

ir
ce
th
se
is

fi
st
v
h
u
t
c

i

.

Spokane is a tribe in
the Plateau Indians group.

PLATEAU INDIANS

The term *Plateau Indians* is taken from the name of the Columbia Plateau. The Columbia Plateau is a region of highlands through which the Columbia River flows. Some 1,200 miles long, situated in both the United States and Canada, the Columbia River is one of the

largest rivers in North America. It starts in the southeastern part of British Columbia, then flows a meandering route to the Pacific Ocean, forming much of the border between Washington and Oregon. It has many tributaries, including the Snake, Thompson, Okanagan,

pg. 1

Deschutes, Umatilla, Willamette, and Kootenai Rivers. This system receives water from three mountain ranges—the Rocky Mountains, the Cascade Mountains, and the Coast Range. Another large river, the Fraser—also starting in the Rocky Mountains in British Columbia—is not part of the Columbia watershed.

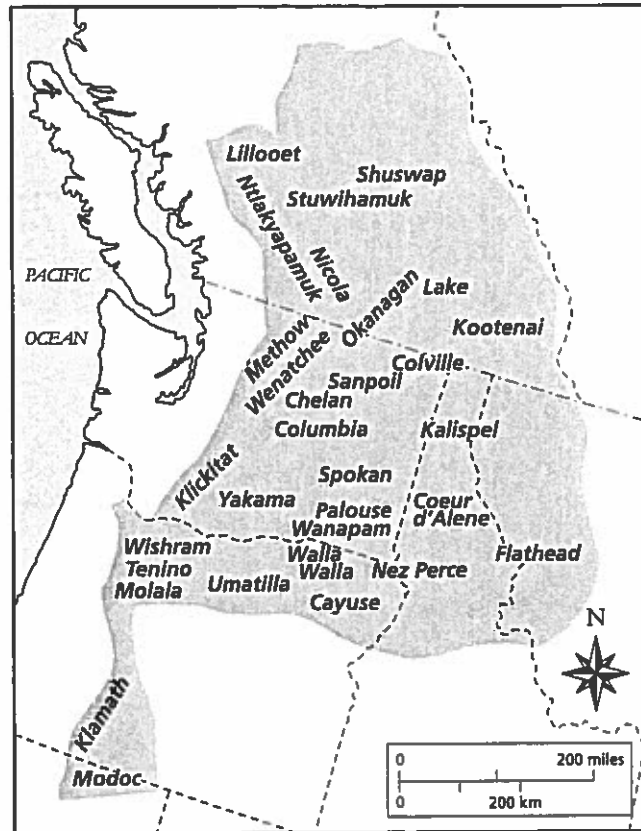
What scholars define as the Plateau Culture Area is situated between the Cascades to the west and the Rockies to the east, the Fraser River to the north and the Great Basin to the south. It includes territory now mapped as southeastern British Columbia, eastern Washington, northeast and central Oregon, northern Idaho, western Montana, and a small part of northern California.

The mountains flanking the Plateau region—the Cascades and the Rockies—catch a great deal of rain and snowfall, making for the great number of rivers and streams. The mountains and river valleys have enough precipitation to support some of the tallest trees in the world. These are evergreen forests of needle-bearing conifers, including pine, hemlock, spruce, fir, and cedar. The giant forests are too dense and shady for much smaller vegetation to grow beneath them.

The Columbia Plateau has little rainfall, since the Cascades block the rain clouds blowing in from the ocean. The land consists mainly of flatlands and rolling hills. Grasses and sagebrush are the dominant vegetation in this part of the culture area.

The sparse ground vegetation of both mountain and plateau meant little game for the Native peoples living there. Some elk, deer, and bear could be found at the edge of the forest. Some antelope and jackrabbits lived out on the dry plains of the plateau. Yet the abundant rivers and streams offered up plentiful food. Among the many different kinds of fish were the salmon that swam upriver from the ocean to lay their eggs. The river valleys also provided plentiful berries, including blackberries and huckleberries. On the grasslands of the plateau, the Indians found other wild plant foods—roots and bulbs, especially from the camas plant, a kind of lily; bitterroot; wild carrots; and wild onions.

