



**Laura Rainey**

***Great Basin Indian Archive***

GBIA 035



**Oral History Interview by**

**Norm Cavanaugh**

**May 28, 2014**

**Cave Lake State Park, NV**



**Great Basin College • Great Basin Indian Archives**

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Interviewee: Laura Stark Rainey

Interviewer: Norm Cavanaugh

Date: May 28, 2014

R: Good morning. My name is Laura Stark Rainey. I'm from the Ely Shoshone Tribe in Ely, Nevada. We're of the Western Shoshone Nation. Today we're going to be filming in the Cave Lake State Park area, which is just outside Ely. My family and I used to come here when I was young. We'd come fishing, rabbit hunting, gathering berries—sour squawbush, currants, chokecherries, elderberries—and everything to last through the winter. We also gathered pinenuts up in the mountains here, which we gathered every year. This area is very rich. This year, it's a little dry. [Laughter] We've had a drought for several years. But it still looks pretty good here in the spring. This is the Steptoe Creek, it feeds the Cave Lake. And there's a lot of good fishing here, still. And it's just beautiful weather. We used to get some watercress along the streams. I don't know if there's any today, we'll see if we can find some. But the fishing is always good. And the willows are just starting to leaf out, although it's the end of May, it's a little slow coming around this year. But it's a wonderful area, and it's good to get out, away from town, and be amongst the wild America again. We love it here. I bring my grandson out here fishing, and he always has a grand time. Of course, most of the time I beat him! [Laughter] But we always catch our limit. It's a good time. Then we go home and have a good fish fry, and he loves it—he started cleaning fish when he was eight years old. And he's twelve now, and he's still cleaning my fish, and I'm so glad I don't have to do it anymore.

C: So how old is your grandson?

R: He's going to be thirteen the end of June. One more month. [Laughter] Then he can really do—I had him helping me make frybread this weekend. He was mixing, helping me mix the dough. He rolled it out, and he fried it. I showed him how to turn it away from him so

he wouldn't burn himself in the grease. And then he dressed the Indian tacos, and he says, he says, "I'm multitasking!" [Laughter] He says, "I'm getting into the family business now." So I hope he keeps his, keeps up with me.

C: Okay. So what do we have there, Laura?

R: Okay, this is what we call the sour squawbush. In the spring, it gets little red berries, and they're hard. You pick them—we'd pick them and put them in a paper bag, put in some salt, shake it up, and eat them that way. And it's better than eating popcorn. [Laughter]

C: Huh. What time of year does it, is it ready for harvesting?

R: In the spring.

C: In the spring? Like, what time?

R: Uh, June, maybe July. Depending on how cold the spring is—you know, how long it takes the winter to go away.

C: Does that bush have any berries on it?

R: It doesn't yet. And this is rose bush, the wild rose bush. And they have the rose hips that come in after the roses go away. And those are edible, too.

C: So what are the rose hips, or rose parts—

R: See, these are coming into blossom, the sour squawbush. Up here on the top. That's where the berries will form.

C: Ah. Now, what color are the berries?

R: The berries are red, the flowers are yellow.

C: Okay. So how big does the berries get?

R: About the size of a BB. [Laughter] You have to collect quite a few of 'em!

C: Oh, I was going to say, yeah. Huh. Okay. So we're just early in the spring here looking at it, and it's got a couple months before they begin to produce any berries. We're in a really beautiful spot here, Laura. And these are—

R: Can you get the **cold** in Cave Rock up there? On the horizon?

C: Yeah, we're taking a shot of the area here. And there's a Cave Rock up there in the mountains, Laura called it.

[Break in recording]

C: Okay, Laura. Now where are we?

R: Okay, we're up above the **state** cliff. It's Cave Lake State Park, in the Schell Creek mountain range, on our way up Success Loop. Over here, there used to be a dance hall way back in Prohibition days. And of course, with the whiskey and [\_\_inaudible at 5:40\_\_] **this was way out when I was working**, [\_\_inaudible at 5:43\_\_].

