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Notes on Yana Ethnobotany

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DURING a recent inventory of anthropological archival material at the University of California, Berkeley, a list of plants collected in Tehama County, California, in or before 1914 by T. T. Waterman (1914-1918) was encountered. This, taken in conjunction with a field check list by C. H. Merriam (1979), consisting in part of native names of plant species collected in Shasta County to the north of Tehama, from Yana Indian residents, may form the basis of at least a partial summary of plant usages by the Yana which has heretofore been lacking. Several other published but scattered sources, especially that of Sapir and Spier (1943) may serve to round out the picture of possibly all that can ever be known, ethnobotanically, for the Yana region.

The specimens collected by Waterman were submitted to the University of California Herbarium in 1914, and identified there by staff botanist Harriet A. Walker. Records of the Herbarium suggested that after the plants were identified they were either returned to Waterman or later discarded. Waterman, along with A. L. Kroeber and others, was in the field in Tehama County with Ishi, the last of the Southern Yana Indians, in early 1914. When the trip was being planned, Waterman had expressed a desire to make use of Ishi's botanical knowledge to add to the store of Yana ethnography (T. Kroeber 1961). It is not a difficult supposition that he made the

collection with the express purpose of writing a monograph on the subject of Southern Yana or Yahi (Ishi's group) use of plants, using Ishi as the only remaining informant. Unfortunately the project appears never to have come about, perhaps because Ishi died in 1916, and Waterman left the University several years later and became interested in other things.

Before Ishi was "discovered" in 1911, C. Hart Merriam, in 1907, had been engaged in securing plant names from the Northern Yana, in Shasta County, adjoining Ishi's territory. He was working with a printed list prepared for use with any Pacific Coast or California Indians. Merriam did not, regrettably, go beyond the name collecting stage with the Yana for the plants which he presumably identified himself, botanically, in the field. The result is that despite both his and Waterman's efforts, the ethnobotany of the Yana was never properly recorded.

Sapir and Spier (1943), Gifford and Klimmek (1936), and Saxton Pope (1918) all contributed information on Yana uses of plants. Pope mentioned Yahi archery materials only, but the others, working largely with Northern and Central Yana informants, described some of the food and medicinal plants which the Yana as a whole must have used. They evidently made little effort to go deeply into the subject of ethnobotany, and relied to some extent on repeating already-known data, e.g., from Merrill (1923) on the materials of Yana baskets now in the R. H. Lowie Museum

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of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley. None of these authors made mention at all of many of the plants named by Merriam (about 56 species) or those collected by Waterman (about 88 genera and species); their listings or mentions of plants represent less than one-half of those on Waterman's list. Of course there is an overlapping in these several sources, and it appears that Waterman's contribution, though incomplete, had the greatest potential value for use as a Yana ethnobotany.

Less than ten species in Waterman's list of 88 have not been reported as of economic value to the Yana or neighboring Indians. Whether this indicates that the collection was made in the company of Ishi or any other person who had intimate knowledge of Yana plants is not known. In perusing Waterman's notes and correspondence in the Bancroft Library of the University of California, especially those pertaining to Ishi and the Yana, I could find no reference to anything pertaining to the collection of plants beyond that already mentioned in Theodora Kroeber's (1961) book. It is certainly possible that Ishi, even if he helped collect the plants, in the end turned out not to be an expert on any but the more obvious food plants. Perhaps if the last Yahi survivor had been a female, Waterman would have had no trouble at all in finding out about the intricacies of Yana ethnobotany.

Although the Yana Indians were almost extinct by the time A. L. Kroeber and Waterman got around to writing about their culture, it is known that in aboriginal times they had trade relations with neighboring tribes such as the Wintun, Achomawi, and Maidu (Davis 1961). It would not be at all unexpected that, given similar plants, the Yana would use them in approximately the same way as their neighbors. Examination of life-zone maps, distributions of plant communities and range lands (see Grinnell 1935; Munz and

