

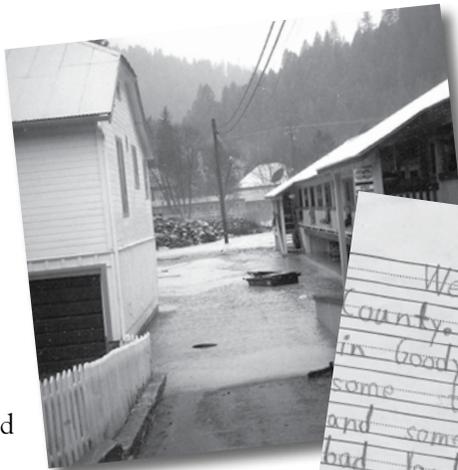
The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —

The Flood of 1997

By Mary Nourse

The floods in Sierra County in 1997 had a resounding impact on its residents, particularly the schoolchildren. In Western Sierra County washed-out bridges and roads caused a temporary hiatus in school services which resulted in a brief extension of the New Year's holiday. After that, undaunted by the after-effects of the flood, school officials and staff sprang into action to re-establish a functioning educational system. School reopened in Downieville for local students, while in Sierra City temporary satellite campuses were set up. The elementary students attended school in the community hall, and the junior/senior high school students met at Jim (JJ) Johnson's home on a modified schedule. Surprisingly the power was on for the most part, so teachers were able to fax lesson plans and assignments between locations. After a few days on this plan, some of the teachers who lived in Sierra City were asked to return to Downieville to work because the bulk of the students were there. This required making the trek via Truckee and Grass Valley, so they stayed with friends throughout the week. When Highway 49 first reopened, commuters were led caravan-style at 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. daily. This actually created rush hour conditions as vehicles lined up to slog through the mud and snow. This system was to remain in place for the rest of the winter.



Derrick Johnson,
Grade 4

I was teaching at Downieville High School during the flood and its aftermath and at that time asked all the K-12 students to record their experiences for posterity. Now, a decade later, these pictures and essays will serve as snapshots of the Flood of 1997.

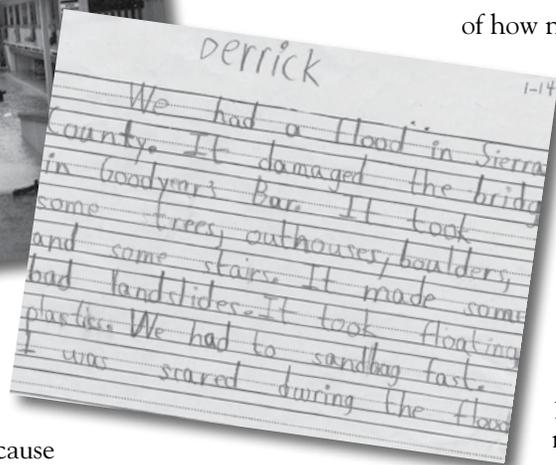
Aila Hale, Grade 7

It was wet, dangerous, and cold—it was the Flood of 1997. There was only one good thing that I can think of about the flood, but there were several bad things. The one good thing was that the community and many families were brought together to save their homes and others'.

This flood was a good example of how nature can take over everything if it wants to. The river moved up about twenty feet, destroying anything in its path from houses to flower beds. Some houses were destroyed, leaving people homeless. The river rose and rose up so far that it flooded

the roads and ruined bridges. The roads were closed and still are. They were so flooded they looked like the Mississippi River. People were stuck away from home for many days, and in some areas power went out for long periods of time, leaving it dark and cold. When we walked out-

Pezzola Lane from
Commercial St.,
Downieville



The Flood of 1997 (Continued on Page 3) —

THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Sierra County Historical Society is an organization of people interested in preserving and promoting an appreciation of Sierra County's rich history. The Society operates a museum at the Kentucky Mine in Sierra City, holds an annual meeting, publishes a newsletter and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of Society activities, receive THE SIERRAN, and are admitted free of charge to the museum and stamp mill tour. If you would like to become involved in these activities or would just like to give your support, please join us!

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Membership in the Sierra County Historical Society is open to any interested person, business or organization. Members need not be residents of Sierra County. Dues are due and payable each January for the calendar year.

Membership categories are as follows:

INDIVIDUAL	\$15.00
FAMILY & INSTITUTION	\$20.00
BUSINESS & SUPPORTING	\$30.00
SUSTAINING	\$50.00
LIFE (per individual)	\$250.00

Please send dues to the Membership Chair:
Lynn McKechnie, PO Box 294, Sierraville, CA 96126

SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Office Address:
Kentucky Mine Museum
PO Box 260, Sierra City, CA 96125 (530) 862-1310

Officers and Executive Board of The Sierra County Historical Society

- President:** Bud Buczkowske, Alleghany
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Board members in addition to those previously mentioned are Maren Scholberg, Sierraville; Suzi Schoensee, Sattley; Sherrie Allen, Alleghany; Mary Nourse, Sierra City; and Judy Lawrence, Sattley.

If you have any suggestions or comments, feel free to contact any board member.

In Memoriam

We are saddened by the sudden passing of two men who helped our organization:

Mike Heuer along with his wife Lila of Sierra City were very active in the past with the support of the Kentucky Mine Museum. Along with friends and other volunteers, they kept the Concert Series active for a number of years, and did a wonderful job. They also put together a work committee to rebuild the Amphitheater and did other maintenance.

Joe Marcantonio, Sierra County deputy public work director, and his crew have done an amazing job this past year on maintenance at the Kentucky Mine Park.

Monico's, We'll Miss You!

Laverne Monico along with her husband Archie have moved from our area due to health concerns. Laverne has been a long time supporter of the Historical Society and promoter of historical events. She and Archie were always willing to take on projects, and they both will be missed. We wish them well at their new Vacaville location.

