

# AMERICAN INDIANS

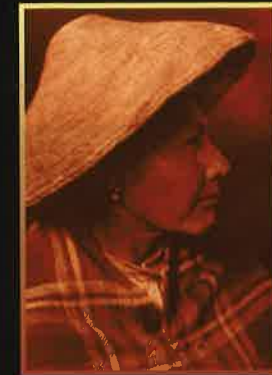
## Washington's Coastal and Plateau Tribes



▲ The above map illustrates the regions of Coastal and Plateau culture in Washington with the tribes that belong to each group.

### COASTAL

### PLATEAU



#### LANGUAGES

- Chinook
- Coastal Salish
- Nootka

#### TRIBES

- Cascade \*
- Chehalis Confederated
- Chinook \*
- Clallam \*
- Cowlitz
- Duwamish \*
- Hoh
- Humptulip \*
- Jamestown S'Klallam
- Kwalniokwa \*
- Lower Chehalis \*
- Lower Elwha
- Lummi
- Makah
- Muckleshoot
- Nisqually
- Nooksack
- Ozette \*
- Port Gamble S'Klallam
- Puyallup
- Quileute
- Quinalt
- Salish \*
- Samish Nation
- Satsop \*
- Sauk-Suiattle
- Semiahmoo \*
- Shoalwater Bay
- Skokomish
- Snoqualmie
- Squaxin Island
- Stillaguamish
- Suquamish
- Swinomish
- Tulalip
- Twana \*
- Upper Skagit

#### LANGUAGES

- Chinook
- Interior Salish
- Sahaptin
- Waiilatpuan

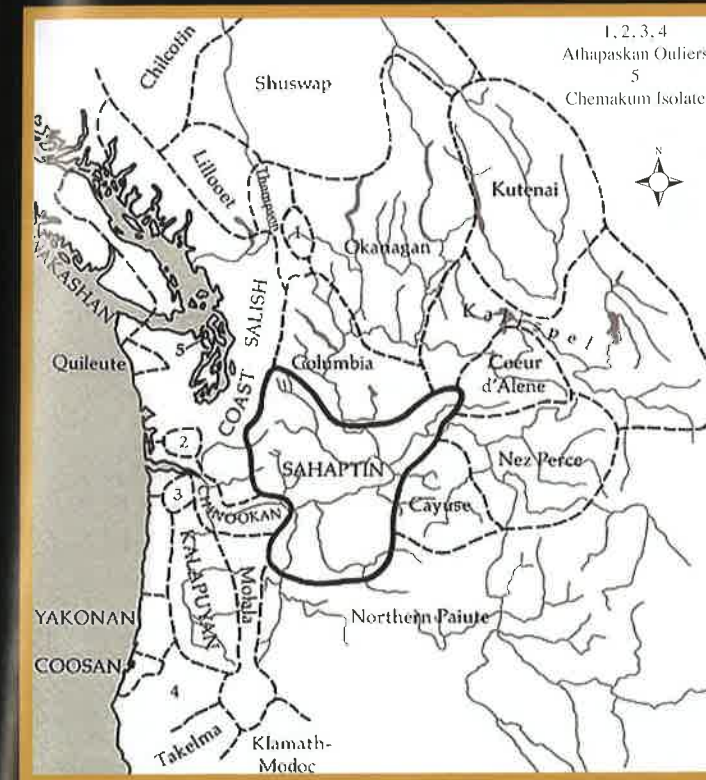
#### TRIBES

- Chelan \*
- Columbia \*
- Colville
- Entiat \*
- Kalispel
- Kittitas \*
- Klickitat \*
- Lakes \*
- Meshal \*
- Methow \*
- Nespelem \*
- Nez Percé
- Palouse \*
- San Poil \*
- Spokane
- Taidnapah \*
- Walla Walla \*
- Wenatchi \*
- Wishram \*
- Yakama

\* No longer federally recognized or is considered part of a larger confederation



▲ Culture Areas of North America



▲ This map depicts the language groups of Indians in Washington. Within each language group there are several, if not dozens, of individual languages. They are placed in groups based on similarities.

## THE COASTAL INDIANS

The **Coastal Indians** of Washington lived west of the Cascade Mountains. The Coastal Indians did not refer to themselves by this name. Rather the name Coastal has been given to the Indians who lived in the western parts of Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, and parts of southern Alaska by later historians. The name is based on the fact that these people all lived along the coast of the Pacific Ocean.

The Coastal Indians were not one unified people but many different peoples who shared broad similarities in their culture and lifestyles. Each Coastal tribe was unique, with its own customs, traditions, and practices. However, each tribe had much in common with one another. These similarities are due in part to their unique adaptations to the environments in which they lived.

The Coastal Indians of Washington encountered a challenging but rewarding environment. The climate of Western Washington is quite mild. Temperature

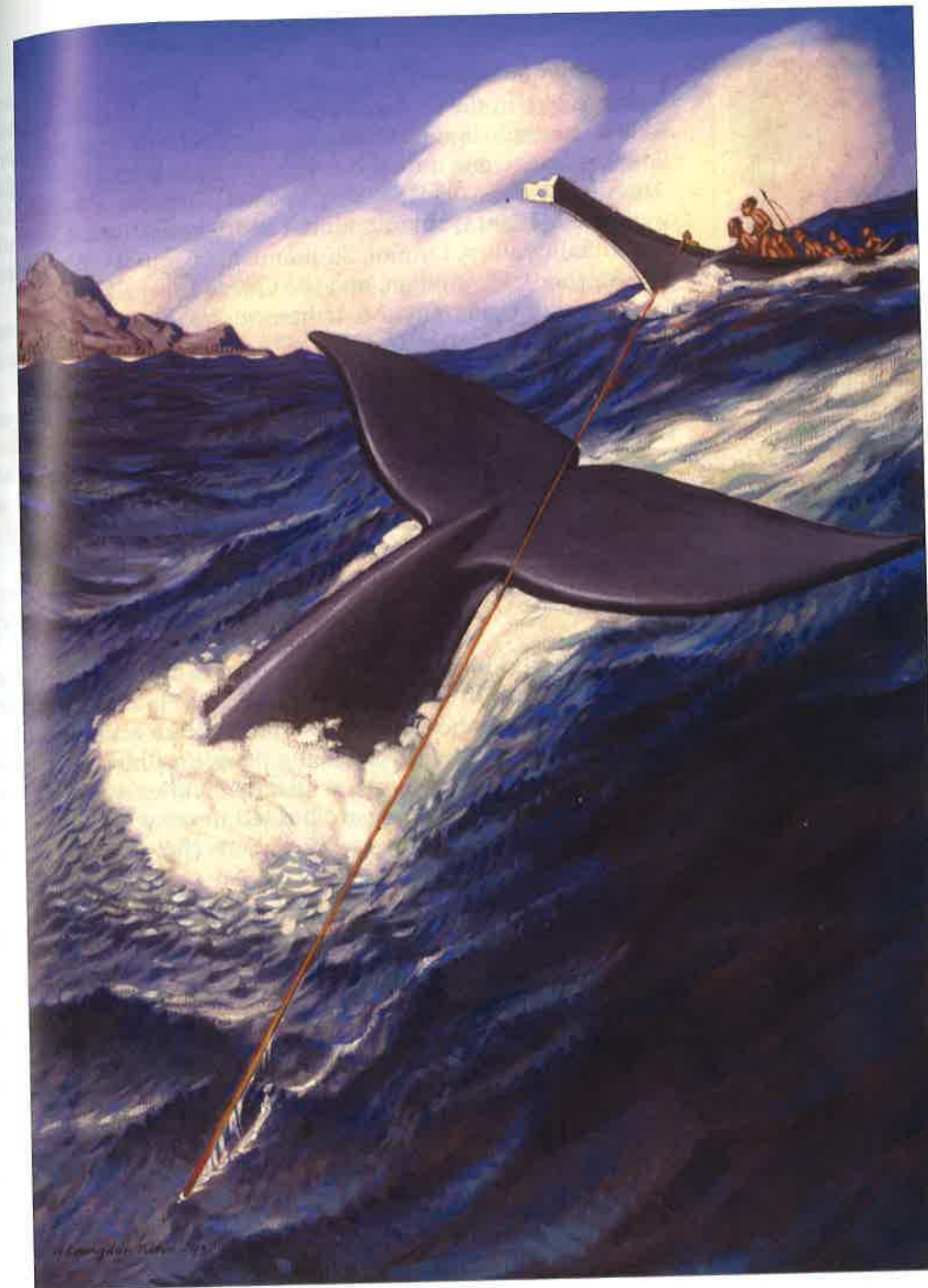
extremes, both hot and cold, are rare but rainfall is frequent and the air is typically very damp. The landscape in which the Coastal Indians lived was covered in vegetation. In higher elevations, such as hills and mountains, coniferous forests and trees were everywhere. In lower elevations, coniferous trees mixed with deciduous forests.

