

# Ukomnom: The Yuki Indians Of Northern California

THE YUKI

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of the family, she was made to lie down in the house and to cover her face with a deerskin or a basket; her face was not to be seen. She was attended by an old woman, sometimes by two women, who brought her a little water when she wished to drink, and at mealtime a little vegetal food. If it became necessary to go outside, they led her out with her face still covered. She was not permitted to scratch with the fingers, but must use a stick. If the season was spring, summer, or autumn, a brush enclosure (*sut*, shade) was built at once, in which the women sang over her for four days and four nights. Otherwise, seclusion and its accompanying restrictions were continued until the weather permitted outdoor activities.

Although only women participated in the singing, the ceremony was under the direction of an old shaman. The first singing occurred in the afternoon. After a few songs, while the women danced in a circle one of the attendants danced with the girl, these two facing each other and holding their hands on each other's shoulders. The girl's head of course was still covered. Within the enclosure was a shallow trench, which from time to time they heated by burning in it a quantity of fuel. Leaves of *pi'mkini* (locally called wormwood) were then spread in the trench, and the girl reclined on them for a time. At night the women sang a few songs and then danced; but the girl did not engage in any activities. The same procedure was followed on the next three days and nights. Then on the fifth morning the medicine-man called for a few women to pound acorns and bake bread. Those who responded, perhaps four to six in number, brought their own mortars, pestles, and baskets, and when they had seated themselves in a row, the medicine-man addressed Taikó-mol as "our father above" and asked him whether these women were all fit for the work they were to do. Two or three other shamans stood near him to see that he did everything in proper order, and listened to note what the reply would be. The shaman professed to receive some answer, and if it purported to be to the effect that some particular woman was unfit, he pointed her out and declared that she would bring bad luck—a great storm or other calamity—if she should pound acorns. Another then took her place, and again the shaman addressed Taikó-mol; and so it went until all the women were pronounced satisfactory. These women were necessarily persons of good character, industrious and capable workers, known to observe all the religious restrictions, such for instance as not working at basketry during their menstrual periods. They proceeded to pound up acorns, while a man dug a

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