

Property of National Park Service
LIBRARY
LAVA BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT
NCC. NO. 2236

The Cassel Intaglios

Floyd Buckskin

Atsuge Band, North-Central California

In eastern Shasta County, near Cassel, California, is a group of ground figures known locally as the Cassel Intaglios. They are in an open meadow at the foot of a low hill west of the State fish hatchery and the P. G. & E. facility.

These ground figures are natural rock alignments with some human modification, consisting of rock enclosures, zigzags (*kil-kil*), lizard and serpent-like patterns, and honeycomb patterns. There is also an interesting anthropomorphic figure on the northwest side of the complex. The site has been impacted by road building and by individuals who pick up the stones that form the figures and then toss them aside, disturbing the patterns.

The Atsuge (Hat Creek) people believe this area is inhabited by several spirit beings, which travel through these places. Several of the cinder cones and volcanic craters are localities of stories from past and present times. Strange misshapen beings walk about at twilight, during the night, and occasionally during the daytime hours. Several elders speak of a spirit being—dog-like in appearance, but having a human head—that has been seen in the area.

Roy Lowe, an Ajumawi elder, told the following story about an experience he had in this area. He was sleeping in his car one night when he was awakened by someone knocking on the window. He heard a voice, in the Ajumawi language, say: "You had better move out of the way. You are blocking the trail. This is the way we travel when we go about during the night." When he looked to see who was speaking, he saw a skeleton standing there. After he moved the car, the skeleton continued on down the trail.

One of the most prominent stories concerns the *Tah-kil-mussiè* (also known as Gorilla or Bigfoot), a creature greatly feared in past times and also today.

The *Tah-kil-mussiè* were not always wild,

terrifying, and horribly ugly creatures, but very beautiful beings. Their beauty was desired by both male and female spirits and humans. Their civilization was unsurpassed. Anything they desired could be had instantly: food, travel, entertainment of all forms. After a while they began to tire of this and they demanded new and different thrills. They began hunting animals for sport and practiced excesses of all kinds, which brought no satisfaction.

Male and female *Tah-kil-mussiè* prostituted themselves for sensual pleasure, and after a while they began to hunt humans for sport. They became jaded, and morally twisted. Right became wrong, wrong became right. If something was evil, wrong, or bad, this is what they would do. Good and right they would not do.

Lizard man saw the humans and felt compassion for them. He decided to rescue them. He warned them to flee to the mountains to hide, as he planned to destroy the world with a great whirlwind and earthquake. So it came about that the great cities and civilization of the *Tah-kil-mussiè* were destroyed. Lizard man changed their beauty, wisdom, and knowledge into ugliness, ignorance, and insanity, and sent them into the hard uninhabited places of the world, where they remain today, with no knowledge of their previous existence.

During recent times, the *Tah-kil-mussiè* would steal the women and children of the native people in the Ajumawi and Atsuge region. One such incident is told about a *Tah-kil-mussiè* stealing a baby.

A young woman had a baby that she didn't want to care for, so she left it with her mother. Every evening the young woman would dress up and go out to find a new man. The baby knew that it was not wanted, so it would just cry and cry. The grandmother scolded her daughter: "You better take care of that baby," she would say, "or it will get

sick and die and go home." "I don't want it. You take care of it," the young woman would say. And out she would go.

The baby cried and cried and wouldn't stop. The grandmother packed the baby and sang and talked to it. "Poor baby," she would say, "that girl is not good." After a while she heard someone on top of the earth lodge at the ladder of the smoke hole. "I hear that baby crying," someone called out. "Yes," said the grandmother, "the baby's mother does not want or love it so it just cries all the time." "Give that baby to me," said the voice, so the grandmother held up the baby, which was tied in a basket (*du jah'mai*).

Suddenly a large, hairy arm reached down and took the baby. The grandmother tried to grab the baby back, but was too late. *Tah-kil-mussiè* had the baby and away it ran, tickling the baby. The baby began to laugh, but the *Tah-kil-mussiè* continued to tickle the baby. The baby would laugh and cry, laugh and cry until it was driven insane by the tickling of the *Tah-kil-mussiè*.

Meanwhile the grandmother hollered to the men: "*Tah-kil-mussiè!* *Tah-kil-mussiè* has stolen the baby!" The men grabbed their bows and arrows, spears, clubs, and firebrands and gave chase, running along the trails across the lava flows up to the top of a small cinder cone. "Hurry, hurry. The *Tah-kil-mussiè* is up here."

The *Tah-kil-mussiè* saw the men with the firebrands, so he began to untie the laces of the baby

basket. Then he took the baby out of the basket and put the basket down, leaning it against the opening of a lava tube, and went into the lava tube and escaped underground. When they arrived at the opening of the lava tube, the men of the village found only the baby's basket.

Many years later, the late Talbot Wilson told me about seeing the baby's basket leaning at the entrance of a lava tube, old and weather-beaten. Talbot was a young man at that time. He wondered if it might still be there where he last saw it leaning at the entrance.

The cinder cone where this lava tube is located is called Big Foot Mountain. The Atsuge placename means "leaning at the entrance." Today the cinder cone is mined for road gravel, and Hat Creek and Rising River are exploited for power. The fish hatchery plants game fish for sportsmen, destroying the native fish. P. G. & E.'s power line crosses the site. As the sacred places are impacted and destroyed, will we, the native people, once again see the emergence of the *Tah-kil-mussiè* and other spirit beings, to warn modern civilizations of the harm they are doing to the earth?

Acknowledgements. The information above was communicated personally to the author by the following Atsuge and Ajumawi elders: Rile Webster, Talbot Wilson, Roy Lowe, Hattie Christie, and Bell Green. The baby is Mary Mike's daughter, Amber.