Water was widespread in the landscape of Western Washington. Numerous rivers flowed through the area, as well as smaller streams. Lakes could be found in many places also. In addition to these freshwater sources, nearly all of Western Washington is close to a saltwater body. Along the Olympic Peninsula is the Pacific Ocean. Further north, ocean waters pour through the Strait of Juan de Fuca and into Puget Sound. As a result, no place in Western Washington is far from water of any type.

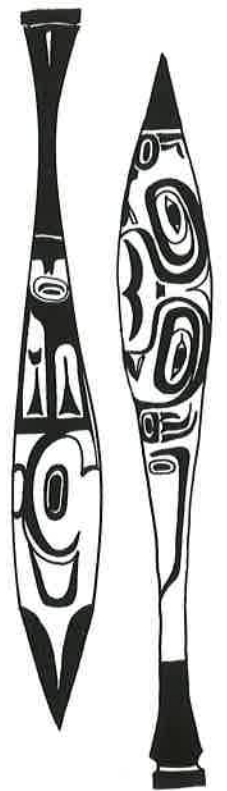
Thus, the mild climate, abundance of fresh and



▲ Due to the high availability of food and natural resources, the Coastal Indians were quite wealthy and comfortable. To demonstrate their wealth, they carved elaborate totem poles, built ornate canoes, and possessed highly decorative clothing.



◀ Whaling, as seen in this painting, was an important source of food and a communal activity in many Coastal tribes.



▲ Many everyday items, such as these oars and mask, were richly decorated in Coastal cultures.

saltwater, and the lush vegetation, make Western Washington the perfect environment for many animals. Deer and elk frequent the many forests and meadows in the region. The rivers and lakes are an ideal habitat for beavers, otters, and fish. Finally, the saltwater bodies provide a home for fish, whales, sea otters, seals, shellfish and many other animals.

In short, Western Washington contained all the essentials for humans to make a living. There were ample food supplies, materials for tools and shelters, and enough land to accommodate large populations. It was these advantages that drew ancestors of the Coastal Indians to the region after they first arrived in Washington.



▲ Coastal chief carrying a wooden staff.

### FOCUS ON

#### Slavery throughout the World ...

As discussed in the chapter, Coastal Indians practiced slavery. However, they were not the only people in North America to do so. Many Indian tribes throughout North and South America utilized slavery. Among them, were the powerful Mayan, Aztec, and Incan empires of Latin America. When Spanish colonists settled the New World in the 1500s, they brought with them African slaves to work the land. British colonists also used slaves in their North American colonies and the system continued after America gained its independence.

In fact, the pages of history are filled with slave holding civilizations. The Roman Empire used slaves to construct buildings, fight in gladiatorial games, and to be household servants. Peoples throughout the Middle East and Africa also employed slavery. Thus, the inhumane practice of slavery is not unique to one people throughout history, but rather has been utilized in countless places over thousands of years. It is only during the last two centuries that humans have attempted to abolish the use of slave labor.

### COASTAL TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

The abundance of food, water, and supplies allowed many tribes to live in the region. A **tribe** is a group of Indians who speak a common language, share similar cultural practices, and who recognize one another as belonging to the same people. Among the most well known Coastal tribes of Washington were the Makah, Quinault, Hoh, Chinook, Clallam, Chehalis, Cowlitz, Puyallup, Lummi, Suquamish, Nisqually, Nooksack, Muckleshoot, Duwamish, and the Queet.

The numerous Coastal tribes of Washington occupied relatively small territories. The tribes did not need much land because food and resources were so easily attained.

Each tribe was divided into **villages**. Villages were permanent settlements and did not move. The number of villages differed from tribe to tribe, as did the size of each village. Villages typically consisted of several families all living in a few shared houses.

### COASTAL SOCIETY

The Coastal Indians had one of the most unique societies found anywhere in North America. **Society** is a word which refers to the organization of people within a community. Some societies are very free, giving people within the society freedom to do whatever they please. Other societies are very strict, meaning people are limited in what jobs they can perform, whom they can marry, where they can live, and many other aspects.

In strict societies an individual's choices are defined by their position within the society. Scholars call positions within a society **classes**. The more classes that a society has, the more strict it is.

Coastal society was very strict. It contained four distinct social classes. The highest social class was the **chief**. A chief ruled a village. He was always male and the wealthiest member of the village. Chiefs were a hereditary position, meaning that a son, or closest male relative, would succeed his father as chief. Chiefs controlled the most land, slaves, weapons, canoes, clothing, and any other item of significance. They also controlled the best fishing spots, forests, and fields for gathering fruits, nuts, and other plants.

In Coastal society, chiefs were the absolute leaders. Within a village the chief was the government. If someone committed a crime, their punishment was decided by the chief. Likewise, disputes between tribal members were settled by chiefs. Chiefs accepted advice from other tribal members but in the end all decisions were made by the chief.

Every village had a chief. Thus within a tribe, which always had numerous villages, there were many chiefs. However, not all chiefs were equal. Some chiefs were more important than others. The most powerful chiefs could rule over lesser chiefs. A chief's status was determined by his wealth. The wealthier the chief, the more power and respect he received.

Below the chiefs, were the **nobles**. Nobles were family members of the chief and other people who had wealth. Nobles advised the chief and noblemen were the warriors and hunters of the villages and tribes. Noble women were held in high esteem. They raised families but performed no other manual labor. They had slaves to fulfill those other tasks.

Underneath the nobility were the **commoners**. Commoners were craftsmen and laborers. Unlike the chief and nobles, they could control no land. Commoners depended heavily on the nobility. In return for their labor and the goods that they made, commoners were allowed to fish and gather food in the territory of the nobles and chief.

Both men and women commoners worked very hard for their living. In general, common men made tools, helped with the hunt, constructed shelters, built canoes, and carved artwork such as totem poles. Common women were responsible for child care, clothing, gathering food, and preparing meals.

The lowest class in Coastal society were **slaves**. Slaves had virtually no rights as humans. Whereas all other members of a village were entitled to fair treatment by others according to their status, slaves were viewed as property.

Slaves were gathered in warfare or purchased from tribes who specialized in the slave trade. The majority of slaves were owned by chiefs and nobles. A slave could be abused, overworked, or receive any other kind of treatment his or her owner desired. In general, slavery was for life. A slave could be released by his or her owner, but it was quite rare.

