

Interior Alaska Athabascan Native Culture



1. **Watch the video** for an introduction to Native Cultures of Interior Alaska!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-K_fSvhldE
2. **Read the slideshow** to learn facts about this Native Culture
3. See the next slide for a video introduction to an Athabascan woman:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bir3s248w8>

Athabascans: People of The Boreal Forest

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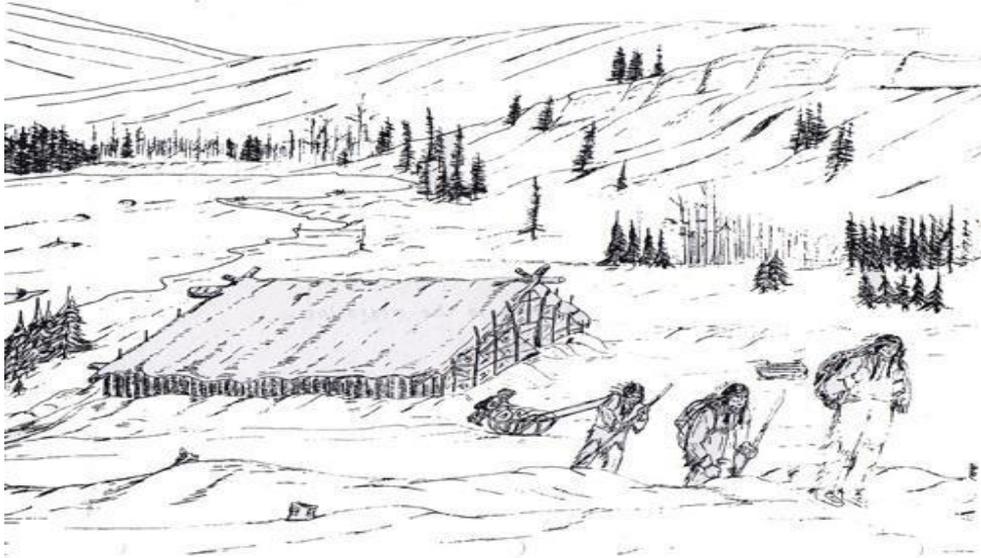


Athabascans



- Athabascans occupy the Interior of Alaska
- Known as **People of The Boreal Forest**
- Exact manner of migration to Alaska is not known
- Population thought to number 10,000 when first contacted

Traditional Life - Pre Contact



- **Athabascans** were nomadic people.
- Traditionally lived in small groups of 20-40 people.
- In winter: traveled on snowshoes and sleds - sometimes with packs of dogs pulling the sled
- In summer: traveled by canoe

Traditional Life - Pre Contact



- Lived in skin tents or tents made of spruce poles and spruce boughs

Traditional Life - Pre Contact



Examples of **skin tents**:
Spruce pole structure with a smoke hole at the top and skins covering the structure.

Traditional Life - Pre Contact



Birch bark canoes
made by early Athabascans
to **travel along the rivers**
in summer.

In winter,
they'd walk with **sleds** or
have packs of dogs pull
them

Traditional Life - Pre Contact



Traditional clothing:
made with caribou and moose skin.

Fur animals like beaver, marten,
ermine, and muskrat:
used to decorate parkas and to
make mittens and hats.

Traditional Life - Pre Contact



Summer clothing:

Lighter weight
smoked and tanned moose hide
would have been worn

Modern Athabascans



Historically Athabascans moved around with some semi-permanent villages in areas of good hunting or fishing

Athabascans started settling in permanent villages when Canadian and “American” trappers and miners started entering the Alaska territory in the late 1800s.

Trading posts were built first, schools followed

Subsistence Foods



Traditionally **moose** were hunted with bow and arrows (first stone point arrows and then metal points)

Like many hunters, Athabascans embraced a better technology and now use guns

Subsistence Foods



Moose hunting -
remains an important subsistence activity for Athabascans.

Subsistence Foods



Caribou hunting:

helped Athabaskans long ago, and now today, gather another major meat source.

Long ago, traditional methods were used to hunt.

Today Athabascans use modern technology.

Subsistence Foods



These men are tending a **fish wheel**.
Athabascans catch salmon in Interior rivers.

Subsistence Foods



Fish camps like this were set up along productive salmon rivers to harvest the bountiful salmon runs in the Interior.

Subsistence Foods



Salmon strips
hung to be smoked in the smoke house.

Subsistence Foods



Salmon are the primary subsistence food harvested in the summer, but pike, grayling, whitefish, and sheefish are caught too.

Fish are caught with nets, fish wheels and sometimes fishing rods.

Subsistence Foods



Other subsistence activities:

berry picking, harvesting wild plants and wild greens happened long ago and today as well.

Trapping is still practiced today too.

Interior Alaska



There are many **Athabascan villages** in the Interior

In the past, Athabascans were highly mobile with some semi-permanent villages in areas of good hunting or fishing.

