

An introduction to:  
Native Americans of the Rogue Valley



Presented by: North Mountain Park Nature Center

A division of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Department

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# A Note on Authenticity

This booklet is one piece of the North Mountain Park Nature Center's interpretation relating to the role of Native Americans of the Rogue Valley on both an historic and ecological level. Although based on numerous ethnographies, historical accounts, archaeological records, and the opinions and statements of tribal people of today, this booklet is not meant to be a scholarly document. The purpose of this booklet is to form a general picture of what life was like for the Native Americans who lived in and around Ashland prior to contact with Euro-Americans, and their role as stewards of this land.

In attempting this interpretation, certain challenges arose as to which tribes actually lived where, how they lived and what they believed. Most of this difficulty is related to the fact that the tribes of the Rogue Valley – the Shasta, Takelma and Athabaskans had a very short contact period with white settlers before being forcibly removed to reservations in northwest Oregon. Unfortunately, the few ethnographies that were conducted, which provide some of the best written accounts of how people lived, occurred long after the people were removed from their homeland and forced to relinquish their traditional way of life.

It is hoped that this booklet will be a starting place for an ongoing dialogue between Native Americans and anyone interested in exploring how people can learn from the past while looking toward a better, more sustainable and more honorable future for everyone.

We invite any and all comments to this document which will be updated periodically in an effort to reflect the most accurate information available.

# Native Americans of the Rogue Valley

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# Introduction to Native Americans of the Rogue Valley



*A depiction of Shasta people in late summer.*

To the Native American tribes that lived here, the Rogue Valley was not just their home, it was what defined them as a culture and a people. Every story they told, every bit of food they ate, every article of clothing they wore and every object they crafted were directly related to their immediate surroundings. Few of them ever set foot out of this region and so from birth until death, everything they did was associated with the landscape that made up the Rogue Valley. While today this type of geographic isolation may seem excruciatingly limiting, the Native Americans experienced, and were challenged by, their world on so many different levels that this homeland must have seemed enormously larger, more complex, and more precious than it does to many residents living here today.

There were three tribes that called the Rogue Valley home: Shasta, Takelma and Athabaskans. All three spoke different languages and had unique nuances to their cultures, but all shared a way of life based on a hunter/gatherer mode of subsistence and a “seasonal round” pattern of movement. These tribes interacted with each other in order to trade, occasionally to fight, at times to intermarry, and certainly to sort out the use of overlapping foraging areas and hunting grounds.

Although they did not farm, tribes of the Rogue Valley managed the vegetation they relied upon in a variety of significant ways, including the use of fire, selective harvesting, pruning, transplanting, and, in the case of tobacco, cultivation and fertilization. These practices also had a number of positive impacts on the availability of big game and other wildlife.

Local natural resources were also managed on a spiritual level. By ascribing spiritual powers to the plants, animals, rocks, and even clouds, the Native Americans imbued them with a type of “payback” ability whereby their use in a disrespectful or wasteful manner could result in a negative consequence, such as a drought or famine. This “holistic” belief, which placed people on a level playing field with the plants and animals, ensured the sustainable use of resources and an almost complete lack of waste or overexploitation. This belief also led to the requirement that people give back to the land in appreciation for all they were given.

For at least as long as 10,000 years, Native Americans – perhaps including the ancestors of the Shasta that lived along Ashland Creek at the time of the first Euro-American contact – were part of the landscape of the Rogue Valley. Over time, the ecology of the Rogue Valley changed and so did its people, but their basic way of life remained the same. Native Americans traveled from the valley floor to the high mountains hunting deer, gathering willow, burning oak stands, celebrating the return of the salmon, raising families, and mourning the loss of loved ones. Myths and stories were told to the younger generation that they might learn to respect and care for the land and its resources, while the chiefs and medicine women led their tribes down a path of negotiation and spiritual protection.

