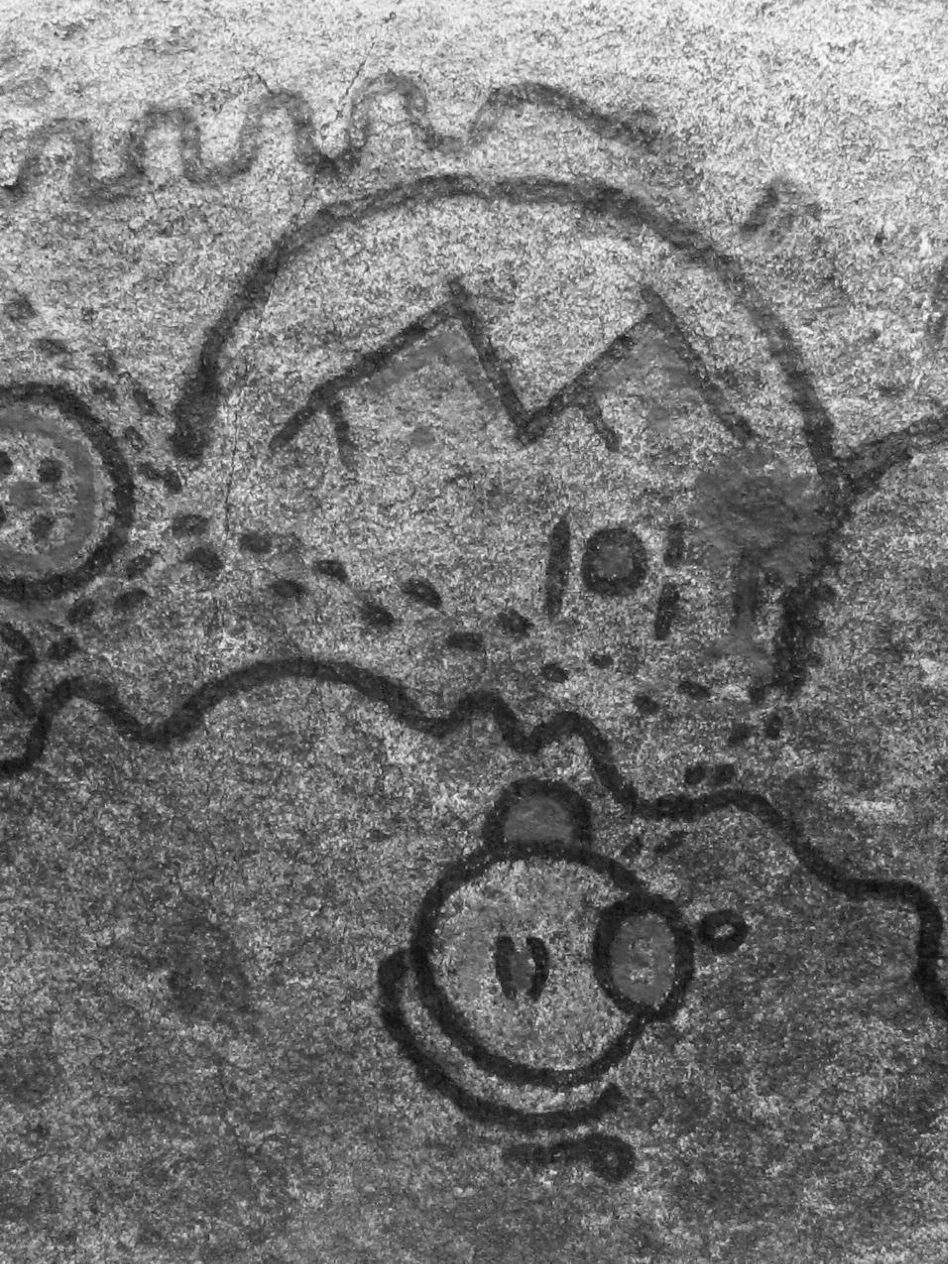


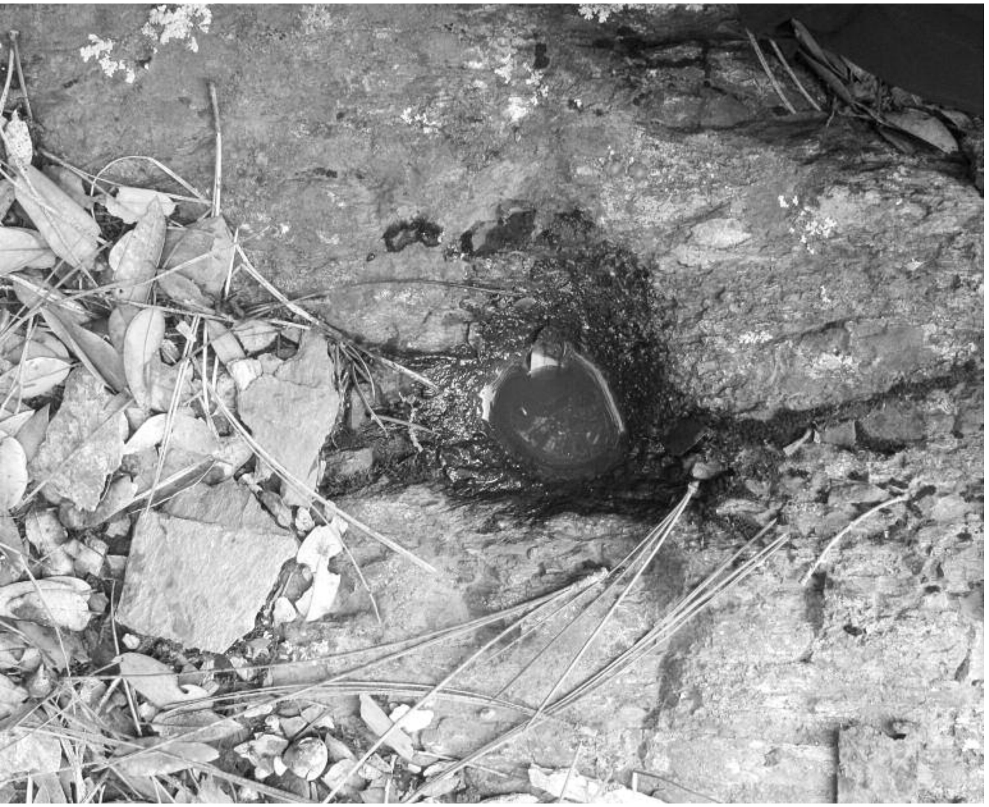
Kristin **TIMKEN**

Performing Landscapes

THE POLITICS OF POSSIBILITY

The Maidu genesis sequence happened here and no place else.
—FARRELL CUNNINGHAM[1]

FIGURE 1—*Grinding Rock, Yuba River Watershed, Sierra Nevada, CA, 2010*



IN JANUARY 2010 I WENT ON A HIKE IN THE SIERRA NEVADA foothills with Hank Meals, a regional historian and archaeologist for the National Forest Service. Along the trail in the Yuba River watershed, Meals pointed out evidence of indigenous culture embedded in the landscape. He identified artifacts and geological features: petroglyphs, grinding rocks, and arrowheads that lay hidden beneath a layer of decomposition he called "duff" (*fig. 1*). The Gold Rush, an environmental disaster of epic proportions, decimated indigenous communities in the region one hundred and fifty years ago. Traces of these cultures are invisible to most who hike through the regenerating landscape, now commonly perceived as "wilderness." My own experience in the north-central Sierra Nevada foothills began with archaeological engagement on my hikes with Meals, but upon meeting members of the Tsi-Akim Maidu tribe, it opened into a contemporary examination of the spatial perceptions, structuring apparatuses, and race relations that continue to shape the landscape.[2]

In this essay a salmon-honoring ceremony held in the Sierra Nevada is my point of departure for an exploration of the contested identities embedded in the concepts "Indianess," "green," and "local." The ceremony began as a gathering beside the Yuba River between a small group of environmental activists (native and non-native) concerned about the decline of the native salmon population. It is now a popular community-wide event in the foothills.[3] Using the ceremony as a lens, I will address the politics of authenticity, coalition building, and place as I examine the idea of the local as relational and contingent.

