

Native American Living Conditions and History by Region

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[Arctic]

[Woodlands]

[Plains | Plateau]

[Southwest / Basin]

[NW Pacific Coast]

[Southeast | Subarctic]

[CA-Intermountain / Basin]

Note: not all the tribes from each region are listed here.



Eastern Woodlands

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The Native American peoples of the Eastern Woodlands included:

- the Iroquois,
- the Lenape (also known as the Delaware),
- the Micmac,
- the Narragansett,
- the Shawnee,
- the Potawatomi,
- the Menominee,
- the Mohican, and
- the Illinois.

Woodlands people formed towns that were often surrounded by palisades. Within the palisades, villagers lived in long houses made of logs, bark, and thatch. Fields were cultivated beyond the walls of the village. Women cultivated crops for the tribe, in some cases growing more than 10 different varieties of corn. The tribes also grew tobacco, squash, beans, potatoes, and rice. Women tilled the soil, gathered wild plants, and stayed near the village, while men hunted and fished together in large groups. Hunting parties would often herd deer into a small clearing, with bowmen encircling the deer.

Woodlands tribes offered assistance to colonists by teaching them how to survive in North America. They taught them about fertilizing the soil, growing corn, potatoes, and other plants. These foods which we have come to consider essential were given to the English by the woodlands tribes.



The Plains

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The Native American peoples of the Plains included:

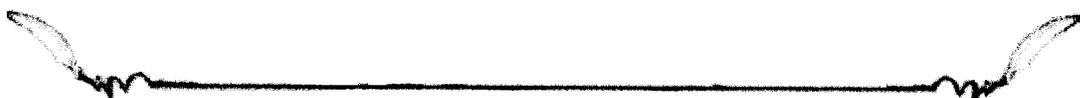
- the Blackfoot,
- the Mandan,
- the Hidatsa,
- the Sioux,
- the Cheyenne,
- the Arapaho,
- the Shoshone,
- the Comanche,
- the Caddo,
- the Omaha,
- the Osage,
- the Crow, and
- the Kiowa.

Prior to 1900, two distinct lifeways coexisted on the Plains.

One way of life centered around a nomadic hunters and gatherers subsistence base. This group included such tribes as the Sioux, the Crow, and the Kiowa. These societies moved their tipi lodges from one campsite to another following the great migration of bison herds as well as other large game animals.

The other, less known, way of life was traditionally based on sedentary agricultural existence. This group included such tribes as the Caddo, the Omaha, and the Osage. In earlier times, they lived in huge earth or grass lodge villages along fertile river valleys of the eastern Plains where they raised crops of beans, corn, and squash. However, even for these people, the bison was an important source of food and raw material.

By the late 1800s and the early 1900s, the vast roaming herds of bison were gone, replaced by fenced in domesticated livestock. The importance was gradually phased out by the automobile. This group has always survived because of its ability to change and adapt to new places to live and new ways of life.



The Plateau

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Plateau peoples include:

the Nez Percé,
the Walla Walla,
the Yakama, and
the Umatilla in the Sahaptian language family,
the Flathead,
the Spokane, and
the Okanagon in the Salishan language family,
the Cayuse, and
the Kootenai (or Kootenay) in Canada (with no linguistic relatives).

The Plateau people in northwestern North America hunted deer and small game, while gathering fruits and nuts from wild plants in the region. They also supplemented their diet from the region's rich salmon runs (up the Columbia, Snake, Fraser, and tributary rivers). The Native Americans dried the fish, preserving it as a staple for trade and winter consumption. They also ate harvests of camas (western United States plants with edible bulbs) and other nutritious tubers and roots in the meadows. People lived in villages made up of sunken round houses in winter and camped in mat houses in summer.



The Northwest Pacific Coast

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Tribes of the Northwest Pacific Coast include:

the Tlingit,
the Tsimshian,
the Haida,
the Kwakiutl,
the Nootka,
the Chinook,
the Salish,
the Quinault,
the Makah, and
the Tillamook.

Bordered on the east by mountains, the habitable land is usually narrow, lying between the sea and the hills. Outside the tropics, the Northwest Coast has many of the largest remaining rainforests on the planet. The sea is rich in sea mammals and in fish, including salmon and halibut; on the land are bear, beaver, deer, rabbits, wolves, mountain sheep and goats, elk, abundant berries, and edible roots and tubers similar to potatoes. These resources supported a dense population organized into large villages where people lived in wooden houses, often more than 30 m (100 ft) long. Each house contained an extended family, sometimes with slaves, and was managed by a chief. During the winter, villagers staged elaborate costumed religious dramas, and they also hosted people from neighboring villages at ceremonial feasts called potlatches, at which gifts were lavishly given. Trade was important, and it extended toward northern Asia, where iron for knives was obtained. The peoples of the Northwest Coast culture

are known for their wood-working skills and their distinctive wood carvings.



