



Chinook

Native Americans of Oregon

4th Grade Social Studies

Climate & Environment

The Chinook Native American tribe lived in the Lower Columbia Region. The Lower Columbia Region covers the northwest corner of today's state of Oregon. The area includes the rocky beaches and shores a few miles north and south of the mouth of the Columbia River, the Columbia River shores to the Cascade Mountains, and down into the Willamette Valley.

The mild climate of the Lower Columbia Region is very wet, misty, and foggy with occasional sun. This mild region is not hot or cold. The average year-round temperature is between 48-68°. It usually does not snow in this region. If it does snow, it is usually high in the mountains. The Willamette Valley occasionally gets a snowstorm severe enough to blanket it with snow.

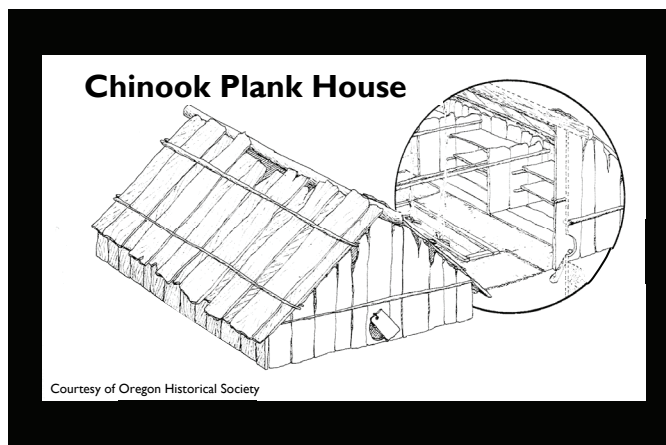


Special Points of Interest:

- The Chinook did not have horses. If they wanted to travel, it was either by foot or by canoe up and down the Pacific Ocean or on the Columbia River.
- The Chinook would apply fish oil and bear grease all over their bodies. Not only did the women think this was very beautiful, but it also kept the fleas and mosquitoes away.
- The Chinook were a very aggressive tribe. They had so much food that other tribes would try to steal it.

Shelter

The Chinook tribe lived in permanent villages along the banks of the Columbia River. The village was broken up into plank houses that contained as many as three families per house. The plank houses measured 40 feet wide and about 80 feet long. The homes were dug into the ground one to five feet deep.



Inside the home, each family had its own fire pit. This is where most of the daily activities took place. One wall of the house was lined with bunks. These bunks were used for beds. Also inside the house were racks of drying fish, stores of food, and most of their possessions.

Faun Rae Hosey, artist. From Jeff Zucker, Kay Hummel & Bob Høgfoss
Oregon Indians: Culture, History & Current Affairs, An Atlas & Introduction
(Portland: Western Imprints, The Press of the Oregon Historical Society, 1983).

Food

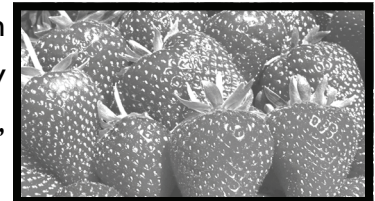
The small region the Chinook lived in had many different environments. Each environment had something special to offer the Chinook. One of the most important environments in this area was the sea, beaches, and tide pools of the Pacific Ocean. This provided the Chinook with a year-round food supply of sea lions, seals, mussels, Roman purple snails, clams, and crab.

This region also had the Columbia River that provided salmon, steelhead, and trout. Another environment within this region was the mountains along the Columbia River. The low-



rising Coastal Range Mountains and the towering Cascade Mountains offered a wide variety of small and large game such as elk, black-tailed deer, beaver, black bear, cougar, otter, squirrel, muskrat, rabbit, and chipmunk.

Lastly, the Lower Columbia Region had the Willamette Valley and its marshes and grassy meadows. This rich environment provided the Chinook with many different plants and bulbs like the Wapato (similar to a potato), lupine, camas bulbs, bracken fern, wild onions, and edible thistle. The Chinook would also harvest many different kinds of berries to eat. The berries they picked were blackberries, strawberries, blueberries, huckleberries, thimbleberries, and salmonberries.



Clothing

Since the climate of the Lower Columbia region was so mild, the natives didn't have a need for a large variety of clothing. During the warmer months, the women wore short wrap-around skirts or aprons made of shredded cedar bark. These skirts looked very much like a grass hula-skirt. They also wore a cape over the shoulders made of woven rushes. During the colder months, women would wear fur robes, woven hats, and rain cloaks made of rushes. The women would also wear elk-hide dresses and beautiful woven hats.

The men did not need many clothes. In the warmer months, they wore an elk-hide breech cloth held up by a woven belt. When it got colder, they would wear elk-hide shirts and leggings. Like the women, they would also wear fur robes, woven hats, rain cloaks, and sometimes a blanket to keep warm. The men and women seldom wore moccasins.

The Chinook were called the flathead tribe because they flattened their babies' heads. For the first year of life, the Chinook strapped their babies to a special cradleboard that flattened their heads. The face remained flat from the nose to the crown of the head through adulthood.