Keck 1968; and Burcham 1957) reveals that the Yana lands had much in common with the inner Coast Ranges and almost the entire length of the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada, especially in the whole region surrounding the northern and central sections of the Great Central Valley of California. As to the usages of the plants, most or many of the useful plants described for the neighbors of the Yana, i.e., the Wintun (Dubois 1935; Merriam 1967), the Shasta (Holt 1946; Dixon 1907), the Northern Maidu (Dixon 1905), and the Achomawi-Atsugewi (Garth 1953) also occur in Yana territory. Because of general environmental similarities, even tribes farther away, such as the peoples of inland Mendocino County (Chesnut 1902), the Karok (Schenck and Gifford 1952), and the Sierra Miwok (Barrett and Gifford 1933) can reasonably be considered in the same plant-use context as the Yana. It is not claimed that the Yana used all the plants itemized here as indicated. Certainly there were minor variations concerning use by the Yana, but in general, and by analogy with better-reported groups in California, it seems safe to assert that the Yana would have used the plants found in their territory approximately as indicated in the list. Probably the main shortcoming in this particular composite list is that it is still not nearly long enough. The Yana must have known of many more humble plants than those summarized, and probably could assign specific uses to them.

PLANTS OCCURRING IN YANA TERRITORY AND THEIR KNOWN OR PROBABLE USES

Legend:

- * Identified in Waterman's collection and mentioned in other published material, e.g., Sapir and Spier (1943), as used by Yana.
- ** Not included in Waterman's list, but elsewhere reported as used by Yana.

*** Mentioned only in C. H. Merriam's (1979) "Vocabularies."

[] Words in brackets are Northern Yana, collected by Merriam in his characteristically simple phonetic rendering, at Round Mountain, in Shasta County, 1907 and 1926. A few Yana (unspecified as to group) words derived from Curtin (1898) and a few Southern Yana words from Waterman (1911-1918) are indicated by [C] or [W], respectively.

Abies concolor (White Fir [*Chaw-lo'-lo*]): fish spears, house construction, mats – wood, bark, boughs; medicine – resin, bark, needles.***

Acer spp.: *circinatum* (Vine Maple [*Ha'-che-le*]); *macrophyllum* (Maple [*Mah-mahl'*]): basketry, cordage, mats – stems, bark; clothing – bark; snowshoe frames, mush paddles – wood.*

Achillea millefolium (Common Yarrow): medicine (tea) – roots, leaves (among Shasta Indians, leaves were used to pad women's caps when carrying burden baskets, because of their sweet odor).

Adiantum jordanii (Maidenhair Fern [*Loo'-poo-poo*]): basketry (overlay) – stems (also for keeping ear-ring holes open and increasing size, by other Indians).*

Aesculus californica (Buckeye [*Pah'-she*]): food – seeds (nuts); fish poison – seeds, leaves; firedrill shafts and hearths, arrow foreshafts – wood; basketry – long shoots.*

Agoseris retrorsa (Mountain Dandelion): food – among the Karok a closely related species (*aurantiaca*) was used: "juice is sucked out of the root near the crown and is chewed like chewing gum" (Schenck and Gifford 1952).

Alnus oregana (Red Alder): dye – bark; arrowshafts – shoots; basketry – roots; medicine – leaves, bark.*

Amelanchier utahensis (Service Berry

[*Pi'-wah-ke*): food – berries; arrows – stems.*

Angelica tomentosa (Angelica): food – shoots, stems; medicine – roots, bark.**

Anthemis cotula (Mayweed): medicine – leaves and flowers.

Apocynum cannabinum (Wild Hemp): cordage, nets – stems, bark fibers; food – seeds.**

Arctostaphylos spp.: *manzanita* (Parry Manzanita); *patula* (Greenleaf Manzanita [*Mah'-che*]); *viscida* (White Leaf Manzanita [*Pah'-chi*]): food (cider) – berries; bows, housing materials, canes, spoons, mush stirrers, tobacco pipes – wood; medicine – bark, leaves, berries; part of deer headdress used in stalking game – branches.*

Aristolachia californica (Dutchman's Pipe): medicine – entire plant.

