

HISTORY OF THE MALHEUR PAUTES AS TOLD BY MARIAN LOUIE  
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Paiutes were the only tribe that made the Harney Basin thier home before the settlers came. They camped around Harney and Malheur Lakes in the Steens and Strawberry Mountains and west to Glass Butte. There was a great nation of Paiutes before the coming of the whitemen. Every Spring and Summer, they all gathered in the Harney Lake region to harvest the little black seed known as "Wada", this gives the name of "Wada-Dikaa" to the band of Paiutes who lived in this location. The Indians freely roamed this country in a seasonal cycle to gather their food for winter. They gathered huckleberries in the Blue Mountains and fished for salmon in the middle fork of the Malheur River, Roots, seeds and nuts were harvested in the hills and desert.

As more and more settlers moved into the area, Paiutes started moving away from the valley from the strangers to the mountains and caves. They were in bands under four chiefs; Egan, Oits, Leggings and We Wah-We Wah. Their numbers were great. Soon a fort was started at the mouth of Rattlesnake Creek on January, 1876. Many soldiers started to pour into Harney Basin and still more settlers. Indians were pushed aside as the land which was given to them by the great spirit was taken by the white settlers.

Some of the soldiers were staking the Indian villages out, wiping out entire bands in their sleep as they protested the treatment of their land, land that they had roamed freely all their lives. Some managed to escape to safety as news of the killings were heard. Indians started to band together because they knew that one day they would have to fight for their land.

Oits, who was a medicine man tried to get the people to settle down in peace with their brothers, when they formed the Malheur Reservation in September 1872. An Executive Order set apart the Malheur Indian Reservation for all the roving and straggling bands in eastern and south-eastern Oregon, which can be induced to settle there. The reserve roughly was the region drained by the three forks of the Malheur River, south, middle and north. An area of about 2,235 square miles. The Agency was to be located south of Castle Rock on the eastern limits. The Silvies River was the western boundary and Strawberry Butte was the Northern boundary.

Indian used to bathe in the hot springs near the Agency. During the winter, the people wintered in the lowlands. Some buildings were erected at the Agency, but were discontinued due to lack of funds, but some years later a school was built for Indian children to learn the ways of farming and digging ditches to irrigate their crops. But life was still not happy, happiness to the Indian is doing and going about their way as did their ancestors. There were 800 Indians recorded at the Agency in 1875.

During this time, there were still some Indians living out in the hills who just went about their business of living, trying to hide from the Cavalry, when one day a group of men had gone into the forest to hunt deer, Upon their return, found that their village was being destroyed by soldiers, a spark of revolt was felt. Then came the Bannocks from the east and Oits who had said he would lay down his gun joined the warring Bannocks on their trail destroying ranches and people on their way from the Idaho border and then what is now known as Drewsey, Frenchglen, Diamond and north to Silvies Creek where they engaged in battle with the soldiers from Fort Harney.

The ones who escaped rode north into Umatilla country to join with them. The Cavalry was still chasing them, Egan who had been an interpreter was a peaceful man who had joined because this was his land was killed up near Emigrant Springs by a Umatilla Indian and some soldiers. His head was brought into an Army camp for identification. With most of their people gone, due to battle, Chief Oits and his followers surrendered at the Malheur Agency in August 1876.

In November, 1878, Gen. Howard recieved definite word from the Government authorities to dispense of 543 prisoners who were at Fort Harney. As punishment, they were to be taken to the Yakima Reservation in Washington state. Many of the Indians didn't know why they were being rounded up at Fort Harney, they were being prepared for the trip north. Men were shackled together by a chain with a steel ball in the middle, two by two, and women and children were allowed to ride in the wagons but the men walked all the way. In January of 1879 the trip began for the Paiutes. Some of the men were taken straight to Fort Vancouver, Chief Oites was one of them, women and children were shipped to Yakima where they lived with the strange Indians unknown to them. They lived here for about five years although some of the Paiutes eventually drifted back to the Harney Basin.

Chief Oits was put on trial in Vancouver for his part in the Bannock War as he was questioned, he said in this native tongue, do what you will with my body, because I will return and show you a much greater battle

more blood will be spilled. He was in prison until sometime later when he was released, he vowed never to return to the land where he had spilled his blood. And he settled with the Warm Springs Tribe.

Some news came from Sarah Winnemucca that each Indian was to be given 160 acres upon his return to the Harney Valley in return for the reservation which was already in public domain. Many of the Indian People walked back to their home and some didn't trust the ways of the shitemen so they stayed and therefore lost out their 160 acres.

Some of the Paiutes went past Harney Valley to settle in Nevada, hoping that their relatives would follow, but as one man said, "that his people had fought hard for this land, he would never leave it for the earth was his mother and the wind his brother."

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