

## Siletz Culture Project

### ★ What Is The Siletz Culture Project?

The Siletz Culture Project is a five-month research project initiated by the Siletz Cultural Heritage Committee on behalf of the Siletz Tribe. The Committee hired four researchers to document tribal history and culture throughout a nine-county area (Linn, Lane, Benton, Lincoln, Tillamook, Polk, Marion, Yamhill, and Multnomah counties). The researchers will contact individuals and organizations willing to share cultural information regarding the Siletz tribes.

All information gathered for this project will be turned over to the Cultural Heritage Committee and utilized in developing a tribal archives. The Committee also anticipates incorporating this data in cultural programs and activities for tribal members and other interested persons.

### ★ Why Develop A Tribal Archives?

Developing an archives is important for all Indian tribes. The 1980 census reveals that Indian people are the fastest growing and youngest of all minority groups in the United States. This indicates that those Indian people who possess and pass on the majority of cultural knowledge — the elders — are an "endangered" segment of tribal populations. The knowledge they carry is based on values and histories unique to individual tribes. As such, they comprise an individual's sense of tribal identity. Instilling this identity in the younger majority and succeeding generations is essential to the survival of Indian people as distinct tribal entities.

Another factor impacting tribal culture is increased contact with the mainstream society. This is especially evident with the current push for tribal economic self-sufficiency. More and more, lands on or near reservations are the sites of unprecedented resource development. Such activities introduce changes that have beneficial and detrimental effects upon tribal societies. The ways and degrees in which these will be felt by Indian people depend largely upon the foresight and decision-making of current tribal leaders.

Given the above, it is clear that protecting tribal culture requires immediate and careful attention. Developing a tribal archives ensures that cultural information is documented and available to all tribal members. An archives is not meant to replace the traditional process of passing knowledge through tribal activities and oration. Rather, it is a way to assist that process. Developing an archives focuses increased attention to the gathering and preservation of cultural knowledge. In turn, archival materials can be used in programs and activities which maintain and strengthen tribal values and identity.

### ★ How Might Interested Persons Participate In This Project?

There are several ways individuals and organizations may become involved in the Siletz Cultural Project. These include:

- scheduling an interview with a researcher to share information regarding tribal history and culture (stories, dances, songs, languages, regalia, food gathering and preparation, artifacts, and photographs).
- joining/attending meetings of the Area Project Advisory Committees to offer ideas and suggestions for this and future projects.
- participating in the planning and carrying out of Cultural Fairs to be held in each area.
- by providing referrals to the cultural researchers of other individuals and organizations that can contribute to the project.

Anyone interested in participating in the Siletz Culture Project should contact the cultural researcher in their area:

**Siletz**  
Denise Wilson  
P.O. Box 549  
Siletz, OR 97380  
Ph: 444-2532 or 444-2234

**Salem**  
Norbert Johnson  
Space 1, 934 S. Main  
Independence, OR 97351  
Ph: 838-0297

**Springfield**  
Bonnie Petersen  
1234 Mill  
Springfield, OR 97477  
Ph: 747-1848 or 746-9658

**Portland**  
Cynthia Viles  
P.O. Box 23334  
Tigard, OR 97223  
Ph: 246-9718 or 244-1221

## Siletz Area Culture Project Report KLAHOWYA! (Good Day!)

By Denise Wilson

The first weeks as Siletz Area Culture & History Information Gatherer have been busy with work plans, developing interview techniques and aids, brainstorming with Culture Committee members at training sessions and just generally laying the groundwork for a successful project. Starting the week of May 13, I will begin contacting tribal members in the Lincoln and Tillamook county areas. Even if you feel you have no cultural or historical information to share, you may enjoy developing a family genealogy chart. Two worksheets are available to record family ancestry.

Robert Kentta, son of JoAnn (Downey) Miller, is studying at the Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois, specifically researching culture and history of Siletz people in the Darcy McNickle American Indian History Collection. He was selected to study under a special research grant awarded by the Newberry Library. When Robert returns, hopefully he'll be willing to share what he has learned in a special event for all interested persons to attend. Congratulations, Robert!!!