Loeffler Family Reunion

The Loeffler family chose the Kentucky Mine Museum and Historical Park for their family reunion in September. Around 50 family members of all ages enjoyed spending the day at the location once mined by their family around the turn of the century. We hope to feature a future article on this family. We are pleased with the donation of photos from descendants of the Loeffler family.

The Flood of 1997 (Continued from Page 1) —

side our house in Sierra City, we had to put plastic bags around our feet to keep them dry from the rushing water.

My aunt and uncle's water pipes froze at their house in Sierraville, so we had to use a blow torch to thaw them out. We filled hundreds and hundreds of sandbags in the pouring rain to save my aunt and uncle's house. The water was rising so fast that their porch was almost drowning in water. We had to dig ditches in their backyard to lower the water in their front yard. The water in the front yard was about 2 ½ feet high, and it was getting even higher. We worked from about noon till around five or six. We were supposed to go home on the first of January, but we were stuck there until the third. When we drove home, we saw mini waterfalls all over the hillside. In some parts, the road was completely gone.

When we finally did get home, my mom, dad, brother, and I walked down to Ladies' Canyon Creek. They wouldn't let us drive down because half the road had fallen into the river, and the bridge was cracked in two. When we left, we took a hike to Wild Plum Campground. The first thing we saw was that in places the road was completely gone. The river had washed it away. As we walked up the road, we saw many bunches of driftwood that had made their way to the shore. Finally, we got to the campground and saw that the river had changed its course, leaving a dry riverbed behind. We walked a little farther up the road looking at how the river had made the cement road look like a square quilt broken in pieces. We saw that a few picnic tables were way down the river, along with a fence from a horse stable. Well, the flood was scary for some people, but educational for all.

Meghan Culcassi, Grade 7

The flood of 1997 brought many inconveniences to many people. The road that people needed to get to work and school was blocked, meaning that some people were out of work, and others out of a home. A few cabins were lost. One, owned by Brian Toth, is now gone because the riverbank was undercut. The new route of the river just towed the cabin away. Brian, who was not in Sierra City at the time, could not get any of his belongings out. The town later got together and had a fundraiser to help him get back on his feet.

This flood was unexpected. I think that it had been about half a century since the last flood. Disaster and chaos was everywhere. I heard that over 250 square miles of land was flooded, mostly in agricultural areas. One man was arrested for not obeying an order to stop rescuing animals.

The worst sight in our area, to me, was the destruction of the Wild Plum Campground. I was amazed to see how much it had changed. There was nothing left of it but rolled-up pavement and a couple of benches with trees stuck in them. I heard that objects were gone in a matter of minutes. Also, there were about fourteen wash-outs between Downieville and Bassetts Station.

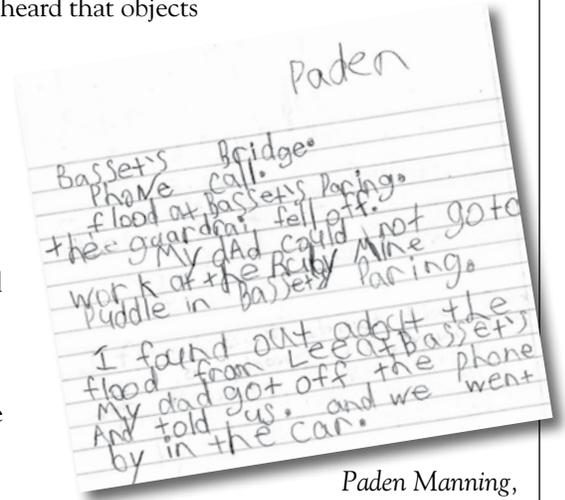
After the flood was over, people rushed to find gold, and some people found some. I, myself, went hunting for things that had washed up. I found a lot of old bottles, but they were broken. There also were cups, plates, and bowls along the river. I spotted an old crock pot lid that was still in one piece. There were stereo wires and extension cords everywhere. A refrigerator door lay right in my path.

The next day, I had school. Since the highway was closed (Sierra City School) was held at J.J. (Jim Johnson's) house for one week of half days. After that week was over, kids could get to (Downieville) School, and adults could go back to work (in Downieville). I guess everyone was pretty happy after the flood was over.

T.C. Beals, Grade 8

It was Friday, December 31, 1996 when it started to rain. I happened to be home watching television and doing homework for Monday. That whole day it rained and rained. The day went by mighty quickly. Before I knew it, I was sleeping. I woke up the next morning to a phone call. The phone call happened to be from one of my friends, curious as to whether I could spend the night. Of course, I accepted the offer and went to spend the night. We played computers and ate wonderful homemade pizza. We watched *Full Metal Jacket*, then went to bed.

When we woke up around 9:30-9:45 a.m. we went downstairs, had cereal, and watched *Nowhere to Run*. After about half of the movie was over, my mom showed up wanting to take me home. We tried to persuade her to



Paden Manning,
Grade 2

The Flood of 1997 (Continued from Page 3) —

reconsider, but it was useless. She wanted to go NOW! When we got into the car, my mom and brother brought me up-to-date about what was going on. They told me, "The town is almost under water. We are losing homes and cabins as we speak." "Yeah, right," was my reply.

They were *right*. Wild Plum Road in Sierra City had a river going across it. There was a waterfall alongside the road where there had never been before. Volunteer firemen were sandbagging along the side, trying to prevent the overflowing creek from taking out the road.

When we got home, we had water here, water there, and a creek running to the right of the house. There normally is no creek anywhere near my house. My dad wasn't there; he was trapped in Downieville because the Ladies' Canyon Bridge was out along with sections of the road. He would probably be stuck there for days. Then I found out, after talking with my dad, that my friend's sister was stuck in Downieville along with him and many other sad souls.

Downieville was probably hit the hardest of the three towns of Sierra City, Downieville, and Goodyear's Bar. We happened to have a scanner at the house so we knew pretty much what was going on in the county. While my mom listened for news, my brother and I were clearing and cleaning out the "stream" in the yard so it wouldn't create a lake and flood us any more than we were. Believe me, things were tough without my dad, but we made it okay.