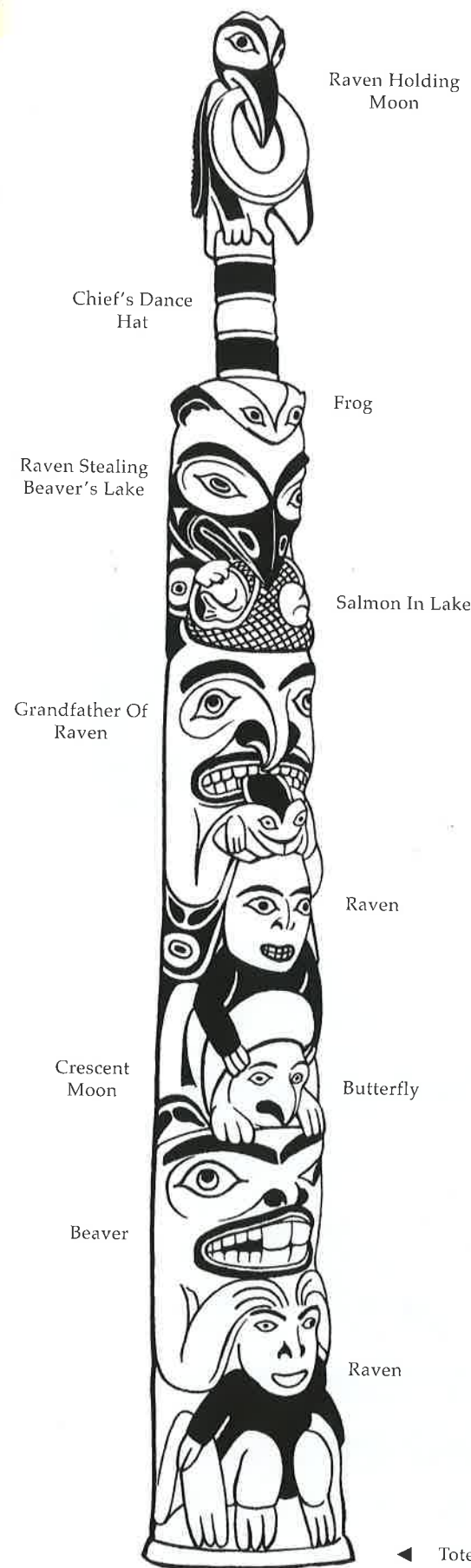
### FOCUS ON

#### Women in Coastal Society ...

The role of women in Coastal society depended greatly upon social classes. Upper class women lived a comfortable and relatively relaxed life. It was seen as a sign of wealth and status if an upper class family owned enough slaves that the women did not have to work. Among the common classes and slaves, women worked much harder. Women were the primary care givers to children. In addition to their roles in raising children, women gathered and prepared food. However, women were not part of the whaling and hunting parties. Finally, women furnished the clothing and blankets from furs, skins, cedar bark, and other resources.



◀ The following painting depicts women weaving blankets and clothing in a longhouse. Women were responsible for the creation of these items in Coastal society.



### ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The first and foremost economic activity of the Coastal Indians was the gathering of food for the tribe. Washington's Coastal Indians were excellent whalers, fishers, food gatherers, and hunters.

The Pacific Ocean and Puget Sound provided the Coastal people with a variety of food. These food sources included: whale, salmon, otter, seal, razor clams, oysters, smelt, abalone, halibut, cod, shellfish, crabs, and many other kinds of seafood. Western Washington rivers yielded salmon, trout, and other fish. They also ate waterfowl, small birds, deer, bear, elk, and mountain sheep and goats.

Coastal Indians used smoke houses, open pit fires, and hot rocks to prepare their foods. They ate roots, nuts, fruits, and berries. They baked or smoked salmon, steamed clams, and cooked meat and fish. In addition, they also dried food to preserve it for later meals.

### Totem Poles

For most Indian societies in the United States, the gathering of food was the primary, if not only, economic concern. But as the description of their diet above makes clear, gathering food was not as challenging for Coastal Indians as it was for others.

The abundance of food enabled Coastal Indians to spend time on the creation of other goods, such as clothing, buildings, canoes, tools, and the like. While it is true that other Indians in the United States created these same goods, they did not do it with the same skill, sophistication, creativity, and artistry as the Coastal Indians.

One of the most elaborate and famous displays of Coastal wealth were **totem poles**. Totem poles are tall posts, decorated with elaborate figures and animals. Each totem pole is unique and specific to a particular family. Since totem poles were expensive to create, only the chiefs and noble families could afford them.

Totem poles were symbols for an individual family. They functioned much like a coat of arms for noble families in Europe. Each figure on the totem pole represents an animal, myth, or story sacred to the history of a particular family. As such, the right to use particular animals and symbols were jealously guarded by families and it was considered a grave insult to use images sacred to another family on your totem pole. Because totem poles represented specific families, there were often many totem poles, sometimes dozens, in a village.

Totem poles were made by master carvers noted for their craftsmanship. They were carved from a single red cedar. Totem poles could take years to create and they were done in secret so as to prevent copying. Once completed families raised the poles in an elaborate ceremony and sometimes at a potlatch.

◀ Totem poles were unique and composed of numerous images stacked one on top of another as seen in this sample.



◀ Since totem poles were the symbols of noble families, villages could have dozens of totem poles depending on the number of noble families present and their respective wealth.

### Clothing

The Coastal Indian used available materials to make their garments. During the mild summers, they wore little clothing. Males wore breechcloths and went barefoot. A few wore leggings and moccasins. Females wore skirts and dresses made from dog hair, grass, cattails, animal skins, and shredded **cedar bark**. Coastal Indians frequently wore cedar bark garments.

The cool, rainy winter climate caused both men and women to wear more clothing items. They wore capes, ponchos, robes, blankets, and clothing made from dog hair, reeds, and cedar bark. Generally, leather was not worn during the rainy season because it shrank. They also wore cone shaped hats to help keep them dry. In addition, protective mats were made from reeds, moss, and cattails. These mats helped them keep drier and warmer during the colder and wetter winter months.

The Coastal people also designed colorful blankets and special ceremonial clothing. They made elaborately designed **ceremonial masks**, which were worn while attending celebrations, and for burial and marriage ceremonies.



▲ Elaborate and colorful clothing were an important part of Coastal society.

# COASTAL CULTURE

Due to the favorable climate and natural environment, Coastal Indians had easy access to vast food supplies. This access left considerable time to devote to other activities, such as ceremonies, festivals, and the arts. Coastal Indians produced a wide variety of items from baskets and clothing to masks and totem poles. The quality and sophistication of the craftsmanship was so great that the only people in North America to produce similar quality were the Pueblos of the Southwest and the mound building peoples of the Southeast.

## Baskets ...

Coastal Indians excelled at the creation of baskets. Baskets were made from reeds, bark, straw, grasses, and other items. Baskets had a practical function, providing storage and a means of transporting goods. But baskets were also works of art and many had intricate designs woven into them. They were valuable trade items between Coastal tribes.



## Masks and Headdresses ...

Religious ceremonies and festivals were an important part of Coastal life. Storytelling, chanting, and dancing were always a part of these ceremonies. Many songs and dances required elaborate costumes and masks as part of the ceremonies. These masks and headdresses had strong meanings and could represent animals, mythological characters, or ancestors.



## Drums ...

All Coastal religious ceremonies and festivals involved song and dance. To accompany these dances, drummers provided the rhythm. In Coastal tribes, most drums were smaller and were hand-held.



## Cedar Bark Clothing ...



Men and women wore cedar bark clothing. One of the most practical materials to make a dress or skirt out of was certainly cedar bark. The western red cedar and other cedar varieties were available along the coastal regions of Washington, therefore the women of Coastal tribes stripped cedar bark off trees and wove garments.



## Hats ...



Hats served both a practical and a social function. Hats were cone-shaped to allow the rain to simply slide off. The ornamentation and design of a hat often denoted the wealth and status of an individual.

## Weapons and Tools ...

Weapons were used for hunting and warfare. As slave raids and intertribal warfare could be common amongst the Coastal Indians, weapons were a fact of life. Most weapons and tools, such as knives, axes, and the like, were made from rock or animal bone.

## Totem Poles ...

Totem poles were signs, proclaiming the history, wealth, and social status of the family to which they belonged. Totem poles were highly valuable and prized creations. Wealthy families spent considerable amounts of wealth and time on their creation. The number of totem poles contained within a village demonstrated how many wealthy families lived there.



