

NORTH CAROLINA INDIANS

INDIANS LONG AGO

Indians were the first people to live in our country. Indians gave modern Americans many gifts and taught the settlers many new ways of doing things. Each year in North Carolina, we celebrate Indian Heritage Month in November to recognize the many contributions of this population to our state.

FOOD

Indians taught the settlers new ways to hunt and fish when they came to North Carolina many years ago. The Indians caught their fish in nets called weirs that were made from reeds, woven or tied together. They would place the weir across the stream and anchor it with rocks or poles that stuck into the sand. Another way Indians caught fish is with spears. Indians hunted big animals mostly with bows and arrows. They hunted deer and bear. Some Indians used blow guns for hunting smaller animals such as rabbit and squirrel.

The Indians cooked the fish and meat over a grill made of reeds or sticks. But, most of the cooking was done in clay pots. They would put the pot on the fire and boil different foods. In this way they would cook vegetables, fruits, nuts, roots and meat.

American Indians planted gardens much like gardens are planted today. They grew beans, peas, melons, pumpkins, sunflowers, potatoes and other foods. The men took turns guarding the fields and scaring away the birds and wild animals. They were probably some of the first scarecrows!

HOUSING

Indians in North Carolina did not live in teepees. Most of the Indians in North Carolina lived in small buildings made of wood and reeds. The frame of the house was made from wooden poles that were tied together. The walls and roof were made from reed mats or sheets of tree bark. Long tables or benches were usually the only furniture in the structure.

DRESS

Indians wore clothes made from deer skins. It took many days to prepare the skin before it was ready to be sewn. First, the hair had to be scraped off the skin. Then the excess flesh had to be removed. Next the hide was stretched and softened. The final step was to smoke the hides to give them a golden brown color. Earrings, necklaces and bracelets were worn by men and women. This jewelry was made from bone, copper, shell and polished-stone beads.

Most men wore their hair long. Women usually had long hair with bangs across the forehead. Both men and women would use braid wraps that were decorated with certain beads. This is one way that showed which tribe they belonged to.

CANOES

Indians often used canoes for transportation. Each canoe was made from a single tree. The only tools the Indians used to build these boats were fire and stones or sharp shells. They burned a small area of the tree trunk to make the tree fall down. Then they burned one side of the log to hollow it out. Indians used paddles, called oars, to help move the boat once it was in the water.

INDIANS TODAY

Did you know that there are many Indians still living in North Carolina? In fact, North Carolina has the

largest Indian population east of the Mississippi River. There are more than 80,000 Native Americans living in North Carolina. The state of North Carolina recognizes seven tribes. They are: Eastern Band of Cherokee, Coharie, Haliwa-Saponi, Indians of Person County, Lumbee, Meherrin and Waccamaw-Siouan. The Eastern Band of Cherokee is the state's only tribe also recognized by the federal government. Other groups include the Guilford Native American Association, Cumberland County Association for Indian People, Metrolina Native American Association and Triangle Native American Society. Can you find the group that lives nearest you?

Indian children today look and live very much like other children. The children live in houses and go to school. They wear jeans, shorts, shirts and shoes like those you wear. American Indians drive cars, go to church and enjoy sports and entertainment like everyone else. Like other people, they are very proud of their heritage and ancestors. To help remind them of their past, Indians have special holidays and celebrations.

GIFTS FROM THE INDIANS

The American Indians introduced many new things to the white settlers. How many of these "gifts" do you enjoy today? Some of the foods that Indians introduced are: chili, pumpkin, succotash, cornbread, popcorn, potatoes, corn, beans, peas, and sunflower seeds. They also gave us the chicle plant which is used to make chewing gum. Indians taught the settlers the drying process that is used to preserve foods and make prunes, raisins and jerky.

Indians introduced the settlers to types of clothing such as moccasins and ponchos. Chaps that rodeo riders wear today are a form of Indian leather leggings. Indians also gave us cotton that is used to make clothing today.

American Indians played forms of what we now call basketball and lacrosse. Sledding was also a sport the Indians enjoyed.

The Indian way of life was to live in harmony with nature. Many of today's organizations are influenced by the arts, crafts and culture of American Indians. Some of these groups are Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls and YMCA Indian Guides.