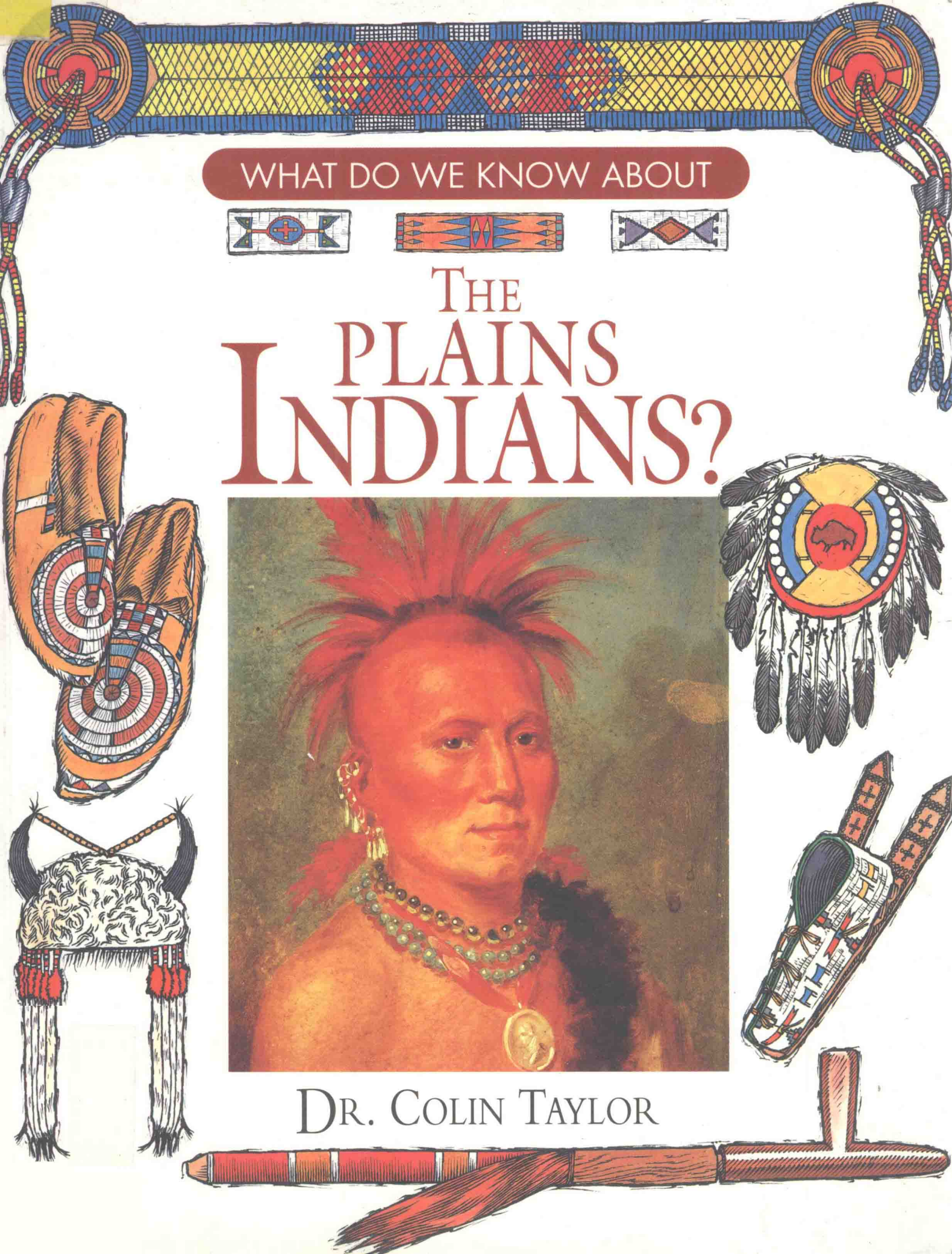


WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT

THE PLAINS INDIANS?



DR. COLIN TAYLOR





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THE PLAINS INDIANS?

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What do we know about the Plains Indians? What was their family life like? What was their religion? Did they live in houses? What are Plains Indians doing today?