That night we went to bed with shaking and horrible noises coming from the boulders hitting the bridge structure supports. We "pulled it out", but my mom and brother barely got any sleep. I woke up the next morning to a warm, toasty fire blazing from within the fireplace. That morning is when we got the phone call from my dad saying he would call every other hour and that Sierra County was going to lose the historical Goodyear's Bridge. It started to rain more and more. The weather channel stated the estimated rainfall was to be three quarters of an inch an hour, which would mean by the end of the day the amount of rain would equal about eighteen and three quarter inches.

The river was climbing higher and higher along the banks each minute. In Downieville, the river was reaching the bottom of the Durgan Bridge. As time went on, we, the citizens of Sierra County, almost lost the Riverview Pizzeria as well as the levee and Willoughby's down that way. The third day, which was a Monday, school was cancelled and the rain began to calm down. My dad was coming home that day and was bringing my friend's sister as well.

The following week, school was cancelled in Downieville and was to be held at J.J.'s (Jim Johnson's) house in Sierra City for the high school and junior high students, and at the community hall for the elementary students. The same week, Ladies' Canyon (Bridge) was closed to commercial use. In other words, you couldn't go to Downieville without going around through Auburn,



Ladies Canyon

Grass Valley, and Nevada City. The Cal Trans workers set up a temporary route across the washed out area for county and emergency vehicles only. Part of the reason why school was cancelled was so that the community could use every available person to help get things back to normal. I did just that—went around the neighborhood to see if help was needed. The week went super quickly. The funny thing was that this flood happened on my fourteenth birthday. Believe me, it was not something that I wished for.

Beginning the following Monday, I went to the temporary school at J.J.'s residence. School started at 8:45 a.m. and ended any time after 10:30 a.m. Monday, the teachers were in Sierra City to make us aware of our assignments for the week. We met with them that day, wrote down our assignments, and began working on them. A friend and I left at about 1:00 p.m. that day to practice basketball for a while. We played basketball after school hours on a regular basis. Sometimes other kids would come over and we'd play a really big game till about 3:00 p.m. and then I would start my homework. Tuesday, I was in a combined class with the ninth grade to complete my assignments. We continued to do this through Friday, and finally on Friday my friend Luke and I were allowed to surf the net for about an hour or so.

I was getting worn out with all the water and with being trapped in Sierra City for that long. Finally, Tuesday, the road was open by convoy. The school bus led the slow moving line of cars that contained Sierra City and Sierra Valley citizens who had to reach Downieville to work. The road was terrifying the first times we crossed it. It was reduced to one narrow lane. The sides of the river-bank, shoulders of the road, and bridge were completely washed out. It looked like the temporary bridge couldn't hold the weight of the school bus. The convoy situation remained in effect for about a month before things turned to normal.

Such were the wonderful, memorable, and intense at times stories about the flood of nineteen hundred and ninety seven. This is based on a true story. No ink was injured in the completing of this assignment.

Emily Ellsmore, Grade 9

It had been raining for several days, and I didn't think much of it. The rain added to my melancholy attitude. It was New Year's Eve and, of course, I was at home doing nothing when I could have been partying. Our television was broken, so I couldn't watch the ball drop or anything cool like that. I eventually fell asleep due to my extreme boredom.

The next day, I awoke to the ritual sound of rain on the roof and talking downstairs. It was about 12:30, and I was still half sleeping and not yet aware of what was happening. I stumbled down the stairs as my parents were in preparation for departure. They told me that everything was flooded and we couldn't even get to Downieville. At first I thought they were blowing things way out of proportion just so I would pay attention to them. They wanted me to go for a walk to survey the damage. I hadn't taken a shower yet or even brushed my teeth, and I didn't even want to go. After I took a shower and had some coffee, this flood thing started to sink in. My parents weren't back yet, so I decided to go out on the porch to see if I could see anything I considered a flood. Once I was on the porch, I could vaguely see through the drizzling rain and trees to make out anything. I saw some silty, brown water that I presumed was the river. Usually you have to climb down a huge bank to even see the water, and now you could see it from my porch. I stood there in the cold, slightly dumbstruck and in awe of my own stupidity for not taking my parents seriously. I turned to go back inside, and something unusual caught my eye. The spillway from the creek by my house down to the river was overflowing. Most of the water was shooting straight out of the culvert from all of the pressure. It was almost fascinating, watching the water rush into the culvert and shoot out the other side. There was so much

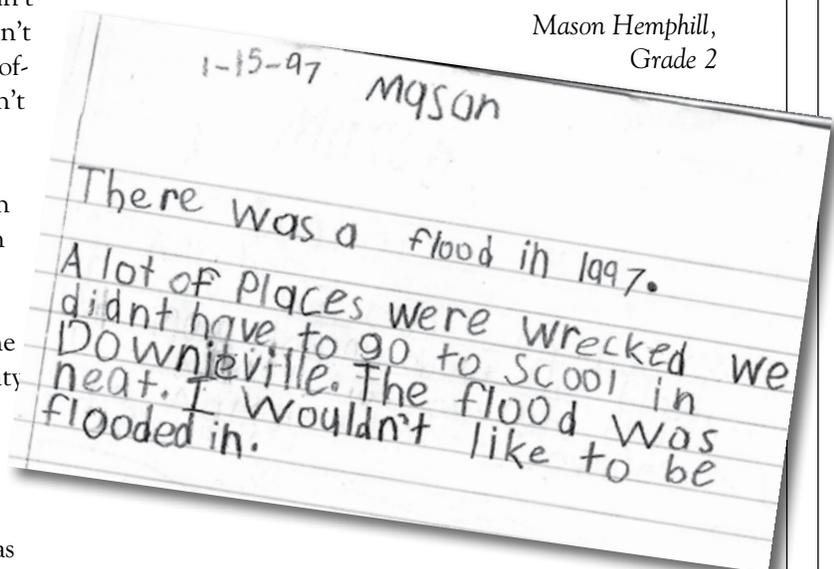
noise from the rain, the creek, and the river that all the sights and sounds were too much to take in. My bare feet were freezing, so I finally went inside. For the rest of the day the phone rang constantly, and with every call we would get more details on the damage.