C: So Laura, can you tell me about this groundhog that's sitting up here in the rocks? What the Shoshone people did with them, or—?

R: Yeah. We call them *yaha*. And we'd have a gathering when we get several *yaha* then. But, usually only the elders get to eat those. Now, maybe I can eat some. [Laughter] I always used to be too young.

C: So how do you prepare the *yaha*?

R: Well, just roast—do just like a prairie dog. Take out the—cut a little slit in the side, pull out the entrails, and stick the hind leg in the hole, and then bury 'em in the coals. Let it roast, and then, when it's done, you take it out, and then peel off the hide. That takes all the charcoal and everything off. And the meat is just delicious and juicy.

[Break in recording]

R: Okay, we're in the Schell Creek Range, just outside Ely. Up here you'll see the caves behind me. Indians used to stay in these. You'll see they're facing the east, so that they're out of the wind, out of the cold north wind. And snow, whatever came. And they're high enough to see the deer, so they could get the deer that they'd harvest sometimes. There are elk here now. And of course, the *yaha* that we saw down below.

C: So what time of the year do you think the Shoshone people used these caves?

R: Okay, the—we would be down in the valleys where it's warm in the wintertime, and the spring and summer we'd come up here in the mountains where it's cool. And if they came out early, and we had late spring storms or something, they could go in those caves. And of course, if it was raining, they had to have some protection. Also, the summers, we'd be up in the mountains here.

C: How many were in a band, or in a group that would travel together or camp together?

R: Well, usually, a normal family, tie two families together, something like that. But in the fall, when it was time to pick pinenuts, they would get several families together, and gather out at the Swamp Cedars in Spring Valley. And then they would, we would all go out to gather pinenuts. And that way, we would make sure that everybody had enough pinenuts to last the winter.

[Break in recording]

C: Okay, Laura. You were starting to tell us about the—

R: Yeah. When the cavalry came through here, when the president sent out the directive to kill all Indians, they came from the Ruby Valley, over there across into this—this is the Duck Creek Basin. Came in through the Duck Creek Basin, and across the mountain—well, not the mountain, but through one of the passes [Laughter]—over to Spring Valley,

where the Swamp Cedars are. That's where all the Indians of this area used to gather in the fall to go picking pinenuts. And a cowboy or somebody came riding by on horseback, and he noticed all the campfires, so he hurried in—no, this is another story, sorry! The cavalry went into Spring Valley, and they were going to kill the Indians. But it was swampy, and the horses were floundering in all the mud in the swamp. And they couldn't get to the Indians, and they got away. And it was later on when the local militia went in there and massacred all the Indians when they were gathered to pick pinenuts. And there were only two little girls and one little boy who were able to survive that massacre.

C: So was there a name for the massacre, or was it called any—?

R: We just call it the Spring Valley Massacre—the *last* Spring Valley Massacre. But the local, we call it the Swamp Cedars Massacre. And my grandmother was one of the little girls who survived that.

C: And how old was your grandmother when she survived it?

R: We figure she was around ten years old. It happened about 1895.

C: Huh. So about how many of the people in the camp were killed, would you say?

R: I would say there were probably 30 or 40 people in the camp. And just three survivors, so that's 10 percent. One day I was out there hunting deer, and I came across an arrowhead. And I told my husband, I says, "This could have been my grandfather's"—or, my great-grandfather's arrowhead. But, who knows? It's all BLM land now, and they're building the windmill farm right next to it. The wind farm. So...

C: So is there a marker or anything to indicate...

R: There isn't, we have one planned. I don't know if we'll ever get the funding for it, but we do plan to put maybe a rest area or something there. Like your state highway markers

with the historical markings. We haven't succeeded in getting that done, but I'm working on it. I think we possibly could get some help through the Great Basin Heritage Area. It covers the Esmeralda County and White Pine County. The route, Highway 50 there, has been designated as the Great Basin Heritage Area partnership.

