

Kwakiutl

Where do the Kwakiutls live?


The Kwakiutl Indians are original people of the Pacific Northwest Coast. They live in British Columbia, Canada.

 What language do the Kwakiutl Indians speak?

Almost all Kwakiutl people speak English today, but some Kwakiutls, especially elders, also speak their native Kwakiutl language, which is known as Kwak'wala. Kwakwala is a complicated language with many sounds that don't exist in English.

 What were men and women's roles in the Kwakiutl tribe?

Kwakiutl women gathered plants, herbs and clams and did most of the child care and cooking. Men were fishermen and hunters and sometimes went to war to protect their families. Both genders took part in storytelling, artwork and music, and traditional medicine. The Kwakiutl chief was always a man, but the clan leaders could be either men or women.


 What were Kwakiutl homes like in the past?


The Kwakiutls lived in coastal villages of rectangular cedar-plank houses with bark roofs. Usually these houses were large (up to 100 feet long) and each one housed several families from the same clan (as many as 50 people.) Today, old-fashioned buildings like these are still made from cedar wood, but they are only used for ceremonial purposes, not for everyday shelter.


 What was Kwakiutl clothing like? Did they wear feather headdresses and face paint?


Kwakiutl men didn't usually wear clothing at all, though some men wore a breech clout. Women wore short skirts made of cedar bark. In colder weather, both genders wore knee-length tunics, long cloaks of shredded cedar bark, and moccasins on their feet. For formal occasions, Kwakiutl people wore more elaborate outfits, with tunics, leggings and cloaks painted with tribal designs. Some important and wealthy Kwakiutls wore the spectacular Chilkat blankets, which were woven from cedar bark and mountain goat hair.


The Kwakiutls didn't wear long headdresses like the Sioux. Instead, both men and women sometimes wore basketry hats made of finely woven spruce root. The designs and patterns of these hats often displayed a person's status and family connections. The Kwakiutls did not usually paint their faces, but they did paint their hair red for festive occasions, and sometimes wore tribal tattoo art in stylized animal designs. Kwakiutl women wore their hair long and loose or in two long braids, while men often coiled theirs into a topknot. Like other Northwestern Indians, Kwakiutl men often wore mustaches and beards. Here is a website with pictures of Native American hair.

 What was Kwakiutl transportation like in the days before cars? Did they paddle canoes? Yes--the Kwakiutl Indian tribe made large dugout canoes by hollowing out cedar logs. The Kwakiutl tribe used these canoes to travel up and down the sea coast for trading, fishing and hunting, and warfare. Their most impressive war canoes, which could be more than sixty feet long and withstand ocean storms, were bought from the Haida tribe, who had access to the best cedar trees and were considered the best canoe-makers by the other Northwest Coast tribes.

 What was Kwakiutl food like in the days before supermarkets? The Kwakiutl Indians were fishing people. Kwakiutl men caught fish and sea mammals from their canoes. They also hunted deer, birds, and small game. Kwakiutl women gathered clams and shellfish, seaweed, berries, and roots.

 What were Kwakiutl weapons and tools like in the past? Kwakiutl fishermen used harpoons, nets, and wooden fish traps. Hunters used bows and arrows. In war, Kwakiutl men fired their bows or fought with spears and war clubs. Some Kwakiutl warriors wore bulky armor made of wooden rods lashed together to protect themselves from enemy archers.

 What are Kwakiutl arts and crafts like? Kwakiutl artists are known for their fine Native American basket and woodcarving arts, including wooden mask and totem pole carvings.

 What other Native Americans did the Kwakiutl tribe interact with? The Kwakiutls traded regularly with all the other tribes of the Northwest Coast, particularly the Tlingit and Haida tribes. They especially liked to buy fine Tlingit weavings and Haida canoes. The Northwest Coast tribes also fought each other frequently, raiding each other's villages to steal wealth and capture slaves.

http://www.bigorin.org/kwakiutl_kids.htm