

# Nisenan People in the American River Canyons

## Interpretive Cheat Sheet

### Objective

To make ASRA visitors more aware of the historic presence of the native Nisenan people, as well as their culture and harmonious relationship with the natural environment.

### Materials

Five banners, 48" X 19", which describe and illustrate history, culture, activities, and the Nisenan people's relationship with the natural environment. A binder contains additional maps, articles, historic and current photos.

### Activities/Interpretation

The banners can be hung with string or other material from the EZ-up canopy or posts or other structures to display them where the public can easily walk up to them and study them. Volunteers can ask the visitors if they know anything about the native people of this area and discuss what is on the banners and in the binder.

The Nisenan, otherwise known as the Southern Maidu, lived for thousands of years in our area and had a strong presence in the American River Canyons. Even today there is evidence of their previous activities. You can ask the visitors if they have seen any of the mortar holes located in protruding bedrock in numerous locations along the river. The greatest concentration of these holes is probably at the rock tip of the Confluence, where the North Fork and Middle Fork meet.

Up until the Gold Rush, the Nisenan people lived here off the land in large numbers, and the local natural environment provided for all of their basic needs. They hunted, fished, trapped, and gathered many different roots, herbs, fruits and nuts for food, clothing, shelters, medicine and tools. The area was formerly very rich in wildlife, fish (including migrating salmon), and edible/usable plants. Many, but not all, of these resources are still present in the area.

While the local Nisenan lived with a lifestyle that met all of their basic needs and was sustainable for thousands of years, the Gold Rush and subsequent in-migration of

thousands of Americans and foreigners resulted in mass destruction to the local natural environment as well as dispossession, marginalization and suffering for the local people. Nevertheless, some of the native people survived and have been able to hold onto much of their traditional culture. The United Auburn Indian Community has had great success in business and is now considered a powerful and influential presence in our local community. Nisenan peoples in other nearby areas, such as Nevada City, Foresthill and Clipper Gap/Meadow Vista have not yet been recognized by the U.S. government and, as a result, have not experienced as much economic success.

It is interesting to learn more about which natural resources the Nisenan traditionally used and how they gathered, processed and used them. Visitors are encouraged to do more research on their own.