The Calling Back the Salmon ceremony, a daylong event, is held in the South Yuba River watershed and hosted by Tsi-Akim tribe in collaboration with the environmental group the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL).[4] Performed annually since 2006, the ceremony symbolically unifies a jurisdictionally fragmented eight-mile stretch of waterside land. Beginning at a confluence of the Yuba River, a group of "Spirit Runners," both native and non-native, run across managed zones of public and private property carrying native Yuba salmon—that have been speared following Maidu tradition—to an upper portion of the river that the salmon can no longer access because of a dam (*fig. 2*).[5] The event ends with a ceremonial circle on a riverbank in a state park, followed by a community meal provided by the Tsi-Akim.

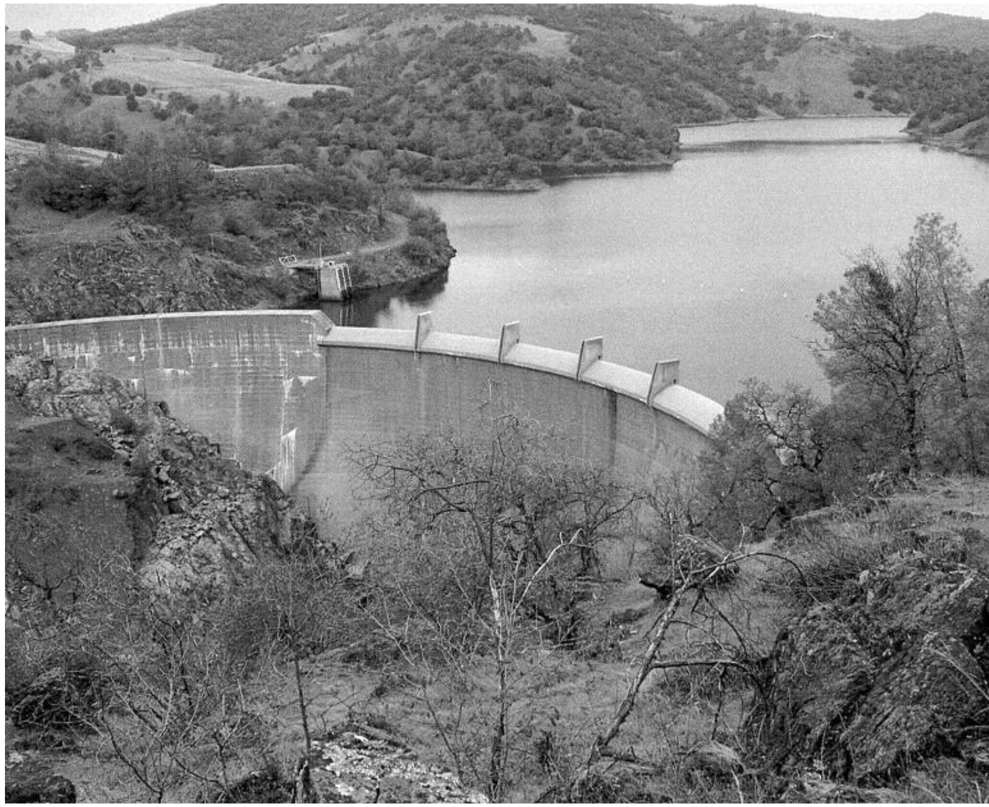
The Tsi-Akim, SYRCL, and community activists have a shared interest in the removal of the dam, and through their collaboration in the ceremony for the past five years these groups have engaged in a politics of coalition. For both native and non-native people, the ceremony provides a site in which to re-imagine spatial boundaries and practice a politics of becoming in relationship with the local geography.

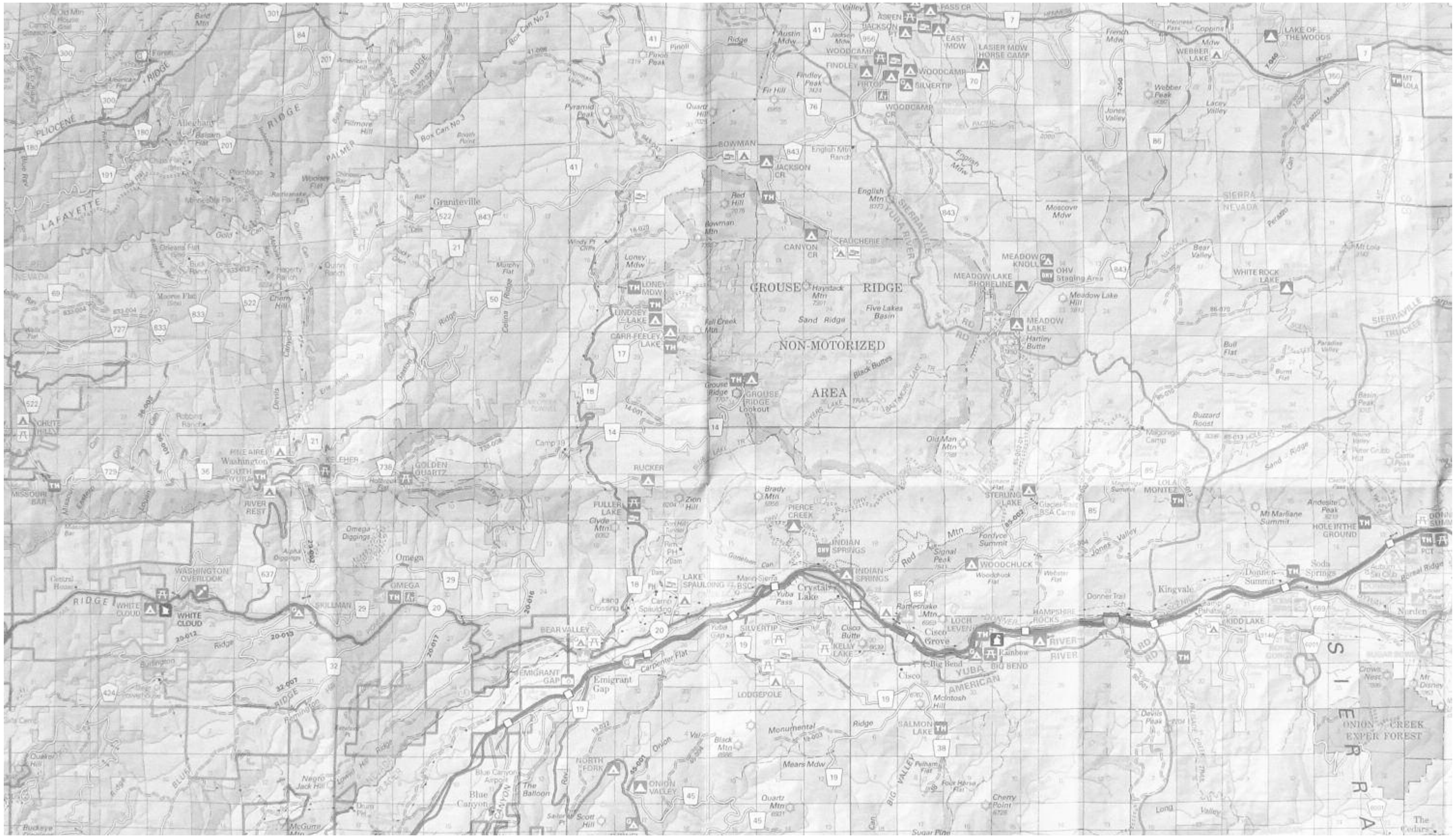
The Past

INSIDE THE OFFICES OF THE RANGER STATION AT THE EDGE OF the Tahoe Forest just outside Nevada City, the same large USDA Forest Service map (*fig. 3*) hangs prominently above each of the desks. The abstract visual of the forest depicts a complex politics of wilderness management. The map resembles a checkerboard in which each unit represents one square mile of land. The white squares denote privately held areas within the forest and the light green squares repre-

FIGURE 2—*The Englebright Dam, South Fork of the Yuba River, 2009. Photo by Hank Meals*

FIGURE 3 (OVERLEAF)—*USFS MAP 2008, Tahoe National Forest, Nevada County, CA, 2010*





GROUSE RIDGE
NON-MOTORIZED
AREA
Graniteville
Washington
Omega
WHITE CLOUD
WASHINGTON OVERLOOK
Emigrant Gap
Blue Canyon
Crystal Lake
Cisco Grove
Kingvale
Donner Summit
Soda Springs
Norden
SIERRA NEVADA
ONION CREEK EXPER FOREST
BOWMAN
JACKSON CR
FAUCHERIE
CANYON CR
MEADOW LAKE
WHITE ROCK LAKE
LAKE OF THE WOODS
WEBBER LAKE
LAFAYETTE
PLIOCENE
RIDGE
PALMER
Alleghany
FULLER LAKE
RUCKER
LINDSEY LAKE
CARR-FEELEY LAKE
LONEY MDW
LAKE SPAULDING
INDIAN SPRINGS
WOODCHUCK
STERLING LAKE
KIDD LAKE
SALMON LAKE
LODGEPOLE
NORTH FORK
ONION VALLEY
BEAR VALLEY
YUBA
AMERICAN RIVER
Big Bend
Rainbow
Cisco
HOLE IN THE GROUND
MONTEZ
SKILLMAN
GOLDEN QUARTZ
KELEHER
RIVER REST
MISSOURI BAR
Sierraville
S I E R R A

sent government holdings. According to the map's legend, lines that cut across the grid represent the National Forest Boundary, Administrative Forest Boundary, Ranger District Boundary, State Boundary, County Boundary, Wilderness Boundary, and many other jurisdictional divisions. The horizontal red line in the lower third of the map demarcates the Scenic Byway.

