



Canada's First Peoples

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The Plateau People

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

Religion

- The people of the Plateau believed strongly that there were spirits inhabiting all living and non-living things.
- Some of the spirits were bad; some of the spirits were good, and they were everywhere.
- The people had a strong spiritual relationship with nature, and held animals in high regard. Some of the most important ones were deer, coyotes, and horses.
- Shamans
 - The most important religious leaders in Plateau culture were the Shamans.
 - The Shamans had special powers to heal the sick, control the hunt, and predict the future.
 - They could do so by communicating with the spirit world.
- Myths
 - They had many myths and legends that were passed on through generations, mainly involving the creator known as 'Coyote'.
 - The belief was that Coyote was responsible for bringing salmon up the river every spring and fall, and for transforming people into their present day form.
- Adolescence Vigils
 - During adolescence all Plateau people went alone on spiritual vigils.
 - They fasted and prayed, in hopes that a guardian spirit would appear to them in a vision.



Kootenay River



Rocky mountains

Ceremonies

- The Plateau people held ceremonies throughout the year to mark special occasions.
- One important time of the year for the Plateau people was the arrival of spring. They held celebrations at the start of spring to mark the first salmon run or the appearance of the first berries.
- The ceremonies involved a lot of music and dancing which were both used to summon up religious powers.
- It was mainly singing, but they used other instruments too like bird-bone flutes, rattles (deer hooves), sticks striking boards, and hide covered wooden drums.



Nlaka'pamux ceremonial headdress

The Winter Guardian Spirit Dance

- Every year the Okanagan, the Nlaka'pamux, the Secwepemc, and the Stl'at'imx held what was called 'The Winter Guardian Spirit Dance', hosted by a Shaman.
- It involved several days of dancing, and healing the sick.
- Essentially it was a way to show the people how they communicated with the spirit world.



Secwepemc drum

The Sun Dance

- The Ktunaxa people, who lived fairly close to the Plains people, also held Sun Dances (like the Plains people).
- It involved singing and dancing, fasting, and spiritual visions.



Nlaka'pamux ceremonial headdress

Art

The Plateau People's art was meant for both the spiritual and the everyday.



Okanagan rock painting

Rock Paintings

- Rock paintings, or pictographs, were common in the southern interior of British Columbia.
- The paint was made out of red ochre pigments mixed with animal oil or fish eggs.
- They were paintings of human or animal forms, or spiritual figures (such as the picture on the left).



Interior Salish women weaving baskets

Weaving

- The women of the Plateau region were skilled weavers. They wove baskets, blankets, mats, and clothing using goat's wool and bark.
- Blankets and Mats
 - The Interior Salish made brightly coloured blankets.
 - They were made from goat's wool woven in a zigzag pattern with different coloured rags and twine.
- Baskets
 - Baskets were used for carrying goods, storage, and cooking.
 - They were made out of birch bark, split roots (spruce or cedar trees).
 - Baskets were used to collect food, like berries.
 - Most baskets were woven with geometric patterns or pictures of animals.
 - One common type of basket was called a 'coiled basket' where each row was woven into the previous one. This gives the look of a continuous spiral.



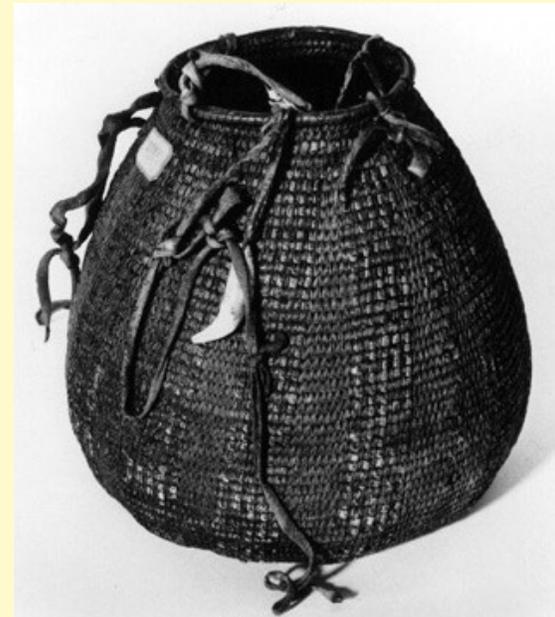
Interior Salish mat



Beaded basket



Woven bag



Woven basket



Tsilhqot'in basket



Coiled basket

Carvings

- Carvings were made out of stone, bone or antler.
- Stone carvings were mostly animal designs, like bears or birds, or human figures.