Artemisia spp.: *douglasiana* (Sagebrush, Wormwood); *ludoviciana* (Sage Herb [*Kah-si'-e*]): food – seeds, shoots; basketry – stems; medicine – bark, leaves, stems; arrowshafts – shoots; granary construction – branches; tattooing – leaves (green color).*

Asclepias spp.: *cordifolia*, *eriocarpa* (Milkweed [*Mah'-se*]): cordage, nets, aprons – stems; medicine – stalk juice, roots; food (chewing gum) – juice.*

Avena barbata (Slender Wild Oat): food – seeds (native of Old World).

Berberis repens (Barberry, Oregon Grape [*We'-choo-choo'-se*]): dye – roots, bark; food – berries; medicine – roots.*

Brickellia californica: I can find no economic use for this plant mentioned in the literature. Voegelin (1938) states that the Tübatulabal of the southern Sierra Nevada "considered it a weed."

Brodiaea spp.: *hyacinthina* (White Brodiaea); *congesta* (Ookow); *laxa* (Grass Nut Ithuriel's Spear); *minor*; *volubilis* (Snake Lily): food – bulbs; adhesive and paint binder when used on bows – juice.*

Bromus mollis (Soft Chess): food – seeds

(native of Europe).

Calochortus spp.: *albus* (Fairy Lantern); *luteus* (Mariposa Lily); *monophyllus* (Yellow Star Lily): food – bulbs.

Calvobista subsculpta (Puffballs, a fungus [Yah'-poon-nah]): Other edible mushroom species are named by C. Hart Merriam, but not identified botanically.***

Calyptidium umbellatum (Pussy Paws): No use found for this plant among Yana or neighboring tribes in literature. Species is described as “named but not used” by the Sierra Miwok (Barrett and Gifford 1933).

Camassia sp. (Camas): food – bulbs.**

Carex sp. (Sedge): basketry – roots, leaves.

Castanopsis sempervirens? (Bush Chinquapin [Lahs-moo-chel-lo']): food – nuts (*C. chrysophylla*, Giant Chinquapin, is the usual species mentioned as used by northern California Indians).

Castilleja affinis (Paint Brush): food – seeds.

Ceanothus spp.: *cordulatus* (Snow Bush [Kah'-pah-choo-se]); *cuneatus* (Buck Brush); *integerrimus* (Deer Brush [Pah'-mutch-hi-yi]); *prostratus* (Squaw Carpet, Mahala Mats [Yahnip-pi-yi]): acorn granaries – stems; mush stirrers, digging sticks – wood; medicine – leaves, bark, root, twigs; food – berries, seeds; basketry – stems, shoots; fish dams – branches.

Centaurea melitensis (Napa Thistle, Tocalote): No economic use reported for Indians in sources available; plant introduced from Europe.

Cercis occidentalis (Redbud [Watch-tah-pahl]): basketry – bark, sapwood, stems.*

Cercocarpus spp.: *betuloides*, *parvifolius* (Mountain Mahogany [Wash-shoo']): spears, clubs, digging sticks, wedges for plank splitting, house construction, harpoon shafts, bows, arrowshafts, stick armor – wood.*

Chlorogallum sp. (Soaproot – Kite' i' la-[W]; *Kedila*- [C]): soap, brushes – roots;

food – roots, shoots; basketry – roots (juice) to make baskets seedproof; fish poison, glue – juice; medicine – roots; tattoo paint – green leaves.**

Clarkia spp.: *amoena* (Summer's Darling); *arcuata*; *quadrivulnera*; *rhomboidea*: food – seeds; medicine – leaves.*

Collinsia linearis: No economic uses reported for Yana or neighboring Indians. A related species was “named but not used” by Sierra Miwok (Barrett and Gifford 1933).

Comandra pallida (Bastard Toad-Flax): Not reported as used by Yana or neighbors, but it is known as a plant with edible fruit “throughout the West” (Kirk 1975).