# WHALING

Whaling was an important activity to many Coastal tribes, especially the Makah and the Nootka. Whale was eaten fresh, but the majority of it was dried for preservation. Whaling was so important that it took on a religious significance. Only a village chief could organize a whaling expedition. In the days leading up to the expedition he and his crew would go through specific rituals to appease the spirit of the whale and ensure a successful hunt. On the appointed day, the whaling crew left at sunset or in the night and they hunted the whale at dawn the next day. Using a system of harpoons, floats, rope, and manpower, they speared and fatigued the whale until it died. They then drug it ashore, chanting the entire journey to announce their triumph.



▲ Dugout canoes were important as a means of transportation, but they were too small to safely hunt whale.



▲ Whaling parties required larger numbers of men and canoes.



▲ A coastal man and his whaling harpoon.



◀ The whaling rattle, used to help steer the whale when towing, also provided a rhythmic sound used in celebration chants.



▲ A Coastal whale hunter displays the harpoon and floats used in whaling.



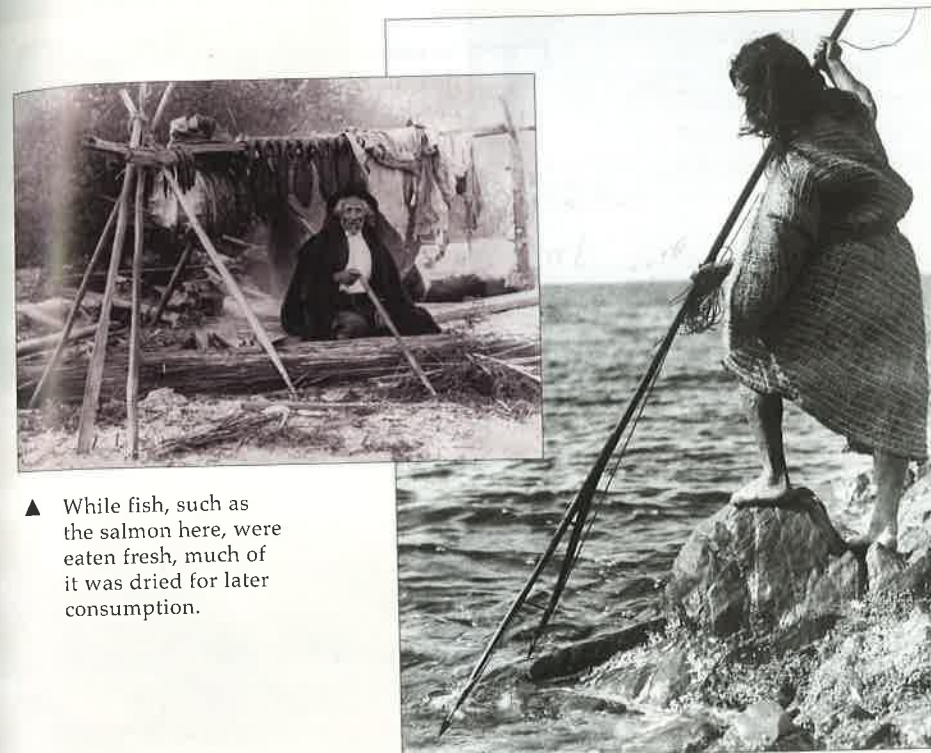
▲ The whale is harpooned.



▲ As shown here, after the whale is harpooned, floats are attached by rope. The floats prevent the whale from escaping and help bring it to the surface.

# FISHING

Fishing was a staple food gathering activity among Coastal Indians. The most important fish were salmon, but shellfish, halibut, and others were also important. Fishing was conducted mostly in the summer months. In fact, Coastal tribes caught so much fish in the summer that they had dried food for the rest of the year. Like whaling, there was a spiritual component to fishing. The first fish caught during the fishing season was accompanied by an elaborate ceremony to give thanks to the fish spirits for the harvest.



▲ A Coastal man fishing.

▲ While fish, such as the salmon here, were eaten fresh, much of it was dried for later consumption.



• Coho Salmon

Chinook Salmon

Chum Salmon

Pink Salmon

Sockeye Salmon



▲ After its death, the whale is towed back to the shore.

## Shelter

Most Coastal Indians lived in a longhouse or plank house. A **longhouse** was a permanent structure made from cedar logs or cedar planks. Longhouses were 40 to 100 feet long and 20 to 30 feet wide. A longhouse had a shed-like roof, no windows, a few doors, and a narrow opening in the ceiling to let the smoke out. Several related families usually lived in the same longhouse. Several longhouses and other house forms (A-frame houses and sheds) would exist in a village. Woven mats or cattails covered some of the wood-framed shelters.

## Transportation

The Coastal people usually traveled by **dugout canoe**. They were excellent canoe builders. To make a dugout canoe took months of hard labor and special talent. These canoes came in all sizes. Some canoes were over 30 feet long. Whaling and war canoes were usually the largest and most skillfully designed. The Washington Coastal Indians were superior canoe builders. Dugouts were used on rivers, lakes, and ocean waters.

Canoes were critical to nearly every facet of life in Coastal tribes. Early explorers to the region often remarked that Coastal people would rather canoe than walk somewhere. This comment speaks volumes about Coastal society. Coastal Indians may have lived in sedentary villages, but they were constantly on the move. First, and foremost, canoes provided a means to make a living. Fishermen and whalers used canoes to access the areas most abundant in marine life.

In addition to providing a means to procure food, canoes helped to maintain vital trade links. Villages were not isolated from one another. There was intensive trade conducted between villages of the same tribe and between different tribes. Trade was not solely restricted to Coastal communities. Coastal Indians, particularly the Chinook Indians, would travel by canoe to Eastern Washington and conduct trade with the Plateau Indians. In this way, the Coastal Indians came into contact with a larger Indian community in North America.

A final use of canoes was in war. War between tribes and villages was frequent in Coastal life. War could be fought over fishing grounds, whaling areas, or valuable hunting regions. Frequently, though, wars were fought over people and possessions. Coastal Indian tribes were slave holding societies and the amount of slaves owned by an individual was a sign of status. Slave raids were common. Coastal Indians in Washington were frequently the targets of slave raids from larger tribes in Canada, such as the Haida. Canoes were a vital part of the protection against and execution of slave raids.

## FOCUS ON

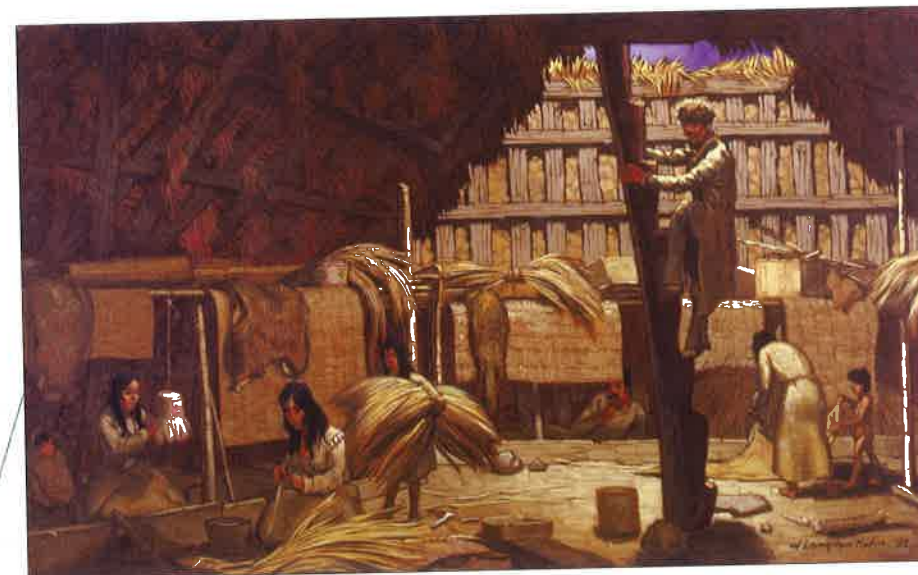
### The Dugout Canoe ...

