



Plains Indians and the Way West

American Indians living on the vast expanse of land west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains depended on the resources nature provided, primarily on the buffalo. For generations millions of buffalo roamed the Great Plains, grazing on abundant prairie grasses. After the advent of the horse, many tribes were able to follow the buffalo herds during their annual migration, while other tribes remained rooted in permanent villages along the rivers. The Hidatsa, Mandan and Arikara, for example, lived in earth lodges and grew corn, beans, and squash in the rich soil of the floodplains. Each of the semi-nomadic tribes, such as the Lakota, lived in easily mobile tipis and were divided into smaller groups called bands. These bands were nimble enough to follow the bison herds and not overuse resources, but large enough to have numerous men for efficient hunting and defense. At certain times of the year, the various bands came together for ceremonies and celebrations. Family life was important to the Plains Indian culture and each member had an important role to play. Men took on the role of hunter and warrior while women were essential to tasks around camp, such as tanning hides, creating a home, and making items needed for everyday life. Plains Indian children learned skills and stories passed down from one generation to another, ensuring the continued success of the family and the tribe.

California National Historic Trail

Oregon National Historic Trail

Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail