

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

- The Ariaal Rendille people (6)
- also called Rendillé, Randille, Randile, Randali, Reendile, and Rendili (7)
- Speak Rendille (6)
- Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic, East, Rendille-Boni, Rendille (6)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

- rel (6)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

- Northern Kenya (6)
- Kaisut Desert of western Marsabit District (6)
- Roam the region of northern Kenya between lake Turkana to the west and Marsabit to the East, between the Merille River to the south and the Chalbi desert to the north, an area of roughly 22,000sq. km (5)
- 37°58' E, 2°19' N (Google Earth)

1.4 Brief history:

- undergoing a transition since the mid twentieth century from a traditional camel reliance to a reliance on cattle, despite cattle being ill-suited for the environment (1)
- the change is due to influence by the Kenyan government, who recognize that cattle has a higher commercial value than camels (1)
- politically dominated their agricultural neighbors in the nineteenth century (3)
during colonial and post-independence rule, government led by agricultural-leaning people who were hostile to pastoral concerns (3)
- during colonial period, bounded in administrative districts that restricted movement (3)
- prohibited from selling livestock in settler-dominated markets (3)
- in 1960's & 1970's, pastoralism was thought to be inefficient and wasteful, so local governments were encouraged to promote private beef and dairy ranching (3)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

- colonial administrative policies changes traditional grazing area rules (1)
- the neighboring, much larger Samburu population (1)
- alliance with the Samburu (4)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- the arid Kaisut Desert (1)
- harsh environment (2)
- scarce resources (2)
- annual rainfall is less than 250 mm in lowlands and 800 mm in the highlands of Mt. Marsabit and the Ndoto Mountains (3)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

- each village (gob) may contain up to 60 households (2)
- between 32,000 and 34,000 (7)
- 34,700 in 2006 (6)
- Marsabit District is Kenya's largest but least populated area (3)
- The Rendille herding range was reduced from 57,600 km sq. to 8,000 km sq. between 1960 and 1980 (4)
- camping units or settlements vary greatly in size, from totals of 30 to 600 depending on the availability of grazing and water for their prized livestock (7)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- cereals consumed in the dry season (3)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- Herd camels, goats & sheep (1)
- Milk and milk products account for 60 to 65 percent of the dietary energy, consumed mainly in the wet season (3)
- Meat (usually from goats and sheep), consumed in the dry season (3)
- Blood (tapped from living animals), consumed in the dry season (3)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

- shields, spears, and wooden clubs or throwing sticks (8)

2.4 Food storage:

- water and milk storage containers hang along the inside wall of the house (8)

2.5 Sexual division of production:

- general separation of sexes (2)
- women in every third generation are expected to tend to herds and wells, like the warriors (2)
- warriors are men (2)
- camel herds are usually managed by unmarried males (7)
- small stock (animals) are herded by girls and unmarried women (7)
- the main is the head of the household (8)
- the house itself is for all practical purposes the territory of the wife, and only a married women can have such a dwelling (8)
- women own no independent property and thus are depended on their husbands and sons (9)

2.6 Land tenure:

- an increasing trend towards settlement (2)
- colonial administrative policies brought about the construction and maintenance of rigidly delineated grazing areas (2)

2.7 Ceramics:

- no info found

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

- no info found

2.9 Food taboos:

- no info found

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- not applicable; no watersources, semi-arid climate

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

- no info found

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

- no info found

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

- no info found

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

- males are expected to delay marriage and parenthood until their age-set is initiated (2)
- mean age at childbearing is 33.77 for sepaade groups and 30.33 for non-sepaade groups (10)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

- average number of children is 1.7 to 2.6 (2)
- population growth is regulated to avoid exceeding the rate of growth of herds (2)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

- the estimate of mean birth interval duration [is] determined as 2.8 years (2)

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

- male: a son should be initiated and marry with the age-set that is three removed from his father's
- firstborn son could be over 40 years old before marriage (2)
- female: all daughters of teeria (firstborn) men are designated sepaade and are forbidden to marry until their brothers wed (2)
- non-sepaade women marrying on average a full eight years earlier than sepaade women (2)
- non-sepaade women marry at approx. 22, sepaade women marry at approx. 30 (2)
- like many other East African peoples with age grades, the period of being a warrior lasts for 14 years, during which [the young men] are not allowed to marry (7)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