California-Intermountain/Basin

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The tribes of California include:

- the Paiute,
- the Ute, and
- the Shoshone are the best-known,
- the Klamath,
- the Modoc, and
- the Yurok in the north,
- the Pomo,
- the Maidu,
- the Miwok,
- the Patwin, and
- the Wintun in the central region, and
- the Diegueño.

The mountain ridges and valleys of Utah, Nevada, and California resemble one another in the pine forests of the mountains and the grasslands and marshes in the valleys. An Archaic way of life-hunting deer and mountain sheep, fishing, netting migratory birds, harvesting pine nuts and wild grains-developed by 8000 BC and persisted with no radical changes until about AD 1850. Villages were simple, with thatched houses, and in the warm months little clothing was worn. The technology of getting, processing, and storing food was sophisticated. Basketry was developed into a true art. On the California coast, people fished and hunted sea lions, dolphins, and other sea mammals from boats; the wealth of resources stimulated a well-regulated trade using shell money.



Southwest/Basin

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The tribes of the Southwest include:

- the Navajo,
- the Apache,
- the Havasupai,
- the Papago (descendants of the Hohokam),
- the Pima (descendants of the Hohokam),
- the Mojave,
- the Pueblos (descendants of the Anasazi), and
- the Hopi.

Early inhabitants of the Southwest Region relied heavily on hunting. As livestock died out,

groups emigrated north from Mexico, bringing farming techniques to the region. Towns and communities developed around the agricultural production, building terraced stone or adobe apartments around central plazas. Eventually, these towns would lose their autonomy, to be dominated by Spain, then Mexico, then the United States.

The first known inhabitants of the Southwest hunted mammoths and other game with Clovis-style spearpoints. As the Ice Age ended, mammoths became extinct. The people in the Southwest turned to hunting bison (known as buffalo in North America) and spent more time collecting wild plants for food. The climate gradually became warmer and drier, Archaic peoples hunted mostly deer, small game, and birds, and they harvested fruits, nuts, and the seeds of wild plants, using stone slabs for grinding seeds into flour. About 3000 BC the Southwesterners learned to grow maize (also known as corn), which had been domesticated in Mexico, but for centuries it was only a minor food.

About 300 BC, some Mexicans whose culture was based on cultivating maize, beans, and squash in irrigated fields migrated to southern Arizona. These people, called the Hohokam, lived in towns in adobe-plastered houses built around public plazas. They grew maize, beans, and squash and lived in towns of terraced stone or in adobe apartment blocks built around central plazas; these blocks had blank walls facing the outside of the town, thereby protecting the people within. During the summer many families lived in small houses at their fields. After 1275 the northern sector suffered severe droughts, and many Anasazi farms and towns were abandoned; those along the Río Grande, however, grew and expanded their irrigation systems. In 1540 Spanish explorers visited the descendants of the Anasazi, who are called the Pueblos. After 1598 the Spanish imposed their rule on the Pueblos, but in 1680 the Pueblos organized a rebellion that kept them free until 1692. Since that time, Pueblo towns have been dominated by Spanish, then Mexican, and finally United States government. The Pueblos attempted to preserve their culture: They continued their farming and, in some towns, secretly maintained their own governments and religion. Twenty-two Pueblo towns exist today.

In the 1400s, hunters speaking an Athapaskan language-related to languages of Alaska and western Canada-appeared in the Southwest, having migrated southward along the western Great Plains. They raided Pueblo towns for food and for captives to sell; from the Pueblos, they learned to farm, and from the Spanish, to raise sheep and horses. Today these peoples are the Navajo and the several tribes of Apache.

The western sector of the Southwest is inhabited by speakers of Yuman languages, including the isolated Havasupai, who farm on the floor of the Grand Canyon; and the Mojave, who live along the lower Colorado River. The Yuman-speaking peoples inhabit small villages of pole-and-thatch houses near their floodplain fields of maize, beans, and squash.