These multiple boundaries within the landscape represent access restrictions and the illuminate the conflicting demands of resource management, environmentalism, and tourism. Symbolizing a Western ideology of "nature," the map portrays land as something to be administered. Since the United States Forest Service was established in the early twentieth century, it has managed and regulated both public and private space within the Tahoe National Forest. The forest service oversees the various industries of resource extraction and tourism that operate within this space of "wilderness."

Non-white people in this region have enjoyed very few benefits from the resource extraction, the tourist economy, or the established recreational infrastructure that has developed from the narratives of "nature tourism" and the redefined landscape as a recreational resource.

Maidu communities have lived in the Sierra Nevada Mountains for many hundreds of years. Although the identity of the Maidu is not singular, Maidu creation stories are directly connected to landmarks and features within this vast region.[6] The ancient petroglyphs, rivers, lakes, and cliff faces, features of the landscape, form the place-based Maidu cultural identity. These tales function as an organic process of making meaning and also identify local resources for indigenous people. Alongside this oral tradition, cultural perceptions evolved organically, tying this people to the distinct geographic terrain.

According to archaeologist Helen Valborg and Maidu historian Farrell Cunningham, "All of these places [in the Sierra Nevada] are indelibly registered in the language of the people and acknowledged by them through ritual practices and procurement etiquette. This is the basis for the conviction that the Maidu people, as a people, were created here in this homeland and that the Maidu language, as a language, was created here as well."[7]

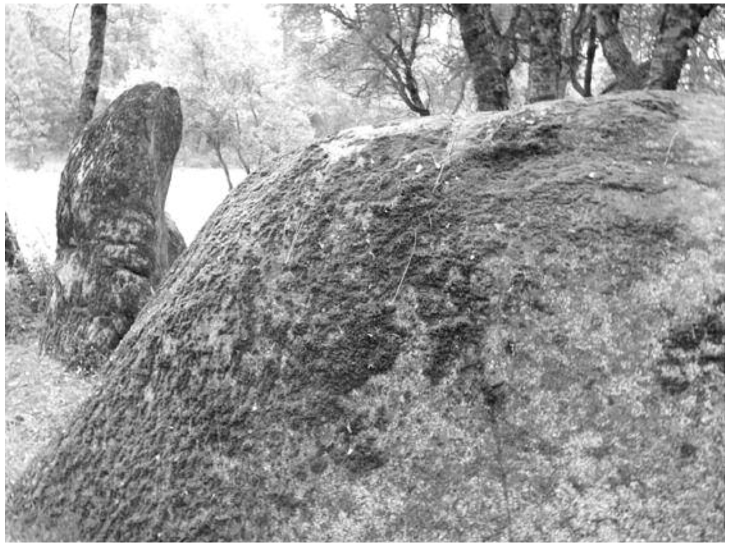
Cunningham himself explained to me that "Both the individual and the collective experience of identity, the core of Maidu subjectivity formation, is linked to distinct features within the landscape, and among indigenous people meaning is transmitted intergenerationally through myth, prayer, and ceremony."[8]

Some Western archeologists have attributed the petroglyphs located in the North Sierra to pre-Maidu cultures; nonetheless, for many Maidu the petroglyphs, along with other material objects found in the landscape, became integrated with and are still central to the Maidu myths and stories as embodiments of Maidu cultural identity.[9] This petroglyph (*fig. 4*) with its cup-shaped marks likely functioned as a map—a material counter-map to the abstract Western representation of landscape displayed at the Ranger Station.[10] Scholar Martin Berger notes, "Native Americans created maps that responded to a human context and material limitations."[11] Like many local artifacts, this petroglyph is currently located on private property, where it is inaccessible to the Maidu people. The inability to connect and interact with their cultural artifacts perpetuates a sense of disjuncture in the Maidu cultural system.[12]

Embedded

HANK MEALS, WHO HAS LIVED IN NEVADA COUNTY FOR MORE than thirty-five years, claims that the sociopolitical makeup of Nevada County (a population of approximately ninety-seven thousand) is, by his estimate, split about fifty-fifty between liberals and conser-

FIGURE 4—*Petroglyph, Nevada County, CA, 2010*



vatives. According to Meals, differences generally fall along class lines, "between the blue collar workers, typically in resource extraction, such mining and logging, and the private landholders." Many of those white landholders are ranchers whose families settled in the area during the mid-nineteenth century.[13]

Meals, who raised a family that remains in the area, navigates the multiple layers of this rural region with dexterity, operating within the different registers, from the individual to the institutional. He understands how this web of relations constitutes the environment in the foothills. In addition to working for the National Forest Service, he is a member of the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), a nearly thirty-year-old Nevada City grassroots nonprofit environmental organization that focuses on the protection and restoration of the Yuba River and the Greater Yuba watershed. He has been very involved with the Calling Back the Salmon ceremony and was one of the original committee members responsible for organizing that event.

Recently, large parcels of property in the foothills have been purchased by wealthy out-of-towners, but locals who have become financially successful are also buying up land. Meals knows many of these people and their families, and on occasion they ask him to create archeological maps of their property. In July 2010 I joined him as he fulfilled one of these requests, remapping the archaeological features of a private landscape.

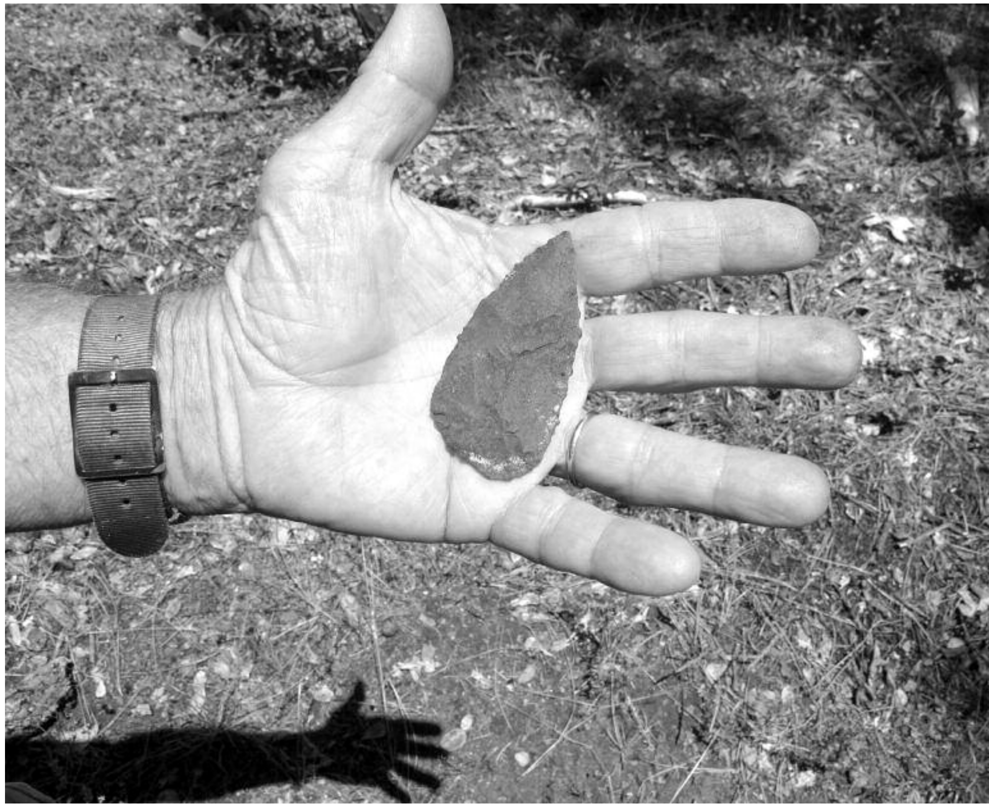
We hiked briskly in the hot sunshine across the property, which was filled with oaks and madrone trees. Meals moves quickly in the landscape, keeping his eyes to the ground in search of artifacts. Through experience, he has learned that property owners are anxious to know the location of the artifacts—especially the indigenous ones. Referring to an earlier site map, he located large petroglyphs and granite mortars, now hidden by tall grasses. When he discovered new objects on our walk, such as a "leaf" style arrowhead specimen he spotted just as we were getting ready to leave, he updated the map in pencil. After documenting the location of the arrowhead, he left it for the owner, who would come to "collect" it once we had left the property (*fig. 5*).