Cornus spp.: *glabrata* (Brown Dogwood [Pah-pahm'-se]); *nuttallii* (Mountain Dogwood [Chil'-pi-ow']): bows, arrowshafts, arrow foreshafts – wood; basketry – long shoots; medicine – roots, bark; food – berries.**

Corylus sp. (Hazelnut [Hoo'-pah]): food – nuts; basketry (hats) – stems; arrowshafts, frames for snowshoes, fish traps – twigs.**

Crataegus douglasii (Hawthorn [Tit'-kellup'-e']): food – berries.***

Cupressus macnabiana (McNab Cypress [Koo-goo'-e]): medicine – stems; acorn leaching basket lining – leaves.***

Cuscuta sp. (Dodder): Not reported as used by Yana or neighbors. Tūbatulabal, in southern Sierra Nevada, “considered it as weeds” (Voegelin 1938).

Delphinium variegatum (Larkspur): Related species of larkspur used by Northern California Indians as food (leaves and flowers), and for paint for bows and arrows.

Dudleya farinosa (Live Forever): Possibly a mistaken identification by botanist at Berkeley; other *Dudleya* species have been reported as edible among the Maidu (Powers 1877).

Equisetum telmateia (Horsetail [Pah'-te]): abrasive, e.g., for polishing arrows – stalks; medicine – stems.

Eriogonum sp. (Wild Buckwheat, Sour Grass): medicine – leaves, stems, roots; food – stems.

Eriophyllum gracile: “gracile” species not listed in standard botanical treatises, e.g., Munz and Keck (1968). *E. lanatum* (Golden Yarrow), however, reported in use by Miwok as medicine – leaves; (Barrett and Gifford 1933).

Fraxinus latifolia (Oregon Ash [*Hoo-se-re'-re*]): tobacco pipes, canes, harpoons – wood; medicine – roots.***

Fritillaria sp. (Checker Lily): food – roots.

Gallium nuttallii (Bedstraw, Cleavers): medicine – leaves and stems.

Gilia archilleaefolia: Evidently considered mostly as weeds by Northern California Indians. One subspecies grows in Southern California, and seeds of that plant were eaten by the Luiseño (Sparkman 1908).

Grindelia robusta (Gum Plant): medicine – leaves.

Helianthella californica: food – flowers.*

Helianthus sp. (Wild Sunflower): food – seeds, flowers; medicine – roots.**

Heteromeles arbutifolia (Toyon): food – berries; medicine – leaves and bark.

Hemizonia multiglandulosa (Tarweed): food, medicine – seeds.**

Hordeum hystrix (Gussoni's Barley-Grass): Species *hystrix* not reported as in use by Yana or neighbors. Seeds of a similar species (*H. murinum*), however, were used for food by Northern California Indians, e.g., Yuki (Chesnut 1902).

Iris macrosiphon (Wild Iris): cordage (especially for nets), basketry – leaves; medicine – roots.*

Juniperus californica (California Juniper [*Mun'-ne-e*] –? – cf. *Taxus*): food, beverage – berries; medicine – twigs; basketry – roots; bows – wood; cradle mattress – bark.*

Lathyrus sulphureus (Wild Pea): This species not reported in use elsewhere by Yana

or neighbors; several other species (e.g., *jep-sonii*) were used by Northern California Indians (e.g., Yuki) as food – greens and seeds, and as medicine – whole plant (?) (Chesnut 1902).

Librocedrus decurrens (Incense Cedar [*Te-yu'-te*]): used in acorn leaching basins (flavoring and water distribution) – leaves; bows – wood; medicine – leaves.***

Lilium pardalinum (Leopard Lily, Panther Lily): food – bulbs, seed-like portions.**

Lithocarpus densiflora (Tanbark Oak [*Ki-u-e*]): food – seeds (acorns).***

Lolium temulentum (Darnel): food – seeds.

Lomatium utriculatum (?): This and other species, e.g., those commonly known as Incense Root and Indian Balsam were used by other Northern California Indians, e.g., Yuki and Karok, as food – leaves, and as medicine – roots (Chesnut 1902; Schenck and Gifford 1952).

Lonicera interrupta (Chaparral Honey-suckle): basketry – stems; medicine – leaves.

Lupinus albicaulis (Lupine): This species not reported as used by Yana or neighbors; other species, however, were used by Northern California Indians as food – leaves, flowers; medicine – whole plant (Chesnut 1902; Barrett and Gifford 1933; Schenck and Gifford 1952).