**T**he most common process for making a dugout canoe was simple, but involved much effort and special craftsmanship. A tall cedar tree was selected and cut to a desired length. The bark and limbs were removed. The craftsman used an adze or ax to dig out the wood. They would burn the inside portion of the emerging canoe, which created a sealant. Then the dugout would be filled with water. Hot rocks were placed in the dugout to heat the water. Bark fires would heat the outside of the dugout. Braces would help shape the dugout. Workers would smooth the bottom, apply decorative paint, and carve the bow of the finished canoe.

Women weaving watertight baskets inside a traditional longhouse.

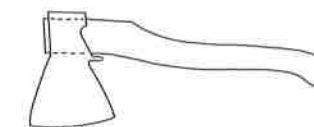


Constructing a dugout canoe.



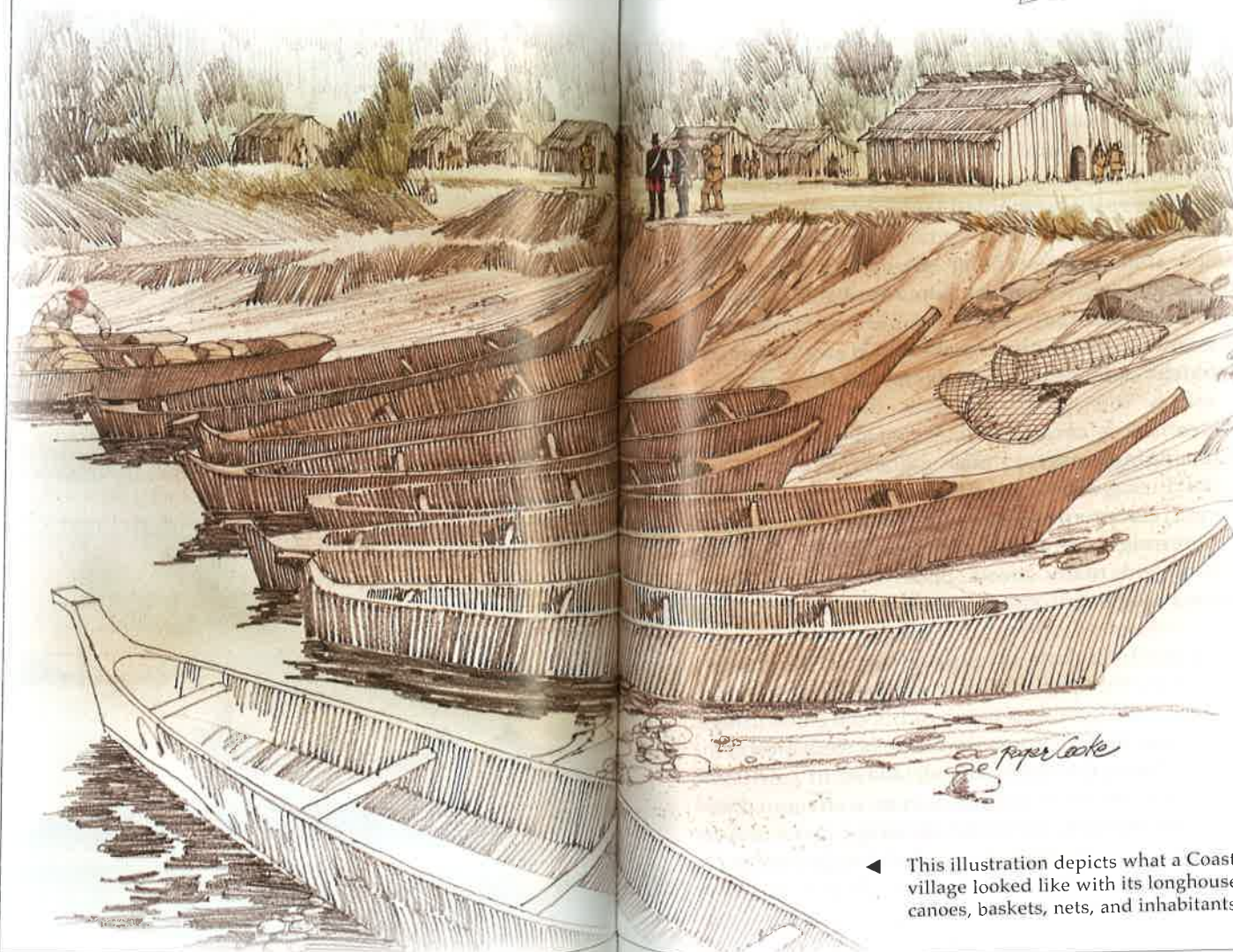
### The Longhouse ...

**T**he longhouse was the principal year round lodging of Coastal Indians. Numerous families lived in a single longhouse. Within a longhouse the division of space was highly regimented. Social status determined where families lived in the longhouse. At one end of the house lived the noble classes. Commoners and slaves lived on the other end of the house. Typically, longhouses were owned by the upper classes. Lower classes lived in longhouses at the invitation of the upper classes.



Adze ...

**A**n adze was a tool made of bone, rock, or, later, metal and used to carve out wood. The adze was an essential tool in the creation of dugout canoes. It was used to both carve out the canoe and later to shape it.



This illustration depicts what a Coastal village looked like with its longhouses, canoes, baskets, nets, and inhabitants.



▲ Nobleman dressed in traditional regalia.



▲ Coastal women were expert basket weavers. Baskets were a frequent gift given away at potlatches.



▲ Potlatches provide many activities for guests to participate in. One of the most popular games to play is called the stick game.

## Religion

The Coastal Indians owed their entire existence and lifestyle to the natural environment. The environment provided them with food, water, and materials for shelters, canoes, clothing, and more. All the necessities of life were available in abundance to Coastal tribes. The Coastal Indians themselves were very aware of this fact. As a result, it was only natural that their religion was based upon worship and respect for nature and the environment.

They believed that everything in nature from animals to plants to landforms, possessed a spirit. These spirits directly influenced human life. For instance, the spirit of an animal, such as a deer or salmon, allowed itself to be caught by humans for food. If the humans who caught it showed respect for the animal, then the animal would continue to allow itself to be used for human food.

It was not only animals that possessed strong spirits, but places as well. Coastal Indians believed that certain places, such as a mountain or an island, were strong spiritual areas. Often special ceremonies would be conducted at these locations. For instance, archaeologists have found evidence of places on the lower elevations of Mount Rainier where certain Coastal tribes performed important ceremonies for the prosperity of the people.

Through animals and sacred places, the spirit world interacted on a daily basis with the Coastal Indians. To ensure that the spirits remained favorable to the Indians, all villages and tribes had a spiritual leader called the **shaman**. A shaman was almost always male and from the noble class. The shaman communicated with the spirits and revealed their will to the Indians. In this way, the shaman made sure that humans did not offend the spirits which could result in problems for the tribe.

To satisfy the spirits, shamans directed religious ceremonies. These ceremonies almost always included dancing, singing, prayer, and games. The activities performed during ceremonies depended on the occasion. There were ceremonies for young boys who became adults, marriage, funerals, thanksgiving, hunting, celebration, and many more. Each of these different celebrations required specific prayers, dances, and songs.

In addition to his role as spiritual leader, the shaman also served as the doctor for a village or tribe. This position was simply an extension of his religious duties. For Coastal Indians, sickness and illness were problems of the spirit. Since the shaman specialized in spirits, he was qualified to treat the sick. However, a shaman could refuse to help the sick. He could do so for good reason. In Coastal society, a shaman was held responsible for the health of anyone he chose to treat. If they failed to get better then he too could lose his life. Thus, shamans often chose their patients carefully.



▲ Certain places, such as Mount Rainier, had important spiritual meaning to Coastal tribes.

