

Plains Apache

Plains Apaches have also been known to non-natives as Kiowa Apaches, Prairie Apaches, Plains Lipans, and possibly Catakas, Palomas, Wetapahatos, and Paducas. Their self-designation is *Na-ishan Dine'é*, "Our People." Plains Apaches spoke an Athapaskan language.

Ancestors of the historic Plains Apaches may have lived in northeastern Wyoming and western South Dakota as early as the 12th century. They may also have entered the Yellowstone Valley from Canada by 1600. In the early 18th century, the Comanches on the west and the Pawnees on the east forced Apaches living on the central Plains to the south and southwest. Cut off from their fellow Apacheans around 1720, the people known as Plains Apaches may have joined the Kiowa for protection. Although they functioned effectively as a Kiowa band and were a Plains tribe in all senses, they maintained a separate language and never came under the jurisdiction of the Kiowa tribal council.

Sacred bundles, with their associated ceremonies, were a focus of Kiowa religious practice. Plains Apaches adopted the sun dance in the 18th century, although they did not incorporate elements of self-mutilation into the ceremony. Young men also fasted to produce guardian spirit visions. In general, wealth remained in the family through inheritance.

Corpses were buried or left in a teepee on a hill. Former possessions were given away. Mourners cut their hair and mutilated themselves. Before the people acquired horses, they hunted nearby buffalo and ate local roots, berries, seeds, and bulbs. Buffalo became a staple after the mid-18th century. Men also hunted other large and small game. They did not eat bear at all and fish rarely. Women gathered a variety of wild potatoes and other vegetables, fruits, nuts, and berries. Plains Apaches ate dried, pounded acorns and also made them into a drink. Cornmeal and dried fruit were acquired by trade. The buffalo and other animals provided the materials for the usual items such as parfleches and other containers. Points for bird arrows came from prickly pear thorns. The cradle board was a bead-covered skin case attached to a V-shaped frame. Women made shallow, coiled basketry gambling trays and built skin teepees.

During the 18th century, Plains Apaches traded extensively with the upper Missouri tribes. There was also regular trade with New Mexico, where they exchanged meat, buffalo hides, and salt for cornmeal and dried fruit. During the 19th century they traded Comanche horses to the Osages and other tribes. Calendric skins and beadwork were two important Native artistic traditions.

Plains Apaches are probably the Apaches del Norte named in the historical record as the group of Apaches who arrived in New Mexico by the late 18th century. They moved back and forth between New Mexico and the upper Missouri area during the early 19th century, serving as trade intermediaries between New Mexico and the upper Missouri tribes, such as the Mandans and Arikaras. By the early 1850s, they and the Kiowas were spending more time south rather than north of the Arkansas River. They settled on the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation in 1868. In 1901, this reservation was allotted in 160-acre parcels to individual tribal members, with the "surplus" opened to non-native settlement.

Further Reading

Hicks, John D. *The Federal Union: A History of the United States to 1865*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1937; Moquin, Wayne. *Great Documents in American Indian History*. New York: Praeger, 1973; Pritzker, Barry M. *Native America Today: A Guide to Community Politics and Culture*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999.

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