Melilotus indicus (Yellow Melilot – native of Eurasia): Not reported as used by Yana or neighbors, although Moore (1979) indicates its use (not necessarily by Indians) as a well-known medicinal plant. Tübatalabal knew of plant, but considered it a weed (Voegelin 1938).

Mimulus nasutus (Monkey Flower, Musk Flower): medicine – whole plant; food – greens.

Monardella sp. (Coyote Mint?): medicine – leaves, stems, flowers.

Nasturtium officinale (Water Cress – naturalized from Europe): food, medicine –

green tops.

Navarretia pubescens (related species commonly called Potela and Skunkweed): food – seeds; medicine – whole plant.

Nicotiana bigelovii (Wild Tobacco – mou-hat- [W]): smoked, chewed – leaves.**

Paeonia brownii (Peony): arrowshafts – stems; medicine – root, seeds.*

Peltiphyllum peltatum (Indian Rhubarb): food – young shoots; medicine – roots.

Penstemon heterophyllus (Beard Tongue): Related species (*breviflorus*) used by Northern California Indians (e.g., Miwok), as medicine – roots, stems, leaves (Barrett and Gifford 1933).

Perideridia sp. (Squaw Root, sometimes known as Anise): food – roots; medicine – flowers.*

Philadelphus lewisii (Syringa): arrow shafts – stems; tobacco pipes – wood.*

Picea sp. (Spruce): basketry (for amulet containers) – twigs.**

Pinus spp.: *lambertiana* (Sugar Pine [*Hoo'-nah*]); *ponderosa* (Yellow Pine, Ponderosa Pine [*She-wit'-e*]); *sabiniana* (Digger Pine [*Chow'-nah*]): food – seeds (“nuts”); adhesive or sealant, “face blackeners” – pitch; basketry – needles, roots; house roofing – wood; beads – shells of seeds; dye – roots.**

Plantago lanceolata (Ribgrass, English Plantain – introduced from Europe): Grows in many places in Northern California, but there are no reports known to me referring to economic uses by Yana or neighbors. Some called it “White Man’s Foot,” because it grew everywhere, supposedly, where Whites set foot (Clarke 1977). *P. major* (Common, or American Plantain) is said to have been used as a medical poultice by Southern California Indians (Romero 1954).

Platanus racemosa (Western Sycamore): house construction, bowls – wood. These uses are recorded for Southern California (Bean and Saubel 1972); no references for use

as indicated have been found for Northern or Central California Indians.

Polygala californica (Milkwort): *P. cornuta* noted as medicinal plant among Central California Indians (Barrett and Gifford 1933).

Polystichum sp. (Sword Fern): lining for acorn leaching basins – fronds; basketry (overlay) – stems.**

Populus spp.: *fremontii* (Fremont Cottonwood); *trichocarpa* (Black Cottonwood [*Hau-de*]): medicine – bark.

Prunus spp.: *subcordata* (Sierra Plum [*Paht'-koo*]); *virginiana* (Western Chokecherry [*Pi'-wah-ke*]): food – fruits, kernels; medicine – bark.**

Pseudotsuga menziesii (Douglas Fir [*Chim'-chim-me*]): medicine – leaves, spring buds; basketry – roots.***

Ptelea crenulata (Hop Tree): Not reported as aboriginally used, but note use in recent times in brewing and baking (Kirk 1975).

Pteridium aquilinum (Brake Fern, Bracken [*Tah'-no-noe-e*]): food – shoots; basketry – underground runners; medicine – roots.**

Quercus spp.: *chrysolepis* (Canyon Oak, Mountain Live Oak [*Shilp'-keel'*]); *douglasii* (Blue Oak [*Yu-a'-hu*]); *dumosa* (Scrub Oak [*Pin'-te-ow-e*]); *garryana* (Oregon Oak [*Ki'yu*], Broad Leaf Shin Oak [*Mah-wah'-yu*]); *kelloggii* (California Black Oak [*Bah'-she-mahl*], *Periwiriwaiya* [C]); *lobata* (Valley Oak [*Pah'-chool*]); *wislizenii* (Interior Live Oak): food – acorns; medicine – ashes of “oak galls” (fungi); dye – bark; mortars, bowls – wood (Central Valley region).