Through fishing, hunting, and gathering, Plateau Indians could subsist without farming. In cold weather, most Plateau Indians lived along rivers in villages of semiunderground earth-covered pithouses, which provided natural insulation. In warm weather, most peoples lived in temporary lodges with basswood frames and bulrush-mat coverings, either along the rivers at salmon-spawning time or on the open plains at camas-digging time. Plateau Indians also used the rivers as avenues of trade, with many contacts among different tribes.



The Plateau Culture Area, showing the approximate locations of Indian tribes circa 1500, before displacement by non-Indians (with modern boundaries)

The varying dialects of the Plateau tribes are part of two main language families: Sahaptian (of the Penutian language phylum) and Salishan (of undetermined phylum affiliation). The Plateau Sahaptian-speaking tribes with their own entries in this book are the NEZ PERCE, PALOUSE, UMATILLA, WALLA WALLA, and YAKAMA. The Salishan-speaking tribes with their own entries include the COEUR D'ALENE, FLATHEAD, KALISPEL, and SPOKAN. The related dialects of the KLAMATH and MODOC, two other Plateau tribes with entries, are an isolate of the Penutian phylum, referred to by some scholars as the Lutuamian language. The language of the KOOTENAI, another tribe with its own entry, is an isolate with undetermined phylum affiliation, although it has some similarities to Algonquian.

These are only a few of the tribes making their homes on the Columbia Plateau. Other Sahaptians include the KLICKITAT, Pshwanwapam, Skin, Taidnapam, Tenino, Tyigh, WANAPAM, and Wauyukma. The Molalla language isolate is of the Penutian phylum, related to Sahaptian. Other Plateau Salishans include the Chelan, Columbia, Colville, Entiat, Lake, Lillooet, Methow,

pg 2

S.

SPOKAN

The Spokane, or Spokane, Indians occupied ancestral territory along the Spokane River, a tributary of the Columbia River, in what now is the eastern part of the state of Washington as well as northern Idaho. Their name, pronounced spo-KAN, probably means "people of the Sun." The Spokane are among those Salishan-speaking peoples classified as PLATEAU INDIANS. Other Salishans to the west are considered NORTHWEST COAST INDIANS. For Plateau peoples, fishing the Columbia River and its tributaries—especially for salmon during their freshwater spawning runs—provided a staple food, as did gathering wild roots, such as camas. Like other area tribes, the Spokane lived in cir-

cular dwellings placed over shallow pits and constructed out of pole frames with grass or woven-mat coverings.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had contact with the Spokane in 1805 during their expedition to the American Northwest. Fur trade in the region was developed in the following years by the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company of Canada, as well as by John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. Astor, through the fur trade with western tribes, became the richest man in America.

The Spokane had peaceful relations with non-Indians until the late 1850s. They suffered the impact of small-

pox epidemics in 1846 and 1852-53. They witnessed the Cayuse War of 1847-50, resulting in part from an outbreak of measles among the CAYUSE. They saw the whites break the terms of the Walla Walla Council of 1855. They saw the Yakama War of 1855-56, resulting from the killing by whites of YAKAMA women and children. When miners and settlers unfairly took their lands, they too revolted. They joined the COEUR D'ALENE, Yakama, PALOUSE, and PAIUTE in a general uprising in 1858. This conflict is known as both the Coeur d'Alene War and the Spokane War.

After the war, the Spokane settled on various reservations, including the Spokane Reservation near present-

day Wellpinit, Washington, and the Colville Reservation near present-day Nespelem, Washington. Others joined the FLATHEAD, another Salishan-speaking people, on their reservation near present-day Dixon, Montana.

The completion of the Grande Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in 1941, blocking miles of fish runs, hurt the Spokane economy. The discovery of uranium oxide on the Spokane Reservation in 1954 led to a new source of income for tribal members. Other reservation endeavors are a lumber mill and a fish hatchery. The tribe also operate the Chewelah Casino in Chewelah, Washington, and the Two Rivers Casino near Lake Roosevelt, providing income for other investments.