

# History: Movie delves into the lives of the Washoe

**Publisher's note: *This is reprinted with permission from the November 1975 Lake Tahoe Historical Society newsletter.***

Approximately 90 people viewed the September 24 showing of the documentary Washo. The hour-long film was made by Veronika Pataky who spent many years in Carson Valley, Jack's Valley and Dresslerville making friends with the Washoe tribe before producing the film in 1968.



Among the ancient rituals portrayed was the Pine Nut Dance which heralded the annual harvest of the pinion pine nuts which has been the staple food of the Washoes for thousands of years. In this ceremony the Washoes dance the shuffling type of round dance which has served the tribe in all ritual and ceremonial occasions, and pray to the Great Spirit to make certain they have not offended and to insure a bountiful harvest.

Men and women are shown separately enjoying a betting game played with sticks and bones – a sort of Washoe “Button, Button, Who has the Button?”

The coming-of-age ceremony for a girl entering womanhood was also shown. During a 4-day fasting period the girl may only drink water and perform various feats of endurance culminated by a great feast and receipt of gifts. Most interesting was the preparation of acorn biscuits with heated stones on the riverbank below Dresslerville, sharply contrasting with the pies and frosted cakes brought to the feast by friends and neighbors who then ate from paper plates.

Today the world of the older Washoes is much the same as always; they speak their ancient tongue, they enjoy the beauty

and strength of the traditional rituals; they listen to the sounds of nature and observe the passing of the seasons. But the world of the younger generation is that of the space age as they become more and more assimilated into modern life.