Rhamnus californica (Coffee Berry, Cascara [*Pah-pahn'-se*]): medicine – berries, bark.

Rhododendron occidentale (Western Azalea [*Ti'ow-choos*]): No record of economic use by Indians found – the plant is known to be poisonous to cattle (Storer and Usinger 1963), presumably to man if eaten.***

Rhus spp.: *diversiloba* (Poison Oak [*Pahk'-ke-lum'-e*]); *trilobata* (Sumac, Squaw Bush [*Tsah'-chah*]): food – fruit; medicine – berries (said to have been used by some Indians as a remedy against smallpox [Chesnut 1902]); basketry – stems.

Ribes spp. (Squaw Currant, Gooseberry [*He-nam'-se*]): arrow foreshafts – stems; food – berries.

Rosa californica (Wild Rose [*Che'-yut-too'-ye*], *Kaya'-iti* [W]): food – buds (hips), blossoms; medicine – blossoms; arrow shafts – shoots.

Rubus spp.: *leucodermis* (Wild Raspberry); *parviflorus* (Thimbleberry [*Che'-kah-te'-ju'-se*]); *vitifolius* (Blackberry [*We'-choo-mow*]): food – berries; medicine – roots.**

Rumex crispus (Curly Dock – native of Eurasia): food – leaves, seeds; medicine – roots.

Salix spp.: *laevigata*, *lasiandra*, *lasiolepis* [*Mut-chit'-te*], (Willow): basketry, including fish traps – small branches; bows – wood; medicine – leaves.

Sanicula spp.: *bipinnatifida* (Purple Sanicle); *tuberosa* (Turkey Pea): food – leaves, roots; medicine – roots.

Sambucus caerulea (Elderberry [*Hoo-yow'-ye*]): food – berries; medicine – blossoms, roots; dye – berries, stems; whistles or flutes – stems or 'twigs.'

Scirpus sp. (Tule, Bulrush): food – roots, seeds; mats (including those used in baby cradles), house roofing, basketry, clothing (caps) – stalks.**

Scutellaria californica (California Skull-cap): medicine – part not reported.

Sedum spathulifolium (Stone Crop): Not reported as used specifically by Indians, but known as an edible species in recent times (Kirk 1975).

Sidalcea malvaeflora (Checker): food – part not reported.**

Silene laciniata (Catch-Fly, Champion): Not reported as used by Indians, but known

as an edible species in recent times (Kirk 1975).

Smilacina stellata (False Solomon Seal): medicine – roots, leaves.**

Smilax californica (Greenbrier): basketry – “long trailing limbs.”

Symphoricarpos sp. (Snowberry [*Ki'-che-kip'-pah*]): arrows, pipestems – branches, twigs.***

Tauschia hartwegii: Not reported as in use by Northern California Indians.

Taxus brevifolia (Western Yew [*Mun'-ne-o*]; cf. *Juniperus*): bows, tobacco pipes – wood; medicine – bark; food – berries.**

Thalictrum fendleri (Meadow Rue): medicine – roots, stems, leaves.

Trifolium spp.: *ciliolatum*, *obtusiflorum* (Clover) – *Tsawandi Kamshu* (Red Flint Clover) [C]: food – leaves, seeds.*

Torreya californica (California Nutmeg): food – nuts; basketry – roots.

Umbellularia californica (California Laurel, California Bay): food – berries; medicine – leaves.

Vaccinium ovatum (Huckleberry): food – berries.**

Vitis californica (Wild Grape – *K! asná* [W]): food – fruit; cordage and withes (including footways for bridges across streams) – vines.*

Wyethia sp. (“narrow leaf species” [*Kah'-mah*]): food – seeds, leaves, stems; medicine – roots.*

Xerophyllum tenax (Bear Grass): food – roots; basketry (overlay), cordage, clothing – stems, leaves.**

Zygadenus venenosus (Death Camass): Known by most Northern California Indians as poisonous, and dangerous, because it resembles camas (Camassia). Chesnut (1902) reported, however, that it was used among some Northern California groups as an externally applied remedy for rheumatism and to alleviate pain caused by strains and bruises.

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