

## Southeast Salish of the Plateau

ETHNONYMS Coeur d'Alene ([n]Schitsu'umsh[/n]; [n]Skitswish[/n]), Flathead ([n]Sqéliö[/n]; [n]Sqelixw[/n]; [n]Séliš[/n]; Bitterroot Salish), Kalispell ([n]Qlispél[/n]; Lower Pend d'Oreille), Pend d'Oreille ([n]Qæispé[/n]; [n]Qlispél[/n]; Upper Pend d'Oreille), Spokane ([n]Sl'x l'axt[/n], [n]Spoqín[/n]; Spokan)

### ORIENTATION, IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION, DEMOGRAPHY, LINGUISTIC

AFFILIATION The southeast Salish peoples of the western United States Plateau region consist of the Coeur d'Alene, Flathead, Kalispell, Pend d'Oreille, and Spokane, each with their own subgroups and/or bands. Their aboriginal territories and current reservations are located in the states of Montana (Flathead and Pend d'Oreille, both on the Flathead Reservation), Idaho (Coeur d'Alene Reservation and Kalispell Reservation) and Washington (Spokane Reservation). The approximate aboriginal population and their tribal enrollments in the year 2000 for these peoples were: Coeur d'Alene at 4,000 and 2,400 respectively; the Kalispell at 1,200 and 400; the Spokane at 1,400 and 2,500; and the Flathead at 1,200 aboriginally and the Pend d'Oreille at 2,000 aboriginally, with a combined enrollment in the year 2000 of approximately 7,000 on the Flathead Reservation. All these peoples speak the Interior Salish language, with dialect distinctions between them. The close similarity of the Spokane-Kalispell-Flathead dialects served as a *lingual franca* throughout the Plateau.

HISTORY AND CULTURAL RELATIONS As with other Plateau peoples and beginning as early as 1780s and preceding the arrival of Lewis and Clark and the fur trade to the region, the demographic, psychological and social-economic consequences of

communicable diseases, and the enhanced mobility and social-economic effects of certain Euro-American trade goods and the horse were transforming Salish life. The horse also resulted in an intensification of intertribal warfare. Meriwether Lewis, William Clark and the Corps of Discovery first provided written accounts of these peoples in 1805, followed by David Thompson and the North West Company in 1810, who were establishing fur trading relations. With the fur trade also came word of a new religion, prophesized by Shinning Shirt (Flathead) and Circling Raven (Coeur d'Alene). It was ushered in by the missionary efforts of the Presbyterians and Jesuits in the 1830s and 1840s. Soon after, missions were built and day-boarding schools established. The southeastern Plateau Salish peoples maintained regular alliances, and trading and marriage exchanges with each other during these unsettled times. Tensions with Whites deteriorate following the killings at Marcus Whitman's mission in 1847, and in 1850 by the Donation Land Act, which brought the indigenous peoples into increasing conflict with miners and homesteaders. These tensions lead to U.S. Army military engagement with "hostile tribes," the Coeur d'Alene, Spokane, Kalispell, Palouse and Yakama, and their defeat in 1858 at the Battle of Four Lakes. Executive Orders established the Spokane (1881), Coeur d'Alene (1889), and Kalispell (1914) reservations, and the Hell Gate Treaty (1855) established a reservation for Flathead and Pend d'Oreille, greatly reducing their land-bases. The Allotment Act of 1887 further eroded the land base.

**SETTLEMENTS** The Salish peoples followed a transhumance seasonal round through their territories. Winter involved large winter encampments, located close to water (rivers or lakes), with tule mat longhouses, and winter hunting and ceremonies activities, such as the Medicine Dance also known as the Jump Dance. Spring into summer would entail

family and band groups dispersing to root digging and fishing locations, with tule mat conical tipi and lean-to structures. Some families would travel to the river falls, such as Kettle or Celilo Falls, meeting other tribal members for fishing, trading and socializing, and even joining other tribal members, traveling east into buffalo country to hunt. Fall involved family and band members reuniting in preparation for the winter encampments, while continuing to hunt and gather huckleberries and late season roots. Membership in these seasonal groupings was flexible, based on bilateral and fictive kinship ties.

**ECONOMY SUBSISTENCE** Reflective of an intimate knowledge of their landscapes and seasonal climatic cycles, the transhumance seasonal pattern of the Salish involved fishing trout, white fish and salmon in the rivers, hunting deer, elk and bear in the woodlands, gathering huckleberries and other berries in the mountains, and digging camas, bitterroot and other roots in the prairies and meadows. Each of the important seasonal foods would be preceded with prayers, and after the first foods were gathered, with ceremonial feasting.

**COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES** By the early twenty-first century, commercial activities centered along natural resource and economic development, such as in forestry and farming, and most importantly, in gaming and entertainment. Casinos, golf courses, restaurants, and concert halls provide employment opportunities and generate funding revenues for tribal enterprises.

**INDUSTRIAL ARTS** Among the traditional industrial arts was the construction of sturgeon-nosed, birch and cedar-bark canoes, along with pine and cedar dugout canoes.

Growing along the marsh lands were tules that could be fashioned into mats. Easily transportable when rolled, these mats were durable, water-proof when wet, yet when dry,

separating and allowing ventilation. When layered on each other, they were a perfect cover for the winter semi sub-terrarium, and the summer surface conical and long-house structures, the latter up to 100 feet in length. The long-house could accommodate 5 to 6 extended families. The Salish peoples excelled in basketry, including the ridged cedar-bark baskets and the coiled spilt cedar-root baskets, each used for for storage in caches and as they were water-proof, for boiling water and cooking. Flexible twined "sally" bags and flat cornhusk bags, all adorned with intricate geometric patterns, were also made. As a mark of respect, elder women wore "cedar basket hats." Adorning rawhide parfleches were geometrically painted designs, and on tanned hides and later trade cloth, beaded patterns were sown. With the arrival of the horse in the mid to late eighteen century, the travois and hide tipi (and later canvas) were adopted. By the late nineteenth century, the tule mat and tipi lodges were replaced by wood-constructed reservation housing.

TRADE The Salish peoples took part in extensive inter-tribal trade networks, converging at the fishing centers throughout the Columbia river-basin, such as at Celilo, Kettle, Spokane and Little falls. While fresh and dried salmon, and dried camas would be traded, these centers linked the abalone and dentalium shells from the Pacific coast with the buffalo robes and catlinite pipes from the plains. While abundant in deer and camas, but lacking access to salmon fishing, the Coeur d'Alene could exchange their dried deer meat and camas for salmon, for example. With Euro-American contact in the late nineteenth century and continuing into the present, trade for metal goods of all kinds and cloth and alcohol began. During the mid-twentieth century, with the construction of dams for irrigation and hydroelectricity along the Columbia River basin, the rich fisheries and their trading centers diminished in importance.

**DIVISION OF LABOR** While gender roles are traditionally clearly demarcated, e.g., males as hunters, fishermen and warriors, and women as gatherers, food preparers and child caring , the Plateau societies are nevertheless characterized by strong gender equality, with men and women ultimately having equally access to power, authority, and autonomy in their respective economic, domestic, political and religious spheres of family life. Men had little to no prerogative or authority over women's roles, while women had little overt say over the activities of men. Likewise, the members of each gender had full access to the power and privilege within their gender-structured roles. When viewed community-wide, both sets of gender roles contributed equally to the wellbeing of the whole, each complementing the other. While many families continue this gender role differentiation, by the early twenty-first century these gender-based distinctions were beginning to blur, as some men increasingly took on childrearing roles and some women hunted and fished, for example.

**LAND TENURE** Individual extended families had access and right to various hunting, fishing, and root digging territories so long as they cared for the land, creating a usufruct relationship. Prayer and gift offerings would be made and only the deer, fish and roots needed by the family would be hunted or gathered. Should a family over-hunt their territory or show disrespect in other ways, that family would no longer have the right to access that area for subsistence or spiritual usage.

**KINSHIP KIN GROUPS, DOMESTIC UNIT, DESCENT and KINSHIP**

**TERMINOLOGY.** The family unit is based upon a bilateral, kindred-based, extended family made up of relatives from both sides of the family, tracing descent back through either male or female founding ancestor, usually a well-known and respected ancestral leader. These units are affiliated by kinship to form band or "clan" groupings. The

extended family is often named, “the children of (name of ancestor).” Besides a name, each extended family is associated with a particular location, regarded as “home,” often the site of the winter villages. While born into a particular family, individuals have the option of choosing another family to establish membership, even within another tribe, expressive of a quality of social permeability. Kinship nomenclature is Hawaiian, differentiating kinsmen only by generation and gender, resulting in is a very expansive and flexible social network.

**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY** No marriage is allowed between any known relative.

Marriage could be arranged by the parents or the couple may simply elope. Marriage was validated through exchange of goods in a “wedding trade” between the two families.

Newly married couples typically practiced patrilocal residence, though they could easily move into bride’s family. Marriages tended to be monogamous, though polygynous marriages were accepted. First marriages were often unstable, with few people married only once in a lifetime. Divorce was easy, as was re-marriage. The instability of the marriage bond is not equated with instability within the family, but reflects its flexibility and adaptive qualities.