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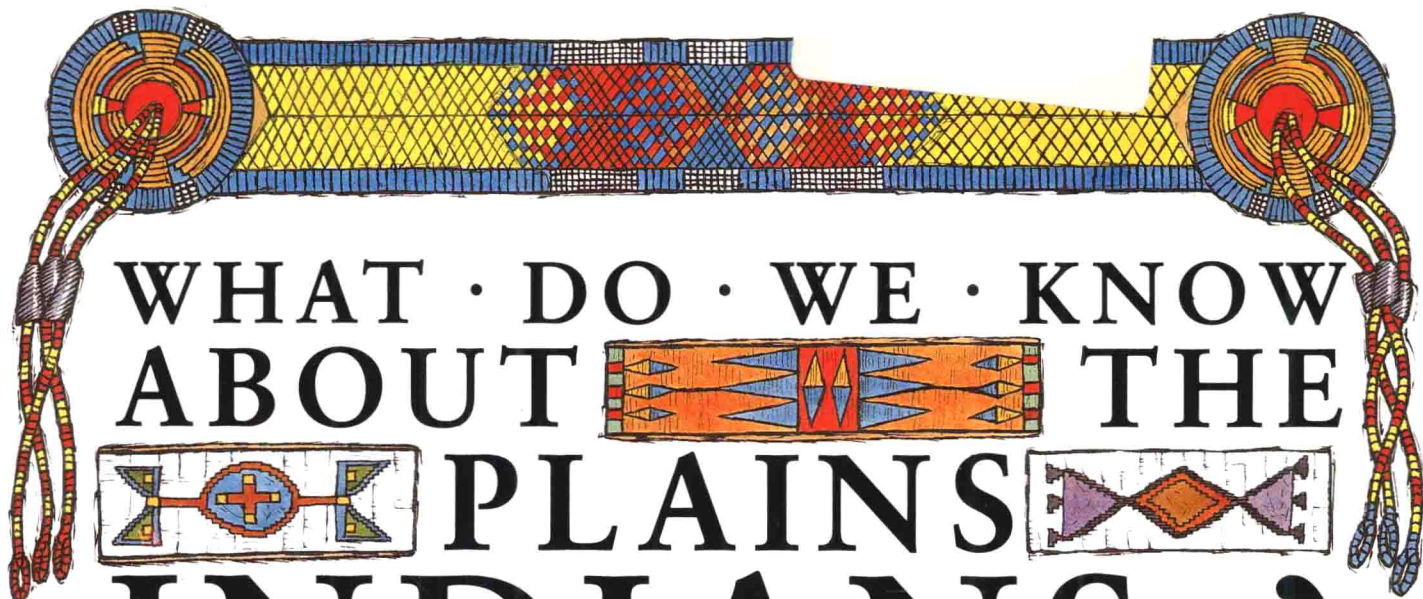


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DR COLIN TAYLOR



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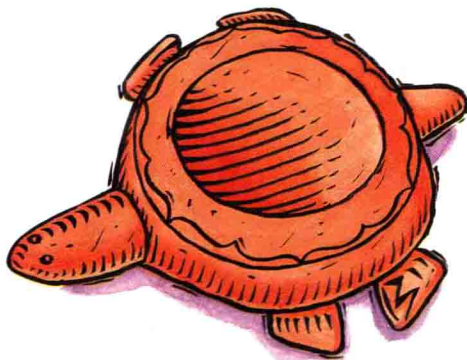
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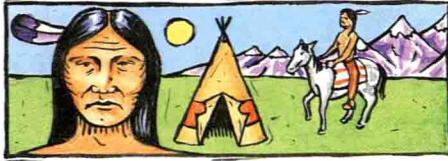
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WHO WERE THE PLAINS INDIANS?



Indians were living on the Great Plains long before white people came to North America. The Indians' ancestors probably migrated from Asia about 20,000 years ago and settled all over America. The Plains Indian tribes spoke different languages and had different customs, but they all had a similar way of life which was well-suited to their environment. This book mainly looks at the Plains Indians at the height of their culture between 1820–1880.



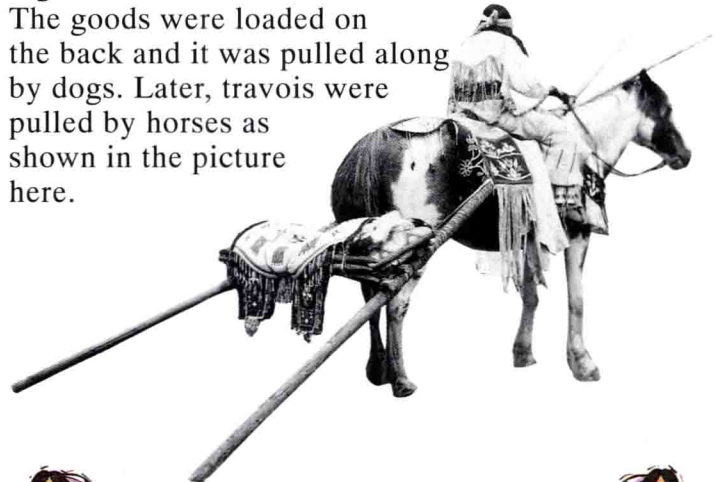
INDIAN COUNTRY

The picture above shows part of the Great Plains. There are grasslands, valleys, hills, streams and very few trees. Summers are hot and the winters long and very cold. There were lots of wild animals on the Plains, many of which the Indians hunted for food and skins. The Indians had to adapt to their environment to get enough food and shelter to survive. And much of their culture, art and religion was shaped by their surroundings.

GETTING AROUND

Plains Indians did not have carts with wheels to transport their goods. Instead they used the 'travois', made by tying two poles together at one end.

The goods were loaded on the back and it was pulled along by dogs. Later, travois were pulled by horses as shown in the picture here.