Interior Salish human figure bowl



Beaded necklace

Clothing

- Beadwork
 - The people used beads to decorate a lot of their clothing. Most of the beads were made out of soapstone.
- Painting
 - They also decorated their clothing with paint.
 - Usually they used geometric patterns to represent different things like:
 - Blue squares represented a lake.
 - Red lines represented the earth.



Beaded moccasins



Nlaka'pamux painted rawhide bag

Clothing



Woman scraping an animal hide

- The women of the Plateau region were responsible for making all the clothing for their families, which included dresses, leggings, shirts, jackets, and robes.
- They used tanned hides, grasses, and softened bark.

Animal Skins

- The most common animal hides used for clothing were muskrat, beaver, and deerskin.
- Before they could use the animal hides for clothing, the women had to go through a lengthy process to prepare and tan the hides.
- They also made use of the animal furs for warmer winter clothing.
- Capes were usually made out of animal skin or animal fur. They were designed to protect against the elements.
- Moccasins were most commonly made out of deerskin, although salmon skin was used as well.
- Moccasins were often beaded for decoration.



Woman's deerskin dress



Fur poncho



Leather mittens



Fur cape



Leather moccasins

Grass and Softened Bark

- Woven clothing was usually used when animal skins were in short supply.
- It was also worn mostly in the summer and rainy times of year.
- Woven capes were normally used during ceremonies.



Woven Nlaka'pamux cape

Men's Clothing

- The men wore leggings that were either made from animal hide or grasses.
- Shirts were usually made out of animal skins, and some groups, like the Ktunaxa, decorate their shirts with long fringes.
- The Nlaka'pamux people painted their clothing using dyes from coloured clays and plants.
- Plateau men also wore breechcloths and moccasins.



Nlaka'pamux man's cape



Nlaka'pamux leather leggings



Nlaka'pamux grass leggings



Leather shirt



Nlaka'pamux man's shirt



Leather breechcloth



Deerskin moccasins

Women's Clothing

- The women wore skirts or dresses.
- Dresses were often decorated with beadwork and long

fringes.

- Dentalia shells, ochre paint, porcupine quills, seeds, and feathers were also used as decoration.
- It was common to paint clothing with designs that symbolized an object, place, or event.
- For example, the images on this young girl's dress were painted to tell a story.
- Common painted symbols:
 - Red ochre lines, drawn along the seams (Earth lines) were good luck.
 - A Cross represented the Morning Star.
 - A blue circle represented clouds.
 - Red dots represented stars.
 - A red Cross represented the sun.
- The women also wore moccasins.



Nlaka'pamux young girl's dress



Nlaka'pamux grass skirt



Nlaka'pamux leather skirt



Nlaka'pamux leather dress



Ktunaxa dress



Painted Nlaka'pamux dress



Painted Nlaka'pamux dress

Winter Clothing

- Since winters were very cold in the Plateau region, they needed to make clothing that would keep them warm.
- They used thicker animal skins and animal furs to add extra warmth to their clothing.
- Thicker leather pants were worn during the winter.



Grass cape, protection against rain



Nlaka'pamux woman in fur cape



Fur and buckskin cape, for cold weather



Nlaka'pamux leather pants

Headdresses

- Headdresses were used to represent a person's status within the community.
- The more elaborate headdresses, for ceremonies, were made with feathers and beads.
- An animal skin or fur hat was used as protection against the cold.



Nlaka'pamux hat



Headdress

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