My brother, who had gone to his girlfriend's house on New Year's Eve, couldn't get home because she lives in Goodyear's Bar. He was stuck there with his girlfriend, her two friends, and her sister. He was surrounded by girls and either he was in heaven, or he was going out of his mind.

The weather subsided and the water level went down a little, but that is when everyone realized how much work had to be done. School was cancelled for a week and every student was happy except the ones that wanted to see their friends in another town. I was one of those; my two real good friends live in Downieville, and I had nothing to do for a week. My mom was anxious to get back to work, so she decided to drive three hours through Truckee and Grass Valley to get to the courthouse. I ended up going too so I could see my friends for the whole week. My mom and I stayed at her friend's house on Pearl Street. I was within a two minute walk to my friends' house, and that was good.

Since I was stuck in Sierra City while the actual flood was happening, I personally wasn't very affected by it. I kind of lived through the dramatic parts through people who told me about them. In a way that is good because I probably would have been terrified. It's too bad that I really couldn't experience it. I'm sure there will be other natural disasters that I will experience first-hand whether I like it or not.

Mason Hemphill,
Grade 2



The Flood of 1997 (Continued on Page 6) —

The Flood of 1997 (Continued from Page 5) —

Jeremiah Fillo, Grade 9

On December 28, 1996, the storm clouds rolled in. They came in swiftly, first going past Goodyear's Bar and traveling up the canyon over Sierra City. Most people had heard of the coming storm, and the people who hadn't, quickly got non-water resistant materials inside and away from the elements.

Sometime on the same day, it started raining. It started out so lightly that no one could feel it unless they looked up into the sky. Steadily, however, the rain fell harder and most people were happy about it. They thought it meant an early spring which everyone, except the elementary students, wanted. But the rain kept coming down while the Yuba and Downie Rivers continued to rise.

By the evening of December 30, most people were ready for some sunshine and an end to the constant downpour. Everyone was getting some amount of cabin fever and they wanted the weather to permit them to do something outdoors. The storm didn't seem to move and the rain continued to fall. The two rivers kept on growing.

Around midday on December 31, everyone in the three towns began to worry. Most people knew if the rain kept up there would be flooding, and nobody wanted that. Even so, almost no one canceled their New Year's arrangements to stay home. So while the whole nation celebrated the end of 1996, the rain continued to fall in a steady downpour.

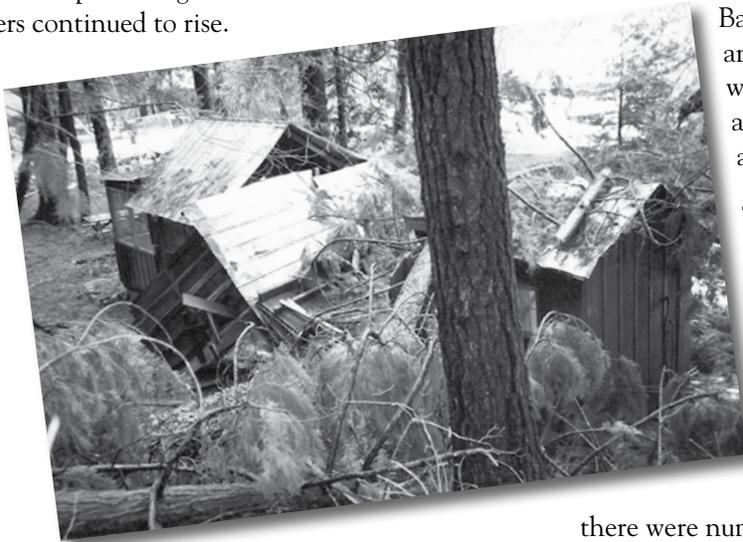
Wednesday morning, January 1, 1997 brought horror to the three small towns in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The two rivers had reached flood levels during the night and were still expanding because of the persistent rain. Families near the Yuba and Downie Rivers evacuated their homes and moved in with friends away from the horrible waterway. Volunteers met in the vacant parking lots to fill sandbags. Some family members even got out video cameras to create flood videos. And the downpour continued.

The rain finally started tapering off around noon, January second. There were clear skies that evening. Throughout the storm, people's emotions had been just about the

same, but right after the clouds were gone the emotion tree branched off. For the families whose houses had gotten damaged or ruined, there was sadness. The people who weren't affected by the flood were either fascinated at the damage or were feeling pity for their unfortunate friends.

The damage was incredible. In Sierra City, a whole cabin on Wild Plum Road was washed away. Also, a 150 yard chunk of road to Wild Plum Campground fell into the river. Downieville had some problems of its own. All the rooms on the bottom floor of the Riverside Motel were filled with at least six inches of mud. At the Riverside Pizzeria, the basement was flooded and the river eroded away the land to about four feet from their outside deck. Goodyear's Bar was no exception to the devastation done

by the flood. The Goodyear's Bar Bridge was mutilated and a group of government workers had to come up and put in a walk-across after the flood.



The highway probably had the roughest time of all. Between Sierra City and Downieville, the Ladies' Canyon Bridge was torn up so badly that it was impassable for days. Between Downieville and Goodyear's Bar

there were numerous mudslides. Right outside of Downieville, if someone was heading towards Sierra City, a 200 yard strip of highway was completely eroded away. It looked like someone just took a big bite out of the pavement. Also, between Sierra City and Goodyear's Bar, railings sat on a tilt and were close to falling into the river. To this day, January 20, 1997, it is still unknown as to when everyone will recover from the flood.

Rachel Guffin and Brandy Read, Grade 10

The following are short recounts of the 1997 New Year's Flood and the damage it caused to homes and businesses:

From the Bakery...

