

Deerskin Dance



by Nick Hillman

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Summer time is hot and dry in the mountains along the Klamath River. That is when the Karuks do ceremonies.

Ceremonies are held at Inaam, near Happy Camp, at Katimeen, which leads to the falls at Somes Bar, and at Tishawnik in Panamnik (Orleans) on lower Camp Creek.

We do White Deerskin Dance every other year.

We do War Dance every year, also we do Medicine Dance every year.

I was nine years old when I first participated. They asked me because they were short on people and so I said “sure” and they let me because I was serious about it.

I always watched and learned from the men who were involved. I got asked to dance because all the other kids my age there just played around and didn't take it seriously.

Dancers fast in the mornings until we are done making medicine. We make medicine by shooting arrows. After we are done making medicine, we can eat breakfast.

We have to fast during the dance and not even drink water.

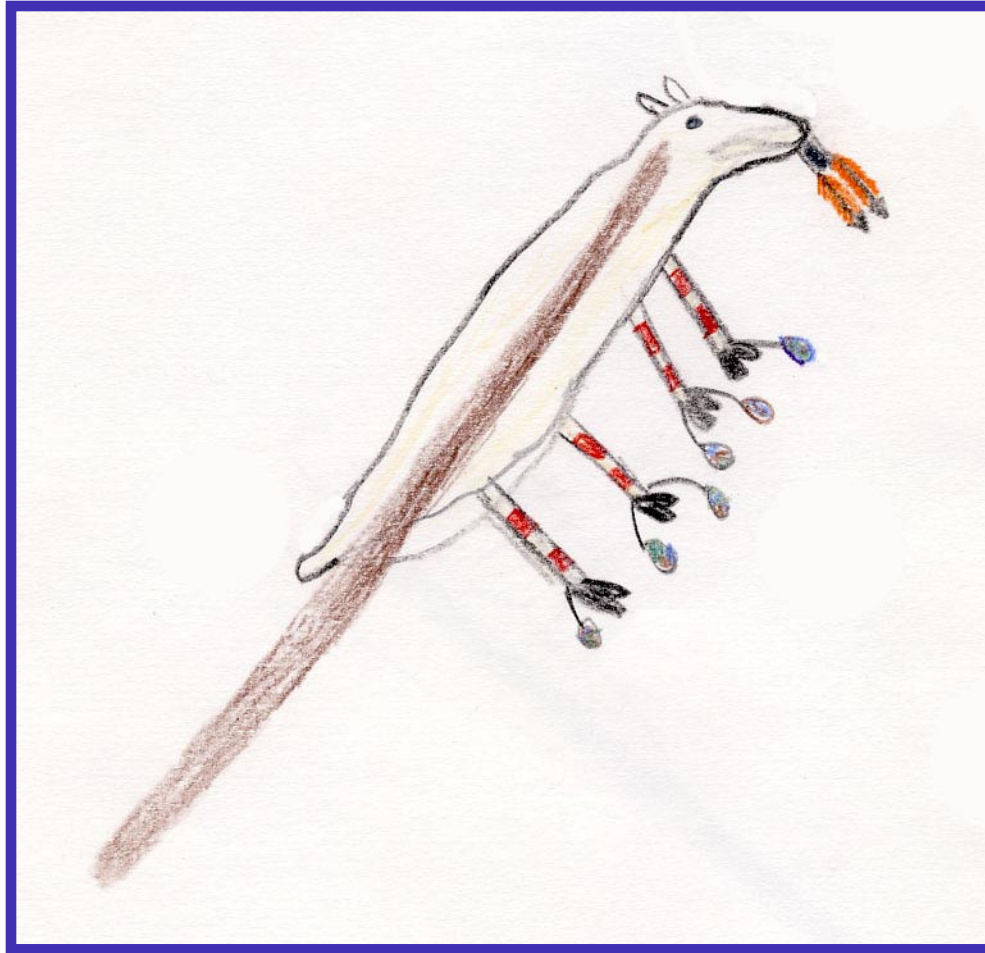
The dance happens when the sun goes down.

Mens' regalia are jump sticks, white deerskins, quivers, and necklaces. Dancers have their shirts and shoes off and wear necklaces. We can wear shorts or jeans.

Only boys can touch the men's regalia, and if it's touched by women, we have to smoke it with kish wulf in the fire.

Dancers hold the big heavy poles. I was holding a white fox because the deerskins were too heavy for me when I was that age.





Deerskins are stuffed with straw to stay on the pole during the White Deerskin Dance.

The white deerskin has flicker feathers, straw in it's mouth. Sticks in the ears so

they stand up. A leather strap in it's mouth. They also have red pileated woodpecker scalps on the legs. They have abalone strings from their hooves.

The singer sang while I rotated and moved the fox on the pole toward the fire. There are seven of us holding poles. We all move in one motion, at one time.

We concentrate on making good medicine to fix the earth.

My favorite part of the dance is when you get to rest because the poles are so heavy.



As the night goes on the most valuable regalia comes out.

The most valuable one is a white wolf that we use. It is so heavy.

Even the smallest deer has the biggest pole. There's a really old deer that's really big, and it's a creamy color.

The most fun dance is the War Dance because you can call people out by pointing the quiver and jumpstick at them. Then you have to jump center. You call out.

I was War Dancing and we were using arrows, and I thought Chook was just messing around, and we jumped center with Chook and Luis and Chook really poked us. It hurt too.

Rock packers are needed too. There are two rock packers in each deerskin Dance. They do not have white deer, they have very big otters and very big arrowheads.

The Rock packers job is even worse than holding the poles. It's like two people jumping center in front of the Deerskin Dance people.

Ceremonies are important for the Karuks to fix the world every year.

The End



About the Author

Nicknekich Hillman is an 11-year-old in the 5th grader at Junction Elementary. He likes to swim and participate in Karuk Tribal ceremonies.

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