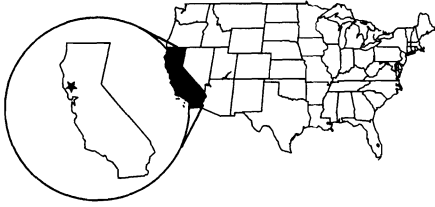


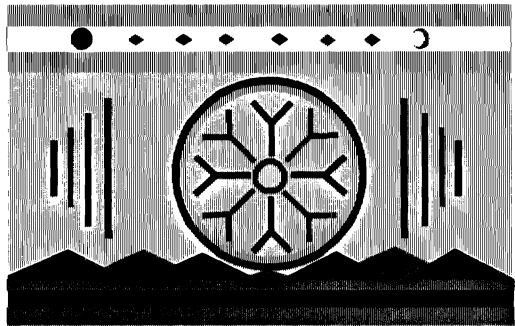
OLEMITCHA MIWOK



California has the largest population of Native Americans among the fifty states, although most are immigrants from other states and now live in California's urban centers. Many native Californians are associated with the large number of small reservations, often called

rancherias, which dot the state.

The Miwok reside in northern California, from the Pacific Ocean to the edge of the Sierra Nevada Mountains (ENAT, 136-137) and are usually divided into three geographic groups. The Valley Miwok (or Sierra Miwok) live farthest inland in the valleys and foothills of the Sierra; the Lake Miwok live around Clear Lake, north of San Francisco; the Coastal (or Olemitcha) Miwok live along the Pacific from Marin County northward. None of these three groups have tribal flags, although the Sierra Miwok and the Coastal Miwok use flags or flag-like objects (vexilloids).



The Sierra Miwok, when preparing for a celebration or religious ritual, hang a string or ribbon from the outside of their ceremonial house. Attached to this string is a series of shells, nuts, feathers, etc., collected by a clan member based upon a specific interpretation of a vision dreamed by the person doing the collecting, by a member of that person's clan, or even by an ancestor. The Sierra Miwok call that string with attachments a "flag".

The Coastal Miwok have more traditional flags, frequently made from cloth and strung from poles, that also result from dream visions.

The designs encompass natural elements that give individuals their own special essence, and represent the individuals, their place in nature, and their relationship with it.

Frequently, the flag dreamed, interpreted, and understood by an individual will continue to symbolize his descendants, perhaps for generations. The entire clan may use the same design, making minor changes to reflect their own parts in nature thus evolving the clan flag over time.

One such flag was received in a dream by the late Tom Smith, a Coastal Miwok from Bodega Bay in Sonoma County. The flag (sketch provided by The Flag Store, Sonoma) was originally white but has evolved into an ecru or pale ochre. Across the top are three stripes. The blue-green stripes represent the water or the sea. The white stripe in the middle denotes the sky. On the white stripe are a black sun, a red moon, and between them six diamonds alternating red and black, representing stars. Throughout the design, black symbolizes the male; red the female.

Below the sea and sky appear two concentric rings—the outer black, the inner red—representing the ceremonial house. It is supported by eight poles, alternating red and black, in the shape of “Y”s pointed outward. In the center, a red ring symbolizes the central fire of a ceremonial house. This design recalls the traditional Miwok house, a round structure whose roof was supported by poles and made of swamp plants, grasses, brush, or palm fronds, depending on local vegetation. To either side four vertical lines, in red and black, decrease in height from the center outward. These denote the four stages of a person’s life: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

Across the base of the flag runs a row of six black and red mountains; below are three stripes of red, black, and red. The mountains signify California’s coastal range; the red stripes indicate life and the black stripe stands for the individual’s path through life. Small white symbols may appear across the entire bottom of the design to mark events in the clan’s life and to bring harmony to the flag. Harmony is important in a

Miwok ceremonial flag because the flag represents the individual's place in nature, and the Miwok prefer a harmonious place within nature. 🌿

[Thanks to Kathleen Smith, an Olemitcha Miwok and Mr. Smith's granddaughter, for explaining the Coastal Miwok's use of flags and interpreting her clan's particular flag.]