Tom states that, "We came for breakfast and we were faced with the sudden flooding." Approximately 4-5 feet of water flooded the basement, but the back wall prevented most of the damage that may have been caused to the bakery. Thanks and appreciation is shown towards everyone who helped with the cleanup.

And the Riverside Inn...

The river rose eleven feet, putting four and a half feet

of water in the rooms on the bottom floor. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Unfortunately, eight beds, many sets of linen, and many more items were lost to the merciless waters. Volunteer help from the community was greatly appreciated. "All the help made me feel as if Downieville really cared," says Mary Dean, manager of the Riverside Inn. The Riverside Inn is hoping to reopen its bottom floor by January 30th. "And we would just as soon not have any more excitement," states Mary.

Meanwhile, at the Sheriff's Office...

"Everyone was really busy," states Alison Baca of the Sierra County Sheriff's Office. "We were operating emergency services and calls were coming in all the time."

Officers from Sierra City became temporary residents of Downieville when Highway 49 was washed away and those still in Sierra City were unable to come to Downieville. The officers in Sierra City patrolled there, but if a prisoner needed to be brought to the jail, instead of the usual fifteen minute drive, it would take three hours to get from Sierra City to Downieville. The sheriff's office did lose water and power, "...but bottled water was provided for the prisoners and officers," says Dave Marshall, "and fortunately, we have a generator." All in all, the Sierra County Sheriff's Office stuck it out and played a vital role in the recovery of Downieville.

As for the Pizza Parlor...

The basement flooded to about five feet. Sand bags were stacked almost level with the park. Back in the basement, the ice machine was floating around. After having a great time downstairs, the ice machine had to go back to work. Luckily, it did work! The pizza parlor was closed for two days, but it is now back in business for all you pizza lovers who can't live without it.

Over at the Gas Station...

Down in the basement, an estimated five feet of water got a lot of the things down there wet. Five pumps were working, and thankfully nothing was lost. The school busses were moved to Canon Point, however, so that they didn't float away or damage anything. We all know we wouldn't want to miss school.

From the Downieville Diner...

We were not fortunate enough to get a full story, but we were lucky enough to get the some quotes: From Patty Jacona, "Come back later, like after I go to Grass Valley," and Hazel Luccesi, "We came, we saw, and it was a f*#@ing mess!"

Melissa Floyd, Grade 10

We are always hearing the expression, "Mother Nature works in mysterious ways". Well, this year so far, I think that she has outdone herself. On January 1, 1997, I woke up to the annoying sound of the telephone ringing. It was my mom, and she seemed very angry. I immediately started to tell her that whatever it is, it's Trisha's fault. She then screamed, "Melissa, Grandma's house is flooding. Wake up Candice and Cassi and get down here!"

I ran into my bedroom and yelled, "Candice, Cassi, get up!" Neither of them moved; they just lay there motionless. For people who sleep in until 11:00 or 12:00, 7:30 is just too early. Finally, after shaking them, they woke up and we all went to my grandma's house.

When we got there, we all stopped. I guess it all

shocked us so much that we couldn't

believe that it was really happening. We grabbed shovels and began to dig a ditch in the road to block the water from going into the house. Mud was up to our knees, and we were soaking wet from the rain. It took about half-an-hour to block off the water, but we finally did it. We were so tired that we just let our shovels drag behind us on our way home.

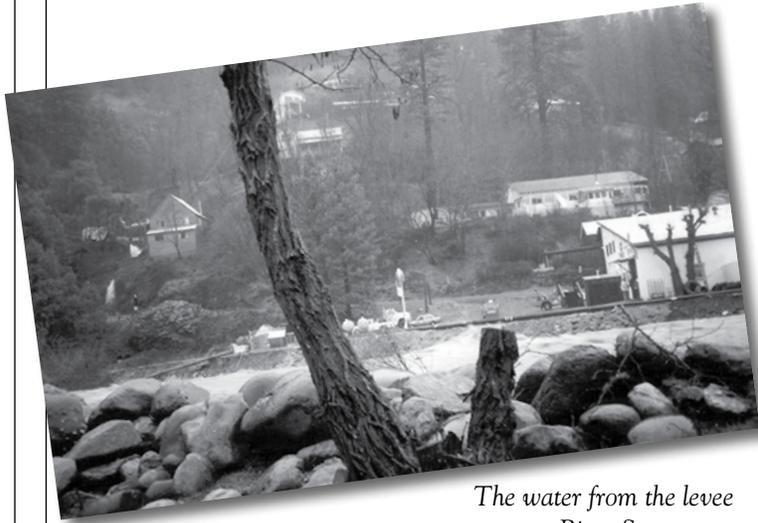
After we changed and warmed up, we piled into the truck to go and see how Lower Goodyears Bar and Downieville were holding up. As we reached the road, we noticed a huge waterfall racing through it. It turned out the culvert was plugged, so the water was backing up and pouring over the road. I can't exactly repeat my parents' words, but it was pretty massive. We used caution as we drove over it, but I didn't trust that old culvert as we drove over it, so I did what any normal person would've done—I closed my eyes and sang to myself.



Downie River from Pearl Street

The Flood of 1997 (Continued from Page 7) —

As we reached the top of the road looking down on Goodyear's Bar Bridge, my heart sank. Never in my life could I have pictured the waves crashing over it. As huge logs smashed up against it, the bridge shook as if from an earthquake. Knowing that people were stranded on the other side made it hard for me to cope with because I couldn't go over there and help them.



*The water from the levee
on River Street*

The trip to Downieville was very frightening for me, knowing that a slide could come down anywhere and at any time sent chills up my spine. I was also quite anxious to see the effects of the flood in town, too. When we got there I found that Downieville was the most depressing place for me to see. The water was up to the picnic tables at the pizza parlor, levees were broken, and the ground was eaten away. People were being evacuated from their homes which was a sad sight to see. I was speechless the whole entire day; nothing could've described the things I saw. This is the town that I have lived in and gone to school in for my whole life, and it was being destroyed right before my very eyes. There was nothing I could do. I heard the roaring of the water and the crashing of the boulders as I watched more and more destruction occur. I wanted to stay in town and help sandbag, but my mom wanted me to come home just in case there was a mudslide between Downieville and Goodyears Bar.