Embodied

ON A SUBSEQUENT VISIT TO THE REGION IN EARLY DECEMBER 2010 I visited the Maidu Active Cultural Center (hereafter MACC) with linguist and Maidu historian Farrell Cunningham. Unlike Meals, Cunningham moves slowly, almost gingerly, through the landscape. In his dark blue Ben Davis jacket and gray workpants, his appearance is more urban artist than "indigenous ecologist."[14] He wanted to show me the four bark houses on the property that the tribe had built by hand as a community. The design of the structures, each one a different size, was based on historical research. They represent a style of bark house from the mid-1800s. According to Cunningham, a Maidu family might live in one such bark house for up to ten years. When it was time to move on, they would either abandon the structure or possibly burn it down. These bark houses, built on land that the Tsi-Akim don't own, may also be abandoned if the group can one day relocate the MACC to a piece of property they own outright. Used by the Tsi-Akim as rematerialized dwellings, the bark houses signify a dynamic process of on-going contemporary cultural negotiation.

The parcel of land leased to Tsi-Akim is the site of a documented former Maidu settlement. The property is full of pine and oak trees and several large grinding mortars.[15] Cunningham notes that all the work done on the property has been carried out without funding. In their effort to acquire their own property, the Tsi-Akim, along with the Nevada County Land Trust and other nonprofits, as well as sev-

FIGURE 5—*"Leaf-Style" Arrowhead, Nevada County, CA, 2010*



eral federal conservation agencies, have submitted a management plan for PG&E land that is being divested.[16]

Thus the Tsi-Akim are in direct competition for the land not only with their current landlord, but also with multiple well-funded agencies. Cunningham stated with irony that in their management plan, the Tsi-Akim were asked by the Stewardship Council to prove that if all their social and interpersonal relationships failed, they would still be able to pay someone to maintain the property— the same land "maintained" without proof of funds by Maidu people for generations. As we moved in and out of and between the different bark houses, Cunningham answered two calls on his cell phone. Both conversations were held in Mountain Maidu.

The Politics of Authenticity

NATIVE AMERICANS ARE, BROADLY SPEAKING, ONE OF THE best-documented ethnic minority groups in America. Using this fact to their advantage, the Tsi-Akim are in the process of building an ancestral registry based on government record—specifically, a 1928 California Indian Claims Commission report.[17] In their effort to re-create a Maidu genealogy, the Tsi-Akim are refuting the colonial Rancheria system, choosing a more open approach that will include the entire Maidu homeland in their future registry. This updated registry proposes to demonstrate that the Maidu territory was much more extensive than originally defined by the government. Yet while genealogical reconstruction of identity means following a paper trail, reinvigorating cultural authenticity is uncharted territory in the region.

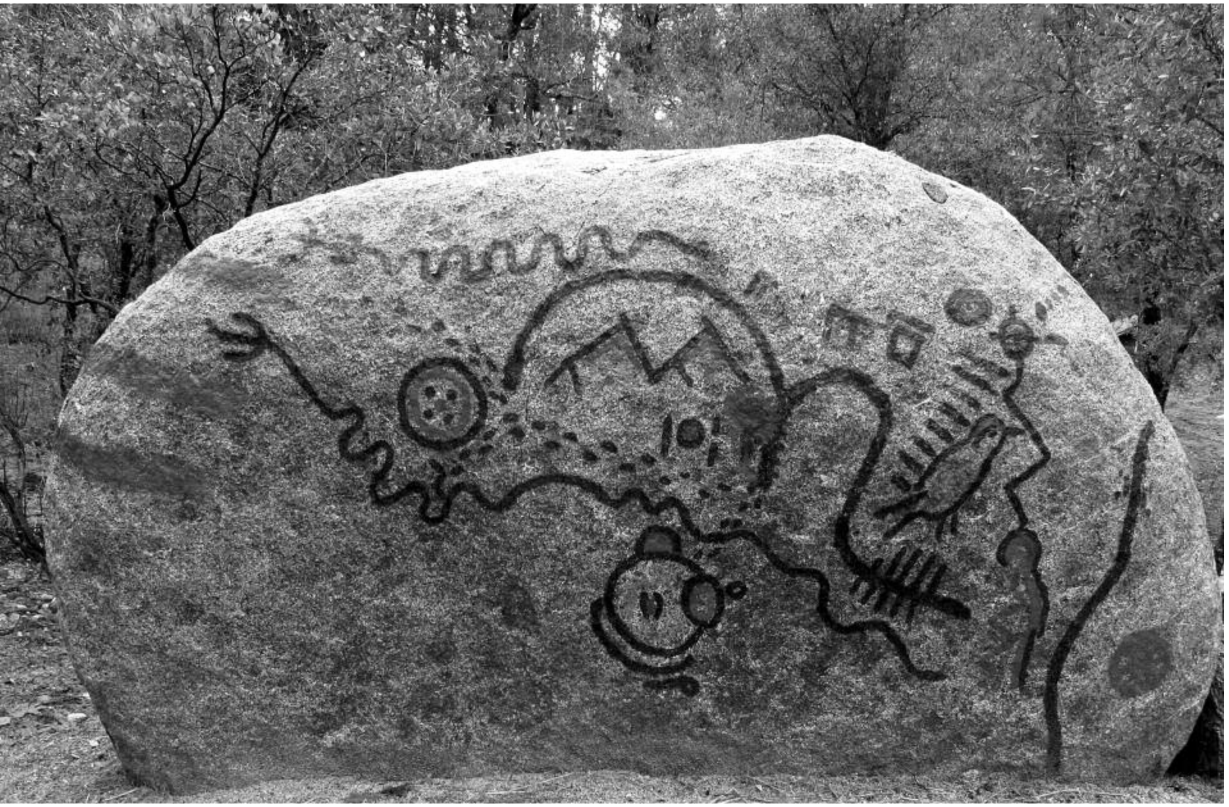
The cultural is the political. The power to produce and determine meaning creates a framework that is constitutive for both the dominant lived experience and for the analysis of that dominant experience. Everyone who contributes to this framework and the analysis of it is implicated: from the Western archaeologists to the academics who perpetuate its existence. Many indigenous people interpret the landscape as culturally full, just as their ancestors did. This view contrasts the well-documented experience of Western European Americans who, when they arrived in the region more than a century ago, generally chose to view the landscape as culturally empty.

Historian Philip J. Deloria writes that, "The authentic, as numerous scholars have pointed out, is a culturally constructed category created in opposition to a perceived state of inauthenticity."[18] In their attempt to reinvigorate aspects of the Maidu culture in the Yuba River watershed, the Tsi-Akim must engage the region as a space of colonialism, with the understanding that Western social sciences define the cultural authenticity of their ancestors. These same regimes of knowledge determine and control contemporary notions of "authentic" indigenous identity, culture, and artwork. It could be said that the surrounding foothill communities participate in a passive form of racism, largely ignoring or excluding the presence of the various indigenous groups or, when necessary, representing the culture as historically dead.

