



Native Alaskans

Alaska Geographic, Thinkquest.org, Travel Alaska

Natives comprise almost 16% of the population of Alaska. There are four distinct cultural groups. Each group has its own language.

Eskimos – Spread out along the entire Alaska Coastline except for the Aleutians and Southeast Alaska. More than 20 groups, all known as Eskimos, inhabit Alaska. Three linguistic groups occur within these areas. 1.) Northern Eskimos – Inupiat 2.) Siberian Yupik occupy Saint Lawrence Island and areas of Siberia. 3.) Yup'ik speaking people inhabit the remainder of Eskimo Territory.

Athapascans – They were nomadic hunters and fishermen who migrated around the same time as the Northwest Coast Indians. They used canoes made of birch bark and moose hide as well as sleds and dogs. They speak many distinct languages, all a part of the greater Na-Dene linguistic family. These include amongst many: the Navajo and Apache of the American Southwest and 13 Northwest Coast and California tribes.

Aleuts – They lived in oblong houses covered with grass. The ancestral home of the Aleuts consists of the western portion of the Alaska Peninsula, the Shumagin Islands and the many islands of the Aleutian chain, which arcs gently for 1,000 miles into the Bering Sea. Water determined their way of life.

Northwest Coast – They were accomplished boatmen and traders. They built canoes out of cedar for traveling. They built permanent winter settlements. They were a complicated diversity of tribes and languages including the following: Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Eyak, Kwakiutl, Bella Bella, Bella Coola, Coast Salish, Nootka, Makah, Chinook, Coos, Umpqua, Tolowa-Tutuni, Yurok, Karok, Hupa, Wiyot.

Sod houses were used in western Alaska until well into the 20th century.

Maine mammals, generally found in great abundance on the coast allowed the establishment of large permanent villages. Smaller fishing camps were established for summer use.

The oldest of the Eskimo cultures is Odvik, dating to just before the birth of Christ. Most artifacts found dating to this time period have been discovered in conjunction with burials and are considered to have been tied in some way to Shamanism ritual and ceremony presided over by a shaman who was in direct contact with the supernatural.

Native Alaskan's Crafts

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| Ivory Carving | Woodworking Crafts | Weaving |
| Skin Garment Sewing | Whale Bone Carving | Masks |
| Basketry | Beadwork | Language Preservation |

Native Alaskans today, are actively involved in preservation of their culture and their languages. They participate in politics, education, Alaska History Preservation and corporate preservation & development of the Alaska Wilderness. Native Alaskans run in the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest and a Native Alaskan, Peggy Willman, was Miss Alaska in 2002. Their culture is active and prevalent in the Alaska Lifestyle.

Alaska, the land of the Native and the Homesteader is alive and well today.



Peggy Willman

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