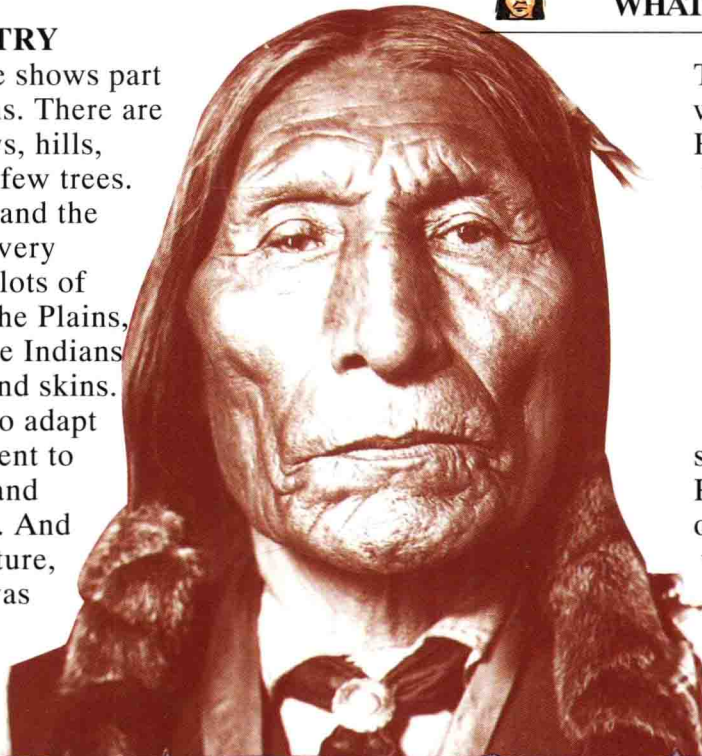


WHAT DID THEY LOOK LIKE?



This Cheyenne warrior, Wolf Robe, was a typical Plains Indian man. He had a long nose, high cheekbones and strong teeth. Most

Plains Indian men were slim and often over 5 feet 10 inches tall, and women were slightly shorter. They all had small hands and feet, bronzed skin and brown eyes. They wore their straight, black hair in braids. Plains Indian men had little facial or body hair – if they did, they would pluck it out.

