



# Canada's First Peoples



[First Peoples](#)

[Contact & Conflict](#)

[Treaties & Change](#)

[The Metis & Rebellion](#)

[Production Credits](#)

[First Peoples Menu](#)  
[The Canada Site.com](#)  
[Boer War Museum](#)  
[Coming Back Alive](#)  
[Goldi Productions Ltd](#)  
[The Store](#)  
[Email Us](#)

## The Plateau People

[Groups in this Region](#)  
 [Food / Hunting / Tools](#)  
 [Transportation / Migration](#)  
 [Religion / Ceremonies / Art / Clothing](#)  
 [Family / Social Structure / Leadership](#)  
 [Tribal Relations / War](#)

The Plateau peoples lived in a small region that included the southern interior of British Columbia and Alberta.

### The Environment

- Even though the plateau region of Canada was one of the smaller areas, it was still very diverse in terms of geography.
- It encompassed the Columbian Plateau region of British Columbia between the coastal region of the province and the Rocky Mountains.
- The First Peoples of the Plateau region lived in an area of Canada that was dominated by the Rocky Mountains and their valleys.
- The territory of the Plateau people also included expanses of forests, and many natural waterways (rivers and lakes).
- Boreal forests, with mostly coniferous trees, dominated the landscape of the Plateau region.
- There were also many lakes in the area.
- Some of the largest and most important lakes in the region were located in the Okanagan valley.
- Rivers were the most important natural resource to the Plateau people, because of their abundance of pacific salmon during the spring and fall salmon runs.
- The three most important rivers in the area were the Thompson River, the Kootenay River and the Columbia River.



