

## College of the Redwoods

Tolowa Dee-ni' History and the Del Norte Education Center



Prior to the arrival of European settlers, two cultural groups occupied what is now Del Norte County: the Tolowa Dee-ni' and the Yurok. Tolowa territory covered the northern part of the county, and includes Crescent City, where the College of the Redwoods Del Norte Campus is located. Crescent City is in the heart of Tolowa ancestral territory and is also known as Taa'-at-dvn.

### Tolowa Dee-ni'

The Aboriginal lands of the Tolowa Dee-ni', the Taa-laa-waa-dvn, lay along the Pacific Coast between Wilson Creek to the south, Sixes River to the north and inland to the Applegate River. Today this area is what is known as Del Norte, Curry, and Josephine Counties. The pre-contact Dee-ni' population exceeded ten thousand individuals. The Dee-ni' emerged at Yan'-daa-k'vt, the Center of the World, their place of Genesis. Their language is a member of the Dené language family, the Dené language was formerly known as the Athabaskan language family.

The Taa-laa-waa-dvn provided a vast and varied source of foods and resources for the Dee-ni'. The rivers were densely populated with several species of salmon, steelhead, and trout. The sea provided multiple sources of protein from clams to whale and sea lion meat. The lake and lagoon provided a multitude of duck and geese. The land was filled with nuts, berries, and game. The herds of deer and elk ran in the hundreds. A high variety of plants and herbs both fed and healed the Dee-ni'. The immense redwoods provided both river, lagoon and sea going canoes.

The Taa-laa-waa-dvn was divided into eleven yvtlh-'i~ or governance polities. The yvtlh-'i~ was a specific section of land owned and governed by the headmen and citizens living there. Each yvtlh-'i~ included land for food, prayer, and general resources for making a living, as well as a section of the coast, an expanse of river and an inter-mountain access. The interior upper Rogue and Illinois Valley yvtlh-'i~ traded with the coastal yvtlh-'i~ for coastal resources. The daily life of the Dee-ni' was to rise before sunrise to bathe and pray. The morning chores were completed and then they had the first meal of the day. At noon, the Dee-ni' prayed once again. The dinner meal was eaten and then evening prayer was offered before bed. At dusk, the Dee-ni' settled in for the night.

The town of Taa-'at-dvn was comprised of dozens of plank homes, a Dance House, and a sweathouse. Though the original village is no longer, the Dee-ni', their language and religion has endured the fire storm of European contact, obliteration, and subjugation.

The contemporary Tolowa Dee-ni' are governed under the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation while other Tolowas are registered under various federally recognized nations and tribes throughout the Pacific Northwest. This thriving tribal government is run by an elected 7-person tribal council passionate about reviving tribal language and ceremonies, passing down information, traditions and customs to younger generations and building a thriving tribal community for years to come.

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Today the Tolowa continue their tradition of a strong government with comprehensive Tribal programs and traditional cultural activities.

## **College of the Redwoods Del Norte Campus**

College of the Redwoods currently serves a diverse population of communities in Del Norte, Humboldt, and the western edge of Trinity counties. In 1978, Del Norte County joined the Redwoods district and in 1984, the Del Norte Education Center, located at 884 W. Washington Blvd. in Crescent City opened. This site, thirty miles south of the Oregon border near Point St. George, serves the residents with fourteen degree and certificate programs.