

## The Kwakiutl of the Northwest Coast

The Kwakiutl Native American tribe migrated to the Northwest coast of North America. The area where they lived is a long narrow strip of land extending north and south along the Pacific Ocean, covering parts of the states we now know as Washington, Oregon, and northern California. It also included land that now makes up the Canadian province of British Columbia. To the west of the region is the Pacific Ocean and to the east are high mountains. The land stretches about 2,000 miles from north to south but only about 150 miles from east to west. The northwest coast receives more rain than any other region, which keeps the land moist. The temperatures are warm but get cooler as you move east. Off the northwest coast, breezes are felt from the Pacific Ocean.

Because of the amount of rain on the northwest coast, the Kwakiutl had an abundance of large evergreen trees, which included fir, cedar, spruce, and redwood. The trees were used to build 'cedar-plank' houses with bark roofs. The windowless houses were long and narrow, and many family members lived together in one home. A hole was left in the center of the roof to allow smoke from the fire to exit. Many homes were built right on the shoreline of the Pacific, and they were often painted with images to represent the family. With the climate being so rainy, much time was spent indoors, especially in the winter.

For traveling, the Kwakiutl would do lots of walking, but they would also use the evergreens to build 'dug-out' canoes. A dug-out canoe is a log that has been hollowed out. They were able to build large sturdy canoes to withstand ocean currents. When going out on large fishing trips, the canoes could hold twenty people plus all of the fish they caught.

Living on the coast meant much of the Kwakiutl tribe's food came from the ocean or other waterways. Men would travel in their canoes to catch fish, such as salmon, in addition to other sea animals. Larger sea animals caught might include sea otters and seals. They would use nets, fishing traps, and harpoons to help them catch the animals. A harpoon is a spear connected to a long rope. Men would also hunt bear and deer using bows and arrows. Women helped by collecting seaweed, berries, oysters, and clams.

Salmon was one of the most important foods, so each year they held a celebration to give thanks for the first salmon caught that season. They believed that throwing the unbroken salmon bones into the water where the first fish was caught would bless them with many more fish throughout the season.

With the climate of the northwest being so comfortable, little clothing was needed. Actually, most men rarely wore clothing during summer months. When they did though, it was usually just a 'breechcloth', which is a front and back flap that hangs from the waist and is made of animal skin. Women, and sometimes men, would wear a 'tunic', which is a lightweight sleeveless shirt that hangs to the knees. Apron-type skirts were also worn by women, which they made using cedar bark that had been dried and shredded. If the weather was cooler, they might add a robe made from the hair of a mountain goat. Woven cedar-bark hats were common because of the amount of rain on the northern coast. The tight weave would provide a water-proof hat. Moccasins were also worn by both men and women.

The Kwakiutl were experts in wood craftsmanship. Decorative 'totem poles' are one creation they are known for. A totem pole is a column of wood that has been carved to tell a story. The symbols on the poles usually told about the people that owned the pole or their heritage. They were used in different places, like door entry-ways, columns to hold a roof, or even just as a free-standing pole.



Sketch a shoreline off the Pacific. Include features mentioned in the passage.