
Pre-Contact—Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians

Key vocabulary words

Tributary (noun) A river or stream that flows into a larger river.

Example sentence: The Missouri River is a tributary of the Mississippi River.

Sustenance (noun) Food and drink regarded as a source of strength; nourishment.

Example sentence: The farmers relied on the crops for sustenance during the winter months.

Decoy (noun) An object used to lure or attract animals or people in order to catch or trap them.

Example sentence: The hunter used a decoy to attract ducks to his hunting spot.

Repurpose (verb) To adapt or use something for a different purpose than it was originally intended.

Example sentence: She repurposed an old ladder as a bookshelf.

Lowlands (noun) A low-lying area, such as a plain or valley, often located near a body of water.

Example sentence: The village was situated in the lowlands, surrounded by lush green fields.

Adapted reading passage

The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, our people, thrived in the beautiful region of southwestern Oregon for many years. Our homeland, nestled between the Cascade and Coast ranges, offered abundant resources to sustain our way of life. The heart of our land centered around the South Umpqua River and its main tributary, Cow Creek.

We utilized various methods to catch salmon from the shimmering rivers and streams, including spearing, netting, and trapping. By constructing stick dams and using baskets made of hazel shoots, we were able to capture salmon as they swam upstream. Men ventured into the water to retrieve lamprey, another valuable food source, from the rocks. Both salmon and lamprey were smoked and dried, providing sustenance during the winter months. Additionally, we gathered trout, crawfish, and freshwater mussels from the creeks and rivers.

Our region was teeming with deer, elk, and bear, and we employed different techniques to hunt them. One method involved building long fences made of brush across canyons, forcing the deer to pass through a narrow area where snares awaited. Skilled bow hunters would also approach their prey while disguised with a dried deer-head decoy. We used every part of the animal—the meat was dried, the hide transformed into clothing, the bones fashioned into tools, the dewclaws repurposed as rattles, and the sinews employed as bow strings. Bears were particularly prized due to their grease and marrow, and their claws were used for decorative purposes.

<https://www.cowcreek-nsn.gov/tribal-story/pre-contact/>

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In addition to hunting, our ancestors gathered an abundance of seeds, nuts, and berries. Acorns were collected, ground, and stored for the winter. Tarweed seeds were obtained by burning the fields to remove the plant's sticky substance, then beating the tarweed pods over a basket to collect the seeds. Women in our Tribe skillfully gathered camas bulbs using deer-horn-handled digging sticks and stored them in burden baskets slung over their shoulders. After the bulbs were baked in an earth oven, they could be dried or mashed into cakes for winter storage. Other important plant foods included hazel nuts, chinquapin, elderberries, blackberries, strawberries, service berries, salal, and blackcaps.

During late summer and early fall, our Tribe engaged in a significant social and food-gathering activity. We journeyed to the Rogue-Umpqua Divide where we picked huckleberries and dried them on large flat rocks under the sun. As night fell and the colder weather approached, we left the mountains and settled in permanent winter villages located in the lowlands. These villages consisted of semi-underground lodges made from split wooden planks supported by upright posts. The roofs were upheld by crossbeams tied with hazel bark ropes. A ladder led to the main area surrounding a central fire pit. These dwellings also served as storage for various gathered foods, such as acorns, hazelnuts, camas cakes, tarweed seeds, smoked salmon, lamprey, and dried meat.

Our Tribe continued this way of life until the early 1800s when we encountered Euro-American settlers, forever altering our existence.

Summary

- The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians thrived in southwestern Oregon for many years, using the abundant resources of the region.
- They employed various methods to catch salmon and lamprey from the rivers and streams, and gathered other food sources like trout and mussels.
- The Tribe hunted deer, elk, and bear using different techniques, and gathered a variety of seeds, nuts, and berries for sustenance.

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Multiple choice questions

What was one method the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians used to catch salmon?

- a. Spearfishing
- b. Fishing with nets
- c. Using traps
- d. All of the above

Which animal's claws were used for decorative purposes?

- a. Deer
- b. Elk
- c. Bear
- d. None of the above

What changed about the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians' way of life in the early 1800s?

- a. They encountered Euro-American settlers
- b. They moved to permanent winter villages
- c. They stopped hunting and gathering
- d. None of the above

Pre-Contact–Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians *(Continued)*

Short answer questions

1. What methods did the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians use to catch salmon?

2. How did the Tribe use different parts of the animals they hunted?

3. What were some of the plant foods that the Tribe gathered?