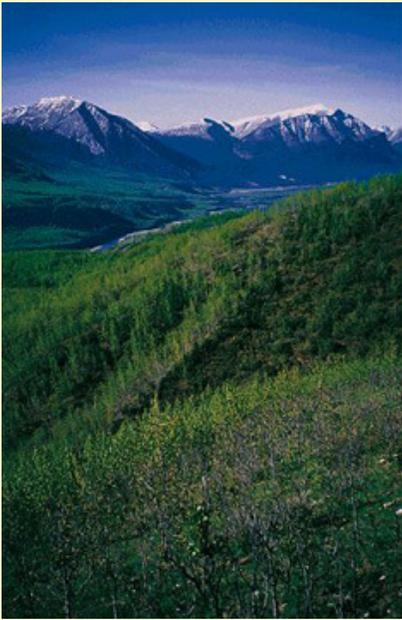
*Rocky Mountains and a lake*



*Chilcotin, BC*



*Chilcotin Mountain Park, BC*



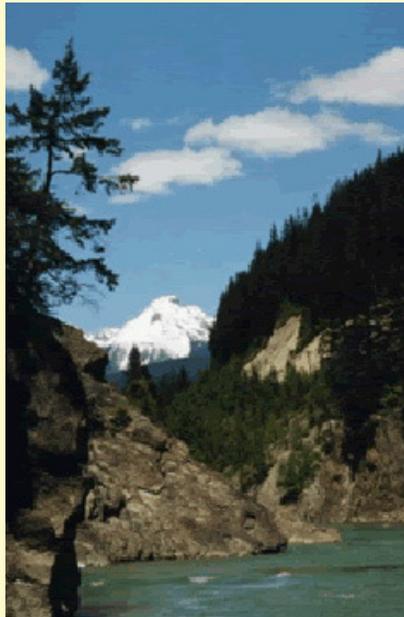
*Boreal forest*



*A typical Okanagan Valley lake*



*River in a Rocky Mountain valley*



*Columbia River*



*Thompson River*



*Kootenay River*

## Settlements and Housing

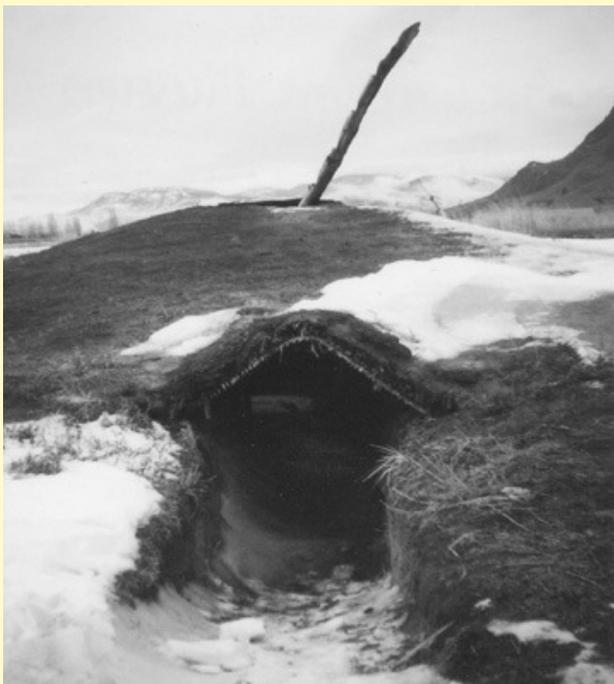
- The people of the Plateau region were semi-nomadic, meaning they moved around in search of food. Therefore, they needed shelters that were easy to take down and set up.
- They lived in one of three shelters, depending on the season: a pit house, a tipi, or a tule-mat lodge.



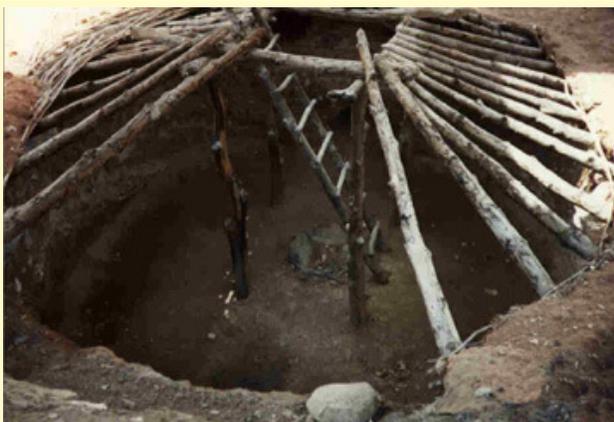
*Example of a pit house*

### Housing - the Pit House

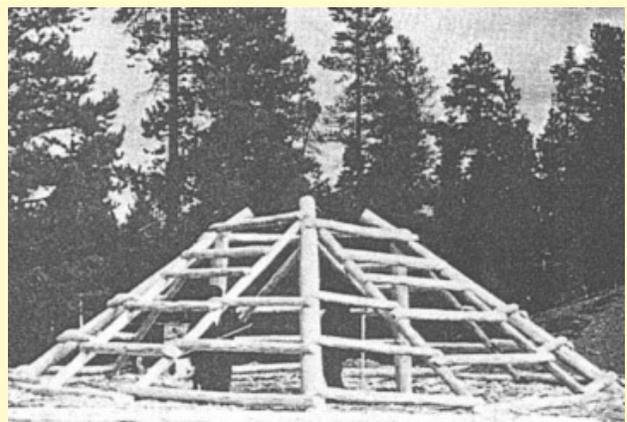
- Pit houses were used mostly during the winter months, although some might have been used all year.
- A pit house was a shelter built mostly below ground with an entrance and ladder at the top.
- The first step in constructing a pit house was to dig a 1-2 metre deep pit into the ground using a wooden digging stick or an elk scapula shovel.
- The walls and frame of the pit house were built with logs and sealed (for insulation) with dirt and grasses.
- The domed roof frame was also made out of wooden poles, and then covered with layers of timber, bark and earth.
- The entrance into a pit house was usually via a ladder through a hole in the roof. However, some pit houses had entrances in the side of the roof.
- Several families lived in each pit house. Most pit houses were 8-10 metres in diameter, but a Chief's pit house could be twice as large.