That night Candice and I stayed up worrying. We felt helpless knowing there were people staying in the community hall who were in need of things and we couldn't get to them to help. Hour by hour passed, and finally it was the next morning. We all got back into the truck to go see how the Goodyears Bar Bridge held out. To our dismay, it had buckled. I felt horrible. I mean the bridge that held so many memories for me had collapsed.

The next day the water level went down about four to five feet, which spelled relief for our town. Everyone pitched in to clean up after the flood, and things were back to normal in no time. This flood really showed how much the people in this town care about each other. In my eyes, I never personally realized just how much I cared about Downieville and Goodyears Bar until we almost lost them. I will never forget the flood of '97 and how it brought our little town together.

Peter Villarreal, Grade 10
Have You Learned?

I have been here since before recorded time. My origins run from the top of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and I empty into the great Pacific Ocean. I range in size from a small trickle to a raging river. To you I am no stranger; they call me The Yuba.

To some, I am a beautiful riverfront view, while to others I am the keeper of the gold. Still to others, I am the holder of giant-sized trout and a cool friend to summertime swimmers. Even though we may be friends—never, ever lose respect for me, for those who do, must always pay the price.

Ever since I can remember there have always been times that you have not considered me a friend. About every ten years I must remind you that even though you live by me, you can never control me. You did not learn your lesson during the severe storms and floods of 1852, 1862, 1874, 1883, 1901, 1937, 1955, 1963, or 1986. Hopefully, the 1997 flood has taught you well. Several weeks before the flood, heavy wet snows blanketed the mountain tops. Then, a few days before New Year's Day, a hot tropical rainstorm began. These heavy rains started to melt the snow. Water poured out from the streams and creeks. Rain and snow combined with my mainstream. My banks and levees started to crumble because of my speed and power. I pushed car-sized boulders, trees, and any objects that got in my way. I also started to eat away the very foundations of your man-made roads.

On New Year's Eve, the heavy rains continued to fall and the civilization's worries continued to grow. Busting through leaves, men tried to regain control by piling meager sandbags across my ever-increasing route. This race continued through the night, but so did the rains.

New Year's Day began with more of the same. My waters now had crested, and I had expanded my empire. I had flooded cellars, ripped away propane tanks, carried away Forest Service picnic tables, and filled hotel rooms with silt and water. I had twisted your bridges and tested their very foundations. My strength and force had collapsed

your roads, and I even swallowed 100-foot pine trees from your properties. Your equipment was so inferior that I even used it against you. The pipes you thought would drain water from the mountainsides into the river now were carrying backwash water and flooding your streets.

The days after the flood were still not normal. People were pumping water out of their basements and shoveling mud from their homes. Trucks were bringing giant rocks, hoping to open a passage eastward. People were talking about storing water and food. My only question now is, "Have you learned?"

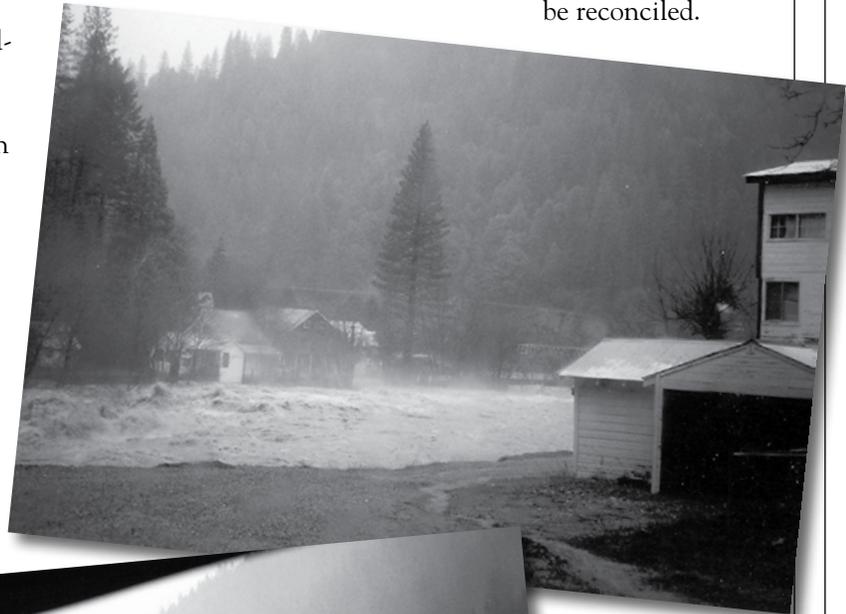
Frank Sanchez, Grade 11 In the Wake of a Flood

On the day of January first, the premier of a promising year, disaster hit Sierra County in the form of a flood. The usual tranquil waters of the Yuba, the Downie, and various streams combined to destroy levees, houses, and several other structures. By January fourth, the communities of Downieville, Sierra City, and Goodyear's Bar were relieved when the floodwaters began to dwindle, returning the rivers and streams to a usual flow.

However, the nightmare was just now beginning for Cal Trans who was deemed responsible for the cleanup of the slides, breaks, and even gaps of the crippled Highway 49. The estimation of damage is incalculable due to the fact that many roadways are still blocked by slides, obstructing their evaluation. Cal Trans officially closed the highway northbound of Downieville for obvious reasons, such as its disappearance in various areas. Immediately bidding began in order to elect a company to be contracted with for the cleanup and repair of the road. Several companies filed for the project, however, Granite, a credible construction company, impressed Cal Trans and was contracted for the intimidating task. And so the cleanup commenced, bringing over forty Granite and Sierra County transport trucks storming the road.

The appointed civil engineer for Cal Trans is a Mr. Dan Walker who is currently battling the unstable landscape. "Our biggest task," commented Walker at the beginning of the project, "was to find materials for filling in the gaps in the roadways." (These materials were found in the Goodyear's Bar area in the form of sand.) "Now, continued Mr. Walker, "Our hardest task is to find a place to put all of the rubble (rock and dirt)."