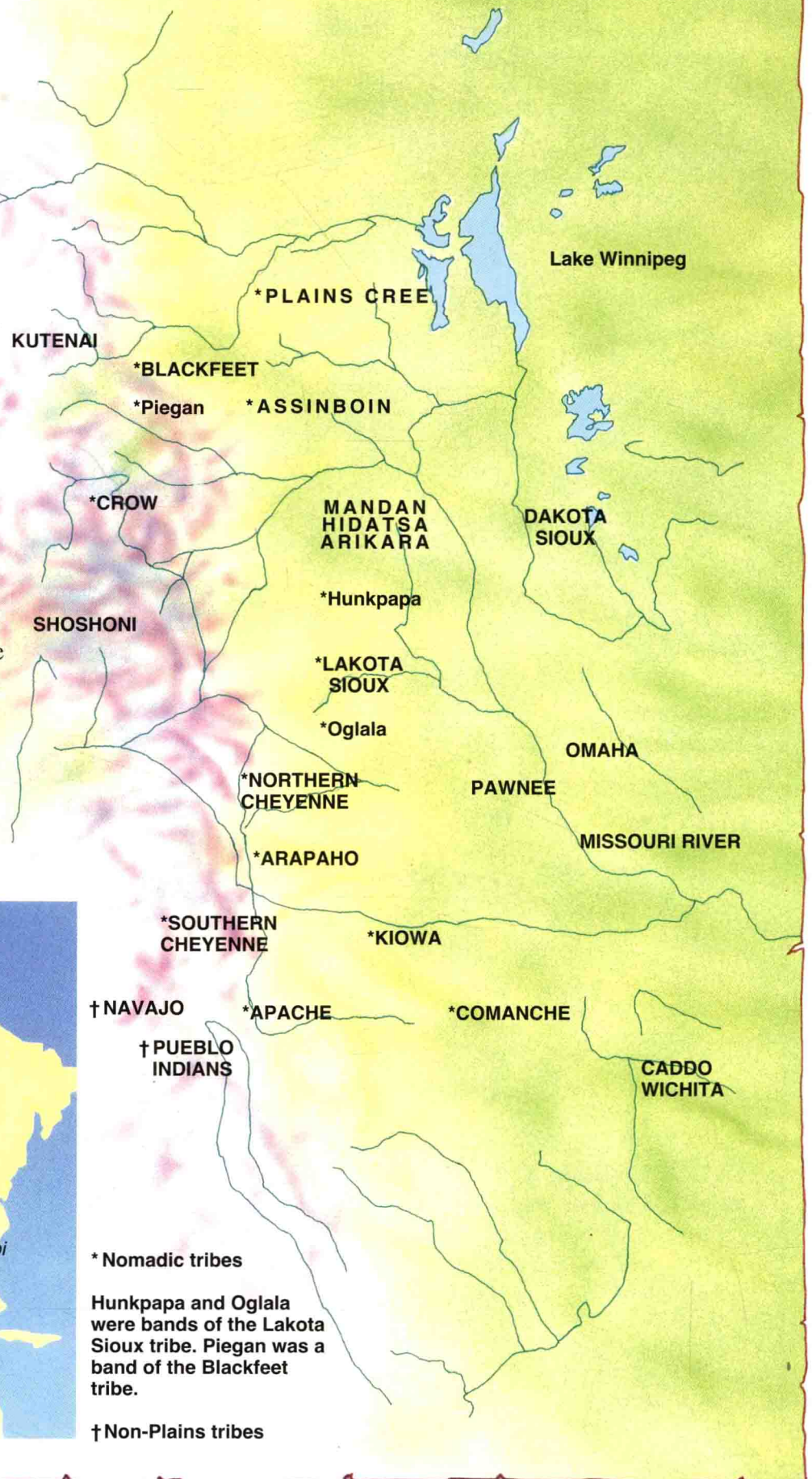


INDIAN TERRITORIES

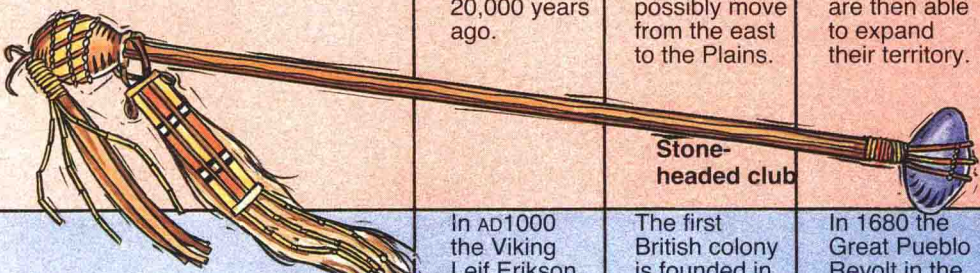


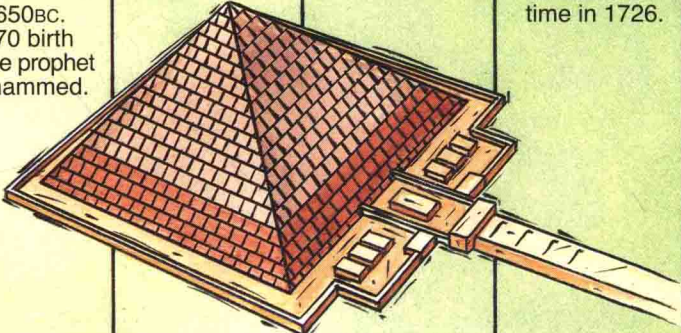
Look at the map on the right to see where different tribes lived. There were about twenty Plains tribes made up of 4,000–15,000 people. The total population in about 1800 was 120,000. Some Plains Indian tribes were semi-settled, living in villages along rivers like the Missouri. Other tribes were nomadic. They roamed across the Plains, living in tepees and following the huge herds of buffalo which they hunted. By 1650, some southern Plains tribes had acquired horses from Spanish settlers which made travel easier and quicker.

THE GREAT PLAINS

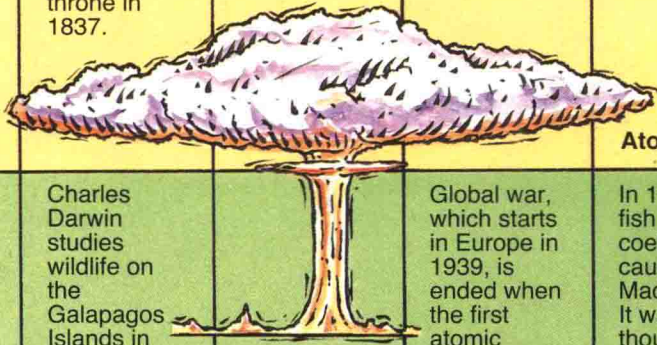
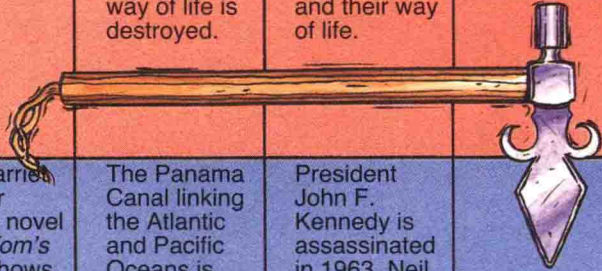
As the map below shows, the Great Plains are found in the heartland of North America. The Plains cover approximately 780,000 square miles with the Saskatchewan River to the north, the Rio Grande to the south, the Mississippi River to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west.