[Break in recording]

C: So can you tell me where we're at, at this point on our trip, Laura?

R: Okay, we're on the Success Loop, we're on the north side of the summit, head down into Duck Creek Basin. This is a quaking aspen grove, with some lodgepole pine mixed in. And some, a lot of small quakies, they've got other pine trees. And there's natural meadowgrass. It's just beautiful here. Usually, you see a deer or two. I think we're too late in the day, though.

C: So do the, our Shoshone people use quakies for anything?

R: You can use some for your artifacts, for handles. If you cut the quakie when it's green, it will keep its bark, which is really attractive. If you cut a dead piece, in time the bark will fall off. They're nice and straight, so they make good handles for tools. Like tomahawks, or rattles. Ceremonial objects.

[Break in recording]

R: When the cavalry came through from Ruby Valley to the west, they came through Steptoe Valley, and through this break here into the basin, Duck Creek Basin. And proceeded through this area, and you can see the—between the mountains up there, there's kind of an opening, it's where Timber Creek comes through. And they went through there, and on over into Spring Valley. And that's where they had planned to catch the Shoshone, at the Swamp Cedars. They had intended to massacre them all. And

that's where the horses got mired down in the mud, and they were floundering so much that they had to turn back. That time, they didn't get as many Indians as they had planned. And you can see the pipeline that goes—the Consolidated Copper Company built from Duck Creek, and it takes the water all the way around the mountain, and up over the other side, to McGill where they had a smelter set up. [\_\_ Inaudible at 12:53 \_\_] west of Ely. Then it was brought down by the train to McGill, and run through the smelter, and then that's where the pure gold was taken from there. Or the gold nuggets made.

C: About what time of the, or about when was that, in terms of years?

R: Okay, first story of the cavalry, probably about 1890-something. Early 1890s. And when the Consolidated Copper, this was about the 1920s or [19]30s. And then just at the mouth of the valley here, there was a sawmill that they also used the lumber for building things. [\_\_ Inaudible at 14:39 \_\_] Not much left there nowadays. Though this is big wide-open area, and when the cavalry were coming, they were following the water sources. You know, that's why they came through Duck Creek. And right now, the Schell Creek [\_\_ Inaudible at 15:01 \_\_] we have the largest **national park** in the state of Nevada. **Lot of hunters** in this area up here, which does help our economy, and bring some money in. But if they build that water line down to Las Vegas, eight foot diameter pipe, they'll drain all the water from this area, then everything will die. We won't have any more fishing, and no more hunting to offer. Everything's going to be dead. I hope we can—we've been fighting the battle to keep our water, but it's been a hard battle and I don't know if we'll ever win. I hate to see this country go to desert, but it may some day. It's wonderful land right now. And in every canyon, there's a stream, in this area. There's Bird Creek, Berry

Creek, Timber Creek, Duck Creek, East Creek, Kalamazoo—every one has a creek  
[\_\_ Inaudible at 16:13\_\_].

C: And you said at one time, you could just drink right out of the creek?

R: Oh, yes! If I was a [\_\_ inaudible at 16:21\_\_] some fishing or hiking, whatever, if there was a creek, you just lay down on your belly and get a good drink of water. And now you can't go on the mountain and drink the water because they said that there's giardia in the streams and [\_\_ inaudible at 16:34\_\_] Shame. We're just polluting our world.

[\_\_ inaudible at 16:43\_\_] Well, this is the time to do it. I'm 72 years old, I got a deer tag again this year. [Laughter] So, I'll be out in the fall. Make good use of it while I can.

C: So what all parts of the deer do you use for, you know, craftsmanship, or...?