The most damaged area of the local highway is within the vicinity of Sierra Shangri La. Here, the massive amounts of water eroded the base of the slope causing its collapse, and the covering of approximately 1,000 yards of highway. The crew worked hard and cleared the rubble, however a slope the length of 165 feet remains to be reconciled.



Durgan Bridge

So how much will this cost you, the local taxpayers? A near cool \$3 million is the approximate tab for the state.

Update: Due to the rapid work of Cal Trans and Granite, Highway 49 reopened on February 3. As for the complete restoration of the "old highway", Mr. Walker expects this to be done mid-summer. A very special thanks to Mr. Walker who hosted a complete tour of the construction area and was more than willing to answer all of my questions.

The Washoe in Sierra Valley

By Judy Lawrence



In the summer of 2002 a Caltrans crew began surveying a portion of State Highway 70 near Beckwourth, California, which is located in Sierra Valley in northeastern California. Highway 70 runs in an east/west direction across the northern end of the Sierra Valley. The Caltrans crew was doing preliminary work for a proposed highway widening project. Because a previous survey had identified the presence of a Native American site near the proposed widening project area, Caltrans began a cultural resource study, in accordance with federal and state laws which require that consideration be given to the potential impacts of projects on significant cultural resources. Test excavations were conducted by a cultural resource management group which resulted in the discovery of several large earth ovens and many other features, a total of 54 features in all. The site, known as the Buttes Site, has been determined to belong to the Washoe culture, after examination of the artifact assemblage and consultation with the Tribe. A preliminary theory has been developed concerning the habitation pattern and purpose of the site based on its location – a high knoll overlooking fields of camas plants, one of the vegetal resources utilized by the Washoe. It is theorized that the Buttes Site represents a seasonal camas bulb processing site.

The World of the Washoe — Past and Present

The area occupied or used by the Washoe in early historic times was part of the Sierra Nevada region, “a special culture province, characterized by seasonal movements within its borders of the inhabitants, who for most of the year, including the winter time, utilized its lower altitude eastern and western slopes” (Elsasser 1960). According to Warren D’Azevedo, this area was made up of three major life-zones which provided abundant and varied plant and animal species.

Boreal Zone

This zone included the area around Lake Tahoe and along the crest of the Sierra Nevada at elevations of from 6,000 to 10,000 or more feet. The environment was one of many forests of Jeffrey pine, fir, sugar pine, and hemlock, as well as numerous lakes, streams, and mountain meadows. Despite the deep winter snow, large game such as mountain sheep, deer, and antelope were plentiful, and the lakes provided abundant fish resources. The Washoe traveled to the western foothills to gather acorns in the late summer and fall, following the tributaries of the many rivers flowing into California from the crest of the Sierra Nevada.

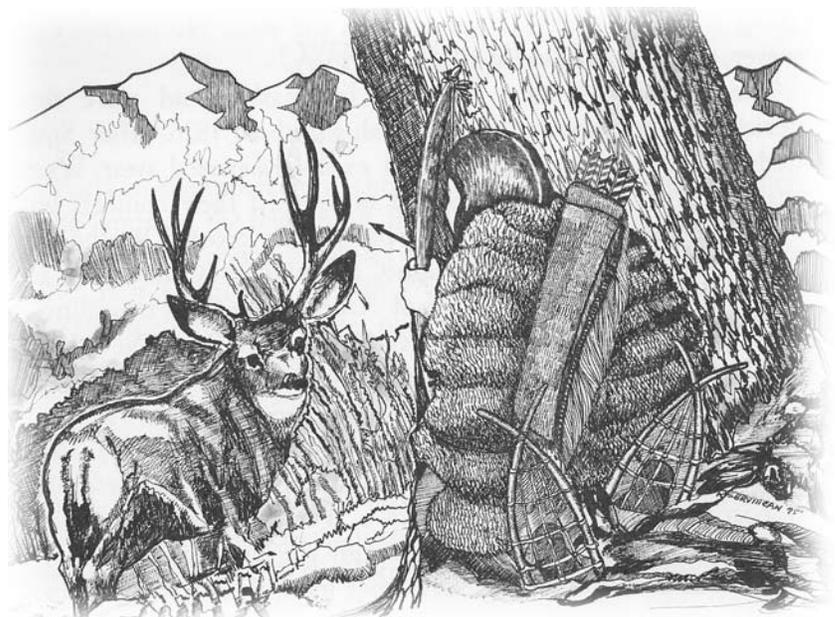
Transition Zone

This zone included the lower elevations of the Sierra Nevada at about 4,500 to 6,000 feet. Forests of Jeffrey pine and fir trees, merged with the piñon, juniper, and safebrush belt in the Pine Nut Mountains, which divides the region from the Upper Sonoran Zone.

