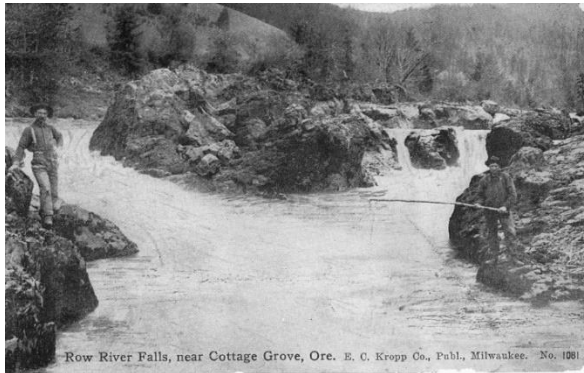


Indians of the South Willamette Valley

"No river can return to its source, yet all rivers must have a beginning"

Native American Proverb quote

Before the arrival of European Americans, the south end of the Willamette Valley was home to bands of Kalapuya Indians. As with many native tribes, their history was passed down through oral story telling.



Social Life

Evidence of villages have been found along Bennett Creek, Coast Fork, Row River and Silk Creek. These locations served as home to thousands of Kalapuya for hundreds of years prior to the arrival of fur trappers and early explorers. In Fall and Winter the valley was full of thriving communities. When Spring

came, bands, or small groups, would travel into the mountains to gather food, hunt game, and fish the rivers restocking food supplies for the winter.

Yearly gatherings of tribes from miles around occurred at locations like Wildwood Falls. These gatherings were not just a time to stock up on salmon for the year, but also large social and trading events. Tribes from Klamath Falls to the coast would gather to trade tools, baskets, foods and stories.

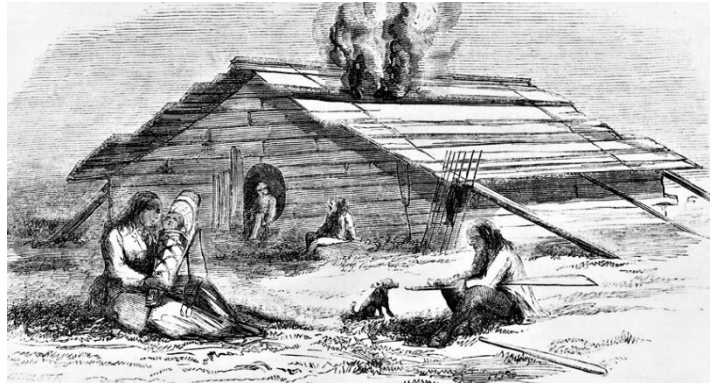


Food

Life in the valley was generally peaceful and resources were plentiful. Rivers were filled with fish including trout and salmon. Valley fields were ripe with camas, grasshoppers, berries, and hazelnuts. Forests were filled with animals for hunting and eatable wild plants.

While not farmers as we would define it, the Kalapuya used land management methods to improve and increase annual harvests. Fields were burned to clear young trees and prepare the ground for another year of **fertile** growth. Fires were also used to herd larger game such as rabbits and deer toward waiting hunters.

One important crop to the Kalapuya was **camas**. The bulb of the camas flower was harvested, roasted, ground, and dried into large patties for storage. This flower was easy to find in the valley and used in a variety of meals. The root is similar in look and texture to onions. They can be eaten raw, freshly roasted, as a mush, and baked into a bread like product. Field burning encouraged the growth of the camas flower. While most camas varieties are edible the white or yellow camas is poisonous. When found, members of the tribe would destroy these plants to discourage their spread and make sure the bulb was not accidentally harvested.



Housing

Teepees spotted in this area were commonly used by fur trappers, but not by the Kalapuya who lived in longhouses and birchbark huts.

Longhouses were built out of cedar planks and housed large extended family groups. The floor of the house was dug out of the earth and left as packed dirt. Poles would create the supports, and cedar planks created walls and a roof. The ridge of the longhouse roof was left open to let smoke escape. It would seem these openings would cause issues in the rainy season, but surprisingly the gap in the ridge of the roof did not permit rain to enter. **Tule reed** mats were used for temporary structures when traveling.

Though our knowledge of these great tribes is scarce, we have a responsibility to remember those who first called this valley home.

Discussion Points

1. Why do you think the annual gathering of tribes was such an important event?
 2. Considering what we know about the food, homes, and social lives of the Kalapuya, what knowledge do you think parents taught their children?
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Vocabulary

Fertile: (of soil or land) producing or capable of producing a lot of vegetation or crops

Camas Flower: North American plant of the lily family, grown for its starchy blue or purple flowers

Tule Reed: large bulrush that grows in marshy areas