

The First Americans

The first North Americans probably arrived 15 to 35 thousand years ago. During the ice age, so much water was frozen that the sea level fell. People could walk from Asia to Alaska across a land bridge. From Alaska, these peoples spread southwards. There were hundreds of different tribes and languages, and their lifestyles fitted the geography and natural resources of the places where they lived. The Inuit of Alaska, for example, hunted Arctic animals such as caribou, foxes, and hares, and harpooned whales and seals from their kayaks.

The Indians of the Great Plains lived very different lives. They were nomads who traveled about following herds of bison. These Indians depended on bison for food, clothing, tents, called tepees, and even fuel. There is no firewood on the Plains, so the Indians burned dry bison dung to make their fires. They tamed horses that escaped from white settlers and became expert riders.



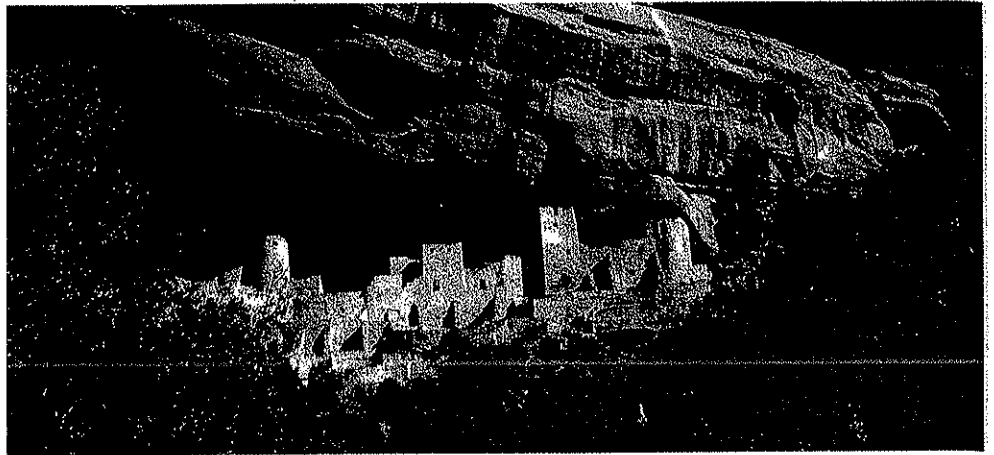
freaky facts:

The American bison is popularly called a "buffalo." A grown bull may weigh as much as 1,400 kilos. In 1850, there were about 20 million bison. By 1889, only 541 bison were still alive in the United States. Since then, bison have been protected, and there are now about 22,000 bison in the US. Some bison are raised for meat. Bison can even be crossed with ordinary cows and bulls – the results are called beefaloes and cattaloos.

Destination USA
af Conrad Kisch
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Copenhagen.

Pueblo ruins, Colorado.



Blackfoot Indian.



In the Southwest, Pueblo Indians (from the Spanish word for town or village) lived as farmers in villages, raised corn and vegetables, and built irrigation canals to conserve water in the dry, hot landscape. They built their houses out of stone, timber, and bricks made of dry clay called adobe.

The Indians of the Pacific Northwest lived in an area covered by gigantic coniferous forests and with easy access to fishing and whaling. These Indians became experts at woodcarving. They built long houses out of timber and carved ocean-going boats out of the trunks of enormous fir trees. The Pacific Northwest Indians covered their houses, boats, and totem poles with carvings of animals. These animals represented their family history or told religious myths.

In the East, the Woodlands Indians used the skins of deer for clothing and built houses and canoes out of bark and wood. They farmed land, but when the land became worn out, they simply moved their villages to a new place. These were the Indians that the first settlers from Europe met when they landed on America's East Coast. To survive, Europeans copied many of the inventions of the Indians, like canoes, moccasins, toboggans, and snowshoes and started to raise corn.

Before the Europeans came, Indians had never been exposed to children's illnesses such as measles and chicken pox. They were not resistant and many died. As America expanded, pioneers sought land for farming and raising cattle, and people found gold, silver, copper, and other valuable resources. Gradually, Indians were pushed west. With the opening of the first railroad across the continent in 1869, California and the West were within easy reach of the rest of the nation. Farmers out West could now send cattle and produce to America's big industrial cities. Soon, the lifestyle of the Plains Indians was threatened as settlers fenced in the land and killed the bison, forcing the Plains Indians to become dependent on government help. The Indians tried to fight back, but their struggle was hopeless. By 1890, the last tribes had given up. The surviving Indians were poor and suffered from disease, alcoholism, and malnutrition. In 1920, there were less than 350,000 Indians left.

Today, there are about two million Indians and Inuit - probably about the same number there were before the Europeans came. Federal and state governments recognize more than 550 tribes in the United States and over 275 Indian reservations. Reservations have powers similar to those of states. They make many of their own laws and have their own schools, courts, fire departments, and police.

Some tribes are well off and own valuable natural resources or have opened luxury resorts for tourists. Other Indians are among the poorest people in the US. 80% of the Navajo Indians are unemployed, and many of them do not have electricity or running water.

freaky facts:



Indian tribes have discovered a new way to make money. In most states, gambling is against the law, but these laws do not apply to Indian reservations. 130 tribes in 24 different states have opened their own gambling casinos where people spend billions of dollars trying to get rich.