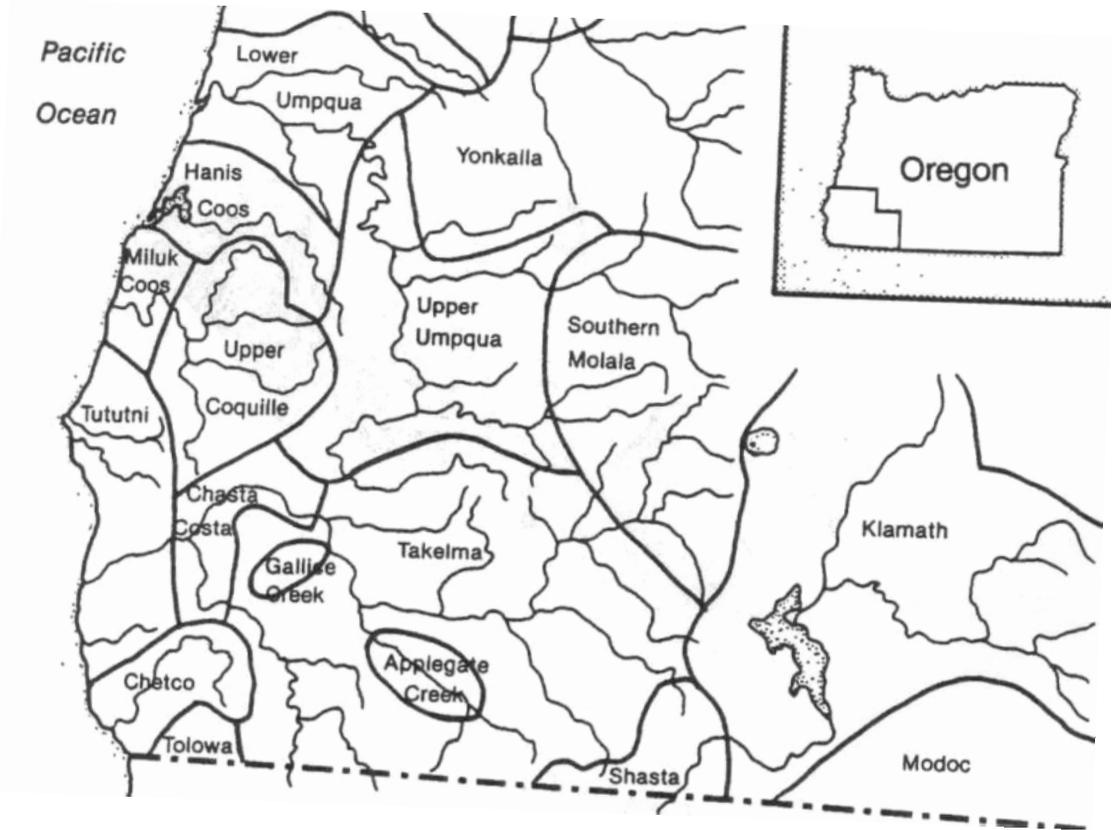
In the mid 1800s, this finely tuned “hunter-gatherer” lifestyle came abruptly into contact with the agriculturally-based, land-hungry, gold-seeking, divinely sanctioned culture of the arriving American pioneers. Unfortunately, the Native’s long-standing culture was under-appreciated and horribly misunderstood. From the settlers’ perspective, the Rogue Valley was a Mecca of gold, timber, and land barely used by the native inhabitants. To the Native Americans, the first settlers must have seemed greedy, wasteful, and spiritually misguided. With the discovery of gold in Jacksonville and the ensuing rush of settlers into the Rogue Valley, the resources that the Native Americans had managed and relied upon for so long quickly became compromised. Salmon runs were impacted by sediment and pollution brought about through gold mining, while game runs disappeared as forests were cut for timber and hungry miners shot at anything with fur. At the same time, camas meadows were destroyed by the newly arriving pigs, and tarweed patches were grazed over by cattle and sheep. Finally, entire villages were overtaken as towns such as Jacksonville and Ashland became established.

The Native Americans fought to keep their land and their livelihood, but the settlers simply did not care about the people and cultures they were destroying. After four years of sporadic fighting and the placement of the Native Americans onto a temporary reservation near Table Rock, all of the tribes of southwestern Oregon were forcibly removed to two reservations – the Siletz and the Grand Ronde – both located along or near the northern Oregon coast. This resulted not only in the loss of their homeland but also the loss of numerous tribal members who had succumbed to new diseases such as measles and smallpox, or who were killed fighting in the Rogue Indian Wars or simply murdered.

After they had been relocated to the foreign land of the reservation, the tribes were forbidden to hunt or fish, to wear their native style of clothing, to engage in any of their spiritual practices, or even to speak their native language. They were forced to learn farming and to survive on a diet of white flour and beef. It was under these conditions that the descendants of the Shasta, Takelma and Athabaskans struggled to maintain their identity as a culture and a people over the past 150 years. In the meantime, much has changed in the use and management of the land and the resources of the Rogue Valley.

# Tribes of the Rogue Valley

Three main groups of Native Americans lived in the Rogue Valley at the time of contact with white settlers in the mid-1800s: Shasta, Takelma and Athabaskans.