*Side entrance pit house*



*Pit house during construction*



*Construction of pit house roof frame*

### Housing - the Tipi

- The summer shelter for the Plateau people was usually an above ground shelter such as a tipi or tule mat lodge.
- Plateau tipis were similar to the tipis built by their

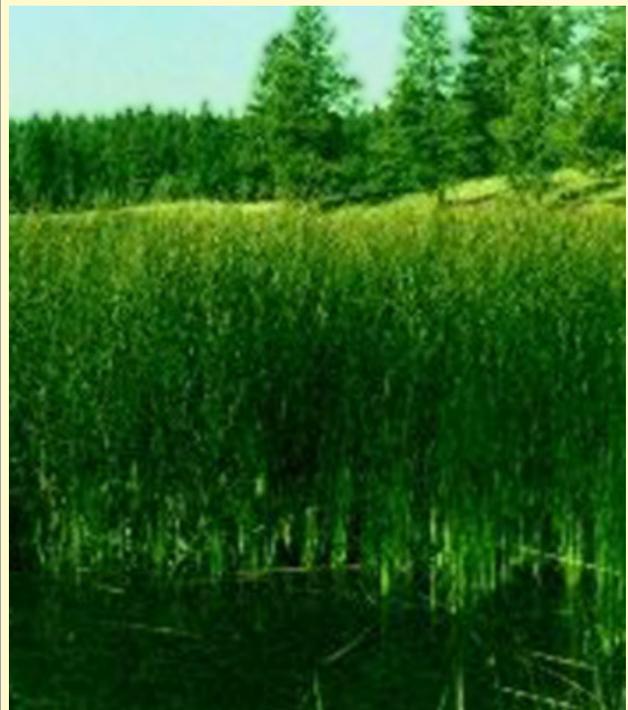


*Plateau tipi*

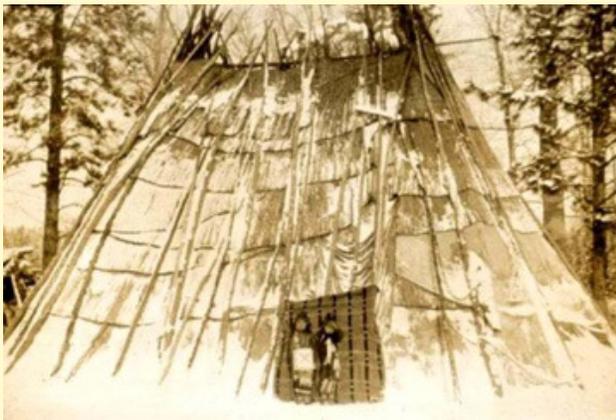
- neighbours - the Plains people.
- It was mostly the Ktunaxa people who built these tipis, as they lived the closest to the Plains people who greatly influenced their culture.
- The Plateau people built covered wooden frame tipis-like the Plains people.
- However, unlike the Plains people who covered their tipis with animal hides, the Plateau people mostly used tule (bulrush) reed mats.



*Ktunaxa tule mat tipi*



*Tule marsh*



*Tule mat lodge*

**Housing - Tule Mat Lodges**

- The summer shelter for the Plateau people was usually an above ground shelter such as a tipi or tule mat lodge.
- Tule mat lodges were essentially large, oblong-shaped tipis, constructed using the same materials.
- They had a wooden frame, covered with mats of tule or other grass.
- Tule reeds were used in the construction of tipis and lodges, because they were strong, durable reeds that were readily available in the area.

**Housing - Lean-tos**

- 'Lean-tos' were temporary shelters built by the Plateau people.
- They were made out of poles and tule brush mats, similar to the construction of a tipi.



*Lean-to*

- However, they were built to lean against a solid frame, and were intended to be very temporary.



*Winter pit house village*

**Seasonal Villages**

- The people of the Plateau region moved around and lived in seasonal villages.
- During the warmer months, groups of related families migrated together in search of food. They generally lived in small villages or village clusters near berry patches or good hunting and fishing grounds.
- In the summer, they usually lived above ground in either reed mat tipis or tule mat lodges.
- During the winter months, the Plateau people settled in larger, more permanent villages.
- A winter village either consisted of one large community pit house, or several smaller pit houses. Sometimes the pit houses were connected with a tunnel.



*Ktunaxa tipi encampment*

[Groups in this Region](#)  
 [Food / Hunting / Tools](#)  
 [Transportation / Migration](#)  
 [Religion / Ceremonies / Art / Clothing](#)  
 [Family / Social Structure / Leadership](#)  
 [Tribal Relations / War](#)

[Back to the top](#)

[Back to Canada's First Peoples Menu](#)

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