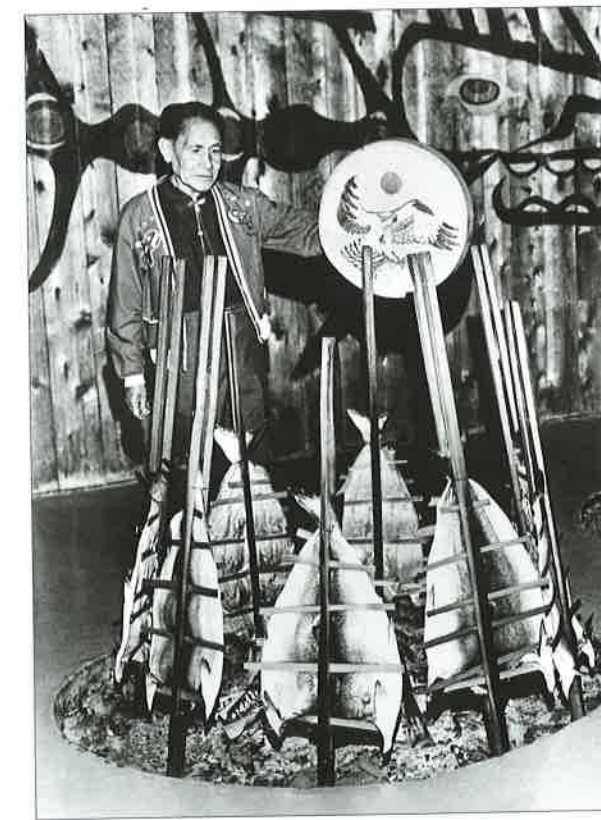
## The Potlatch

While the Coastal Indians held many different religious ceremonies during the year, they were particularly noted for a gathering called a **potlatch**. Potlatch was a Chinook word meaning, "to give." A potlatch was a Coastal tribal ceremony hosted by a chief.

The object of a potlatch was to demonstrate the wealth and power of a chief by throwing an elaborate party and giving away numerous gifts. Potlatches were huge events and people were invited from many different villages and sometimes from other tribes.

At every potlatch, the host tried to give away more of his wealth than the previous potlatch host. Gifts were given to thank guests for coming. Some hosts would destroy their own property, such as burning their longhouse or sinking a canoe simply to demonstrate how much wealth they had to give away.

Any number of events could result in a potlatch. Marriage, funerals, the coming of age by prominent youth, or the completion of a new longhouse were all times for a potlatch. A potlatch was a great social event. Potlatches helped determine which chiefs were considered the most powerful within a tribe and between rival tribes. Most of all, potlatches demonstrated the wealth as a whole of the tribes.



▲ A Coastal man cooks salmon in preparation for a potlatch at Blake Island.



## THE PLATEAU INDIANS

Just as the physical landscape of Western Washington differs from that of the east, so too did the Indians who inhabited Eastern Washington contrast with those living in the west. Modern scholars refer to the Indians living in Eastern Washington as Plateau. The name derives from the fact that many of these Indians lived in the vast Columbia Plateau located in Eastern Washington, Oregon, and western Idaho. However, the Plateau Indians did not just inhabit these lands, but also stretched through all of Idaho, Northern California, western Montana, and parts of southern Canada.

### PLATEAU TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

Plateau society was much different from Coastal social practices. Plateau Indians grouped themselves into tribes. Just like the Coastal Indians, Plateau tribes were groups of Indians who shared a common culture and language. Plateau tribes could contain



▲ A Plateau chief dressed in a traditional style of regalia common to all Plateau tribes.

large numbers of people and cover a large geographic area. Plateau tribes were divided into **bands**. Bands inhabited specific regions within the territory of a tribe. Bands were further subdivided into extended family groups who lived in villages within a band.

A closer look at a typical Plateau tribe, the Nez Percé, will better illustrate how this social organization functioned. The Nez Percé were a group of Plateau Indians who lived in southeastern Washington, northeastern Oregon, and western Idaho. The Nez Percé tribe contained several bands. Some of these bands lived in Washington, while others resided in Oregon and Idaho. One band was the Wallowa band of Nez Percé, of whom the famous Chief Joseph was a member. Like all bands, the Wallowa were not unified, but divided into smaller clusters of villages.

This type of organization allowed Plateau Indians local independence. Villages were mostly self sufficient and able to make independent decisions. Villages only gathered into their larger bands for important religious ceremonies, celebrations, fishing, hunting, or war. Bands came together into an entire tribe only in times of necessity, such as important decisions and warfare. Thus, Plateau Indians were not as tightly organized as Coastal Indians.

### PLATEAU SOCIETY

Unlike the Coastal Indians, Plateau tribes did not have a strict society. The highest social position in Plateau society, just as with the Coastal Indians, was the **chief**. In Plateau tribes, chiefs were not determined by birth, but by ability. Certainly, birth did carry some weight and the son of a chief was likely to succeed to that position. However, ability was much more valued. A person might become a chief based on his success in battle. Similarly, someone who had demonstrated great wisdom or leadership skills could become a chief.

In many ways, the position of chief was like an elected position. Chiefs existed in Plateau society at several levels. At the lowest level, there were village chiefs. Village chiefs had authority only within their own villages. But, as noted earlier, Plateau Indians were organized into bands and tribes. Each band appointed its own chief, or sometimes several chiefs, to represent them in trade, negotiation, and warfare. Band chiefs often came from the most respected chiefs at the village level. If circumstances called for a larger response than the band, an entire tribe could



▲ Tepees, such as those shown above, were a mobile form of lodging that the Plateau Indians adopted after the arrival of the horse.

come together. Just as when bands came together, tribal gatherings often resulted in the appointment of chiefs to represent the entire tribe.

As evidenced by the complex and complicated manner in which chiefs were appointed, the Plateau Indians had a much different society than the Coastal Indians. Plateau Indians had a less strict social construction. There were no real social classes. People earned their rank in Plateau society based on their merit as hunters, warriors, leaders, and spiritual advisers. As long as a person continued to excel in one, or many, of these areas, he or she would be respected and hold a great standing in the village, band, or tribe. However, if one began to fail, then their status could decline.

Thus, Plateau society was based upon merit and accomplishment. As a result, Plateau tribes tended to be more democratic than Coastal tribes. All people of a village, band, or tribe had some say in major decisions. People came together to elect chiefs and chiefs only held power so long as the people continued to believe in them. Moreover, most villages, bands, and tribes had councils. **Councils** were composed of wise and respected individuals. At the village

level, councils were composed of respected **elders**, shamans, and chiefs. In larger gatherings, such as bands and tribes, councils had numerous chiefs and shamans. Whether at the tribal or village level, councils had great authority. Councils gave advice to chiefs and often had more decision making power than chiefs.

Initially, Plateau society was semi-nomadic. Villages were located near important food gathering centers that depended on the season. For instance, in the fall villages were located next to areas where edible plants and berries were ready for harvest. When the salmon returned to rivers, streams, and lakes to spawn, villages moved to be close to the fishing grounds. In short, people relocated villages to be near seasonal food gathering centers.

Plateau society remained in this state until the arrival of the horse during the 1700s. The arrival of the horse changed Plateau society. Suddenly, Plateau Indians could travel long distances faster and carry their belongings more easily. In addition to the change in means of transportation, Plateau Indians could now hunt big game more regularly and travel east to the Great Plains for buffalo hunting.

## CONNECTING TO HISTORY

In Plateau society, men and women were more equal than in Coastal society. Plateau women could serve important religious roles and had a voice in major decisions. Even though there was more equality between men and women, each gender still had specific roles within Plateau society. Women were the primary care givers for children and spent a considerable amount of time raising them. Women were also responsible for gathering plants, roots, and berries, as well as preparing food. Finally, women wove clothing, blankets, and baskets. Conversely, men were warriors and hunters. Men also could serve as chiefs and held larger roles in religion as shaman.

