

The Treaty Trail: U. S. - Indian Treaty Councils in the Northwest

THE ANCIENT INHABITANTS OF THE EYAKEMA VALLEY

The beautiful Valley lies along the Eastern Slopes of the Cascade Mountains in the south-central part of the state of Washington. The snowcapped peak of Mt. Adams dominates the western horizon. The eastern foothills of this great mountain are heavily timbered, dotted with alpine lakes and laced with streams, creating a natural habitat for fish and wildlife. The lower ridges and the cultivated valley floor produce a large variety of crops and are noted for apples and cattle. Here is the land of the Yakamas – the Indian Reservation of one million four hundred thousand acres, one and a half times larger than the state of Rhode Island.



During the last stages of the Pleistocene Ice Age, some 14,000 years ago nomadic bands roamed the Great Plains that would eventually become Eastern Washington. The Peaks of the Cascades had already been uplifted and stood raw and treeless.

The plains east of the southern Cascades consisted of volcanic basalt rock and wind-blown dust from the sandy deserts to the south. Rivers and streams eroded the soil and brought fresh water to sustain life. Vegetation, fish and animals were in abundance and provided for the People who inhabited the new land.

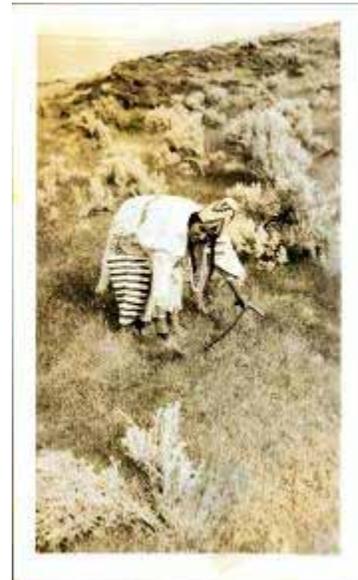
The first People to inhabit this land were proficient in the hunting and preservation of wild game, in the catching of salmon and the gathering of wild plant foods. Gathering food made them a People on the move. In early spring the migration led to the traditional root grounds at the timberline where, as the snow melted and left the earth uncovered and wet, the tender roots were easy to dig. Then to the rivers and streams for the great salmon runs. Deer, elk and

other game were hunted in the summer in the high country. Finally, just before the winter snows, the fields of huckleberries that grow on the foothills of Pahto (Mt. Adams) were harvested.

The People's survival from year to year, generation to generation, was assured. Their way of life was in rhythm with nature.

Earth and life were sacred. The land taught material and spiritual values.

In the early 1700's they acquired horses and became highly skilled horsemen. The horse made possible expeditions to the plains east of the Rockies to hunt the plentiful buffalo, a journey of many months.



This photographer asked Yakama women to dress in traditional clothes and demonstrate gathering activities. The picture above is entitled "The Plateau Gatherer". Washington State Historical Society Collection.



This photograph of a Yakama warrior on horseback, entitled "The Challenge", is credited to Eugene Everett Lavalleur and L.V. McWhorter. It was taken in 1911. McWhorter, a member of the Washington State Historical Society, had become an adopted member of the Yakama Nation on June 9, 1909. The name which he was known by was "Big Foot".
Washington State Historical Society Collection.

One legend told and retold from generation to generation recalls the ancient history of our Yakama People.

In the beginning, our Creator spoke the word and this earth was created. He spoke the word again and all living things were put on earth. And then he said the word and we, the (Indian) people were created and planted here on this earth.

We are like the plants of this earth. Our food was put here as plants to feed us; just like when we plant a garden. That is the way our earth was in the beginning.

There were salmon, deer, elk, and all kinds of birds. It is as if our bodies are the very end of the earth, still growing while our ancestors are all buried in the ground.

He named everything he created. He put water on the earth. He made it flow into the rivers and lakes to water this great garden and to quench the thirst of the people, the animals, plants, birds and fish.

He took the feet of the people and made them walk on this earth. He created the horse; which is like a human being. He put the horse and the people together to help one another.

*All of the land where we live and where our ancestors lived was created for the (Indian) people.**



This woman's basketry hat is woven in wrapped twining of hemp, bear grass, and an unidentified plant fiber. The creator was most likely a member of a plateau tribe.

Washington State Historical Society Collection.

***This legend reprinted
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