R: Okay, the feet. I always tie them back and make a like gun rack or pole rack. Mount it on, mount the feet on the board, and then they hold those, hold your gun or whatever. Your pole. Or they make good coat racks, hat racks. Some of them I keep, I put them straight so when they harden, they're stiff, and I use those as handles for knives. My husband makes several obsidian knife blades, and I usually put antler handles on those. Antler handles or deer feet. And the dew claws, I use those for the rattles on my turtle rattles. I fasten them on a piece of leather, drill a hole through the turtle shell and **fasten** the dew claw, and then when you twist your wrist, the dew claws rattle against the turtle shell. **Used to use those in rituals, medicine** man's rattle. But we make them now to sell as artifacts to tourists. And I'm a silversmith, and this ring I made, that's a stone from my father's mine near Hamilton. Austin/Hamilton area. And my dad passed away, I still have some of his stone left. And I still bring some out. Also, I make rings and necklaces out of the garnets from Garnet Hill there. The garnet is a naturally faceted stone, and it makes a

really wonderful ring, or necklace, or earrings. I've done all those. I plan to do a whole line of that type of jewelry and sell it this summer. Still like to do my crafts, even though I'm getting old. [Laughter] My eyes are getting bad, but I'll keep on going. And I do a lot of beadwork, traditional beadwork. And this is last winter, I made my first—no, my second—willow cradleboard. And this one turned out pretty good, I think I may have to make some more. People like those. And I'm just trying to get back to my roots, and there are more things I need to teach younger people before I move on or can't teach them anymore. I teach—I've taught certain silversmiths, I do a lot of beadwork classes, and buckskin working. And I did, I have done demonstrations on brain-tanning deerhides. And I just try to keep our traditions alive. And I'm doing, I'm trying to make a gourd dipper, for dipping water. The gourd is used in the ceremonial—or, the official sweatlodge ceremonies. And I'm trying to duplicate that. [\_\_inaudible at 20:03\_\_] But a lot of people really like the white buckskin for wedding dresses. I make those for ladies.

C: So are these, what you're talking about, was this passed on to you from your mom or family, or—

R: I'm **learning** this **however**, wherever I can, you know, from elders. It doesn't even have to be the Ely Shoshone, just all Shoshone around, wherever I can get the information, I'd like to get it passed on. That's just as I was saying, for the cattails, when they're first coming out in the spring, when they first break through the water, they can be collected and they taste like fresh asparagus. And after they grow up and start forming the cattails, they can be collected and eaten. And they look just like little ears of corn. And they taste that way, too. That's, uh—you know, there're so many things that can be used just right off the land out here. It's just such a rich area, fertile. And just about every kind of berry

you can imagine grows out here. Just have to know which one to pick! [Laughter] And, uh, there's just all this information I'd like to be able to pass on to the younger people. So it doesn't die. [\_\_inaudible at 21:28\_\_] and my mother was 97, and passed away a year and a half ago. And there are a lot of things that went with her that I wouldn't know. But we're, we're hoping we can have something that's carried on.

C: So is there a group of youth, or young people that you're working with to pass the traditions on to, or just family members, or whoever's interested?

R: I was trying to build a cultural center. My husband passed away, so now it's, I don't see how I can get it accomplished by myself. So I'm just teaching people who are interested, whether they're native or non-native, young, old, doesn't matter. If they have an interest, I'd like to try to pass it on to them. Because if somebody gets a little bit, you know, they can pass it on to someone else. And that's the, that's the only way we're going to keep our traditions alive. They—our preschool has a native Shoshone class in language. They teach them some of the construction of teepees and things like that. So the younger people are getting that. It's the older ones, the high school age, who've kind of been skipped. [\_\_inaudible at 22:44\_\_]. And of course, [\_\_inaudible at 22:48\_\_] had visitors from out of state, even out of the country, that are interested in these things. And I can go through and give them instructions [\_\_inaudible at 22:59\_\_] to see how these things are done. I didn't give classes, I just did demonstrations.