The Southeast

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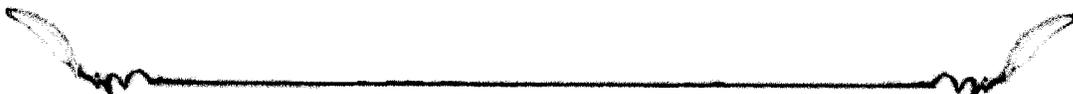
Southeastern peoples included:
the Cherokee,

the Choctaw,
the Chickasaw,
the Creek, and
the Seminole (known as the Five Civilized Tribes),
the Natchez,
the Chitimacha, and
the Coushatta.

Much of this land once consisted of pine forests, which the Native Americans of the region kept cleared of underbrush by yearly burnings, a form of wildlife management that maintained high deer populations for hunting. The early history of the Southeast is similar to that of adjacent areas. Cultivation of native plants was the work of the women who farmed plots for the tribe while men hunted and gathered additional food. These women used such modern techniques as fertilization, planting by rows, and crop rotation. Because of their agricultural success, Southeastern tribes had the highest population of any region in North America prior to contact with Europeans.

In the 1700s, Oconee, Hitchiti, Alabama, Koasati, Coosa, and others made up what is now known as the Creek tribe or confederacy. The Seminole, descendants of the Creek, due to external pressure moved to what is now Florida. The Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, the Creek, and the Seminole, known as the Five Civilized Tribes because they resembled European nations in organization and economy, and because they quickly incorporated desirable European imports (such as fruit trees) into their way of life. The Natchez, another famous Southeastern people, had an elaborate mound-building culture that was destroyed by Europeans in the 18th century.

In the 1830s, Southeastern tribes were forced to relocate. Beginning with Thomas Jefferson's idea of driving Indians farther west, President Andrew Jackson forcibly marched Southeastern tribes from the deep South to "permanent Indian territory" in Oklahoma. Often referred to as "The Trail of Tears", thousands of Native Americans died.



The Subarctic

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The peoples native to the Subarctic region include:

[Eastern half]

the Cree,
the Ojibwa (also known as the Chippewa),
the Montagnais, and
the Naskapi (all speakers of Algonquian languages).

[Western half]

the Chipewyan,
the Beaver,
the Kutchin,
the Ingalik,
the Kaska, and
the Tanana (speakers of northern Athapaskan languages).

The eastern half of this region was once heavily glaciated, and its soil and drainage are poor. No agriculture is possible in the Subarctic because summers are extremely short, and so the region's peoples lived by hunting moose and caribou (a North American reindeer) and by fishing. They were nomadic, sheltering themselves in tents or, in the west, sometimes in sunken round houses (as in the Plateau region). To move camp, they used canoes in summer and sleds in winter. Because of the limited food resources, Subarctic populations remained small; even the summer rendezvous at good fishing spots drew only hundreds, compared to the thousands of persons who gathered at seasonal rendezvous in the Great Lakes or Plains regions. Many Subarctic peoples, although now settled in villages, still live by trapping, fishing, and hunting.



The Arctic

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The Arctic people include:

- the Inuit,
- the Yuit (also known as Yupik), and
- the Aleut.

Like the Subarctic peoples but unlike most Native Americans, the Inuit, Yuit, and Aleut peoples today retain much of their ancient way of life because their culture areas are remote from cities and their lands cannot be farmed. The Arctic culture area rings the coasts of Alaska and northern Canada. Because winters are long and dark, agriculture is impossible; people live by fishing and by hunting seal, caribou, and (in northern Alaska and eastern Canada), whale. Traditional summer houses were tents. Winter houses were round, well-insulated frame structures covered with skins and blocks of sod; in central Canada the winter houses often were made of blocks of ice. Populations were small because resources were so limited.

In Alaska the Inuit and the Yuit (also known as Yupik) developed ingenious technology to deal with the difficult climate and meager economic resources. About AD 1000 bands of Alaskan Inuit migrated across Canada to Greenland; called the Thule culture, they appear to have absorbed an earlier people in eastern Canada and Greenland (the Dorset culture). These people are now often referred to as the Greenland Inuit. Because of this migration, traditional Inuit culture and language are similar from Alaska to Greenland. Living in southwestern Alaska (and the eastern end of Siberia) are the Yuit, who are related to the Inuit in culture and ancestry but whose language is slightly different. Distantly related to the Inuit and Yuit are the Aleuts, who since 6000 BC have remained in their homeland on the Aleutian Islands, fishing and hunting sea mammals.



Note:

This information was gathered and compiled from various sources including: Microsoft

Encarta 98 Encyclopedia, Microsoft Bookshelf 98, Webster's Concise Interactive Encyclopedia, and materials from the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Some sources give different region areas and where this was the case, I took the liberty of combining some information to fit the areas as outlined on the map of North America.



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