## When did they first arrive and where did they live?

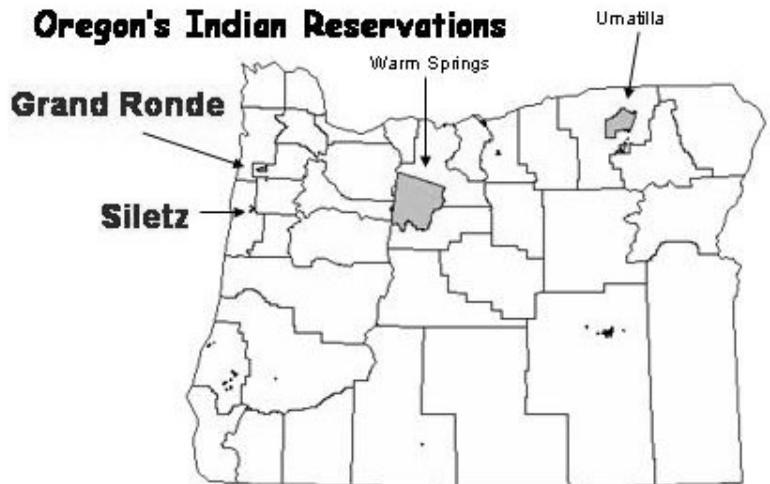
Probably the first to arrive in the region of Southern Oregon and Northern California were the ancestors of the Hokan-speaking Shasta, around 10 to 12,000 years ago. It is believed that Hokan speaking groups had a continuous presence in the Rogue Valley up until the time of contact. Their descendents, the Oregon Shasta, lived along the upper reaches of Bear Creek in southwest Oregon. One of their permanent villages was located along Ashland Creek in present-day Lithia Park. There is evidence of another Oregon Shasta village alongside Emigrant Creek under present-day Emigrant Lake. Three other groups of Shasta lived along the Klamath River in northern California on the south side of the Siskiyou pass.

The second group to settle in the Rogue Valley was comprised of ancestors of the Takelma. At the time of contact, the Penutian-speaking Takelma lived along Bear Creek, east as far as the Cascade Summit, north to the current town of Prospect, and west to the Illinois River.

Last to arrive were Athabaskan-speaking groups, approximately 1500 years ago. There were two bands present at the time of contact, one near Galice Creek and the other along the Applegate River.

Each of these tribes claimed a nuclear territory (homeland) where they maintained a permanent village, usually alongside a river or creek. Villages typically had populations of 20 to 100 people. The upland areas located between villages were seasonally exploited, often by more than one band or tribe.

Virtually all of the surviving Oregon Shasta, Takelma and Athabaskan tribal members were relocated to reservations in northwestern Oregon in 1856 following the Rogue Indian Wars. Today, their descendants are members of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz and Grand Ronde.



*A map of current Native American Indian reservations in Oregon (by county).*

Many of the Shasta descendents who remained in California are today members of the federally recognized Quartz Valley Indian Reservation in Ft. Jones, California.

# Food and the Seasonal Round

One of the most significant differences between the Native Americans of the Rogue Valley and the Euro-Americans who came to “settle” the region had to do with the acquisition of food. The settlers were an agricultural people in contrast to the indigenous tribes whose hunter-gatherer lifestyles were based on moving throughout the region as wild food resources became available and abundant. This subsistence pattern, known as the **Seasonal Round**

## Spring

### Plant foods:

Wild celery, wild parsley,  
wild rhubarb leaves,  
Miner’s lettuce and  
other greens  
camas and ipos bulbs

### Animal Foods:

Bear, deer, elk, ducks and  
geese, salmon, steelhead,  
trout, eel, grasshoppers,  
yellow jacket larvae, crickets,  
crawfish, and mussels



*A depiction of Shasta women gathering camas bulbs in spring. (In actuality, the women would be standing and using the digging sticks' deer-antler handles.)*



*A depiction of Shasta people weaving baskets, mending clothes and playing during the winter months.*

## Winter

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stored and dried;  
Venison that was hunted  
with the use of snowshoes

The seasonal round began in early spring when families or extended families would leave their permanent winter villages and travel to prime root-gathering and fishing sites. \_\_\_\_\_ was a time for gathering green shoots, digging camas and other bulbs, and fishing for the spring runs of salmon. \_\_\_\_\_ was a time for moving to the higher elevations of the valley in search of big game, bulbs and a variety of berries. By \_\_\_\_\_, families returned to mid elevations where they would be busy catching and drying salmon, burning tarweed fields for easy collection of the seeds, and for gathering the enormously important acorn crop. \_\_\_\_\_ was a time for communal deer and elk drives and the processing of the resultant venison. By \_\_\_\_\_ it was time for families to return to their permanent village locations in the lowlands where they would complete the processing of acorns and other foods that were needed to last throughout the cold, wet winter months. \_\_\_\_\_ was also a time to work on repairing and crafting weapons, tools, clothes and a variety of household items, and for the telling stories and visiting other villages.