[Break in recording]

R: Hi, we're at East Creek right now, in the area where a lot of gathering—there's a lot of fruits and seeds. The ricegrass looks good this year. Hope there's a good pinenut crop. This is where the local Indians used to come gather a lot of things, the edible things we

loved. And back when, in the 1800s, when the sheepherders used to come through this area, and the cavalry, the Indian ladies would be out gathering berries and roots and all kinds of things. And it was kind of a sad thing, because the young girls, if they were caught out in the open like this, the sheep herders or soldiers would grab them and rape them. And so, they learned that when they were out in areas like this, alone, or their mothers taught them to find—if they couldn't outrun their pursuers, they would just sit down in a sandy wash and fill their cavity with sand. And that way, if the men tried to rape them, then it would hurt them too badly, and they'd leave them alone. This, there's always trout in these streams, so there's plenty to eat. It's always nice to be out among nature. We hope to get some more pinenuts this year. Last year they were just in small spots. But we had quite a bit of snow in November and December, so maybe we'll, if we get some spring rains, we should have good pinenut crop. We're all hoping for that.

When I was growing up here, we spent a lot of time in the mountains, shooting rabbits and gathering pinenuts and things. And that was fun. And when I started to go to high school, we moved to Las Vegas, because my dad wanted us to have a good education. And he was going where—there was more work down in Las Vegas than there was in Ely. We moved there. First time we moved down there was 1946. And then every summer, we came back to Ely until I think it was about 1950, and then we moved down to Las Vegas for good. And I went to Las Vegas High School there. And I got into engineering—which, they said it wasn't for a girl, but I got into it anyway, because my dad wanted my sister and I to draw plans, the house plans for him because he built homes. And two years I tried to get into the drafting class, and they kept telling me, "No, that's for boys. That's not for girls." Well, I finally got into drafting, and I did very well

with that. And I continued on. I worked for the Planning Commission, for Clark County. And I learned planning and zoning. And I married my husband. He was in the Air Force, and we went to Vandenberg Air Force Base. And I worked for a surveyor down there. I learned subdivision design, and designed several subdivisions. In fact, I designed subdivisions in Las Vegas. And it's kind of neat when I fly into Las Vegas and I can look down and I say, "Oh, there's the East Gate subdivision that I designed! Looks just like it does on paper!" [Laughter] It's a good feeling. And I worked—my husband being in the Air Force, we traveled all around. I was in Guam for two years. That was during the time we were bombing Vietnam. That was very interesting, there. And the B-52s taking off every day, night and day. And went to Glassberg, New York, and I worked for an architect—a professional engineer there. And I got deeper into the architecture. I designed a million-dollar factory building, some apartment houses, and a store. And then we were transferred to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona. And I just did my crafts there. I went to Virginia and worked for the Newport News Shipbuilding. And I worked on the design—the piping system for the nuclear aircraft carrier, Nimitz and the Eisenhower. And then I worked for this deepsea ventures company—it's been so many years ago! [Laughter] And we were doing undersea mining for these, they were these nodules that roll around on the, collect on the sea floor. The nucleus is a shark's tooth. And then it rolls, it gains magnesium. And so these were—or, manganese. They were very rich in manganese. They were nodules. And it seemed every time we'd get a shipload full, the pirates would come and steal our cargo, and we would have to go back to mining again! But it's been a very interesting life. And now I'm trying to continue on with my traditional things. Building artifacts, and making the buckskin dresses and things

