

The Chiloquin
Community and the Federated
Klamath Tribes

A Basic Study Guide

Prepared by the Sierra Service Project

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Introduction

This summer, volunteers from the Sierra Service Project will be living and serving in the small rural town of Chiloquin, Oregon. This community is located in south-central Oregon in an area known as the Klamath Basin. Klamath Lake is nearby. It is a lightly-forested area that sits at an elevation of 4,200 feet.

SSP will be serving people from all parts of the local community. This study guide is designed to help you better understand the community that you will be visiting and serving this summer.

The Chiloquin Community Today

The current population of the town of Chiloquin is 734 persons according to the 2010 census. About half of the residents are Native American and most of these people are members of the Klamath Tribes, a federally recognized tribe consisting of Klamath, Modoc and Yahooskin Indians. This summer, we will be working with both tribal and non-tribal residents in Chiloquin.

Chiloquin is a very low-income community. Its per-capita income (income per person) is \$9,604, compared to a U.S. national average of \$27,335. In fact, out of the largest 308 towns and places in Oregon, Chiloquin ranks 303rd in income, making it one of the lowest-income areas in the state.

About the Klamath Tribes

The official name of the Tribe is “The Klamath Tribes,” which reflects the fact that three distinct indigenous groups - the Modoc, Klamath and Yahooskin - have come together into this federally recognized tribe. Although these groups traditionally occupied adjacent areas within and near the Klamath basin, they were distinct groups, speaking different languages, possessing differing cultures and occupying different traditional areas.

Prior to European contact, residents of this area lived off the abundant fish in the local rivers, by hunting and by gathering berries and root crops. The first European-American to visit the area is reported to be Peter Ogden Skeen, who was an employee of the Hudson Bay Company. Skeen was followed by trappers, missionaries, ranchers and farmers. Under pressure from the exploding white population, the Klamath Indians ceded the rights to 23 million acres of traditional land in exchange for the right to hunt and fish on the land in perpetuity and retention of a 1.8 million acre reservation.

The Modoc Indians were located in the high-desert region southeast of Klamath Lake. Author Cheewa James, herself a member of the Modoc Tribe of Oklahoma, has written in “Modoc: The Tribe That Refused to Die”:

“...the Modocs’ culture, theology, and life had become perfectly tuned to their environment and the richness of the resources it provided them. Their nomadic patterns took them to the right places at the right times for their hunting, fishing, and food gathering activities. Then the last move of the year brought them back to the favored areas for building their winter homes and storing their winter food caches. Above all, the Modocs loved their land. It was, in every sense, their world.”

The Modocs resisted their forced removal to the Klamath Reservation and fought the Modoc War with the US Army in 1872 - 1873. This war is famous for the resistance that the Modocs displayed in their successful evasion of the Americans for five months. After their capture, revolt leaders, notably Captain Jack and Schonchin John, were tried and hanged in nearby Fort Klamath. Our program is being housed in the United Methodist Church on Schonchin Street. Surviving Modocs were deported to Oklahoma. A generation later, in 1909, they were allowed to return to the Klamath Reservation.

With its very large land base of timberlands and its location along a major railroad, the Klamath Tribes were very successful in timber harvesting, cattle ranching and shipping. By the 1950's, the Klamath Tribes was one of the wealthiest tribes in the U.S. and the only tribe at the time to pay for all of its services from the U.S. Government.

In 1954, however, the U.S. Congress passed the Klamath Termination Act over the objections of the Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This Act removed federal recognition and protection of the tribe. Tragically, the 1.8 million acres of tribal land was deemed "excess" and removed from tribal ownership.

The Tribes continued a legal fight against termination and loss of tribal land. In 1974, the Federal Courts ruled that the Tribes retained treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather on its treaty-recognized lands. In 1986, Congress restored federal recognition to the Tribes, but did not restore ownership of the original reservation lands. The Tribes celebrate this event each August.

Despite the loss of its land base, the Tribes have attempted to rebuild the tribal economy. Part of this effort is the small Kla-Mo-Ya Casino, an amalgamation of the tribal names Klamath, Modoc, and Yahooskin, located just outside of Chiloquin. The casino opened in 1997.

Current Conditions

Chiloquin is the site of the administrative office of the Klamath Tribes. The vast majority of the jobs in Chiloquin are with the Tribes, which employs at least 250 persons. Outside of the tribe, the town of Chiloquin consists of only a few businesses: a hardware store, a small grocery store and a liquor store.

There is an elementary, middle and high school in Chiloquin. These schools have a difficult time attracting and retaining strong teachers and administrators. Currently, 80 percent of the students enrolled in high school qualify for free or reduced price school lunches. School performance is low. For example, only 27 percent of Grade 8 students meet the state's standards for reading proficiency.

Chiloquin is an incorporated city with a functioning town government. The mayor is Joe Hobbs.

Chiloquin Visions in Progress (CVIP) is a civic organization made up of concerned citizens working together to improve the quality of life in Chiloquin. One of CVIP's accomplishments was the building of the Community Center.