## Summer

### Plant foods:

Manzanita berries, wild native blackberry, service berry, gooseberries, thimbleberries, chokecherries, three-leaf sumac berries, elderberries, tarweed seeds, grass seeds, wild sunflower seeds

### Animal Foods:

Mountain lion, bighorn sheep, antelope, bobcat, rabbits, squirrels, beaver, grasshoppers, yellow jacket larvae, crickets, crawfish, and mussels



*A depiction of Shasta people burning tarweed and collecting roasted grasshoppers and tarweed seeds..*



*A depiction of Shasta people gathering firewood and berries and pounding acorns.*

## Fall

### Plant foods:

Black and white oak acorns, ponderosa pinenuts and hazelnuts

### Animal Foods:

Salmon, steelhead, trout, eel, ducks, geese, grasshoppers, yellow jacket larvae, crickets, crawfish, and mussels

# Clothing and Decoration



*Men's winter clothing*

Similar to most cultures today, Native American tribes of the Rogue Valley had two sets of clothing: “everyday” wear and “dress up” attire for ceremonies, visiting and other special occasions. Women’s everyday wear included a double skirt made of buckskin covered by an apron (made of pine nuts, grass or buckskin), a sleeveless poncho-style shirt, and a basket cap. In winter, fur-lined moccasins and shawls or robes made of raccoon, fox or wild cats would be added for warmth. Women’s formal wear included stylized skirts fringed with pine beads, dentalium shells, and grass braidwork as well as belts embedded with porcupine quillwork.

For the men, everyday wear would be a breechclout or nothing at all. Cooler weather called for the addition of a pair of buckskin leggings, held up with a belt that went through a loop at the top of each legging. Buckskin shirts, either short or long sleeved, came down to the knees. Like the women, men would utilize fur in the form of robes and lined moccasins for warmth during winter. Men’s formal wear was not as elaborate as the women’s but could include fringed shirts or leggings and decorated moccasins. Men also wore ceremonial headbands made of colorful bird feathers.



*Men's summer clothing*

Children often moved about naked or with a simple breechclout during the warmer months. As the weather cooled, they would utilize a buckskin shirt that hung down to the knees. Moccasins and fur robes were also worn during the cold winter months.

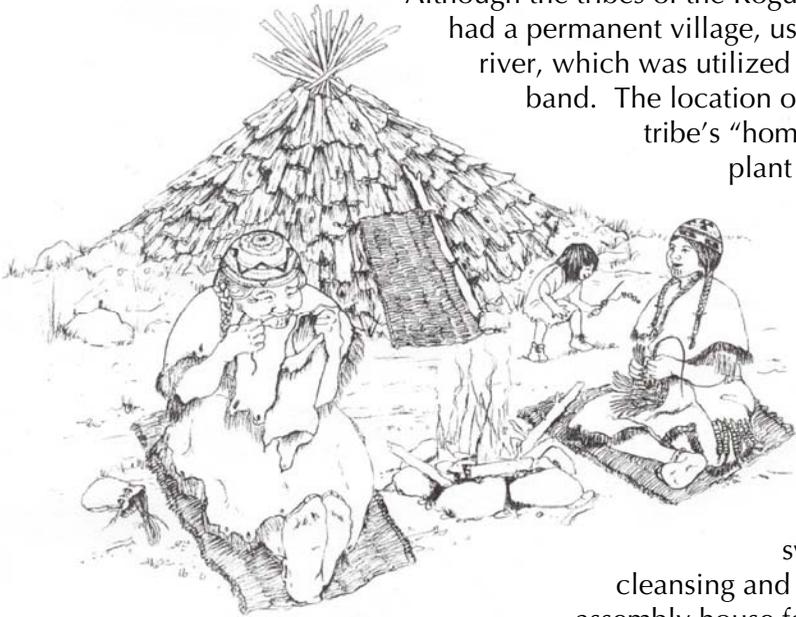


*Women's fall and spring clothing*

For decoration, women adorned their chins with clay tattoos which were applied with an obsidian blade at puberty. Men wore tattoos on their arms for the measurement of dentalium, a type of shell currency. Both men and women wore necklaces and bracelets made of shells or pine nuts and pierced-nose ornaments made of shell or feather.