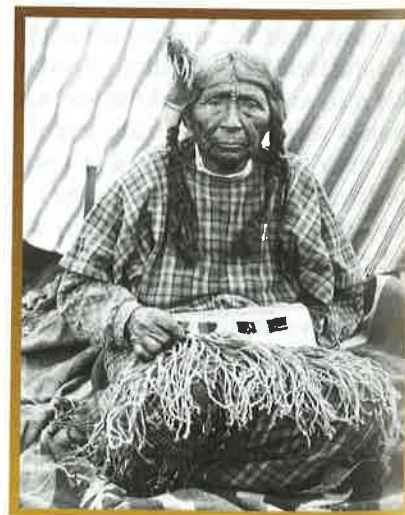
This portrait depicts Plateau women in traditional dress surrounded by the goods that they made, such as baskets, blankets, shawls, and beadwork.



▲ Plateau women carried babies, as seen above, in cradleboards until they were able to walk.



▲ A portrait of Plateau women and children in traditional dress.



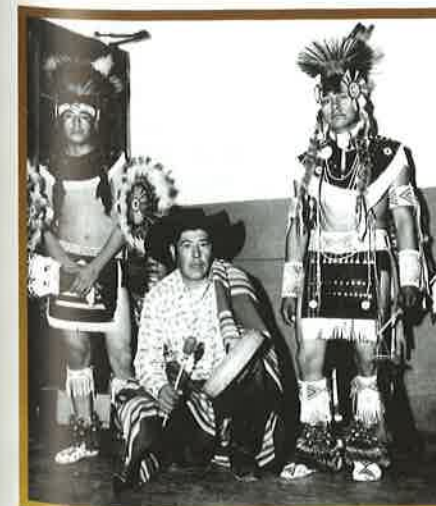
▲ A Plateau woman weaving.



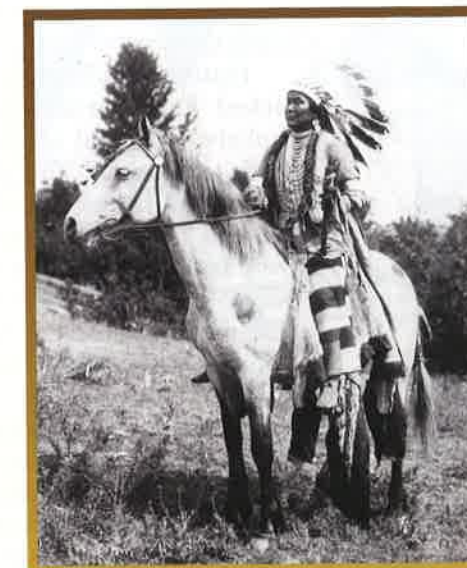
▲ The above photo depicts a group of Plateau warriors dressed in traditional clothing and headdresses. War and hunting were activities exclusively conducted by males in Plateau society.

# PLATEAU INDIANS

## Men and Women in Plateau Society



▲ Plateau men in traditional dress.



▲ A Nez Percé warrior in full regalia.



▲ A Nez Percé warrior.

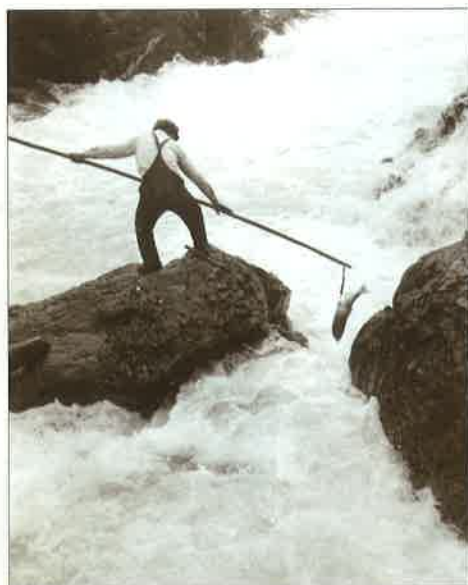
## FOCUS ON

## Salmon ...



In spite of living far from the sea, salmon was the most important food to Plateau Indians. Plateau tribes depended on the annual salmon runs for survival. Salmon was eaten fresh in season, but the majority of salmon caught was smoked and dried for preservation. In this way salmon could be eaten year round, especially in the difficult winter months when food was scarce.

The salmon harvest was a sacred time for Plateau tribes. Every year tribes gathered at the same locations to catch fish. They performed sacred ceremonies and rituals to give thanks for the arrival of the salmon. Since the harvest brought faraway tribes together, it was a time of celebration, games, singing, and dancing. Thus, the salmon harvest became an important cultural event in the lives of Plateau tribes.



▲ Spear fishing at Celilo Falls on the Columbia River.

## ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The economic activities of the Plateau Indians were similar to those of their coastal neighbors. There were some major differences as well. The Plateau Indians were more skilled in animal husbandry or the caring of animals especially horses, cattle, dogs, and the like. However, their canoe building was not as skilled or elaborate as the Coastal craftsmen.

Woodworking, woodcarving, and seashell crafts were less important to the Plateau Indian, but their beadwork and leather goods were more intricate than those made by the Coastal tribes. Adapting to their environment was critical for both the Plateau and Coastal Indians. Each faced survival under demanding natural conditions.

## Diet

The Plateau Indians were not as fortunate as the Coastal Indians. Food and water were generally scarce and difficult to find. Plateau tribes often found themselves competing for food at the same fishing and hunting grounds.

The Plateau people were **nomadic**. Moving from place to place, they sought adequate food and water for their families and livestock. Living between the Cascade and Rocky mountains, all Plateau Indians had a harsh lifestyle. Control of those places where life's necessities existed was fiercely competitive.

The Plateau Indians were nomadic by necessity not necessarily by choice. They would hunt deer, antelope, bear, elk, buffalo, game birds, waterfowl, rabbits, mountain goat, big horn sheep, beaver, grouse, ground hogs, prairie dogs, and other meat sources. When food was scarce, they ate dog, horse, snakes, grasshoppers, crickets, and other insects. Buffalo hunting parties had to cross the Rocky Mountains to reach the Great Plains. This was a very dangerous venture.

Plateau Indians were also food gatherers. They picked wild berries such as blackberries, huckleberries, chokeberries, and serviceberries. They collected nuts and seeds, especially the sunflower seed. They dug **camas bulbs**, and bitterroots that were cooked in earthen ovens, mashed, boiled, and then dried into flat cakes. Biscuit roots were cooked and dried into square cakes. Bitterroots were peeled and boiled before being eaten. The Plateau Indians also made **pemmican** from processed animal fat, berries, camas root, and fish. Pemmican was baked, boiled, or eaten raw.

Salmon was a very important food source for the Plateau people. Salmon was abundant during the spawning season. Salmon migrated upstream in the late summer and early autumn to spawn. Driven by instinct, the salmon struggled against swift mountain stream currents in their quest to reach their original spawning grounds. The struggling salmon were a challenge to catch.

## Clothing

The Plateau Indian wore clothing made from animal skins, fur pelts, dog hair, and grass. These materials reflected their environment. Their clothing was practical. During the dry hot summer months, the Plateau Indians wore light clothing. Males wore light breechcloths, leather moccasins, and leather leggings to protect their legs from thorny plants. Females wore decorative dresses made from animal skins, woven grass, or dog hair. They wore moccasins to protect their feet. In winter, they wore heavy garments made from animal skins and fur pelts. These protected them from snow, long cold spells, and the strong bitter cold winds. Tough leather moccasins, heavy leggings, and clothing designed to help keep them warm and dry were necessary during the cold winters.

The Plateau Indians made brightly colored feather headdresses. These were worn at tribal ceremonies, special celebrations, and during times of war. They wore accessories such as feathers, bear claws, necklaces, earrings, nose rings, bones, scalps, and very colorful stones, shells, and beads. The most prized accessories were eagle feathers, which were believed to have important spiritual qualities. They also wore hair ornaments made from wood, bone, shells, copper, and other metals.

## Shelter

Nomadic people required a form of shelter that was quick and easy to put up and take down. The majority of the Plateau Indians lived in **tepees**. The tepee is a cone frame shelter supported by several long poles. Woven mats or hides of animals covered the poles. A tepee had no windows and usually one hide or mat flap for an entrance. Smoke escaped through an opening at the top of the tepee.