like that. Because I'd like to pass this knowledge on to the younger people, so our traditions don't die. And I would like to, I hope, build a cultural center so I could have classes. I don't know if I'll make that happen or not, because I'm 72 years old now, and don't know how long I can keep going! [Laughter] But I'm going to try. But for young people, you know, you can do whatever you want to do with your life. You can start from nothing and then build to everything, or, or if you just don't want to do anything, I guess, you can do that too, but it's not very interesting. And when I was in Nebraska, we rented this old farmstead, and so I was able to raise my three boys, teaching them how to take care of the—we've had little bucket calves. We fed calves and rode horses, and raised chickens and pigs, and had our big garden. **And believe it or not**, one year, I made fifty gallons of dill pickles. [Laughter] Our garden really did well. We had—we fertilized it from the hen house. We cleaned the hen house, put that on the garden, and oh, everything just flourished. It was great. And then, when I moved out to, back to Las Vegas in 1980, and went to work at the Test Site, and worked there for ten years. And then I, my first husband passed away, and I married my second husband, and we went on the road going on the powwow trail, going to shows all around California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona, and Colorado. Did that for three years, and then back home to Pahrump. And then finally, I decided I wanted to come back to Ely. I just missed the mountains and everything. And so we came. About seven acres, and moved up here. That's where I had planned to build my cultural center and museum, but my husband passed away four years ago, so I don't know if that will come to fruition or not. But I'm going to do everything I can to go down those roads. And it's just—it feels so good to be back to this mountain country and to Ely. It's home. [Laughter]

[Break in recording]

I would like to encourage people to do more things with their hands. I realize now, with the technology we have, everything is done on computer. You don't have to do anything. But people still need to keep their minds busy and their hands busy. If you could do more hands-on building things, rather than just doing it on the computer. I know the computer models work great, they're great for architects in showing, like, this way and that way, but in my drafting background, I draw little blocks to be able to move around on the drawing, so you could see what rooms could go where in your building. Where you can do that with the computer. But when you have a hands-on feel, I think it's a, you get a deeper concern about the program—about what you're doing. And it gets, I think it gets people thinking out of the box. I think everybody should have drafting because, boy or girl, because when you're drafting you're thinking of how something is built, and if it's turned around, you can turn it in your mind, and you don't have to depend on the computer to do it for you. It gets your thinking, your brain, engaged. Because it was hard for me to get into a drafting class, but as I got—I think it should be a required subject for all students. Because it gets your mind working. And you can tear something apart in your mind, because you need to know how to put it back together. And it's—that works even in cooking. Anything you do in life. To be able to dismantle something in your mind and put it back together, I think, is very important to everyone. And that's—that has helped me. So...

C: And then, for educators that might—?

R: The educators, that too. I think they should have programs where the kids can have a hands-on, doing things. The other day, I found a tick on my dog. It was huge—almost as

big as my fingernail. And, well, got it off, put it in the jar, you know, says, “Oh, it’s dead.” And then I found, this friend of mine told me, that they live, they like the carbon dioxide. So I took off the lid, blew in there, and put the lid back on, and pretty soon his little legs started moving. And so I shut the bottle, and he went upside-down. And it’s kind of like the ballast tanks in a ship. You could see where he would evacuate a section, and pretty soon he got it so he could roll over, and he was back on his feet. And I blew some more carbon dioxide, put the lid on there, and his feet came out, and pretty soon he started walking around. And you know, for kids to have something hands-on, rather than the imaginary things on the computer that you see—if educators can provide things like that. The nature things. I think it would just, everybody could connect better. And you wouldn’t have so many shootings in the schools! [Laughter]

C: Yeah, that’s unfortunate.

R: Because, I think those terrible programs they have on the monsters and things have a lot to do with the shootings. But, that’s my thought. And educators could do more field trips, take kids out among nature—amongst nature. They could get a better grasp on where we are in this world.

C: Well, I’d like to take this opportunity today, Laura, and thank you on behalf of the Great Basin Indian Archive for giving me the opportunity to, you know, see things out in nature, and experience the backwoods country in Ely that I never knew existed.

R: You bet. A lot of people think, “Oh, Nevada is desert.” But it’s not! [Laughter] And thank you for inviting me.

C: So this concludes our field tour—throughout the backwoods, I guess, if you want to call it—of Ely. And there’s so many very beautiful wildlife—plants—and... this is probably

the best time of the year to experience everything, so... It's so green. And in bloom. And  
Laura knows so much about everything out here, that it's made this tour very interesting.

And once again, I just want to thank you, Laura.

R: You're very welcome. Thank you.

[End of recording]