Australian environmental theorist Val Plumwood refers to this process of denial as backgrounding, claiming: "Denial is often accomplished via a perceptual politics of what is worth noticing, of what can be acknowledged, foregrounded, and rewarded and what is relegated to the background."[19] As the Tsi-Akim increase their visibility in the local, foregrounding an identity that is dynamic and contemporary, they have chosen to approach decolonization as a process of co-healing with fellow members from the community.[20]

The ceremony serves as one example of their progressive approach; another is Cunningham's willingness to teach the Mountain Maidu language to anyone who wants to learn. He frequently holds

FIGURE 6—*Contemporary Pictograph by Farrell Cunningham, Nevada County, CA, 2011*



his language and culture class at the MACC. His students, predominantly white, are members of the local foothill communities. Cunningham cites the importance of teaching various aspects of Maidu culture, such as stories, myths, and culturally based ecological practices in conjunction with the language.[21] It is his opinion that "Linguistics are the direct root to a particular thought pattern." He sees language as an entry point to a culture, but asserts that a generalized Maidu perspective includes more than just the ability to understand and speak the language.

During our visit to the MACC, Cunningham, who is a painter, led me over to a rock art painting he made using traditional pigments on a large boulder located on the MACC property (*fig. 6*). Cunningham called the work a pictograph and stated, "It's completely modern, but it's in the (Maidu) pattern." Pictographs are very rare in the Northern Sierra. Western archeologists who classify and document rock art, in an effort to prevent their destruction, are notoriously reluctant to reveal the locations of the pictographs. Cunningham's "modern pictograph" is derived from the ancient rock drawings he studied as a child walking in the landscape with his father.[22] Looking closely at his pictograph, Cunningham suddenly exclaims, "I love it —it's 'American' graffiti!'"

In 2011, the *New York Times* published a piece about the ongoing problem of graffiti artists defacing Native American pictographs in the Nevada "wilderness."[23] The writer, who discussed the work of the graffiti "artists," defined wilderness space in the article " as land that was not managed by National or State Park Services." Amidst all the land in the Northern Sierra managed by either Federal or State agencies, the MACC provides a temporary "zone of autonomy," establishing a locus from which the Tsi-Akim can reestablish and practice their culture in a dynamic and embodied way.[24]

I briefly discussed the "politics of authenticity" with Cunningham (who had mentioned in a prior conversation he doesn't want to be pigeonholed as an "indigenous artist") When I questioned him about Western social sciences and the entrenched definitions of authenticity, he demonstrated limited patience for the multiple discourses and theory that surround authenticity. He simply said, "That's the story of my life."

KT: How do you define authentic?

FC: *What is* authentic? *That is what I would like to know. I have never thought of myself as authentic…but the fact is, I guess there is an authenticity that exists with me, that nobody else can ever have.*

KT: Why?

FC: *Why? Because I am who I am and I was born at a particular time. Not only was I born here, but I grew up embodied and because of that—I am* this man who is standing before you, *who is thirty-four years old and was fortunate enough to have spent time with my ancestors, my elders. And I am* one *of less than twenty people who can speak an entire language today— but not only that language. I had the privilege of going with my father and other elders and seeing these places where our ancestors applied pigments to rocks and did these things and* thought *about stuff. I was taught by my elders in a direct line of ceremonies, and I carry them on—that's authenticity.*[25]

More than twenty years ago, critical anthropologist James Clifford noted that the general perception among the American public was that "Native American societies could not by definition be dynamic, inventive, or expansive."[26] Embodying these qualities is challenging when as an indigenous group many Maidu communities may be more profitably contextualized in the tourist narratives of the local foothill communities if they are extinct, or at least "of the past."

Area Controlled

THE MACC IS LOCATED JUST A FEW MILES AWAY FROM THE TAHOE National Forest Ranger Station, where I interviewed Ann Westling, the supervisor in charge of the Tahoe District, in the summer of 2010. During the interview I asked her to address the complex topic of wilderness management.[27] When I inquired about local Native American communities, she indicated that up to that point in time no indigenous people had come forward with issues pertaining to sacred sites in the Tahoe District. She suggested I speak with U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) ecologist Kathy VanZuuk about any potential Native American projects in the forest. VanZuuk, the coordinator and community liaison for projects in the forest, oversees the Yuba watershed management entities, including the National Forest Service (NFS), the Bureau of Land management, State Parks, fisheries, private individuals, and Nevada City Irrigation, to name just a few (*fig. 7*). Each time a project in the Tahoe National Forest is proposed, the coalition of participating groups must produce a stakeholders report for the NFS. This report involves providing costly and extensive scientific testing, research, and data interpretation. VanZuuk mentioned that several months prior she had been approached with a proposal by a "local interest group," the "Friends of Deer Creek," for a watershed restoration project. The project, a partnership between Friends of Deer Creek (a local creek in Nevada City) and the Tsi-Akim, would include the restoration of culturally important plant materials like willow, which was used for basket weaving. VanZuuk handed me the two-page proposal and stated that the plan, in its current form, was extremely inadequate and did not meet the strict government standards required of projects within the Tahoe National Forest.[28]

There are multiple government and environmental nonprofit

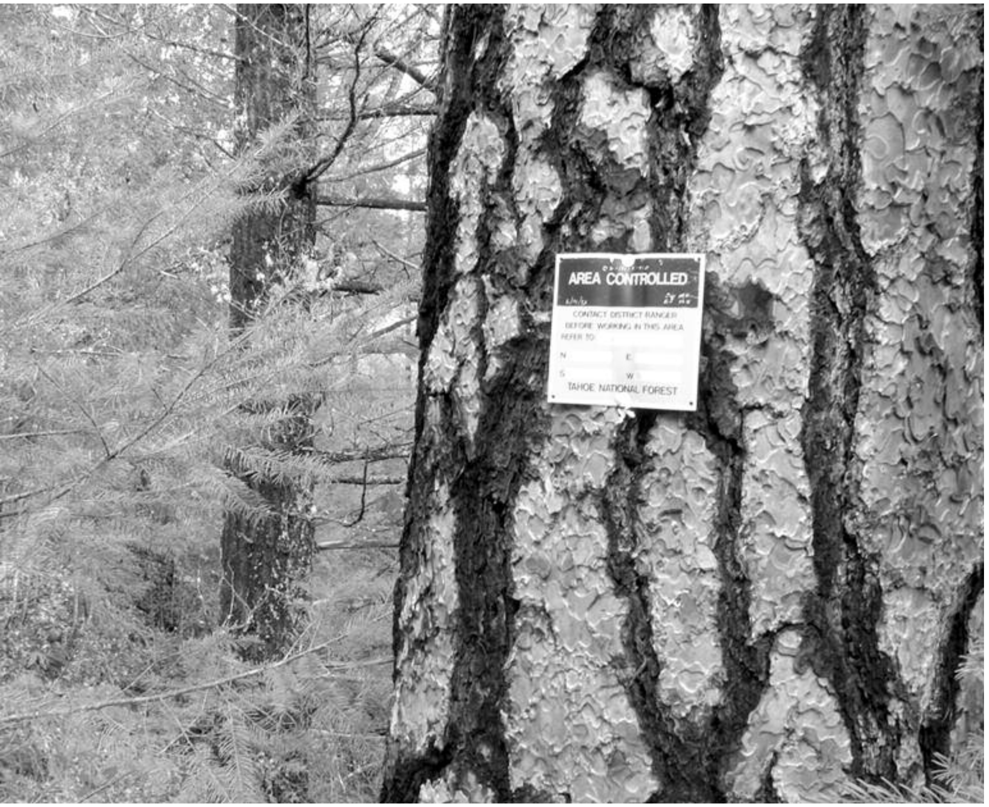


FIGURE 7—*Area Controlled: BLM, Nevada County, CA, 2010*

agencies operating within the Yuba River watershed. A 2010 report published by the nonprofit SYRCL acknowledged the difficulties in coordinating all the entities that have been created to combat destruction and manage resource extraction in a sustainable way within the region. The multijurisdictional government management process is entrenched and dispersed between the Department of Agriculture (U.S. Forest Service), the Department of Commerce (National Marine Fisheries), and the Department of Interior (Bureau of Land Management). These agencies all represent the federal resource interests in the region. There is limited inter-agency collaboration between the state and federal levels. The checkerboard grid of public and private parcels within the Yuba Basin creates further fragmentation, pushing ecosystems to functional collapse.[29]

In recent years, the staff at public agencies and multiple environmental nonprofits in the north-central Sierra Nevada region have made attempts to coordinate and cooperate with each other. Finding the federal and state government agencies impenetrable, the Tsi-Akim have turned to organizations such as the Nevada County Land Trust to lease land, and have partnered with various nonprofits, most notably SYRCL, in order to carry out their projects.