**INHERITANCE** Rights to hunting and gathering territories and important property would pass to relatives by gender role. Particularly valuable domestic and subsistence-related items would be transferred to selected descendants through the practice of the giveaway following the wake of a deceased relative.

**SOCIALIZATION** Children were enculturated through a combination of direct kin-based teaching from elders, active observation by children of adult roles during subsistence, social and ceremonial activities, and the sharing of narrative oral traditions. Such stories

were embedded with teachings relating to values and ethics, as well as practical skills. Children were viewed as “little adults,” and allowed to participate in most adult activities, and supervised along gender lines. Teasing and admonishment, rather than corporeal punishment, were practiced as a means of social control. Grandparents played a critical role in socialization.

**SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANIZATION, SOCIAL ORGANIZATION** Within the kinship system, decisions were reserved to the elders and those with particular expertise in a particular social, economic or political activity under consideration. Elders were granted authority by others by the example they set while adhering to the key cultural values. Reflective of the equalitarian and flexible qualities of the family structure, leadership positions were ideally achieved, and not acquired through ascribed or inherited roles. Any man was potentially eligible to become a chief, though sons of former chiefs were often so elected, giving some preference to inheritance of leadership roles. While no women could become a chief, and speak at social gatherings, many women were well respected for their wisdom and “chief-like qualities,” and were exerted considerable influence over public opinion. Whether a village, a band, or the tribal head “chief,” their leadership position was signified by publically possessing of a “stone pipe.” The role of the chief, often referred to as “headmen,” was at all levels advisory. They led by their example and ruled by consensus. Headmen, whether village or band, had no coercive or punitive powers. Sub-chiefs and councils of chiefs and sub-chiefs discussed issues of collective concern, leading to consensus decision-making. There was thus no necessity for a “police society” to carry out and enforce the decisions of the headmen. Skills in oratory and gentle persuasion were the means to build consensus. The practice of the giveaway enhanced inter-family and band affiliations and

alliances, and facilitated rites of passage for individuals. They continue to be held at such occasions as a naming ceremony, a first kill or root gathering ceremony, a marriage, upon the return of a military veteran, when a great honor has been bestowed, a healing ceremony, and following the wake at a funeral and a year later at a memorial for the deceased. Elders would receive special acknowledgement in the quality of gift given. By the early twenty-first century the traditional family units have remained relatively intact, while challenged by the effects of alcohol and drug abuse and the dysfunction that resulted. Leadership roles have changed given the Indian Reorganization Act and the incorporation of elected tribal councils. Nevertheless, elders retain considerable respect and authority. Slavery was infrequently practiced.

**SOCIAL CONTROL** Kinship relations defined social control practices. As with children, teasing, admonishment and shaming, rather than corporeal punishment, were practiced as a typical means of social control. For extreme deviant behavior, ostracism was the preferred option. Generosity, bravery, and honesty were behaviors rewarded with public praise and acknowledgement, and often at giveaways.

**CONFLICT** Conflict between individuals, families, bands or tribal groupings were often settled through competitive means, such as hand game contests, horse racing or mock battles. Men would take up weapons for defense from an outside aggressor or, on occasion, for revenge for a grievous transgression, such as the murder of a relative.

Peaceful relations typically dominated interpersonal relations. Scalping an enemy did occur. There were no warrior societies, nor personal coup system, as present among the plains tribes. With the coming of the horse, tensions with plains tribes increased, such as with the Blackfeet and Crow.

RELIGION AND EXPRESSIVE CULTURE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS [n]Amotqn[/n], a creator being, along with the First Peoples, such as Coyote and Salmon, prepared the world for the coming of human peoples by embedding it with “gifts,” such as [n]suumesh[/n] or spiritual power, the moral and utilitarian and moral “teachings” and the fish, animals and plants the people would need to thrive. It was Coyote who, in slaying the Gobbler Monster, created the various human peoples from its parts. There are oral traditions of the Little People, and of dangerous beings, such as “Stick Indians,” and various water and land monsters. The “landscape is as textbook,” its specific rock and river formations expressive of these narrative oral traditions. In their retelling, essential tribal and family identities are conveyed, along with key values and practical skills. [n]Suumesh[/n] is acquired through fasting and prayer in the mountains, or through inheritance. Its efficacy might be intended for a specific application, as for example, in hunting or healing, or it might be generalized, applicable to a range of intentions. Associated [n]suumesh[/n] songs are song when this spiritual power is applied. Smudging with cedar and prayer is taken in its proper use and care. These oral traditions and practices have continued into the early twenty-first century, often viewed as complementary to Christianity.

