North Yolla Bolly Mountain which were under the claimed ownership of Indians who were hostile to Lucy's tribe. Because they had no horses, Lucy's people, the entire journey was made on foot...Old people, very small children and nursing mothers were left at home. If stores of roots and berries had been left over from the winter, these were buried in pits in the ground, or placed in safe caches.

"Big baskets or surplus valuables were hung securely in trees. The summer would be dry, and there were no thieves in those days. If possible, fresh meat was obtained in order to leave some with the stay-at-homes, and in order to take some with the Salt party for the first day or two, when hunting was unlikely to be good.

"The journey was planned to take a month's time, reaching the Salt Country, so as to arrive close to North Yolla Bolly about full moon.

"Knee-length buckskin moccasins were worn by the big walking children, i.e., those able to take care of themselves, and carry a small pack of salt as well. The women, too, wore moccasins, but the men went barefoot.

"For some time before the journey began, old baskets, nets and carriers of any kind were collected and patched so that they could contain salt. Lattice work was made to fit in the baskets to hold successive layers of salt.

"As they traveled, they lived off the country, with frequent pauses to fish or hunt, to dry meat, or to prospect for bulbs, or to mark the places where they grew, with the thought of harvesting them when they were ripe, on the return trip.

"Having finally arrived at the Salt Ground, they waited, if too early, for the moon to be right. Some of the women kept the children with their

baskets on the edge of No-Mans Land - the section between the territory claimed for hunting by Chief Lassik, Lucy's great-uncle and the Salt Country, claimed by their enemies - while the swift runners among the women, and the entire band of warriors crept on to the Salt Country.

"There, crusts of salt covered the ground, and frequently low hanging shrubs were encrusted also and could be stripped quickly into the baskets. The moon made it light as day. If the time was exactly right, they were not molested, but if they were a day or more, late, their passage was fiercely disputed by the other Indians.

"If they were lucky, their foray was successful, and it resulted in nearly a year's supply of salt, which, when they had put a discreet distance between them and their enemies, they would stop to pick over for sticks and stones, and sometimes boil down in baskets with hot stones, pouring off the small dirt on top, and leaving a crust of pure salt to be skimmed off when cold.

"Secure in the possession of this valuable salt, much hunting was done on the way home, meat was dried, and fish was dried and smoked. Frequently they met other hunting parties, and much visiting and sharing of game ensued.

"Small wonder that all Indians thought of Heaven as "The Happy Hunting Ground!" It was an ideal life - that of the Salt Journey - making use of everything in Nature, wasting nothing, sharing everything, stealing nothing.

"Why steal? When anything could be had for the asking? Compare this life with the ten years following the coming of the white man, when an Indian had no rights that a white man was bound to respect, not even the Indian's wife, or life, or land, or game.

"Small wonder that reprisals and bloody battles such as Lucy Young witnessed, were common events in the years that followed."

- From "Indian Uses of Native Plants" by Edith Van Allen Murphey. Printed by the Mendocino County Historical Society, 603 West Perkins St, Ukiah CA 95482. Available at the Orange Cat in Garberville CA.

Story found at:

http://www.blocksburg.com/lucyyoung_comments.php?id=9_0_6_0_C