



# **The Killing of Ishi: The Death of the Last American Stone-Age Warrior and the Accidental Discovery of his Family Members Still in Hiding**

*James J. Callahan Jr.*

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The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife set out several camera traps deep in the Ochoco Wilderness to document the number of timber wolves returning to Central Oregon.

It's what the cameras picked up on the last few seconds of film that no one ever expected. After filming a wolf pack led by a massive black wolf, four Native Americans were caught on camera hunting in the forest. Three of the four were male. The fourth was a young female.

All four were wearing traditional buckskin clothing and moccasins. They were carrying juniper bows and bone handle knives with long obsidian blades. The woman's knife sheath was covered with old fashioned trade beads. The youngest of the men had a wooden plug piercing his septum.

With only several seconds of film remaining, the female suddenly stopped, turned, and in the very last frames was seen staring directly into the camera lens.

Law enforcement officials from the Wolf Recovery Task Force quickly gathered for an emergency meeting to review the film. Ryan McKenna, a state game warden, and Mason Many Crows, a tribal policeman and tracker for the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation Police Department, led the meeting.

Mason Many Crows shared that for years tribal elders had whispered about the existence of a stone-age tribe hiding out in the Ochocos. He identified them to be Yahi, a small tribe which fled Northern California to Central Oregon after being repeatedly attacked and killed by frontier guardsmen. The tribe was believed to have become extinct after the death of their last tribal member in 1916--a warrior by the name of Ishi.

The film now suggested some in fact had survived. So good were the Yahi at hiding that Ishi spent forty years of his life living in caves or on a two-acre ledge some five hundred feet up a sheer canyon wall.

After his capture in 1911, Ishi went from being a stone-age warrior to a San Francisco city dweller. At all times, his greatest fear was to be put to death by the whites. Murder by whites was what he had grown up with. Yahi tribal members were always killed every time they encountered whites. Most were shot, hanged or sometimes even held down and drowned.

On the last day of his life, Ishi faced his greatest fear but not in any way he could ever have anticipated.

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