- the low fertility levels of sepaade women often leads to divorce (2)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

- a cultural emphasis on monogamy (2)
- while polygyny rates are low in Rendille society, polygynous marriages are present in all age-sets (2)
- husbands with sepaade first wives frequently enter into polygynous marriages (2)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

- The groom's family brings animals to pay the *kamaratan* (female circumciser) for her service, and one sheep is given as a gift to the bride's mother (9)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

- traditionally practice primogeniture (1)
- vertical/lineal transmission of family herds via primogeniture (2)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

unequal parental investment favouring the eldest surviving son (4)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

- no info found

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

- latter-born sons are frequently forced to leave Rendille society and marry into either Ariaal or Samburu populations (4)
- social custom of exogamy (marrying outside the lineage) has encouraged many in the southern areas to marry Samburu or other pastoralist peoples of the region (7)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

- no info found

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

- no info found

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

- no info found

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

- no instances found; not suggested in the literature

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

- no info found

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

- Women may engage in premarital sex, but are forbidden to bear children outside of marriage (2)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

- no extramarital offspring; if pregnancy occurs outside of marriage, infanticide or abortion (2)

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

- no info found

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

- no info found

4.22 Evidence for couvades

- no evidence found

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

- literature suggests older husbands are common, although no direct info found

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

- Rendille girls are expected to avoid members of their fathers' age-set and generation (12)

4.24 Joking relationships?

- no info found

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

- patrilineal descent for herds, via primogeniture (2)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

- besides norm of exogamy, no info found

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

- "Two days before the wedding, the groom and his family form a ritual procession (*guro*) from their home to the bride's home, and outside the hut women sing the praises of the groom and the fortuitous union of the two families (Beaman 1981). A ram is slaughtered and presented to the bride's mother for a feast among married women, and the skin of the ram is prepared for the bride to sit upon while being cut. The procession arrives again on the eve of the wedding, and girls bring red ochre to smear on the bride's beaded necklaces.

On the wedding day, before dawn the [female] circumciser (*kamaratan*), who was selected by the bride's mother, is brought to the hut, and at first light the young bride is circumcised." (9)

- the bride is given new skins, a large woven necklace made of sisal or giraffe hair, and a strand of red and white marriage beads that she will wear until she bears her first child (9)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

- to make the transformation from a girl to a woman, brides discard their fathers' names and take their husbands' names (9)

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

- it is forbidden to marry within the same, close families (7)

- social custom of exogamy (marrying outside the lineage) (7)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

- until recently, couples preferred to have their marriages arranged between their parents to avoid too-close marriage partners (7)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

- no info found

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

- no specific info found, though raiding and fighting inferred to be common occurrences

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

- sepaade tradition due to intertribal warfare and raiding, because when the men are all away fighting, the sepaade generation of women are needed to take the men's places (2)

- warriors abandoned their role as livestock herders and protectors (2)

- recently, increased armed attacks between Boran and Rendille (3)

- Samburu and Rendille fight against Gabra, Boran, and Somali (3)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

- increased competition with pastoral neighbors for pasture and water (3)
raiding (3)

- ethnic conflict has increased in the past decade between Boran and Rendille farmers (3)

- Rendille have faced attacks by Gabra, Turkana, and Somalis raiding camels in the lowlands (3)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

- alliance with neighboring Samburu (4)

- increased competition with pastoral neighbors for pasture and water (3)
raiding (3)

- ethnic conflict has increased in the past decade between Boran and Rendille farmers (3)

- Rendille have faced attacks by Gabra, Turkana, and Somalis raiding camels in the lowlands (3)

4.18 Cannibalism?

- not suggested in the literature

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- up to 60 households (2)

- large seminomadic settlements of fifty houses or more (3)

- camping units or settlements vary greatly in size, from totals of 30 to 600 depending on the availability of grazing and water for their prized livestock (7)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

- traditional nomadic pastoralist (1)

- increasing trend towards settlement (1)

- about 30 percent of the Rendille population are permanently settled (3)