# Shelter

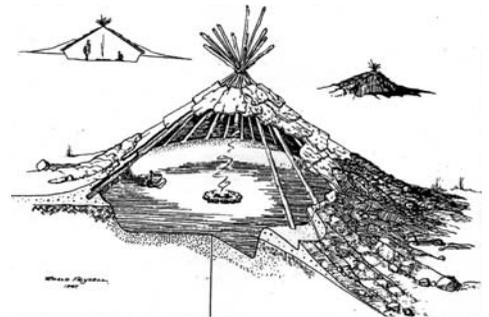
Although the tribes of the Rogue Valley traveled seasonally, each had a permanent village, usually located near a stream or river, which was utilized during the winter by the entire band. The location of the winter village defined a tribe's "homeland" and was surrounded by the plant and animal resources that were "theirs" and could not be taken by other tribes or bands without permission. Villages were made up of as few as 15 or as many as 100 people. Shasta villages were made of individual family dwellings, known as "ummas", family sweathouses used for ritual cleansing and general health, a centrally located assembly house for meetings and dances, and a women's menstrual and childbirth hut.



*Shasta members sitting in front of an umma*

The Shasta umma was conical in shape, framed by a series of tall pine poles. The outside of the umma was covered with bark shingles, and the interior was insulated with strips of tule or pine needles. The inside of the umma was excavated down to a depth of three feet which helped to insulate it and give it more height. A fire pit was located in the center of the umma, and it was around this that everyone slept on tule mats with fur blankets. Possessions were stored along the outer edges or hung in the rafters formed by the interior ribs. Takelma winter homes (and some Shasta) were rectangular in shape.

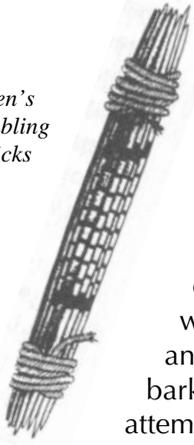
Unlike the teepees of the plains, ummas were not transported. When families left in the spring to locate the early runs of salmon, the very young and very old members would remain behind in the permanent village. Those that left their winter home would construct temporary willow or brush shelters as they traveled throughout the rest of the year in search of fish, game and a variety of plant foods.



*Umma construction*

# Toys and Games

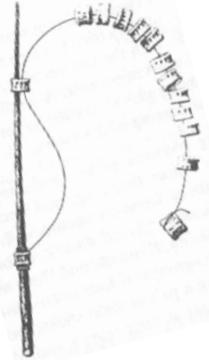
*Men's  
gambling  
sticks*



As with people everywhere, the Native Americans of the Rogue Valley provided their children with a variety of toys, and everyone participated in game playing. Some games, such as the adult gambling games, were quite serious and were associated with elaborate rituals and taboos.

Other games, played by children, were used to teach life skills that would be essential in later years. One such game was played by the Shasta using a disk of ponderosa pine. The disk was rolled down a hill as young boys shot at it with their toy bow and arrows. Similar to this was the hoop and pole game, whereby a hoop made of a pliable shoot or bark strip was rolled on the ground as the youngsters attempted to throw a spear through it – imitating spear fishing.

Toys could be fashioned out of any number of readily available materials. The ball and pin game, whereby players attempted to catch a series of hoops onto an attached stick, was made out of a wooden pin and twelve salmon vertebrae attached to a cordage string. Other toys, such as dolls and stick animals, could easily be fashioned from common plants including cattail and willow. Even acorns could be made into small tops.



*Ball and pin game*

# Stories and Myths

The Native Americans of the Rogue Valley spoke languages that could be traced back thousands of years, but none of them ever developed a written language. Instead, they passed down critical historical and cultural information through oral myths and stories. For this reason, stories were much more than a form of entertainment – they were serious lessons that explained the origin of the natural world, tribal history, and codes of conduct. For the Shasta, myths were also a timeless and sacred way of presenting a higher truth.



Almost without exception, stories and myths were told during the dark winter months. Usually told by elderly women, stories and myths would be repeated over and over so that none of the details would be lost. As a way of keeping children focused, storytellers would ask their audience to chime in with a word or phrase at frequent intervals. Some storytellers would have their young audience repeat each line of the story as a way of ensuring that it would be remembered. All tribes have significant mythological characters, a favorite of which is coyote. For the Shasta, coyote is lusty, wily, greedy, cowardly, and sometimes foolish but extremely smart, using his wit to help others.

# Household Items

Because the tribes of the Rogue Valley were very mobile, moving from the valley floor into the high mountains and back each year, their inventory of household items was fairly small. Rather than traveling with all of their household goods, the tribes reproduced many items at each new location or used them only at their permanent village site.

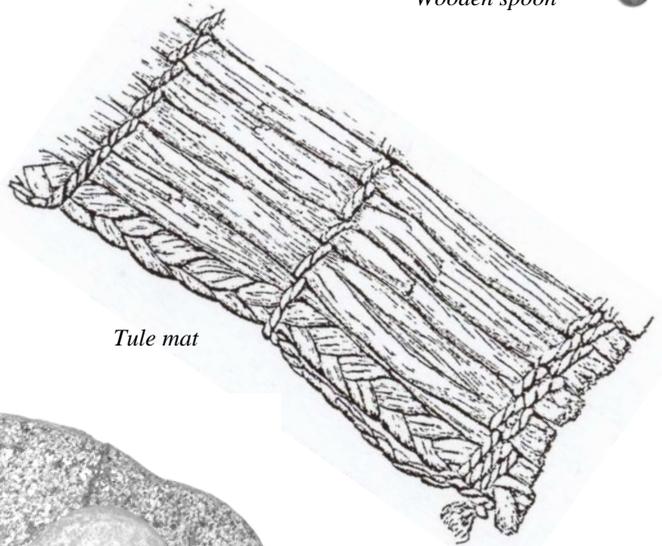
Some items that were critical and in use at all times included baskets (made of willow and other plant materials), sleeping and sitting mats woven from tule (bullrush) or cattail, metates (grinding stones) and manos (hand tools) used to process seeds and nuts, spoons made of wood or antler, cordage used to lash any number of items, and sharp obsidian blades.



*Wooden spoon*

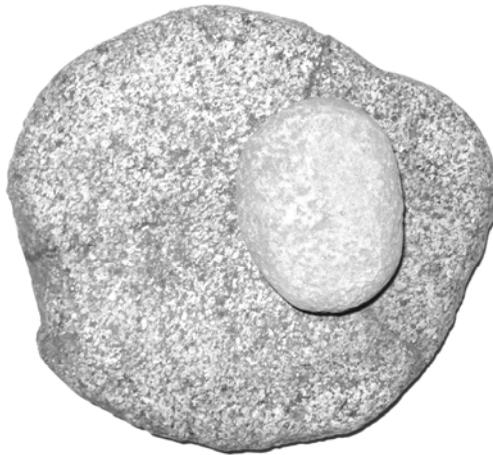


*Cordage and cordage keeper*



*Tule mat*

While most of these items were small enough to transport, some of the heavier items, such as the metates, would have been formed wherever they were needed and then stored at that location for seasonal use.



*Metate (grindstone)  
with a mano  
(hand tool)*



*Water-tight cooking basket*

# Tools and Weapons

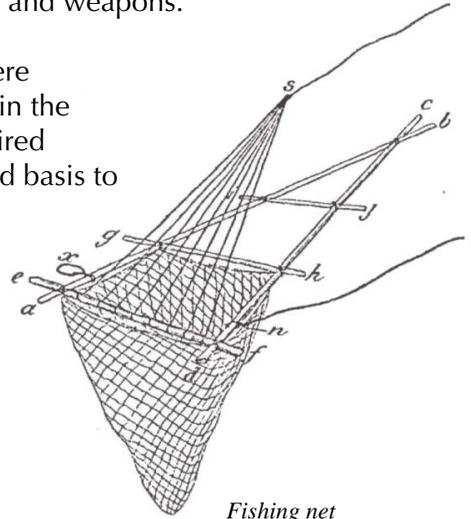
The landscape of the Rogue Valley provided Native Americans with a variety of raw materials that could be shaped into all manner of tools and weapons.



*Fish club*

Although gold and other metals were available, these were not utilized in the manufacture of any items. Clay fired pottery was used on a very limited basis to make vessels and figurines.

All of their tools and weapons were produced from three main resources: plants, rocks and animals. To do so required extensive knowledge as to where these resources could be found, as well as a means of acquiring them and then of forming them into useful items.

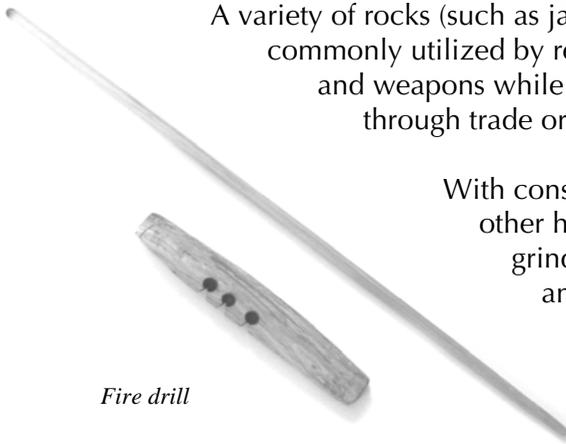


*Fishing net*

Because there were no written texts, children learned these skills through careful observation and playful imitation of their elders.

