Western Apache

The word "Apache" comes from the Zuni *apachu*, meaning "enemy." These people are properly known as Ndee, or Dine'ë, "the People." "Western Apache" is a somewhat artificial designation given to an Apache tribe composed, with some exceptions, of bands living in Arizona. After 1850, these bands were primarily the San Carlos, White Mountain, Tonto (divided into northern and southern Tonto by anthropologists), and Cibecue. Apaches spoke southern Athapaskan, or Apachean.

Traditionally, Western Apache bands covered nearly all but the northwesternmost quarter of Arizona. Their territory encompassed an extreme ecological diversity. Today's reservations include Fort Apache (Cibecue and White Mountain); San Carlos (San Carlos); Camp Verde, including Clarkdale and Middle Verde (mostly Tonto, shared with the Yavapai); and Payson. Tontos also live in the Middle Verde, Clarkdale, and Payson communities.

Each of the Western Apache tribes was considered autonomous and distinct, although intermarriage did occur. Tribal cohesion was minimal; there was no central political authority. A tribe was based on a common territory, language, and culture. Each was made up of between two and five bands of greatly varying size. Bands formed the most important Apache unit, which were in turn composed of local groups (35 to 200 people in extended families, themselves led by a headman) headed by a chief. The chief lectured his followers before sunrise every morning on proper behavior. His authority was based on his personal qualities and perhaps his ceremonial knowledge. Decisions were made by consensus. One of the chief's most important functions was to mitigate friction among his people.

Having acquired the horse, the Western Apache groups established a trading and raiding network with at least a dozen other groups, from the Hopi to Spanish settlements in Sonora. Although the Spanish policy of promoting docility by providing liquor to Native Americans worked moderately well from the late 18th century through the early 19th, Apache raids remained ongoing into the 19th century. By 1830, the Apaches had drifted away from the presidios and resumed a full schedule of raiding.

Following the war between Mexico and the United States (1848), the Apaches, who did their part to bring misery to Mexico, assumed that the Americans would continue to be their allies. The Apaches were shocked and disgusted to learn that their lands were now considered part of the United States and that the Americans planned to "pacify" them. Having been squeezed by the Spanish, the Comanches, the Mexicans, and now miners, farmers, and other land-grabbers from the United States, some Apaches were more than ever determined to protect their way of life.

Throughout the 1850s, most of the anti-Apache attention was centered on the Chiricahua. The White Mountain and Cibecue people never fought to the finish with the Americans; out of range of the mines and settlements, they continued their lives of farming and hunting. When Fort Apache was created (1863), these people adapted peacefully to reservation life and went on to serve as scouts against the Tontos and Chiricahuas.

The Prescott gold strike (1863) heralded a cycle of raid, murder, and massacre for the Tonto. By 1865, a string of forts ringed their territory; they were defeated militarily eight years later. A massacre of San Carlos (Aravaipa) women in 1871 led to Grant's Peace Policy, a policy of concentration via forced marches. The result was that
thousands of Chiricahuas and Western Apaches lived on the crowded and disease-ridden San Carlos Reservation. There, a handful of dissident chiefs, confined in chains, held out for the old life of freedom and self-respect. The Chiricahua Victorio bolted with 350 followers and remained at large and raiding for years. More fled in 1881. By 1884, all had been killed or had returned, at least temporarily. In general, the Western Apaches remained peaceful on the reservations while corrupt agents and settlers stole their best land.

The White Mountain people joined Fort Apache in 1879. As the various bands were spuriously lumped together, group distinctions as well as traditional identity began to break down. A man named Silas John Edwards established a significant and enduring religious cult at Fort Apache in the 1920s. Though not exactly Christian, it did substitute a new set of ceremonies in place of the old ones, contributing further to the general decline of traditional life. In 1918, the government issued cattle to the Apaches, and lumbering began in the 1920s. In 1930, the government informed the Apaches that a new dam (the Coolidge) would flood old San Carlos. All residents were forced out, and subsistence agriculture ended for them. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) provided them with cattle and let all Anglo leases expire; by the late 1930s these Indians were stock-herders.

**Further Reading**


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