- Rendille groups may move up to six times per year, depending on resources (7)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

- clan-based village organization (2)

- Special area (naabo/ceremonial firepit) for elders suggests elders have special status (2)

5.4 Post marital residence:

- the basic management unit is the combined labor pool represented by agnatic and affinal kin (1)

- patrilocal (2)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

- colonial administrative policies brought about the construction and maintenance of rigidly delineated grazing areas (1)

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex):

- general separation of sexes (2)
- the Rendille have age grades or *gadaa*, and they are 14 years apart in their system; there are six main grades (7)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

- no info found

5.8 Village and house organization:

- clan-based village organization (2)
- all gobs have at their center a ceremonial fire, termed *naabo*, which acts as a meeting and prayer place for village elders (2)
- houses are arranged around *naabo* according to senior segmentary lineages (2)
- a “house of the fire” is the featured house, for whom the gob is names (2)
- a typical Rendille camp is surrounded with a bramble fence called a *tikhorat* (7)
- in the center of a typical Rendille camp is a stone-walled enclosure called the *naabo*, where the main hearth burns and where the lineage elders meet (7)
- the camp’s tents are built of wood and brush and near them are the brush pens or *sumi-ki-gaal* for their livestock (7)
- when camps are large, they expand in semidetached semicircles for each of the lineages (7)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

- all gobs have at their center a ceremonial fire, termed *naabo*, which acts as a meeting and prayer place for village elders (2)
- houses are arranged around *naabo* according to senior segmentary lineages (2)
- a “house of the fire” is the featured house, for whom the gob is names (2)
- a typical Rendille camp is surrounded with a bramble fence called a *tikhorat* (7)
- in the center of a typical Rendille camp is a stone-walled enclosure called the *naabo*, where the main hearth burns and where the lineage elders meet (7)
- the camp’s tents are built of wood and brush and near them are the brush pens or *sumi-ki-gaal* for their livestock (7)
- unmarried males who tend to the camel herds set of their own temporary camps closer to the grazing (7)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

- tents are built of wood and brush (7)
- houses are made of framing sticks... and roof mats woven from wild sisal (8)
- two half skins cover the doorway, which is positioned on the western side of the house, and a few cow skins hang as a wind block against the inside back wall (the eastern side) (8)
- two mats cover the ground in the back part of the house, which are then overlaid with cow skins for sitting and sleeping (8)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

- the basic labor unit is the combined labor pool represented by agnatic and affinal kin clan-based organization of villages (2)
- houses are arranged around *naabo* according to senior segmentary lineages (2)
- a “house of the fire” is the featured house, for whom the gob is names (2)
- Rendille society is divided into lineages (7)

- all persons know their place in society by their spatial place in the camp, which is maintained even as the camp moves to new settlements (7)
- the placement of houses in the settlements are based on seniority (8)

5.12 Trade:

- colonially supported increased in imported goods, notably maize, maize meal, tea, and sugar

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

- Increasingly larger economic and social inequalities, aggravated by adoption of cattle on previously camel-dominated pastures (2)
- Cash economy and wage labor creating wealthy absentee land owners and dependent, part-time pastoralists (2)
- Special area (naabo/ceremonial firepit) for elders suggests elders have special status (2)
- houses are arranged around naabo according to senior segmentary lineages (2)
- a “house of the fire” is the featured house, for whom the gob is names (2)
- homes in the settlement are organized so that those of seniority are placed beginning immediately to the north of the settlement’s western entrance (8)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

- no info found

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- traditional birth attendants are called *tagan* (9)
- traditional women circumcisers, *kamaratan*, are usually elderly women with a reputation for being careful and observant (9)
- *loibon* practice ritual divination and *ntasim* curing (11)
- the *loibon* is a ritual intermediary between the world of human society and the world of supernatural power (11)
- male elders are leaders in community rituals (11)

6.2 Stimulants:

- no info found

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

- males are circumcised (2)
- sepaade women are symbolically circumcised one year after their brothers (2)
- circumcision of young men is an important part of moving from childhood to adulthood (7)
- among the Rendille, female circumcision is traditionally performed during the marriage ceremony (9)