Plant stems and fibers were used in the manufacture of numerous tools and weapons, including shelters, digging sticks, fire drills, cordage (rope), spears, fishing nets, fish weirs, fish drying racks, bows, arrows, deer snares, gambling sticks and children's toys.

A variety of rocks (such as jasper, agate, and basalt) were readily available and commonly utilized by residents of the Rogue Valley in the making of tools and weapons while others, such as obsidian, had to be obtained through trade or long-distance travel.



*Fire drill*

With considerable labor, people could shape basalt and other hard stone into bowls, pipes, grinding slabs, grinding manos and metates, hammer stones, ax heads, and wedges. Soapstone was used to make pipes and other small items.

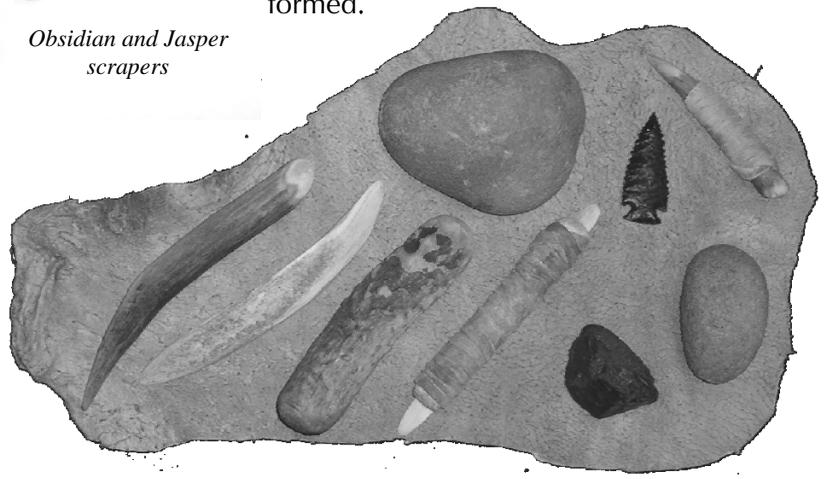


*Bow*



*Obsidian and Jasper scrapers*

Stones were also used in the process of flint-knapping to turn large pieces of obsidian and jasper into points and knife blades. This was done by hammering large chunks of rock with stones and antlers until fine pieces were formed.



*Flint knapping kit*



*Fish hooks*



Animal parts, including hides, fur, claws, hooves, teeth, bones and antlers were critical in the manufacture of needles, awls, wedges, fishhooks, digging stick handles, scrapers, bow strings, arrows quivers and ceremonial decorations, among other items.

Deer antlers were also part of the all-important flint-knapping kit.

# Hunting and Fishing



Because the Native Americans of the Rogue Valley did not raise domestic animals for food, their main source of protein came from the game they hunted. Deer, hunted year-round, was their most important game meat, most commonly being dried as jerky for long-term storage. Elk and bear meat were also important sources of protein-rich food. In addition to the meat they provided, game animals were utilized in the making of numerous tools and household items.

The main tool of the hunter was the bow and arrow, which replaced the atlatl approximately 2,000 years ago. An atlatl was a long spear-like tool that was launched with an additional hand tool. Hunting was done on foot (horses were not part of the pre-contact landscape of the Rogue Valley), often with the aid of trained hunting dogs. Hunting was almost always done by the men

of the tribe with the exception of the deer drives, where women participated. Because hunting was such a critical component to their subsistence, hunters were very careful in the preparation of their weapons and in the mindset they brought to the hunt. Hunters often spent days in ritual cleansing to prepare for an important hunt. Numerous taboos existed which related to hunting, particularly in the way hunters needed to share meat with the entire village. For the Shasta, their overriding respect for all animals ensured that hunters honored and thanked the animals that were killed.



Animals hunted and trapped by Rogue Valley tribes included deer, elk, black bear, grizzly bear, cougar, bobcat, antelope, big horn sheep, rabbit, fox, beaver, mink and squirrel.

Salmon and steelhead, which provided another important source of protein, were caught with the

aid of traps, spears, weirs, nets, hooks and lines and drives. Spring and fall runs provided an abundance of fish which could be eaten fresh or dried for winter.

The Shasta also had a great respect for the salmon they caught, evidenced in their protection of the spawning grounds and in their first-salmon ceremonies. Fish that were utilized by Rogue Valley tribes included salmon, steelhead, trout, and eel.