SYRCL has been spearheading efforts to recover and protect the wild salmon population in the Yuba River watershed since the 1990s. The organization's Executive Director, Jason Rainey, emphasizes what he calls a place-based holistic approach in the group's effort to restore the watershed. Rainey feels that a spiritual approach—incompatible and in deliberate contrast to federal and state land management policies—is an important element for SYRCL to integrate into the salmon restoration project. He is aware of the stereotype of "Greens" employing "Indianness" to legitimize environmental activism, and does not want SYRCL to be just another "enviro group using indigenous people to further their own agenda."[30] He sees the Calling Back the Salmon ceremony as an opportunity to infuse political action with a "vibrancy and resonance that tested boundaries," and to "heal and support difference while doing the spiritual work necessary to bring the salmon back to the upper portion of the river."[31]

Alliances Across Difference

SINCE THE 2000S, ALLIANCES HAVE FORMED BETWEEN INDIGENOUS people and non-natives in rural, predominantly white communities, generally as a response to direct threats from outside the community. Professor of geography and Native American studies Zoltan Grossman has researched the experiences of people who crossed racial lines in order to protect a common place against a perceived threat. According to Grossman, within the particular groups he studied, "The Native/non-Native alliances do not cross social boundaries but rather reconfigure those boundaries in the face of an outside environmental threat."[32] Grossman notes four general, often intersecting, developments that have lead to cooperation.

First, Native Americans asserted their cultural autonomy and tribal sovereignty. Second, a backlash from some rural whites created a conflict around the use of land or natural resources. Third, the conflict declined in intensity and the two groups initiated dialogue. Finally, the communities increased collaboration around the protection of their community livelihood and common natural resources.[33]

Grossman's study suggests a framework for understanding how alliances may be formed between native and non-native people based on ownership and resources. The indigenous groups he cites in his work are tribes who own land. Grossman's analysis indicates a process for reconfiguring the boundaries between groups. The Tsi-Akim, unlike some of the recognized Maidu communities in the region, are without land or the ability to penetrate the environmental hegemony in the Sierras, and so they must work with the boundaries of social space. These boundaries include natives, non-natives, Maidu, non-Maidu, environmentalists and those who work in resource extraction. Lack of material ownership shapes Tsi-Akim relations in the sociopolitical hierarchy. In order to reassert a place-based identity in the local, the group must explore and practice coalition building.[34] The Calling Back the Salmon ceremony creates a locus in which to negotiate conflict, recognize difference, and temporarily re-territorialize and reimagine place. As activism, the ceremony provides the Tsi-Akim the opportunity to practice crossing material geographic boundaries to practice becoming contemporary in the local.

Since the first Calling Back the Salmon ceremony in 2005, the Tsi-Akim have, as a group, increased their visibility within the wider community. Currently they are waiting to hear whether or not they will receive federal recognition. Based on a land management proposal they submitted to the Stewardship Council, the Tsi-Akim hope to become one of the entities that will receive land from the divestiture of the PG&E properties.[35]

Grossman writes that "[an alliance] can be successful if it broadens relationships beyond environmental issues, to build more equal and stable political, economic, and cultural links between communities."[36] Ideally, through the production of the ceremony, the groups forge alliances that could lead to increased Native American equality. In the past several years, the Tsi-Akim have begun to assert their cultural autonomy. Members continue to push the ceremony in a direction that prioritizes the reinvigoration of Maidu ceremonial culture. While SYRCL and the Tsi-Akim have the mutual goal of reviving the salmon population, they also have independent agendas. Whereas the Tsi-Akim are seeking cultural autonomy, federal recognition, and land ownership, SYRCL is using legal and scientific channels to work for local watershed assessment and governance.

Based on attendance alone, the 2009 ceremonial event was a huge success. However, with that success came a new set of issues to be negotiated between the various individuals and groups that produce the ceremony. One Tsi-Akim elder who participated in the ceremony became physically ill. Some Tsi-Akim members attributed the sickness to the large number of people present at the event. There was a belief among those members that the illness signaled that some participants may be attending the ceremony without the "right intentions." Some Tsi-Akim were fearful that the ceremony could become a spectacle. According to Cunningham, there were members who felt that the ceremony "was at risk of being perceived as an Indian Pow-Wow." Several Tsi-Akim members did not want the ceremonial practice to be absorbed into the local environmental hegemony as a tourist event.

Committee members with whom I spoke prior to the 2010 ceremony, such as SYRCL Director Jason Rainey, were under the false impression that the Tsi-Akim, particularly the elders, were beginning to accept the idea of the inclusive nature of the ceremony. Chairman Ryberg supports the original intention for community healing and coalition building. Other original committee members, including Michael Ben Ortiz, also advocate for the ceremony to remain as open to the wider community as possible. Cunningham feels that from a Maidu perspective the ceremony is already compromised by the fact that it is held in a State Park and requires permits. In the past two years several other Calling Back the Salmon ceremonies have sprung up in various locations throughout Northern California, including one performed by a Buddhist community in Marin. One environmentalist I spoke to called it a "movement."

Cunningham told me prior to the 2010 ceremony "If the ceremony [we perform] is truly Maidu then the other [non-native] 'Spiritualists' will eventually drop off."[37] Cunningham's comment illustrates the inherent tension inherent in the struggle for the Tsi- Akim to reinvigorate a fragmented spiritual cultural system. They must frequently contend with the romanticism associated with the idea of "Indianness" by the American public. They have little patience with non-natives who want to play Indian.

On October 9, 2010, I found myself greeting the dawn on the banks of the Yuba River with close to a hundred people. As tribal Chair Don Ryberg's nephew Jason performed a traditional smudging, fanning those present in the crowd with the smoke of burning sage, I began to recognize faces.[38] They belonged to the various people I had spoken to over the course of the past year about the evolution of the ceremony. Michael Ben Ortiz, who had recently moved away from the area, returned to act as the Master of Ceremonies. I said hello to SYRCL's Jason Rainey, who was also in the crowd and mentioned that he felt weak from several days of fasting.[39]

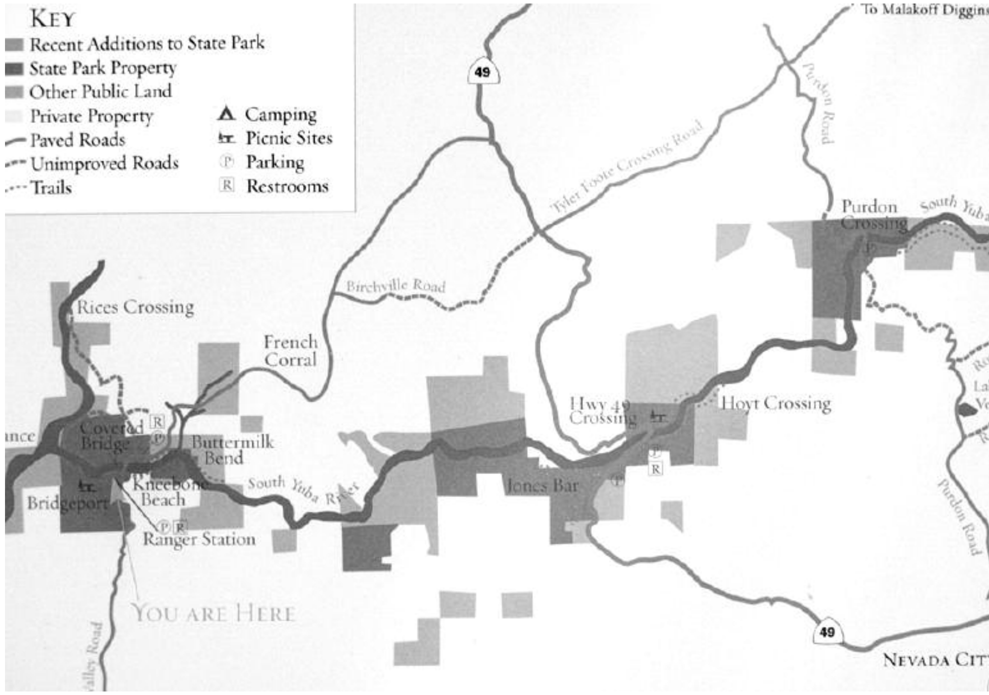
Twenty-three spirit runners were participating in the run, but fewer than half would actually carry the salmon. Through word of mouth, the run has acquired the cachet of "social activist" tourism. The runners, mostly young and white, were visibly full of enthusiasm. During the gathering, Cunningham gave a blessing in Maidu. Shortly thereafter, Jason Ryberg went off with Tsi-Akim Cultural Director Grayson Coney to spear a salmon so that the runners could set off on their run before it got too hot.[40] I headed off to wait at Bridgeport Park, the site of the river crossing and the location of the ceremonial circle community meal that would follow. It would be several hours before a salmon was caught and carried eight miles up the river. The printed schedule noted, "Time is approximate—let the salmon lead the way."