6.4 Other rituals:

- the naabo in the center of the settlement provides the focus for the community’s ritual activity (8)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

- Rendille cosmology states that their god Wakh or Ngai prefers the sesert and the desert is the place Wakh created for them (7)
- Wakh, in their tales, does not like mountains or seas, and feels that the desert is the perfect place for Rendille because of their dependence on the camel (7)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- no info found

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

- traditional Rendille ceremonies are strictly gender divided (7)
- most ceremonies are forbidden to women (7)
- only men of certain age grade are allowed to attend most ceremonies (7)
- Rendille women are not allowed to touch objects or talk to men during the ceremonies (7)
- only those ceremonies around courtship are open to both men and women (7)
- male elders are leaders in community rituals (11)

6.8 Missionary effect:

- Catholic and Protestant missions began long-term famine distribution efforts and agricultural schemes for desperate nomads following the droughts of 1968-73 (3)
- some Rendille have converted to Islam and Christianity, but belief in their traditional religion is still strong (7)

6.9 RCR revival:

- no info found

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- no info found

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

- no info found

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

- no info found

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

- their god is called Wakh or Ngai (7)
- Wakh is the supreme being and creator (11)
- Wakh is appealed to in prayers for peace, rain, and fertility, but does not intervene directly in human affairs (11)
- immoral supernatural power exists in cosmology, particularly the power of witchcraft and socery (11)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

- no info found

7.2 Piercings:

- no info found

7.3 Haircut:

- a hairstyle in the form of an elegant crest (*doko*) is proudly worn by all Rendille women whose first-born is a son (4)

7.4 Scarification:

- when boys are about eight or nine, the father or some other male cuts into the skin round their navel. This is done in a series of snicks over a period of months until the circle is complete. As the wound heals, the skin contracts over the navel until it is covered by a hole only one-quarter of an inch in diameter and is barely visible (12)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

- the warriors move into the status of *ennui* around the age of 30 and mark this period by wearing a purple loincloth and a white feather in their hair (7)
- once men enter the stage of elder, they change to tartan cloth, and their headgear becomes far more important to them, no one being allowed to touch them (7)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

- no info found

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

- no info found

7.8 Missionary effect:

- no info found

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

- no info found

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

- no info found

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

- no info found

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

- no info found

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

- the Rendille regulate their population growth (with strategies other than contraception) so that it will not exceed their herds' rate of increase (2)
- this population regulation exemplifies the paradigm of group selection (2)
- select males as the target of infanticide, due to primogeniture practices (2)

Numbered references

1. Roth EA. 1990. Modeling Rendille Household Herd Composition. *Human Ecology* 18: 441-455.
2. Roth EA. 1993. A Reexamination of Rendille Population Regulation. *American Anthropologist* 95: 597-611.
3. Fratkin E. 2001. East African Pastoralism in Transition: Maasai, Boran, and Rendille Cases. *African Studies Review* 44: 1-25.
4. Roth EA. 2000. On Pastoralist Egalitarianism: Consequences of Primogeniture among the Rendille. *Current Anthropology* 41: 269-271.
5. African Latitude. The Ancestral Peoples: The Rendille. <http://www.africanlatitude.com/en/info/the-ancestral-peoples/the-rendille.html>, accessed February 19, 2013.
6. Ethnologue. 2009. Languages of the World: Rendille. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=rel, accessed February 3, 2013.
7. Shoup JA. 2011. *Ethnic Groups of Africa and the Middle East: An Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
8. Sobania NW. 2003. *Cultures and Customs of Kenya*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
9. Shell-Duncan B. 2001. Female "Circumcision" in Africa: Culture, Controversy, and Change. Lynne Rienner Pub
10. Roth EA. 1999. Proximate and Distal Variables in the Demography of Rendille Pastoralists. *Human Ecology* 27: 517-536

11. Franklin E. 1991. The "Loibon" as Sorcerer: A Samburu "Loibon" among the Ariaal Rendille, 1973-87. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 61: 318-333.
12. Spencer P. 1973. *Nomads in Alliance: Symbiosis and growth among the Rendille and Samburu of Kenya*. London: Oxford University Press.