Native Texans of the Gulf Coast

Native Texans (Native Americans who lived in Texas) developed lifestyles that made the most of the plants and wildlife in their areas. The Coahuiltecan (ko•ah•WEE•l•tay•cunz) and the Karankawa (ka•RAN•keh•wahs) were the two major groups of Native Texans who lived in this region. The Coahuiltecans were actually several native groups who lived on the southern coast. This area extended south along the Gulf Coast past the Rio Grande and inland to present-day San Antonio. The terrain was hot, semi-arid brush country that yielded little food or shelter.

The game of the region was limited to deer and smaller animals such as rabbits. An occasional buffalo was a treat. Otherwise, Native Texans lived on food gathered nearby, often by the women. This food included mesquite beans, nuts, berries, cacti, worms, lizards, insects, and roots.

The Coahuiltecan lived as nomads. When the limited food supply ran out in one place, they moved their camp to another area. Their temporary dwellings were made of mud, animal skins, and brush. Living such a harsh lifestyle built the Coahuiltecan’s toughness and endurance. Upon encountering the Coahuiltecan men, the Europeans were amazed at their ability to run all day without tiring.
Many Native American groups migrated to Texas at different periods of time. ● Which region had the greatest number of Native Texan groups? Why?

The Karankawas lived on the coast between Corpus Christi Bay and Galveston Bay. These Native Texans used dugout canoes they pushed with poles. They used cane traps and bows and arrows to catch fish. They gathered mollusks, clams, and oysters along coastal bays and rivers. They also hunted for small game. Because the Karankawas lived near marshy areas, they had to cope with swarms of mosquitoes. To ward off the insects, they coated their bodies with alligator or shark grease. Spanish explorer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca described the Karankawas:

**TEXAS VOICES**

The people there are tall and well built. Their only weapons are bows and arrows, with which they are very skillful. The men have their lower lip pierced and wear a piece of cane in it half a finger in diameter. Their women do the hard work.

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Journey of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*

The women made clothing from deerskin and moss. They also tattooed and painted their bodies. The Karankawas were very gentle with their children. and they loved dogs.
Native Texans of East Texas

The Piney Woods of East Texas had plenty of rainfall and fertile soil. The Native Texans of this region lived in a food-rich environment. They learned to clear the forests and plant crops such as pumpkins, beans, and corn. They also hunted game such as deer, bears, and an occasional buffalo. The forests provided timber, which the people used to build permanent dwellings. Having secured food and shelter, these Native Texans created colorful crafts such as rugs, baskets, and pottery. Their success as farmers and craftspeople helped them develop trade networks as far west as New Mexico. The East Texas farming groups developed complex societies.

The Caddoes were the largest East Texas native group. They built sturdy grass lodges up to fifty feet high and lived in large villages. The Caddoes were ruled by a major chief called the caddi, assisted by other chiefs who were appointed as helpers. The caddi made the important political decisions for the village and led war councils. Women also played important roles in Caddoan society. The oldest woman in each family controlled the entire family, even if the men were chiefs or warriors.

The Caddoes built huge temple and burial mounds. A head priest kept the temple fire and directed the ceremonies. Most Caddoes lived along the Angelina and Neches Rivers. Groups of Caddoes joined together to form federations such as the Hasinai Confederacy.

Other, smaller bands of Native Texans also lived in East Texas. The Atakapas (ah•TAK•uh•pans) lived in southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana. They lived in the marshy wetlands, hunting small animals and deer and fishing from dugout canoes. They also gathered roots, berries, and shellfish as the Karankawas did. Some of the Atakapas who lived farther inland also raised some crops.

The Alabama and Coushatta groups came from Alabama in the 1700s and settled along the Trinity River. Because the two groups were closely tied, they became known as one group, the Alabama-Coushattas. In the 1780s, some moved into the Big Thicket area, which had fewer settlers and plenty of deer and other game, fish, berries, and other food. They lived in cabins surrounded by fields of vegetables and fruit trees. They were skilled in making baskets and other crafts.

Angelina

Angelina County and the Angelina River in East Texas were both named for a Caddoan woman. Around 1700, Angelina was captured, renamed, and taught by Spanish priests near the Rio Grande. She used her knowledge of the Spanish language to serve as a translator for many years. Angelina was well respected by her people and is the only woman for whom a Texas county is named. Why do you think Angelina was well respected by her people?
Native Texans of the Plains

Large parts of North, West, and Central Texas were a sea of grass that provided a plentiful food supply for millions of buffalo. The Native Texans who lived there based their lives and cultures on the buffalo. They relied on buffalo to provide them with all of their living essentials—food, shelter, clothing, weapons, and tools. In the spring and fall, the entire group would set out on the prairies to hunt buffalo. Before horses were introduced to the region by the Spaniards, the buffalo had to be hunted on foot. Groups of hunters ran the huge animals into streams or over cliffs for the kill. After the Native Texans obtained horses, they were able to hunt and kill the buffalo more efficiently. Some groups on the Texas plains also hunted elk, deer, antelope, or rabbits. They also gathered plants for food.

Once a buffalo was killed, members of the group removed and ate some of the animal’s organs immediately. They roasted most of the meat and preserved some by setting it out to dry into a form of jerky. The women pounded the dried meat and mixed it with nuts and berries to make pemmican. Bones were made into tools, and the hide was used to make tepees, clothing, shoes, and blankets. Women did much of this work as well.

