

## Interactions with Native Americans in the Humboldt Sink

1  
2 Source: ***Adventures of a Mountain Man: The Narrative of Zenas Leonard*** (journal of years 1831-1835;  
3 published in 1839 – The following section is about traveling through the Humboldt Sink in Nevada in  
4 1833.)

5 The Indians of this area are totally naked with the exception of a shield of grass, which they wear  
6 around their ***loins***. They are generally small and weak, and some of them very hairy. They subsist upon  
7 grass-seed, frogs, fish. In warm weather there is a fly, about the size and similar to a grain of wheat, on  
8 this lake, in great numbers. When the wind rolls the waters onto the shore, these flies are left on the  
9 beach --- the female Indians then carefully gather them into baskets and dried for winter provender.  
10 These flies, together with grass seed, and a few rabbits, is their principal food during the winter season.

11 A great many Indians were seen in this vicinity, and it was decided to ***fortify*** the camp. A ***breastwork***  
12 was made by piling up the baggage and saddles. Before everything was completed, eight- to nine-  
13 hundred Indians marched straight toward the camp. About one hundred and fifty yards away, the  
14 Indians stopped, and five of their chiefs continued on to the camp. They indicated their people wanted  
15 to come into camp and smoke.

16 Capt. Walker refused to let the Indians enter the camp. To frighten them off, he had some of the men  
17 shoot at ducks on the lake. The ducks were killed, which astonished the Indians a good deal, but the  
18 noise of the guns caused them to fall flat to the ground.

19 A few days later, large numbers of Indians were moving in the tall ***reeds*** around camp. A party of  
20 eighty to one hundred approached in a threatening manner. The boldness of the Indians alarmed Capt.  
21 Walker. When he gave his consent to show them the strength of our rifles, thirty-two men ***mounted***  
22 and surrounded the Indians. Thirty-nine Indians were killed and the remainder ran into the high grass  
23 in every direction, howling in the most lamentable manner. Capt. Walker then gave orders to some of  
24 the men to take the bows of the fallen Indians and put the wounded out of misery. Our object was to  
25 strike a decisive blow.

**Vocabulary:** ***loins***: area below the stomach and above the thighs; ***fortify***: strengthen against possible attack; ***breastwork***: wall about four feet high that protects and allows men to shoot over at the enemy; ***reeds***: plants; ***mounted***: got up on their horses

**Citation:** [www.projecttahoe.org](http://www.projecttahoe.org)

## Captain Fremont's Narrative

27 *Background: January 15, 1844, two days after discovering the pyramid in Pyramid Lake, John C.*  
28 *Fremont describes his encounter with the Native Americans who lived in the Great Basin of northern*  
29 *Nevada. He describes his first meetings in his journal.*

30 Early in the afternoon, when we were approaching the groves at the mouth of the river, three or four  
31 Indians met us on the trail. We had an explanatory conversation in signs, and then we moved on  
32 together towards the village, which the chief said was encamped on the bottom.

33 ...The chief commenced speaking in a loud voice as we approached; and parties of Indians, armed with  
34 bows and arrows, issued from the thickets. We selected a strong place for our encampment- a grassy  
35 bottom, nearly enclosed by the river, and furnished with abundant firewood. The village, a collection of  
36 straw huts, was few hundred yards higher up. An Indian brought in a large fish to trade, which we had  
37 the inexpressible satisfaction to find was a salmon-trout; we gathered round him eagerly. The Indians  
38 were amused with our delight, and immediately brought in numbers, so that the camp was soon  
39 stocked....

40 ... I remarked that one of them (Indian) gave a fish to the Indian we had first seen, which he carried off  
41 to his family. To them it was probably a feast; being of the Digger tribe, and having not share in the  
42 fishery, living generally on seeds and roots. (excerpted pgs. 307-308)

43 17<sup>th</sup>.—... On the way we surprised a family of Indians in the hills; but the man ran up the mountain with  
44 rapidity; and the woman was so terrified, and kept up such a continued screaming that we could do  
45 nothing with her, and were obliged to let her go. (excerpted pgs. 309-310)

46 19<sup>th</sup>.—A great number of smokes are still visible this morning, attesting at once the alarm our  
47 appearance had spread among these people, and their ignorance of us. If they knew the whites, they  
48 would understand that their only object in coming among them was to trade, which required peace  
49 and friendship; but they have nothing to trade—consequently, nothing to attract the white man; hence  
50 their fear and flight. (excerpted pg. 310)

51 24<sup>th</sup>.—A man was discovered running towards the camp as we were about to start this morning, who  
52 proved to be an Indian of rather advanced age—a sort of forlorn hope, who seemed to have been  
53 worked up into the resolution of visiting the strangers who were passing through the country. He  
54 seized the hand of the first man as he came up, out of breath and held on, as if to assure himself of  
55 protection. He brought with him a little skin bag, a few pounds of the seeds of a pine-tree, which to-  
56 day we saw for the first time... it might be called the *nut pine*. We purchased them all from him. The  
57 nut is oily, of very agreeable flavor, and must be very nutritious, as is constitutes the principal  
58 subsistence of the tribes among which we were not traveling. (excerpted pgs. 312-313)

**Citation:** The Narrative of Exploring the Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the year of 1842 and to Oregon and North California in the years of 1843-1844 by Brevet Captain J.C. Fremont, 1884, p. 307-313

After reading the passages, answer the following questions. Provide evidence from the text to support your thinking.

1. When did Captain Walker and the other mountain men travel thru the Humboldt Sink?

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2. In the text, underline and annotate Captain Walker's first impressions of the Native Americans in the area.

3a. The Native Americans and the mountain men had different reactions to the white men who made camp. What do you think the Native Americans wanted accomplish? Why might they want to do this? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3b. How did the mountain men react to the Native Americans? What was their motive? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. When did Captain Fremont complete his expedition through the Great Basin of northern Nevada?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Describe Captain Fremont's interactions with the Native Americans. Underline evidence in the text to support your thinking. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. In lines 43-45, Captain Fremont describes an encounter with a family of Native Americans. Based on your understanding from the first passage, why do you think the family reacted that way? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. According to Captain Fremont, what is the reason why the Native Americans are afraid of the white men in the expedition? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How were Walker and Fremont's interactions with the Native Americans of the Great Basin alike and different?

<b>Similar:</b>	<b>Different:</b>
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.