When Athabascans settled in villages, most **settled along rivers** such as the **Yukon, Tanana, Kuskokwim, and Koyukuk.**

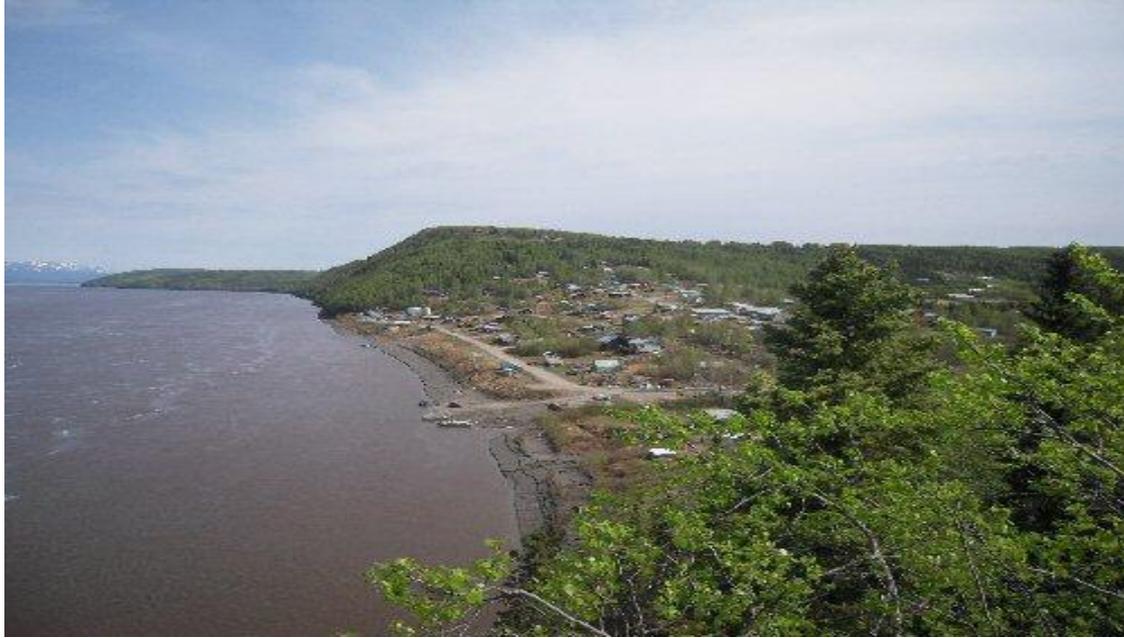
Interior Alaska



Fairbanks is the major city in the Interior.
It is a regional hub for the villages
along the Yukon, Kuskokwim, Koyukuk, and Tanana rivers

Interior Alaskan Villages

Ruby,
Alaska



Villages along the Yukon River include:

Eagle, Circle, Fort Yukon, Tanana, Galena, Ruby, Koyukuk, Nulato and more

Interior Alaskan Villages

Tanana,
Alaska

Flood
during
Breakup
2009

Population 265



Villages along the Tanana River:

Tanana, Manley Hot Springs, Nenana, Delta Junction, Tok, Northway.

Interior Alaskan Villages



McGrath,
Alaska

Population 401

Villages along the Kuskokwim River:

Lake Minchumina, McGrath, Stoney River, Sleetmute, Kalskag and more

Interior Alaskan Villages

Huslia,
Alaska -

Population 259



Villages along the Koyukuk River:
Koyukuk, Hughes, Huslia, Bettles and more

Transportation in Interior Athabascan Villages



A Cessna 206 - one of the more common airplanes that service the small villages in Interior Alaska

Transportation in Interior Athabaskan Villages



ATVs are the most common form of transportation within a village.

Transportation in Interior Athabaskan Villages



In the **summer**,
the rivers become like highways.

Travel is done in long jon boats,
a flat bottom riverboat
often 20-24 ft. long.

Some have a covered cabin to
keep the passengers dry in a
rainstorm.

Transportation in Interior Athabaskan Villages



Athabascans in villages all over the Interior rely on snowmachines for **winter travel**. (like this picture of an Inupiat hunter)

Athabaskan Art



Athabaskan artwork:

known for smoked moose or caribou hide clothing
with intricate **beadwork** patterns.

Traditionally the artwork was done with dyed porcupine quills,
Trading posts brought glass beads which were used long ago too. Now plastic beads are
sometimes used as well. **Note the floral patterns.**

Athabascan Art



A **birch bark** baby carrier.

Traditionally this was a baby backpack and served a purpose.

Nowadays this is considered artwork.

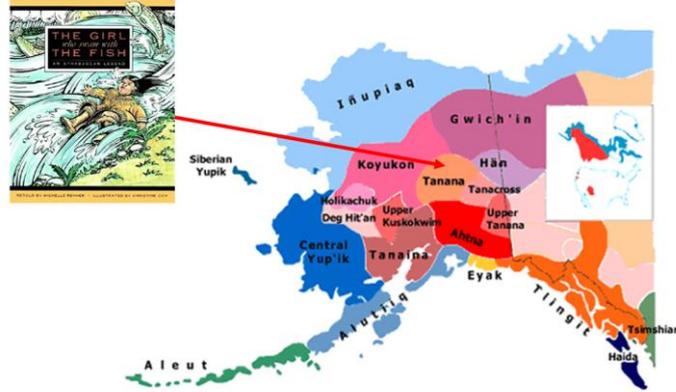
It takes great skill to weave spruce roots together with birch bark to form a basket or a baby carrier.

Athabascan Art



Spruce roots and
a piece of **birch bark**
getting ready to be turned into a basket

Stories From Interior/Western Athabascan Native Cultures



Listen to [The Girl Who Swam With the Fish](#) retold by Michelle Renner.

This is a story from the Athabascan region of Alaska.
Look at examples of [fish racks](#) from across Alaska and ideas on how to design your own model fish rack.