# Gathering and Processing Plants

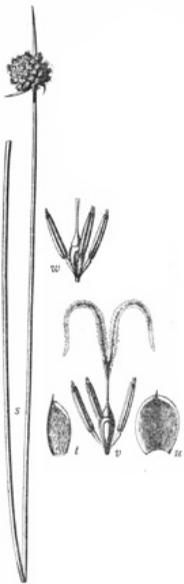


Native Americans of the Rogue Valley, like indigenous people everywhere, had an intimate knowledge of the plants in their region. This knowledge was gained over thousand of years as people experimented to see which plants were edible, which had medicinal value, which could be counted on to make the sturdiest bows, and which could be formed into beautiful baskets and caps.

The gathering and processing of plant materials was primarily the work of the women who could do so while caring for young children. Men, however, worked with a number of specific plant materials in the making of bows, arrows, and cordage for fish nets and deer snares, items that, due to taboos, Shasta women were not allowed to craft.



While all women had a thorough working knowledge of commonly used plants, medicine women also had extensive knowledge of a variety of plants used for healing and for ceremonial purposes.



The timing as to when the needed plant materials were available helped dictate the movement of tribes throughout the year. Shoots of willow that grew along the streambeds, for example, had to be gathered in early spring, while berries that grew in the higher mountains were not available until later in the summer. During the fall, tribal members knew it was time to travel back to the lower elevations to gather the falling acorns and to burn tarweed fields and then collect the seeds.



# Ceremonies and Spirituality

For the Native Americans of the Rogue Valley, the world was a spiritual place that required serious attention. While people related to and felt protected by their personalized guiding spirit, they also believed that all living things were imbued with a spirit. Numerous rituals and taboos, including the first salmon and puberty celebrations, helped ensure that the spirits that surrounded them were adequately acknowledged and respected.

Because it was believed that spirits could do harm as well as good, it was necessary to be able to enter the world of the spirits and to function within their

realm. To do so, the Shasta utilized a Shaman, usually a woman, who was able to communicate directly with the spirit world. The Shaman was called in at any time that there was serious discord or illness, conditions which were thought to be related to spiritual disharmony.

Finally the overseer of all of Earth's spirits was the Great Spirit, whom the Shasta believed had long ago brought their people to their ancestral homelands. The Great Spirit was the receiver of the prayers of the people and the one who guided people's personal spirits. By tuning in with the desire of the Great Spirit for balance and harmony, people were able to maintain a sustainable way of life among themselves and all of the plant and animal creatures of their homeland for hundreds and even thousands of years.



# Resources

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*The Shasta. Bulletin of the American Museum of Nat. History*

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*Handbook of the Indians of California*  
*Overview of the Environment of Native Inhabitants or SW OR ...*  
*Primitive Pragmatists: The Modoc Indians of Northern California*  
*Cultural Resource Overview of the Siskiyou National Forest*  
*The Takelma and their Athapaskan Neighbors*  
*Takelma and Athapaskan Lifeways and History*  
*Shastan Peoples*  
*Survival and Adaptation among the Shasta Indians*  
*Handbook of N. Am. Indians Vol. 7 NW Coast Tribes*  
*The Shasta Indians of California and their Neighbors*

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*Survival Arts of the Primitive Paiutes*  
*The Indians of SW Oregon: An Ethnohistorical Review*  
*Little Applegate River WS Analysis*  
*Summary Report of the 1989 Obsidian-sourcing Project*  
*The Windom Site: A Persistent Place in the W. Cascades of S. OR*

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*Plants and the people: the Ethnobotany of the Karuk Tribe*  
*Native American Ethnobotany*  
*Various SOHS and other published articles*

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*The Way we Lived*  
*Native Ways*

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*Cultural Ecology of the Ashland Crk. WS Prehistory-1929*  
*In Search of the Intangible: Geophyte Management...Vol 1 and 2*

# Future Topics

-look for these topics in upcoming editions of this booklet

## Political Structure –

## Trade –

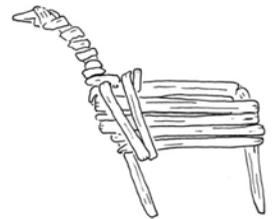
items they did not have access to?



**End of a way of life** - A look at the impacts of miners and settlers on the indigenous people of the Rogue Valley, the ensuing Rogue Indian Wars, and the forced relocation of all of the tribes of southwestern Oregon onto reservations

## Change and adaptation

## Re-establishing cultural traditions



## Looking ahead