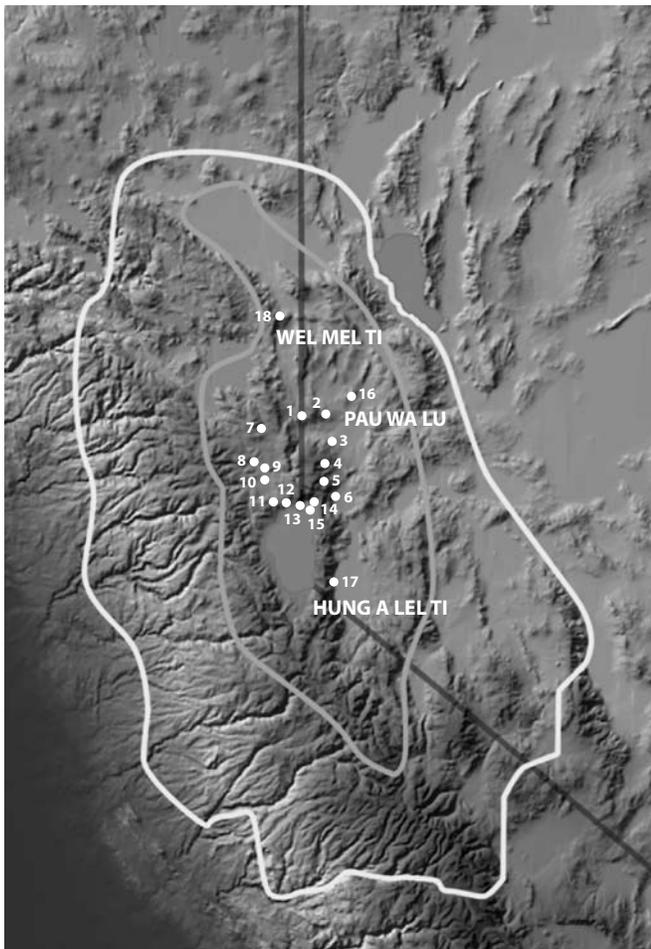
Upper Sonoran Zone

A piedmont environment existed in the chain of large valleys that extend north and south on the Sierra slope in this zone. Honey Lake, Washoe Lake, and Topaz Lake provided fish and waterfowl resources, a variety of plants, and small and large game that were attracted to their shores.

Each of these zones represented a specialized vegetation environment as well as a distinctive animal community. The Washoe were able to move seasonally between these zones, which were in close geographic proximity, in order to make optimal use of the subsistence resources that each zone offered. These resources included more than 68 species of mammals; an abundance of fish in the



Snoeshoes enabled the Washoe to travel easily and quickly over the snow-covered terrain. (A Richard Servilican drawing)



NAME AND MAP LOCATION NUMBER

Name	Translation	No.
Moi Lum Watah	Spring	1
Magoi Ya	Incline	2
Dan Ma Da Yel Lee	Rainbow	3
De Ex Wa Oop Pos	Cave Rock	4
Ot Toee Shim Me	Where Fish Come Out	5
Lam Watah	Pounding Rock	6
Da Ea Yor Da Wah	Water Going Over	7
Shoo We Tuck Watah	Clam River	8
Mayala Waiah	Meek's River	9
Magulu Waiah	Lonley Gulch	10
Ashux Waiah	Back River	11
De Gil Ex Waiah	Red River	12
Imgi Waiah	Salmon Creek	13
Daugi Shashu	Bright on Light River	14
Maiush Ha Who Waiah	White Trout River	15
Pau Wa Lu	People of the Valley	16
Hung A LeI Ti	South Band of Washo	17
Wel Mel Ti	North Band of Washo	18

KEY

Names	•
Nuclear	—
Peripheral	—

Map created by Phoebe Bender, GIS Specialist

many lakes and streams; tubers, seeds, and berries in the mountain meadows; and pinon nuts and acorns harvested in the woodlands of the lower eastern and western Sierra foothills. (D'Azevedo 1986).

The Washoe people “have had long tenure in their known area of historic occupation and their presence predates the arrival of their Numic-speaking neighbors” (d'Azevedo 1986). As evidence of this, d'Azevedo notes that the Washoe are the only people of the Great Basin whose language is Hokan and not Numic. Tracing the archaeological evidence, he theorizes that the Washoe people have occupied their core range, centered around the Sierra Nevada, for at least 4,000 years. The Washoe are generally known as a Great Basin people but their culture and subsistence patterns reflect west of the Sierra Nevada, California-culture traits, as well as the eastern Sierra Nevada/Great Basin culture. An archeological complex of sites, known as the Kings Beach complex, which emerged in the Lake Tahoe region about A.D. 500, is “generally equated with the Washoe” according to d'Azevedo, and this complex continued to historic times (d'Azevedo 1986).

The Sierra Nevada region offered the Washoe a varied range of life-zones within which they moved seasonally in order to take advantage of subsistence resources offered by each of the zones.

The upland area around Lake Tahoe provided large game such as mountain sheep, deer, and antelope, which were plentiful even during winter months. Fish were abundant in lakes and rivers and were one of the most important subsistence resources for the Washoe. Walker, Pyramid, and Honey Lakes were fished at regular intervals throughout the year. At lower elevations, 4,500 to 6,000 feet, a transitional zone included the Pine Nut Mountains which provided the nutritious piñon nuts which the Washoe harvested seasonally. Oak groves on the west side of the Sierras in California, including area around the present town of Loyalton, provided acorns which were a staple of the southern Washoe. This transitional zone also included many valleys and mountain meadows such as Sierra Valley, where the Washoe gathered grass seeds, bulbs and roots during the spring and early summer. Camas was collected and processed for storage and future use, or eaten raw (d'Azevedo 1986).

The Washoe in Sierra Valley (Continued on Page 12) ➤

The Sierran

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The Washoe in Sierra Valley (Continued from Page 11)

Washoe habitation zone were similar, the Washoe experienced little hardship or starvation. If the resources at one location became scarce, groups could move to another location that provided those same resources in greater abundance. According to d'Azevedo (1986), "Small groups ranged in highly divergent and independent strategies of subsistence during the seasonal cycle of procurement."

As the Washoe moved about in a seasonal rotation throughout their habitation zone, they encountered people of other tribes but there is no evidence that the Washoe tried to exclude these tribes from their territory, which was essentially an open range. However, Washoe elders tell stories passed down from older generations of hostilities between the Washoe, Paiute, and Maidu tribes.

In her book *Wa She Shu: A Washoe Tribal History*, Jo Ann Nevers writes, "As the winter drew to an end, the Washoe prepared for spring. Once again the annual cycle began. The Washoe waited eagerly for the early plants, the spawning fish, and the young animals. They watched the signs of the new year in the land they knew so well. They gave thanks for bounty and prepared for times when the land was frugal. Staying close to the earth which fed and clothed them, the Washoe lived in harmony with their land."

"The Washoe in Sierra Valley" will be continued in the following issue along with a complete bibliography.