Buffalo herds in Texas were constantly migrating. The Native Texan groups who followed the herds were nomads. Their dwellings had to be easy to take apart and carry on long journeys. Before horses were brought to Texas, these native groups domesticated dogs to drag their belongings from one place to another using small wooden sleds. Later, horses became their primary beasts of burden.

Families formed the basis of social organization on the Texas plains. Groups of families banded together under the leadership of a chief. These groups were self-sufficient and independent. The warriors often held high status because of their bravery. Their dangerous hunting lives constantly tested the survival skills of these Native Texans.
The Apaches moved south into Texas in the 1600s or earlier. They quickly learned to hunt the plentiful game on the plains. The Apaches wore high boots of soft leather to protect themselves from thorns and brush. The men wore headbands that absorbed sweat in the hot desert sun. Women held a central place within the group.

The Mescalero Apaches were mainly nomadic hunters known for raiding other groups in West Texas and northern Mexico. The Lipan Apaches hunted and farmed. For part of the year they lived in farming communities along rivers or streams called rancherías by Spaniards. They grew beans, maize (corn), squash, and pumpkins and traded with neighboring groups. To avoid their enemies, the Comanches, the Lipan Apaches later moved into South Texas.

The Comanches migrated from the harsh, cold mountains of Canada in the 1700s. Fierce warriors, the Comanches became so skilled at riding horses that the Europeans called them the “lords of the plains.” The Comanches were also skilled traders. Both the Comanches and the Apaches depended on horses to hunt and to raid other groups, taking goods and captives. The women wore finely decorated buckskin dresses.

The Kiowas (KE•uh•was), according to their oral history, moved into Texas in the late 1700s from the mountains of South Dakota and Montana. On the High Plains they often joined the Comanches to drive the Apaches from their territories. The Kiowas painted pictures of important events on their tepees and made beautiful beaded crafts. They also developed a calendar. Kiowa warriors became master riders and were among the most feared native groups on the plains.

Natives of North Central Texas

Native groups in North Central Texas combined the lifestyles of some of their neighbors. The Tonkawas lived in Central Texas near present-day Austin. Like the plains groups, they often hunted buffalo. They also hunted deer and traded the hides. In addition, they fished the rivers and springs for fish, crawfish, and clams. Because there was plenty of food nearby, the

The Lipan Apaches hunted buffalo but also gathered plants and farmed. They traded meat, skins, and other animal products for blankets, maize, and other goods. What impression of the Lipan Apaches do you think the artist, Theodore Gentilz, was trying to convey?
Tonkawas did not have to migrate. Like the East Texas groups, they settled in villages and lived in grass houses. The Tonkawas later joined European settlers in fighting the Comanches.

The Wichitas migrated from Kansas and settled near present-day Waco, Dallas, and Corsicana. Like neighboring East Texas native groups, they obtained their food primarily through farming. They grew corn, beans, pumpkins, squash, and melons. They also hunted buffalo. The Wichitas became skilled artisans, making clay pots and jars and leather bags. They lived in large villages of up to a thousand people. They built sturdy grass lodges that held eight to ten people each. Warriors in the group elected chiefs who enforced rules for daily living. The Wichitas also held the women of the group in high regard.

Native Texans of the Far West

The Jumanos and Tiguas made their homes in far West Texas. The Jumanos lived in farming villages of one-room houses along the Rio Grande from El Paso to the Big Bend area. Their square, flat-roofed houses were made of adobe, which helped keep the homes cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Inside, the homes were brightly painted. The Jumanos planted their crops beside rivers and streams to take advantage of the limited water supply. Some Jumanos hunted and traded farther east.

The Tiguas came to Texas in the late 1600s with Spanish settlers who were fleecing a revolt by native groups in Isleta, New Mexico. The Tiguas settled along the Rio Grande near El Paso and called their community Ysleta del Sur, or “Little Island of the South.” Like the Jumanos, they lived in adobe houses, and they cooked food in round adobe ovens. In addition to some hunting and fishing, the Tiguas grew corn, tomatoes, squash, beans, and grapes. They made beautiful pottery for storing and cooking food. They also grew cotton and wove it into cloth.

adobe a brick or other building material made of sun-dried earth and straw

A large stone metate and a small mano (“hand”) used for grinding corn in West Texas

Farming allowed Native Texans to be less dependent on hunting wild game. In what other ways do you think farming benefited Native Texans?
Latecomers

Some Native Americans moved to Texas in the early 1800s to flee from the pressures of settlers to the north and east. In 1819 and 1820 several hundred Cherokees settled along the Sabine, Neches, and Angelina Rivers. Like other East Texas groups, the Cherokees grew corn, beans, pumpkins, and squash. Even before the Europeans came, they had lived in log cabins in villages and used metal tools.

While some Cherokees maintained traditional ways of life, others intermarried with their southern neighbors and adopted their lifestyles. They owned large farms and plantations, and some even owned slaves. Those who moved to Texas hoped to obtain land grants and live in harmony with the Europeans. Although they arrived later than other Native Texans, the Cherokees became important in Texas history.

Another native group, the Kickapoos, arrived in Texas in the 1830s from the Great Lakes area, where they were being crowded out by settlers. The Kickapoos lived in villages and raised crops, but they also spent periods hunting on the plains. The women built their homes, which were round structures covered by woven mats. They also made baskets and buckskin clothing, and crafted fine beadwork.

Like the other Native Texan groups, the latecomers adapted their cultures to their environment. They learned to survive on the resources that were available. As more and more European settlers arrived, the Native Texans would face new challenges.