

Navajo Indians



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Where the Navajo live(d)



As you can see from the above map, the Navajo live in the Southwestern region of the United States of America. The map above shows their current land size. They used to spread out a bit more beyond the borders of today's reservation.

Geography

The Navajo Indians live in what is now called New Mexico, Arizona, and southern Utah. The Navajo Reservation is largest Native American Reservation in America, almost exactly the same size as the state of West Virginia! The land is primarily desert and has many amazing mesas and canyons. It is pretty "high and dry" there, in that the land is from 5,500 feet to 10,500 feet in elevation. It is so beautiful that over 3 million tourists visit each year.

Climate

The Navajo live primarily in the desert, where it rains only 7-11 inches per year. For comparison, Sacramento averages 20 inches (which still isn't a lot). The temperature can get up to 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. In the winter, the tribe would rebuild their houses to be much stronger for the weather. The difference would be that the opening would be much smaller than in the summer and the house would be much more insulated.

Natural Resources

The Navajo Indians' natural resources were some wood, adobe (straw mixed with mud to make/bake bricks, soil, wool from sheep, silver and turquoise. In modern times they have some oil, natural gas, coal (all used as power sources) and uranium (which was mined to make nuclear bombs and to power nuclear energy plants).



Homes

In the old days, the Navajo Indians lived in a traditional, earth house known as a hogan. A hogan's door frame was made from a special wood called tule. The rest of the house was made from mud and clay. The hogan would stay cool by natural ventilation in the summer and the adobe/earth floor and walls would retain heat from a fire during the winter. The door of the house was always facing east to protect people from the wind. Nowadays Navajos don't live in hogans (they live in houses like we do), but they do use their hogans for traditional ceremonies.



Men

In the old days, the Navajo men were the hunters and the warriors. The men were also the political leaders and only men could be chiefs. The men were the people who made the jewelry. The men wore no shirts until sheep were introduced. Then in cool weather, they started wearing wool items to keep warm. Nowadays the men can farm (the women did this in the old days). Men often had long hair. After getting married, the men went to live in a house near the woman's family.



Women

Traditionally, Navajo women were the farmers and the ones who tended to the livestock and children. The women also did all of the cooking, weaving, and sculpting pots. The women wore skirts made out of yucca fiber. Like the men, the women wore no shirts, but in the cool weather they wore wool items once they were introduced. Women usually wore their hair in a style called *tsiyyeel*.

Food



The Navajo was a very big farming tribe because of where they lived. They farmed lots of crops such as corn, beans, squash, nuts, herbs, and fruit. They also ate cornbread and animals that they raised. The animals that they raised were sheep and goats. They hunted for game animals and ate them too. Nowadays the Navajo are famous for their fry bread, which is like fried naan or a real thick, fried tortilla.

Celebrations and Ceremonies

All of the Navajo ceremonies or celebrations had singing and dancing. The ceremonies or celebrations included the birth ceremony, the first laugh ceremony for babies, the first footprint ceremony, the wedding ceremony, to get rid of the effects of their enemies ceremony, to remove evil ceremony, and to give good health to those who were ill ceremony.

The Navajo use sand paintings as a healing device. They used a smooth bed of sand and used crushed colors rocks and minerals to make an image, then they would sing and dance over it.



Interesting Facts

One interesting fact is that before the Navajo had horses, they used dogs as pack animals, and since they didn't know about wheels, they used two dragging sticks called a travois. Later they would use horses, which were wild-and-then-broken mustangs descended from the horses that escaped from the Spanish explorers!



Another interesting fact is that the Navajo are considered to be the best Native American weavers. At first they used cotton, which they got through trading. Later they switched mostly to weaving with sheep wool, again, using the descendents of escaped animals from the Spanish explorers! Only wealthy leaders could afford to buy blankets made out of wool.

The final interesting fact is that it was so difficult to learn the Navajo language that the US Marines used it as a secret language in World War II to communicate messages to the troops. There were 450-500 Navajo who served as "code talkers" during World War II.



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