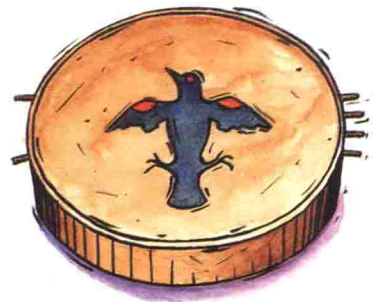
TIMELINE

	Pre 1600	1600-1650	1650-1700	1700-1750	1750-1800
EVENTS IN PLAINS REGIONS 	The ancestors of all the Indian tribes migrate from Asia over the Bering land bridge about 20,000 years ago.	Shoshoni tribes inhabit northern and central Plains for thousands of years. Ancestors of Mountain Crow Indians possibly move from the east to the Plains.	The dog is still the main means of transport. Shoshoni tribes trade with Spanish settlers for horses. They are then able to expand their territory.	Great Battle between Shoshoni against Piegan and Assinboin. Shoshoni are beaten because they do not have guns. They move into the Rocky Mountains.	As white people make more settlements, Indians from the east, southeast and southwest move to the Great Plains. More Indians have guns.
EVENTS IN AMERICA 	In AD1000 the Viking Leif Erikson reaches Newfoundland in present-day Canada. In 1492 Christopher Columbus arrives in the Caribbean and claims the New World for Spain.	The first British colony is founded in Virginia in 1607. Samuel de Champlain founds Quebec in Canada in 1612. The Pilgrim Fathers arrive at Plymouth Rock in the Mayflower in 1620.	In 1680 the Great Pueblo Revolt in the southwest between the Pueblo Indians and Spanish.	The Navajo Indians start weaving by copying techniques of the Pueblo Indians.	The Declaration of Independence is signed in 1776 by the United States. George Washington is elected first President in 1789.
EVENTS IN BRITAIN 	Guy Fawkes	Guy Fawkes is found trying to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605. Shakespeare dies at Stratford in 1616. King Charles I is executed in 1649.	Charles II is restored as King of England in 1660. The Great Fire of London in 1666.	Sir Isaac Newton dies in 1727.	James Watt invents the steam engine in 1765. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution is under way.
EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD 	Great pyramids built at Gizeh c. 2650BC. AD570 birth of the prophet Mohammed.	Great Pyramid		In Japan, money is introduced for the first time in 1726.	Captain Cook crosses the Antarctic Circle for the first time in 1773.

1800-1850	1850-1900	1900-1950	1950-1990	1990s
The major period of the Plains Indians' way of life. The nomadic tribes depend on horses and the buffalo. White explorers and artists begin to visit the Indians.	White settlers move across the Plains and some fight with tribes. Cheyenne and Sioux win Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876.	Plains Indians are forced to live on reservations. Buffalo are all but exterminated by hide hunters and the Indians' way of life is destroyed.	Oil, coal and gas found on Indian reservations make them more independent. Indian tribes begin to assert themselves and their way of life.	Many Indians are now well educated and go to university. They assert their rights and revive old traditions. Pipe tomahawk
James Fenimore Cooper's novel <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> is published in 1823. Canada is granted self-government in 1841.	1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> shows cruelty of slavery. Henry Longfellow's poem <i>Hiawatha</i> is published in 1855. 1861-1865 American Civil War.	The Panama Canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans is built 1904-1914. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 starts the Great Depression of the 1930s.	President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in 1963. Neil Armstrong becomes the first man to walk on the moon in 1969. President Richard Nixon resigns over the Watergate scandal in 1974.	Bill Clinton becomes President in 1993.
Battle of Waterloo in 1815 marks the final defeat of Napoleon I. Queen Victoria comes to the British throne in 1837.	Outbreak of the Crimean War is followed by the disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade in 1854.	First World War breaks out in Europe in 1914. Logie Baird displays color television in 1929.	Festival of Britain is opened by King George VI in 1951. The Beatles have their first hit <i>Love Me Do</i> in 1962.	The Conservative Party in the United Kingdom win their fourth election in 1992.
Charles Darwin studies wildlife on the Galapagos Islands in 1835. His work leads him to publish <i>The Origin of Species</i> in 1859.	Over 55 million people leave Europe to settle in America in the second half of the nineteenth century.	Global war, which starts in Europe in 1939, is ended when the first atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in August 1945.	In 1952, a fish called a coelacanth is caught near Madagascar. It was thought to have been extinct for 50 million years.	Civil War rages in Yugoslavia.



Atomic bomb



Most of the Plains Indians tribes described in this book came from northern and eastern America and settled on the Great Plains from about 1730. They spoke about six different languages – Algonquian, Athabaskan, Caddoan, Iowan, Siouan and Uto-Aztecan – with several different dialects too. Although each tribe had its own customs and traditions, they all shared a similar way of life. The lifestyle of the Plains Indians changed dramatically from 1740 as their contact with white people increased.

Some people call Plains Indians 'Native Americans', but they prefer to be known by the name of their tribe. For example, there are many Sioux tribes. The western Sioux call themselves Lakota and the eastern, Dakota. Within the tribes are smaller bands or groups.

HORSES

Horses were taken to North America by the Spaniards in 1541. They traded them to the Comanche who then traded them to other tribes living on the Great Plains. The Lakota Indians called horses *Shonka Wakan* which means 'medicine dog'.

