

The Indigenous Knowledge Encyclopedia

Book Two • Historical lifeways, materials, trade, healing traditions, technologies, wars and resistance

Research edition | 11 October 2026

Editorial notice

This is an evidence-based, Indigenous-centred foundation for a multi-nation history, not a definitive voice for every Indigenous people. No invented eyewitness testimony, dialogue, or ceremonial instructions are presented. Narrative passages reconstruct general historically documented circumstances, not the life of a named person. Nation-specific variation and uncertainties are identified. Living cultures and sovereignty continue into the present.

The earlier project manuscripts are preserved separately in the transfer package. This edition incorporates and reorganizes their themes; it does not claim to reproduce or independently verify every claim in those drafts.

A | How to read this encyclopedia

Entries identify region, materials, function, period, evidence, and limits. They are historical explanations, not universally applicable construction instructions. Sacred or community-restricted teachings are excluded without authorization.

B | Harvesting and fishing

Great Lakes: seasonal netting, spearing, hook-and-line, fish drying and smoking; manoomin harvested from canoes in suitable wetlands. Pacific Northwest: salmon fishing and preservation, with nation-specific river and coastal technologies. Arctic: sea-ice and marine harvesting knowledge varies by Inuit community. Each practice depended on local governance and ecological knowledge.

C | Hunting and buffalo

Plains nations used varied communal drives, buffalo jumps, stalking, and later mounted hunting. Meat, marrow, fat, hides, sinew, and bone could serve different purposes. Bison decline reflected commercial slaughter, railroads, military policy, ecological pressures and other factors. Avoid claims that all nations followed identical herd migrations. [S4, S5, S10]

D | Shelter and building materials

Plains tipis used poles and hide or later canvas coverings in particular periods; Eastern Woodlands shelters could use bent saplings, bark, mats and timber; Haudenosaunee longhouses used wooden frameworks and bark; Northwest Coast plank houses used large timbers; Southwest pueblos used stone and adobe. Materials and construction changed over time. [S2]

E | Canoes and waterways

Birchbark canoe traditions in parts of northeastern North America used bark, wooden ribs and gunwales, root lashings and sealants. Dugout canoes were made in various coastal and river regions. Great Lakes portages, St. Lawrence, Ottawa, Mississippi, and other watersheds supported trade, kinship and diplomacy. Exact methods should be attributed to particular builders and communities.

F | Clothing and hide preparation

Materials included deerskin, buffalo hide, fur, woven cotton, plant fibres, wool, and bark fibre according to region. Historical hide processing could involve scraping, softening and smoking; clothing was sewn, woven, decorated and repaired. Do not reduce Indigenous dress to feathers and buckskin. [S2]

G | Jewellery, artistry, and exchange

Shell beads and wampum, quillwork, stone, copper, silverwork in later periods, weaving, pottery, and beadwork each have distinct histories. Wampum can record relationships and diplomacy and must not be treated as merely decorative. European glass beads and metals entered pre-existing Indigenous artistic systems through trade.

H | Tools and hunting weapons

Region- and period-specific technologies included stone blades, scrapers, bone awls, fishhooks, nets, bows and arrows, spears, atlatls, and later firearms obtained through trade. Materials science, repair and maintenance mattered. This reference records historical function, not instructions to manufacture or use weapons.

I | Cooking and storage

Hearth roasting, clay-pot boiling, hot-stone cooking, earth ovens, grinding, drying, smoking, and food caches were used in different regions. Maize processing, maple sugaring, wild rice preparation, pemmican, salmon drying, and potato cultivation each require nation-specific accounts. [S3]

J | Plants, medicines, and health

Ethnobotanical records describe medicinal and practical uses of willow, cedar, yarrow, sweetgrass, sage and many other plants, but uses differ by nation, species and preparation. Traditional use is not proof of clinical effectiveness. Some plants are toxic, unsafe during pregnancy, or interact with

medicines. This is historical information, not a dosage or treatment manual. Cultural and ceremonial practices require permission to reproduce.

K | Cleanliness and care

Bathing, grooming, laundering or cleaning clothing, caring for children, and maintaining living areas took different forms depending on water, climate and culture. Some communities practiced steam bathing or sweat ceremonies, but ceremonies should not be equated with ordinary hygiene. Detailed claims require specific ethnographic and community evidence.

L | Trading with Europeans

Furs, hides, fish, food, guides' services and canoe transport were exchanged for metal tools, textiles, firearms and other goods. Trading relationships could include diplomacy and mutual advantage but also debt, dependency, violence, disease and territorial pressure. Indigenous people acted as negotiators and economic agents. [S1]

M | Disease, disruption, and colonization

Smallpox, measles and other epidemics caused devastating losses, interacting with war, forced labour, famine and displacement. Effects differed by time and place. Colonial policies also restricted movement, ceremonies, land access and languages. In Canada residential schooling explicitly sought assimilation. [S6]

N | Wars, treaties, and resistance

Key case studies: Pueblo Revolt (1680); Great Lakes diplomacy and conflicts; Pontiac's War (1763); Haudenosaunee treaty histories; Cherokee removal; Dakota War (1862); Plains Wars; Red River Resistance (1869–70); North-West Resistance (1885). Each requires Indigenous perspectives and primary documentation; participants and causes must not be generalized.

O | Indigenous service and code talkers

First World War and Second World War service included soldiers, scouts, medical workers, and code talkers. Diné code talkers helped secure communications in the Pacific; other Indigenous language speakers served in wartime communication roles. Historical recognition and veterans' treatment require individual and nation-specific records.

P | Living knowledge and intellectual rights

Indigenous knowledge belongs within living social relationships. Publishing a technique, plant use, story or sacred teaching may require permission. Credit knowledge holders, respect Indigenous data sovereignty, and preserve distinctions between public archival descriptions and restricted community knowledge.

Research register: questions to verify before publication

- Nation-specific dates, language names and territorial maps
- Species identification and cultural permissions for medicinal plants
- Primary records for individual treaties and alleged breaches
- Regional techniques for hides, fibres, timber, nets and shelters
- First-person oral histories used only with publication authorization
- Full historical coverage of the Caribbean, Central and South America

Source key and research bibliography

[S1] Smithsonian Native Knowledge 360 — <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/about/essential-understandings>

[S2] Smithsonian Lifeways — <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/faq/did-you-know>

[S3] Smithsonian Landscape and Croplands — <https://americanindian.si.edu/visit/dc/architecture-landscape>

[S4] NPS People and Bison — <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/bison/people.htm>

[S5] NPS What Happened to the Bison — <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/what-happened-to-the-bison.htm>

[S6] NCTR Residential School History — <https://nctr.ca/education/residential-school-history/>

[S7] NCTR Mandate — <https://nctr.ca/about/our-mandate/>

[S8] Library of Congress Indigenous Collections — <https://guides.loc.gov/indigenous-peoples-america>

[S9] Smithsonian Nation to Nation — <https://americanindian.si.edu/nationtonation/>

[S10] National Park Service Bison History — <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/historyculture/bison-management.htm>

Additional books for cross-checking: Charles C. Mann, 1491; Pekka Hämäläinen, Indigenous Continent; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States; Thomas King, The Inconvenient Indian; Andrés Reséndez, The Other Slavery; Edward Benton-Banai, The Mishomis Book. These books are recommended for consultation, not represented as fully read or quoted here.

Publication status: research foundation; not a comprehensive or Indigenous-authorized definitive history of the Americas.