I spent the morning by the river at Bridgeport Park. It was a beautiful fall day in the Sierra. The park visitors who crossed the historic covered bridge or lounged on the riverbank had no idea what would be taking place in the next few hours. Frankly, neither did I. Feeling disconnected, fragments of the many conversations from the past six months ran through my head.[41] While I waited, I spent some time looking at the map of the watershed located in the parking lot next to the river. The map clearly depicted the fragmented landscape bordering a portion of the river that salmon could no longer access (*fig. 8*).

Some time after noon, people began to gather at the riverbank where the runners would soon be crossing. As I watched people come together, I witnessed the local in all its competing and conflicting manifestations. I noticed Cunningham arrive with several elders, and watched them create a circle out of rocks in the sand under the shade of a tree on the beach. They dug a shallow pit and lit a small fire at its center for the salmon. In order to have a fire it is necessary to get a permit, which meant that the Nevada County fire department must be on site. When it got quiet enough, I could hear the firemen's walkie-talkies periodically crackling in the background.

Suddenly, someone across the river signaled that the runners had crossed the dam and were close by. Ortiz quickly cleared a pathway for the runners so they could pass through the crowd of at least two hundred people waiting in quiet anticipation. The runners would head in a line to the ceremonial circle where several young boys were playing near the fire (I found out later they that were Jason Ryberg's sons). After a few more minutes passed, the runners broke through the brush and charged into the river toward us. First everyone stood up and just stared—the crowd began to cheer with joy, thrilled by what they saw. Although the runners looked exhausted by the heat,

FIGURE 8—*Map Of South Yuba River Watershed, Nevada County, CA, 2010*


KEY
Recent Additions to State Park
State Park Property
Other Public Land
Private Property
Paved Roads
Unimproved Roads
Trails
Camping
Picnic Sites
Parking
Restrooms
To Malakoff Diggin
49
Purdon Road
Tyler Foote Crossing Road
Purdon Crossing
South Yuba
Birchville Road
Rices Crossing
French Corral
ince
Covered Bridge
Buttermilk Bend
Bridgeport
Kneebone Beach
Ranger Station
South Yuba River
Hwy 49 Crossing
Hoyt Crossing
Jones Bar
Purdon Road
You are Here
Valley Road
49
Nevada Cit

you could see them revive as they ran into the water to the sound of the cheering crowd. Tsi-Akim Jason Ryberg was in front as the pack, splashing into the cold, waist-high water. A huge smile flashed across his face. I found myself riveted in place, unable to move, stunned by the sight of the giant Yuba salmon Ryberg carried in his arms, raised high above his head. As the runners passed by me, I could feel the enthusiasm and energy they embodied.

I had not spoken to either Ortiz or Cunningham for several weeks, so I had no idea how or if the tensions between committee members and the Tsi-Akim had been resolved. In past ceremonies everyone present on the beach was included in the ceremonial circle, but this format is no longer tolerable for some Tsi-Akim. These members want to firmly ground the ceremony in a foundation of prayer and movement rooted in Maidu Cultural practices. For the first time since the ceremony had been performed for the general public, only the "spirit runners" and the members of the Tsi-Akim present on the riverbank that day entered the ceremonial circle to honor the salmon. All others—whether they were environmentalists, members from the community, or tourists—remained outside. The ceremony that followed was simple, silent, and powerful.

Canadian scholar Alf Hornborg writes, "To focus on the processes through which local experience is fragmented and absorbed by modernity would be a step toward the protection and resurrection of place."[42] The ceremony provides a way for the community to come together to re-imagine spatial boundaries in the jurisdictionally fragmented landscape. This symbolic unification suggests that place, like the subject, is a site for becoming.[43] The Calling Back the Salmon ceremony in the north-central Sierra foothills creates a space in which to forge alliances across difference and perform a politics of possibility.

Notes

1 Farrell Cunningham, interview with author, December 13, 2010, Nevada City, CA. Tsi-Akim Maidu historian and linguist Farrell Cunningham was born and raised in Plumas County. At thirty-four he is the only remaining speaker of the Mountain Maidu dialect under the age of eighty.

2 The Tsi-Akim tribe is a non-profit group currently petitioning for federal recognition. The Tsi-Akim are connected to the Taylorsville Rancheria in the Mountain Maidu homeland of the Northern Sierra; 40 percent of the Tsi-Akim community live in Nevada County and 40 percent live in Plumas County. The remaining 20 percent live throughout the world. The tribe operates a thrift store in Grass Valley. Chairman Don Ryberg refers to his tribe as a "thrift store tribe," not a "casino tribe." The Tsi-Akim group address environmental issues as they pursue a cultural revival in the region. They lease a four-acre property from the Nevada County Land Trust where the The Maidu Active Cultural Center (MACC) is located.

3 The event in 2010 combined traditional native elements, such as the spearing of the salmon and the ceremonial circle, and invented features like the run. In the first gathering, the ceremonial blessing was given by non-native environmental activist Bill Jacobsen. This auspicious beginning remains a source of contention for Tsi-Akim elders. Philip Deloria notes that the phenomenon of non-Indians performing prayers as stems from the countercultural spiritualist movement in the '70s, stating, "As cultural boundaries opened up. The role of the mediator, already difficult to pin down, proved almost impossibly slippery. Non-Indians began taking up permanent native identities in order to lay claim to the cultural power of Indianess in the white imagination." See Deloria, Philip J, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale Historical Publication, 1998), 168.

4 The South Yuba River Citizens League, the oldest environmental nonprofit group in the region, is focused on protecting and preserving a thirty-nine-mile stretch of the South Yuba River.

5 Constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1941, the Englebright Dam comes up for a relicensing review in six years. It currently supplies electricity to a small number of homes along the Yuba River.

6 According to Native American Studies professor Elisabeth Middleton, "The great Maidu 'nation,' is one of the largest Native Indian tribes in California, whether we organize people based on Kroeber's linguistic boundaries (which would include Nisenan and Concow Maidu), or around the nationalistic views of some Maidu. Yet, the Maidu Nation is difficult to find—on a map, in the list of recognized tribes, or in the census.… This invisibility stems from treaties made with Maidu in 1851,

and “lost” in the Senate archives for 50 years in response to pressure from speculators that California was “too valuable” to give 8,800,000 acres to the Indians. The non-ratification of these treaties left the Maidu officially landless and federally unrecognized as a tribe. Maidu were not able to access collective Indian lands until a series of appropriation beginning in 1914 (38 Stat.582–589) and culminating in the 1922 “Purchase of Land for Homeless Indians of California”(42 Stat.559–567), authorized funds for land purchase. See Middleton, Elisabeth,“A Political Ecology of Healing,” *The Journal of Political Ecology* 17 (2010), 2.

7 Angus R. Quinlan, *Great Basin Rock Art: Archaeological Perspectives* (Reno: University of Nevada Press), 31. According to Cunningham, “Procurement etiquette” refers to the songs, prayers, and ceremonies historically performed by Maidu people in the process of procuring food. There are traditional songs and blessings connected to food sources such as acorns or salmon that have been passed down intergenerationally. Cunningham, interview, December 13, 2010.

8 Cunningham, interview, December 13, 2010.

9 Ibid.

10 According to the CAL FIRE Archaeology Program Web Site, this type of petroglyph is called “Style #1 (Pitted Boulders). This style consists of the use of cup-shaped pits on rounded boulders. The pits are randomly placed on boulder surfaces, with most examples found in association with large occupation sites and/or bedrock mortar areas. Pitted boulders have been found over much of the northern Sierra Nevada, with notable concentrations in the Truckee basin and along the foothills.” CAL FIRE Archaeology Program Web Site, February 12, 2011, http://www.indiana.edu/~e472/cdf/sierra.shtml.