While in Klamath Falls recently visiting family, Patricia McMillan, of the Klamath County Museum, gave me an educational tour of the research files and reference library. It was very helpful to learn how persons in the History Business index and record information. Mrs. McMillan wished us the best of luck in our Culture Project, and volunteered to help in any way possible.

A new book is available on coastal Indians. Written by Oregon State University anthropologist Barbara Hall, **THE COQUILLE INDIANS: YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW**, is available at the OSU Bookstore in Corvallis or may be ordered from your local bookstore for \$5. The book was written based on recent interviews of the Coquille, and entirely with their support and encouragement.

**BEADING CONTEST:** In conjunction with the Culture Fair to be held on July 21, Sunday, at the Siletz Tribal Community Center, the Siletz Area Culture Advisory Committee is sponsoring a Beading and Basketry Contest. Beading may be entered in the following categories: a) Medallion, b) Hairpiece, c) Any Other. Additional categories may be named as interest grows. Beaded items must have been made within the last 5 years. The Basketry Contest will not have categories, but must be made of local native materials within the last 25 years. I'm making the time span so large to allow children or grandchildren to enter baskets made by now deceased weavers. No baskets of non-Siletz tradition will be accepted.

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE:** The Siletz Area Culture Project Advisory Committee had its first meeting May 16th. However, additional members are still needed. Activities of Advisory Committee members include:

1. Suggest reference persons and other resources.
2. Discuss cultural and historical information gathered, add additional comments.
3. Support Tribal Archives locating search.
4. Assist and support plans for Area Culture Fair.

Any interested person is encouraged to join the Advisory Committee. A project of this nature needs the support and assistance of many to be a success.

Write or call to share your memories or tales, to offer suggestions or to volunteer assistance:

**CULTURE COMMITTEE PROJECT**  
Confederated Tribes of Siletz  
P.O. Box 549  
Siletz, OR 97380  
ATTN: Denise Wilson  
PHONE:  
Message 444-2532  
Home 444-2234

## The Medicine Snake

By Denise Wilson

A part of the Siletz culture is the familiar stories we've all been told about the larger than average snakes, lizards and, of course, the serpent that frequents the Twin Bridge area. These legends/tales are an important part of our culture, and to the careful listener or reader they are more than just someone's nightmares. Our legends tell about our feelings, describe our way of life, how we relate to Nature and much more. It is very important to share these stories with our young people and I encourage, invite all with similar or unique stories to please come forward.

The following story was retold by Robert Simmons: I believe it was John Poncee who was coming down from Upper Farm one day, headed for the gambling games at Lower Farm. He was riding in a buckboard pulled by one horse. At that time, there was a big hole in a field close to the road Poncee would be passing by on. In later years, the people round about would throw their garbage in the hole, finally filling it up. Brambles grew up, eventually erasing all sign. And before that the owner had to put a fence up around it to keep the cattle from falling in and breaking their legs. Anyway, Poncee came down the road in his buckboard, and quite aways before coming abreast of the hole, a huge snake rose its head and body up into the air. It rose and rose, finally reaching into the sky about 20-25 feet. Poncee's horse was going crazy, rearing and bucking. The snake looked all up and down the valley, turning its head this way and that. Finally, seemingly not seeing anything it wanted, the snake slid back down into its hole. Poncee calmed his horse, got down from the rig and tied the frightened horse up. He walked to the edge of the hole, right up to the very rim. He found a foamy substance around the edge where the snake's body had touched. Feeling the snake had been a very strong Medicine sign, Poncee washed the foam all over his upper chest and arms, bathing himself in it. He felt it would bring very powerful Medicine to his gambling to do this act and he was right. John Poncee won all that week in the gambling games at Lower Farm.

## Culture Fair July 21, 1985

Page 6

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