During the cold winters, the Plateau Indians sought refuge from the snow and extreme winds by living in caves or constructing a **pit house**. A pit house was usually five to six feet deep and perhaps 30 feet in diameter. The framework above the pit was covered with animal skins, hides, and earthen materials. Normally, the pit house was constructed on the leeward slope of hills away from the penetrating winter winds.

Plateau tribes also constructed **sweat lodges**. Sweat lodges were buildings with wooden frames and mud walls. These were not living quarters, but buildings where ritual cleansing took place. Plateau Indians believed that sweating was good for the body and soul. As a result, they filled sweat lodges with hot rocks, poured water over the rocks to create steam, and sat inside to sweat. Sweat lodges were typically reserved for men only.

## FOCUS ON

## The Tepee ...

The tepee was an important form of shelter to Plateau Indians. Tepees were highly portable and easy to move. They consisted of a series of poles held together by rope and then covered with animal hide or tulle mats. The tops were open to allow smoke to escape from indoor fires. Tepees were convenient for spring, summer, and fall, but were generally not used in the winter.

Although tepees have long been associated with Plateau Indians, they were not always a part of Plateau cultures. The tepee actually originated amongst the Great Plains Indians. When the horse arrived in the 1700s, the Plateau Indians adopted many customs of the Plains Indians. Tepees are one such example. They were adopted to provide a more mobile and easy to carry shelter.



▲ A partially constructed tulle mat tepee.



▲ Fully constructed tulle mat tepee.

# PLATEAU CULTURE

Plateau Indians created many intricate and valuable goods. Since the Plateau Indians were a nomadic culture, the goods that they created needed to be small and lightweight enough to be carried or hauled by horses. Such restrictions meant that Plateau Indians tended to create practical artwork, tools, crafts, and other items. Nevertheless the craftsmanship and skill needed to create these items was considerable.

## Beadwork ...

Plateau Indians are famous for their beadwork. They incorporated beadwork into almost every article of clothing. The colors of the beads were expertly placed to create intricate designs and illustrations. Beadwork was used not only on clothing, but bags, saddle pads, and jewelry as well.



▲ Saddle Pad



▲ Bag



▲ Handbag



▲ Necklace and Bracelet



◀ Dress



▲ Hat



▲ Moccasins



▲ Gloves

## Baskets ...

Baskets were an important part of Plateau culture. Baskets were mostly functional, used to carry goods as the Plateau Indians moved from place to place. Still, Plateau baskets were designed with skill and artistry, often using patterns and geometric shapes.



## Hand Bags ...

Handbags were primarily carried by women. Many handbags were quite elaborate, with beadwork designs. Handbags were part of the regalia for women.



## Tools ...

The needs of warfare, hunting, gathering, cooking, and building required a wide variety of tools. Plateau Indians were competent toolmakers. They produced tomahawks, arrows, and axes from stone. Plateau Indians carved hand tools and digging sticks from animal bones. They also shaped wood into utensils.



▲ Tomahawk



▲ Stone axe



▲ Digging Stick



▲ Arrowheads



▲ Fishing bag



▲ Axe or Adze



▲ Pestle and Mortar



▲ Spoons

▲ Hand Tools

## Regalia ...

Headdresses and decorative clothing, known collectively as regalia, served an important function in Plateau culture and society. Headdresses were often decorated with eagle feathers. Eagles were sacred animals to Plateau Indians. Their feathers were thought to carry powerful magic, or medicine. Other animal parts, such as skins and bones, were used in regalia. Like the feathers, Indians believed they contained powerful medicine.



▲ Eagle Feather



▲ Headdresses

## Drums ...

Singing and dancing were the most important parts of religious ceremony. The rhythm of these dances and songs were provided by drums. Most drums were quite large and were played by many drummers at one time. Drums were sacred objects and drummers were highly skilled and honored members of the tribe.



## Jewelry ...

Plateau Indians made jewelry from beads, feathers, and animal bones. Jewelry was decorative but also had religious and social significance. Jewelry was also a part of most ceremonial regalia.



▲ Bracelet

## Transportation

Before the arrival of the horse in the early 18th century, the Plateau Indians relied on walking and running to travel, hunt, and gather food. The horse increased their mobility. The horse, or pony, became their most prized possession. Some Plateau Indian tribes, such as the Klickitat, Nez Percé, and Cayuse were excellent horsemen.

The Plateau Indians often captured and broke wild horses. Frequently they increased their own herds by trading, exchanging, breeding, receiving as gifts, and stealing from other Indians and settlers. The number of horses owned was an accurate measure of wealth.

Horses and dogs were used to haul the Plateau Indians possessions. The horse or dog would drag a travois. A **travois** consisted of two long poles of unequal length. This helped maintain balance and provide a smoother ride. These poles were attached to the shoulders of the animal by leather straps. Woven mats and animal hides covered the space between the poles behind the animal. Most of the Indians' possessions were transported by the travois. In addition to material goods, Plateau Indians often used the travois to move people. The sick, wounded, elderly, or very young would travel by travois.



▲ The above picture illustrates the horse and travois system that the Plateau Indians used to haul their possessions.

## Religion

Like the Coastal Indians, Plateau Indians worshipped spirits of the natural world. The goal was to live in harmony with the natural world. To accomplish this objective, Plateau Indians performed important ceremonies, songs, dances, and offerings in order to promote harmony between the spirits and humans. As with Coastal Indians, the most important religious figure was the shaman, also known as the medicine man. One part healer, one part spirit guide, the shaman was the mediator between the spirits and the Indians. Finally, Plateau Indians also had sacred locations where the spirits were especially strong.

Just as Coastal Indians had a key celebration, the potlatch, so too did Plateau Indians. Throughout the year, Plateau Indians held pow wows. **Pow wows** were great social and religious gathering in which many villages, bands, or tribes would come together and celebrate. Unlike potlatches, pow wows were not about giving gifts or social status. Rather they were celebrations of important religious rights, births, deaths, marriages, adulthood, war victories, or the like. Pow wows always involved games, feasting, dancing, songs, and sacred ceremonies. Pow wows could last several days at a time. Pow wows were also a time to forget feuds and disputes.



▲ A Plateau tribe gathers for a religious ceremony.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has a single focal point, the American Indians who lived in or near the present day state of Washington. These were not truly an indigenous people because their ancestors also once migrated from the Old World to the New World. The chapter's discussion on the various migration hypotheses and theories does not support a single answer as to the basic question of who, where, when, why, and how, but offers a wide selection of possibilities to the reader.

Once American Indians arrived in North America they formed over the millennia into ten Indian culture groups. Each group adapted their lifestyle to their natural environment. Two of the most culturally advanced groups, the Coastal and Plateau Indians, inhabited the Pacific Northwest and Washington. The Coastal Indians actually extended from northern California to southern Alaska. They lived in a mild, moist West Coast Marine environment. Natural resources were readily available. These sedentary people lived in numerous villages along the forested waterways. A broad discussion describes the basic, special, and unique characteristics of their Coastal culture.

In contrast the second cultural group of the region, the Plateau Indians were nomadic as they moved from area to area seeking the basic necessities to sustain life—food, water, shelter, and security. The Plateau Indians lived east of the Cascade Mountains along the leeward slopes and on the semiarid grasslands of the Columbia Plateau. These interior Indians were not farmers but hunters and food gatherers. Their culture and lifestyle were significantly different from the Coastal Indians.

These Indians lived in temporary structures called a tepee rather than the permanent longhouse of the Coastal group. The men hunted and trapped animals and fished for salmon, while the women dug and gathered berries and camas roots. Both the Plateau and Coastal Indians harvested salmon using a variety of techniques and implements. The Plateau Indian's natural environment was more challenging for their survival. Overall the Plateau Indian was mobile and less wealthy than the Coastal Indians.

The primary objective of this chapter was to help the reader gain an appreciation, understanding, and awareness of the contrasting Coastal and Plateau cultures.