• W H A T • • F O O D • D I D T H E Y • E A T ? •

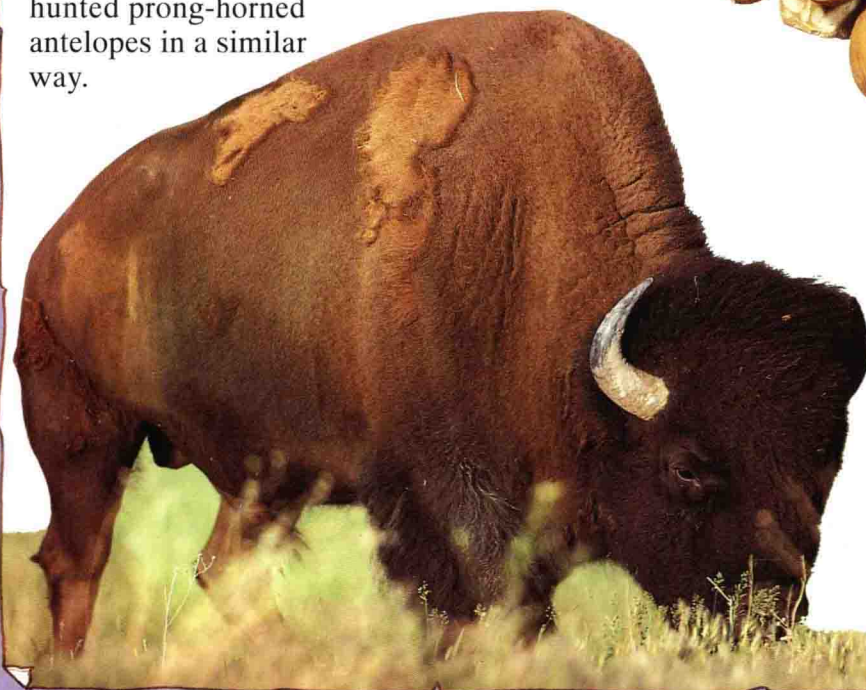


DIFFERENT FOODS

This large picture shows many kinds of Indian foods prepared by Gloria Goggles of the Arapaho tribe in Wyoming. You can see the prairie turnips, dried and tied in strings. These will keep for several years as long

BUFFALO

The Plains Indians depended on the buffalo, which are the largest mammals in North America. They are about 6½ feet tall and weigh up to 2,200 pounds. Before the Indians had horses, they captured buffalo in V-shaped pens or drove them over cliffs to kill them. The Indians also hunted prong-horned antelopes in a similar way.



Indian tribes had to hunt, collect or grow all their food. They also had to develop ways to preserve and store meat and vegetables for the winter when food was scarce. Some tribes, like the Mandan and Hidatsa, farmed various crops such as maize, beans and pumpkins. But nomadic tribes like the Cheyenne or Comanche mainly hunted wild animals and collected wild fruits and vegetables. The prairie turnip was a very important wild vegetable. It was dug up using a special stick, then it could be dried and saved for the winter. Food was often traded between tribes.

as they do not get damp. There are ears of maize and bowls of dried and fresh plums too. Some of the meat has been dried, and some has been mixed with herbs and stuffed to make a kind of sausage.



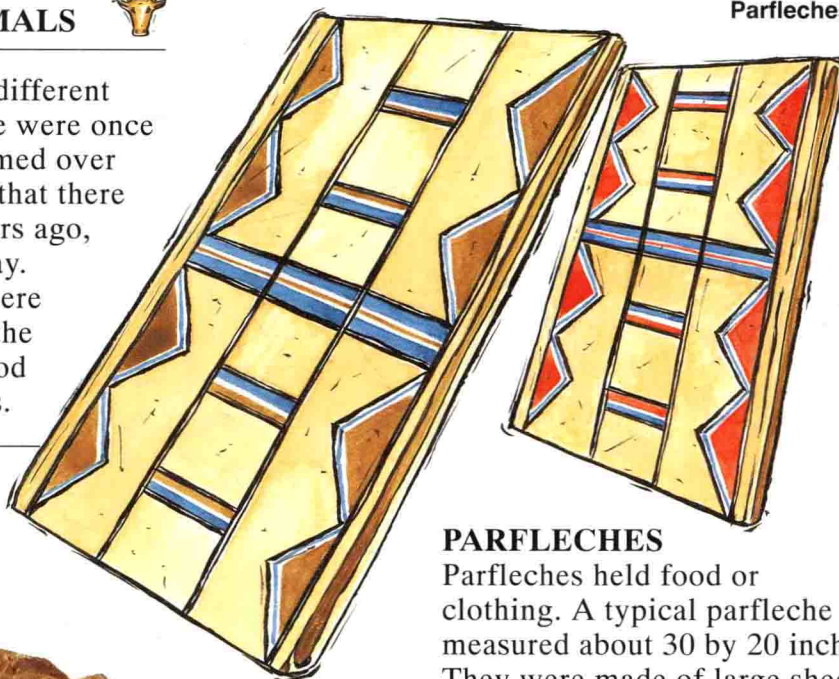
Prong-horned antelope





The Great Plains were home to many different kinds of wildlife. Buffalo and antelope were once very common. They ate grass and roamed over the Plains in huge herds. It is thought that there were 60 million buffalo about 200 years ago, but only several thousand survive today. There were wolves and coyote too. There were at least 500 different plants and the Plains Indians used many kinds for food and others for herb teas and medicines.