11 Martin Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 54.

12 In defining the placed-based Maidu system for making cultural meaning in the Sierra Nevada region, Helen Valborg and Farrell Cunningham note, “It is a process whereby people become self-consciously aware of who they are in connection to time and place.” They argue that, “This process and the validity of these reemerging identities needs to be respected and understood on their own terms.” Quinlan, *Great Basin Rock Art: Archeological Perspectives*, 33; Cunningham emphasizes for the Tsi-Akim the importance of the contemporary connection between landscape, language, and identity. Cunningham, interview, December 13, 2010; In 1998 James Clifford conjectured, “An intellectual historian of the year 2010, if such a person is imaginable, may even look back on the first two-thirds of our century and observe that this was a time when Western intellectuals were preoccupied with grounds of meaning and identity they called “culture” and “language”(much the way we look at the nineteenth century and perceive there a problematic concern with “history” and “progress”). James Clifford. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 95. I think we are seeing signs that the privilege given to natural languages and, as it were, natural cultures is dissolving.”

13 Hank Meals, interview with the author, December 22, 2010.

14 Cunningham worked for the National Forest Service as an ecologist with the *The Maidu Stewardship Project*. The traditional ecology project was listed as a success story in 2003 on the Forest Service website, January 15, 2011, http://www.fs.fed.us/plan/par/2003/ success/stories/act2.shtml.

15 Many of the mortars located here have been attributed by Western European archeologists as the work of pre-Maidu cultures, but as noted earlier by Cunningham, mortars, as features found within the landscape, have since been absorbed into the place-based cultural identity that is Maidu through myths, stories, and ceremony.

16 In 1999 PG&E proposed selling 140,000 acres of land associated with their hydroelectric facilities to recoup some of their lost revenue. PG&E filed for bankruptcy in 2001, and, as part of part of the 2003 Settlement Agreement with the California Public Utilities Commission, the 140,000 acres were to be placed into protective management under oversight of the Stewardship Council. Originally named the PG&E Environmental Enhancement Corporation (EEC), the Council is charged with creating land management plans, and transferring the lands to entities capable of implementation.” Middleton, “A Political Ecology of Healing,”6.

17 Cunningham has an original claims document given to him by a family member. California Native Americans website, January 11, 2011, http://www.nahc.ca.gov/califindian.html.

18 Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 101.

19 Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 104.

20 Discussing de-colonization Middleton writes, “De-colonization can be framed as both external—researchers need to de-colonize their methodologies, Federal agencies need to de-colonize their ways of consulting with indigenous people, the federal government needs to de-colonize its system of recognizing tribes—and internal individuals must de-colonize their way of seeing themselves as colonized people.” Middleton, “A Political Ecology of Healing,”11.

21 Maidu ecology, according to Cunningham, is “A Maidu system of living with the land, and understanding of understory vegetation, [that] allows for maximum ecosystem diversity, health, and population sustainability, while also enabling [the] ecosystem/human relationship to be interactive, reciprocal, and sacred.” Maidu Summit Consortium website, February 6, 2011, http://www.maidusummit.org/about/.

22 According to the CAL FIRE Archaeology Program, Style #7 rock art panels are more complex and contain a greater variety of design elements that any other prehistoric rock art style in the northern Sierra Nevada region, and although considerable variation exists in design elements, there is also an underlying rigidity. Common designs include concentric circles, simple circles elaborated by line elements, wavy lines of varying complexity, tracks, and anthropomorphic-zoomorphic representations. CAL FIRE Archaeology Program Web Site, January 7, 2011, http://www.indiana.edu/~e472/cdf/sierra.shtml.

23 Cunningham, interview, December 13, 2011; Jennifer Medina,"Red Rocks of Nevada Smudged by Less Colorful Graffiti," *New York Times*, January 5, 2011.

24 J.K. Gibson-Graham has cited the example of the Zapatista movement, whose goal was not to wrest control but to establish zones of counter-power by creating and asserting multiple other ways of being in the world. See Gibson-Graham, *Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006), xx.

25 Cunningham, interview, December 13, 2010.

26 Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 284.

27 A twenty-year veteran of the National Forest Service (NFS),Westling argues that the Internet, in combination with an explosion of interest in "wild and natural," has had a dramatic impact on forest visitors. Westling's job involves coordinating the various public and private industries ranging from resource extraction to tourism. When timber is harvested, Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) must notify the NFS because their holdings are interspersed throughout the forest in one-mile parcels that bump up against the government land. Westling cautions against oversimplifications, such as designating SPI as "the bad guy." She maintains that if SPI, who currently allows the public access on their land, continues to feel hassled by logging protesters, they may eventually sell the land and there will be no access.

28 When I spoke with Meals about my meeting with VanZuuk, he told me that in his opinion, based on the strict regulations imposed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) it was unlikely that any indigenous stewardship projects would be permitted in the Tahoe National Forest. Although the NFS is desperate for goodwill with indigenous groups, Meals claimed that a project like the Maidu Stewardship Project, which was undertaken in a remote corner of the Plumas County National Forest, would not happen in the Tahoe National Forest. The NFS promoted the Maidu Stewardship project as a success on its website, November 18, 2010, http://www.fs.fed.us/ plan/par/2003/success/stories/act2.shtml.

29 South Yuba River Citizens League website, January 12, 2011, http://yubariver.org /watershed-assessment/.

30 Jason Rainey, interview with author, July 23, 2010.

31 Rainey, interview, July 23, 2010. SYRCL has filed suits against the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Marine Fisheries, and the Yuba County Water Agency over two dams that divert water from the Yuba and disrupt the native salmon runs. As the oldest and most established nonprofit in the region, SYRCL has a strong base and is one of the few nonprofits that can negotiate the politics and fund the expensive legal maneuverings that undermine many non-governmental environmental projects in the region.

32 Zoltan Grossman, "Unlikely Alliances: Treaty Conflicts and Environmental Cooperation Between Native American and Rural White Communities," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 24-4 (2005), 23.

33 Ibid., 22. The environmental alliance examples Grossman cites between ranchers, farmers, and native groups with land. Additionally, the alliances mentioned in the study are generally responding directly to immediate threats connected to livelihood rather than a concern for healing and protection of both the environment and the community.

34 In this space of becoming, local, localness, and locality are all contested terms. For the purposes of this essay, the terms "local" and "locality" are defined as fluid and open. "Locality is in flux: one cannot step into the same locality even once. But step we must." Mika Hannula and Tere Valden, *Rock the Boat: Localized Ethics, the Situated Self, and Particularism in Contemporary Art* (Kohn: Salon Verlog, 2003), 43.

35 Middleton, "A Political Ecology of Healing," 6.

36 Grossman, 26.

37 Non-native participants who wish to sing songs and perform prayers may now do so during the "Sunrise Gathering" portion of the event.

38 Smudging is a Native American practice used to purify a space.

39 As one of the spirit runners who actually touch the salmon, Rainey was required by the Tsi-Akim to fast for several days prior to the run.

40 The run passes through the town of Smartville, where tourists can gather to cheer the runners as they pass through the small downtown area. In a bridge-building gesture during his greeting at the "Sunrise Gathering," Ryberg encouraged spectators to visit the isolated town that supports the runners by providing refreshments.

41 In particular, I thought about a conversation I'd had with a geologist from the Bureau of Land Management. Like Meals he has lived in the area for quite some time, and he regularly attended the ceremony. On a recent hike together, he mentioned that it was unlikely the salmon would return with or without the dam, primarily because of the effect global warming was having on the oceans. In a prior conversation Cunningham had effectively said the same thing to me, from a Maidu perspective. He observed simply, "they [the salmon] don't have to come back if

they don't want to come back."

42 Hornborg, "Environmentalism, Ethnicity and Sacred Places: Reflections on Modernity, Discourse and Power," *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 31 no. 3 (1994), 264.

43 In my experience of the 2010 ceremony, a delicate balance was struck between the event serving as a community-wide activist intervention and recognition of the place-based Maidu culture. Although the ceremony as cultural production provides capital for the Tsi-Akim, the effort it will take to continue to strike a balance seems unlikely to be sustained. With the possibility of federal recognition and their own land, and a desire to focus on the more pressing issues of social justice for the native population, the time and energy it takes to navigate the complex issues inherent in the production of the ceremony may not continue to be a priority for the small population of Tsi-Akim.