RELIGIOUS PRACTITIONERS The primary role of religious practitioners, such as shaman, is to facilitate access for others to the spiritual world. Through proper prayer and the coordination of human tasks, religious practitioners helped people in the ritual activities associated with healing and rites of passage occasions, with fishing and gathering activities, as well as with sweating and Jump Dancing. These practitioners did not assume the role of a priest per se, advocating a specific religious doctrine or creed.

CEREMONIES The life-cycle of individuals and the seasonal cycle of the year are marked by ceremonial acknowledgments and requests. Among the important rituals for an individual, likely early in one's life, are those of his or her Naming and of Fasting. Bestowed by a respected elder, the spiritually endowed and descriptive nature of an Indian Name provides an individual with guidance, protection, and a social and spiritual identity. Fasting from food and water on a mountain may occur throughout one's life time, providing opportunity for spiritual intervention in a family member's misfortune, or the acquisition of a tutelary spirit. Other critical individual rituals are those associated with his or her first successful hunting, fishing or root gathering, marking a young person's transition to adult responsibilities with the community feast of a First Hunt, First Fish or First Roots Ceremony. Elders bestow accolades and new expectations on the young person at these ceremonies. While all partake of the meat or roots secured by the young hunter or gatherer, he or she does not, reinforcing the new role of providing for others. When a new family is to be established, a "wedding trade" marks the union of a young couple and gifts are given new ties between families. The final transition in life is marked by a wake, burial and memorial giveaway, allowing the deceased to leave his or her family behind, while journeying to the camp across the river or lake. The wake is marked by song, prayers and stories affirming the good deeds of the deceased. With the arrival of spring comes a series of First Foods ceremonies. Held throughout the summer and into the fall, these ceremonies are associated with fishing the lake trout or river salmon, and the gathering of the various roots. Communal feasts are held, charging the hunters, fishermen and gatherers to take care and provide sustenance for those in the community. To spiritually nurture the individual as well as maintain the

balance in the natural world, ceremonies such as the Sweat House and the Winter Dance are held. Sweating occurs year-round, as family members assemble to partake. After rocks have been heated and placed in the lodge, the participants engage in prayer, song and ritual cleansing. The ceremonial culmination of the year comes with what is alternatively called Winter Dance-Medicine Dance-Jump Dance, a mid-winter, tutelary spirit dance. Held in a communal longhouse or even someone's home, and on two or three consecutive nights, the sunset to sunrise ritual involves prayers, songs and a jumping-type of dance. The focus of the ceremony is on particular family's needs and hopes, as well as the renewal of good health to the animals, fish and plants of the land. The Blue-Jay complex, in which an individual is transformed into the Bird, with curative powers, was practiced as part of the Jump Dance. Giveaways are often held in conjunction with many ceremonies, providing an individual or family the opportunity to share with the community the joys of a success or the sorrows of the passing of a loved one.

**ARTS** Besides the aesthetic expressions adorned to parfleches, basketry and clothing, the arts found expression in song and dance. During the mid-twentieth, the powwow emerged as a pan-Indian expression of cultural heritage and artistic expression. A range of competitive dances, accompanied by associated songs, are found in the annual cycle of powwows sponsored by the various tribes, from men's and women's "traditional," to men's "fancy" and "grass" dance, to women's "jingle" and "shawl" dance. Geometric and flower designed beadwork adorn the regalia of the dancers.

**MEDICINE** Physical illness was often attributed to spiritual forces, such as soul loss, spirit or object intrusion and occasionally sorcery. Specialized healers would diagnosis

and provide prognosis and treatment through the application of [n]suumesh[/n]. Curing entailed sweating, sucking the illness out, smudging all accompanied with ritual dance and song. In addition, broken bones were set and a wide range of herbal and root substances were administered to the sick. In the early twenty-first century, traditional healing continues, viewed as an important supplement to Euro-American biomedical healing.

DEATH AND AFTERLIFE Burials involve wakes by the extended family and friends, accompanied by prayers, the retelling of biographic stories about the deceased, many of which are humorous, communal meals, and giveaways. Rose bushes have been typically used to brush over the earthen or stone covered burial site to ritually cleanse the grave, with burial goods laid atop the grave. After burial, close relatives might cut their hair short, and spend the next year in mourning, not participating in public social activities. Cremation was not practiced. For some families there is the conviction that the deceased have crossed a river or lake to prepare a camp for those left behind and yet to come, with the deceased locating the best horse pastures, huckleberry patches and fishing spots. A year after the death, a memorial giveaway and feast would be held in honor of the deceased and end the period of mourning for the close relatives. Ghosts, restless souls of the deceased, might continue visiting members of the extended family, until placated through prayer.

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