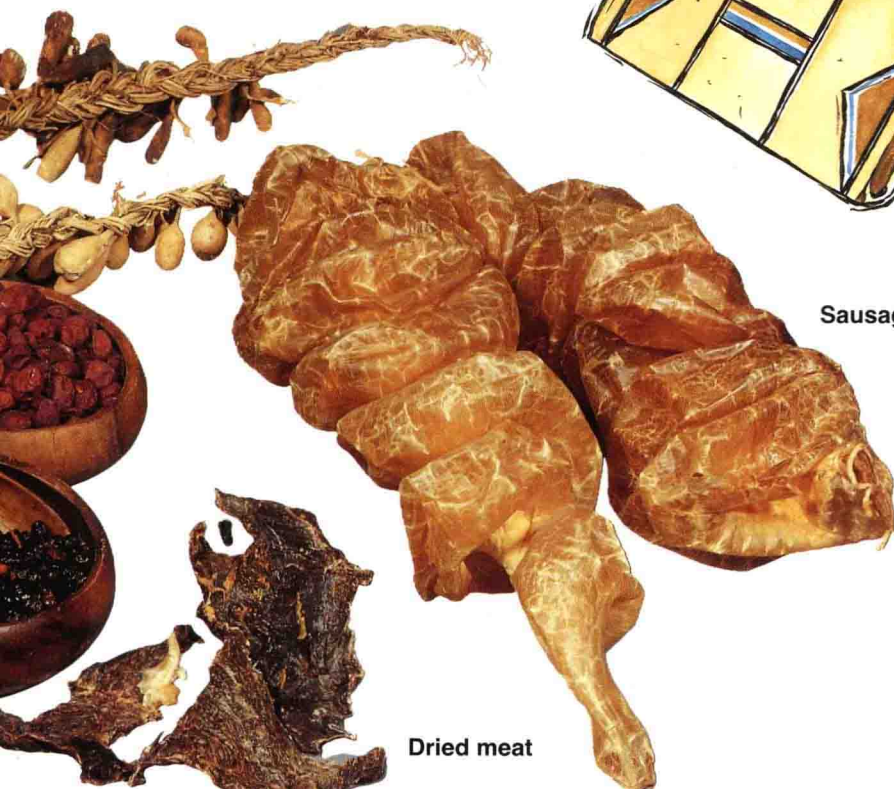
Parfleches



PARFLECHES

Parfleches held food or clothing. A typical parfleche measured about 30 by 20 inches. They were made of large sheets of rawhide roughly cut to the shape of an opened envelope. When they were folded they looked like a suitcase. During the reservation period, they were valued gifts. Gift parfleches were usually cut up to make moccasin soles, so the geometrical designs painted on them (above) are often seen on the insides of moccasins.

Sausage



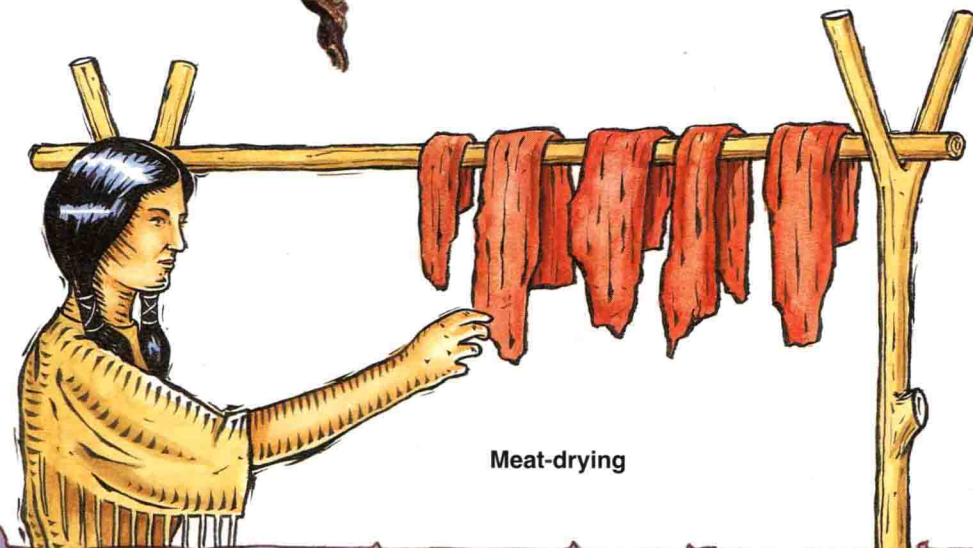
Dried meat



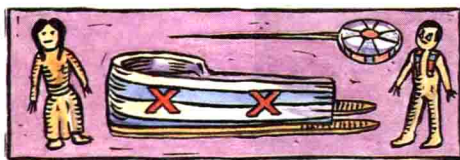
PRESERVING FOOD

This Lakota woman is hanging thin strips of meat on wooden racks to dry them in the sun. Dried meat was pounded into a powder using a stone-headed mallet like the one above. The powder was then mixed with dried fruits into a nutritious food called pemmican. It was then packed into parfleches, sealed with fat and stored. In the winter the pemmican made a good soup.

Meat-drying



• W H A T • • W A S • FAMILY LIFE • L I K E ? •



FATHERS AND FAMILIES

In the semi-settled tribes like the Omaha, men often looked after their children. Fathers and grandfathers played with or soothed unhappy children. In this photograph, taken around 1890, a Cheyenne father and his sons pose in their traditional clothes made by their mother or grandmother. The older boy looks rather startled by the flash.



GUARDIAN SPIRITS



At the age of fourteen, a Plains Indian boy would leave his camp alone to look for his guardian spirit to protect and help him through his life. He stayed alone for four days and nights on a high hill, praying and waiting for the spirit to come to him. Some boys had dreams where they saw animal spirits, such as buffalo, bears, wolves and eagles, who would pass on their strengths and skills. Often the visions were confusing and one of the tribe's holy men would have to interpret them. Boys often wore an amulet to represent their guardian spirit.

The family was a very important part of the Plains Indians' way of life. A young man had to prove he could provide food and transport for his family by going on several hunts and raiding his tribe's enemy for horses. Only then could he think about marrying. An Indian man could have as many wives as he wished, but many only had one. A few men had more than three wives who were often sisters because they felt sisters would not squabble. Having children was very important to the Plains Indians. Mothers were always with their babies, but other family members also helped to care for the children, especially grandmothers.



A PLAINS INDIAN CRADLE

When a new baby was born, the grandparents usually made a cradle. Cradles like this one were made with two wooden boards about 4 feet long. Rawhide was used to join the boards together, then a soft animal skin bag was stretched over the top. The baby could then be carried safely and comfortably on horseback. The bag's beautiful decorations often were not completed until the baby was born so that family designs could be added to show if the baby was a boy or a girl.



BALL GAMES

Boys often played a game called shinny that later became ice hockey. They used a long curved wooden stick to knock a ball over a goal line. The ball was originally made of baked clay covered with buckskin. The ball shown above has been completely covered with beautiful beadwork. The boys developed fitness, speed and skill playing shinny, which would be useful when they grew up to be hunters. This popular game was played by Indians all over America.

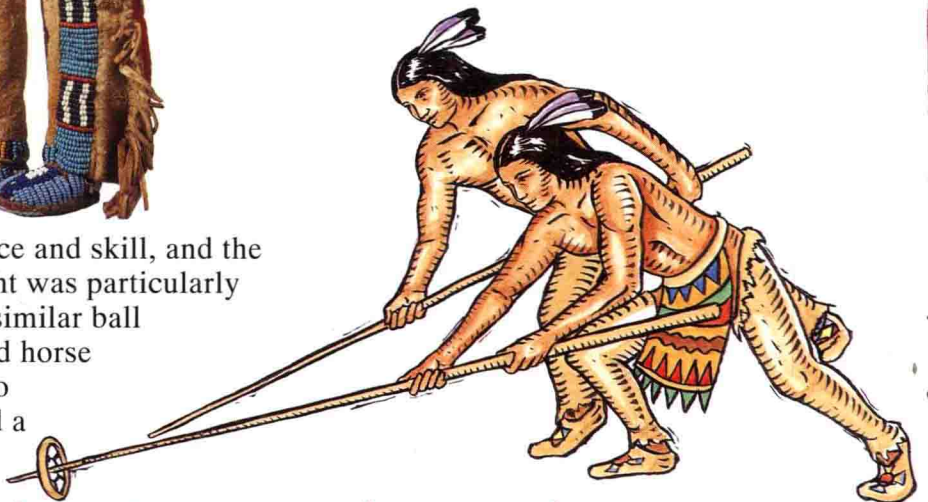
DOLLS

The dolls on the left were made in about 1880 for a Lakota girl. Dolls were normally made of soft buckskin. Their faces were painted or sewn in beadwork and their hair came from a lock of a relative's hair. Dolls were dressed in the typical clothes of the tribe like the woman's beaded dress or the man's shirt.

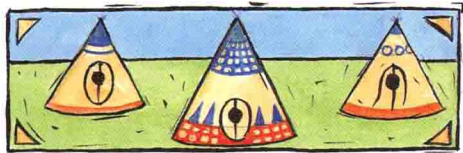
Hoop and pole game

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Adults greatly enjoyed games of chance and skill, and the hoop and pole game shown on the right was particularly popular. Women and children played similar ball games. All children learned to ride and horse racing was very popular. The girls also played moving camp and the boys had a type of hobby horse.



• D I D • • T H E Y • L I V E • I N H O U S E S ?



The nomadic Indian tribes, like the Blackfeet and Lakota, lived in tepees made of buffalo hide and supported by wooden poles. The tepees were put up and taken down by the women, and were easily transported by horses. Tepees could withstand the strong winds on the Plains and were warm in winter and cool in summer. Tribes who lived mostly in the same place, like the Mandan and Omaha, built earth lodges which were often much larger than the tepee. But they also used tepees for spring and summer hunting trips.



LAKOTA TEPEE

This magnificent Lakota tepee was made in the early nineteenth century. It is only 8 feet in diameter when put up. Small tepees were used before the Lakota Indians had horses and when dogs transported their goods on travois. The paintings on this tepee have great religious importance.



Paintings of tepees

TEPEE FURNITURE

There was not much room in a tepee for furniture, but a backrest like this one (right) was essential. It was made from a mat of thin willow rods which rested against a tripod of wooden poles. Tepees were a very important part of Indian life and sometimes they painted pictures of them. A Sioux painted these pictures (left) on a buffalo robe.



Tepee backrest

