



# THE PAIUTES

## **AT A GLANCE:** SOUTHERN UTAH AND PAIUTE SUBSISTENCE, AGRICULTURE, AND TRADE

The ancestral territory of the Southern Paiutes covers parts of the Great Basin, the Mojave Desert, and the Colorado Plateau. This dry region does not contain abundant natural resources, but it is extremely diverse in types of plants and animals. Traditionally, the Paiutes lived in small communities that traded amongst one another to maximize their access to the diverse resources of their southern Utah homeland. Some Paiutes diverted streams to farm a variety of vegetables, while others living in the mountains had better access to fish, wild berries, and game. A strong Paiute trade network allowed each band to meet its resource needs while helping other bands survive.

Skilled botanists, the Southern Paiutes cultivated and gathered ninety-six varieties of edible plants, using them both for food and to build tools. Some of the tools Paiute traditionally used were milkweed nets for hunting, mahogany shovels for guiding streams and digging potatoes and bulbs, and willow baskets for storing grains, carrying water, and processing seeds. Paiute basketry was particularly specialized and inventive. The portability of resources was essential to the Paiute trade network, and baskets allowed the Paiutes to transport goods and travel distances that would not have been possible with heavy, fragile pottery. (For more information on Paiute basketry, see “The Art and Technology of Utah’s Five Unique Indian Cultures” lesson plan).

Invariably, the resources available to a particular Paiute band were linked to their location and

habitat. Historically, Paiute bands that lived near rivers and streams built complex irrigation canals to plant and harvest a variety of vegetables, including several types of squash and four different colors of corn. There is evidence that the Paiutes dammed rivers and diverted water for up to a half-mile. The Paiutes prepared fields for planting by burning off the existing brush, tilling the soil, and digging out irrigation rows. Communities that did not live near rivers utilized a method of irrigation in which they dug pits three feet across and six inches deep. Rainwater collected in the pits and was used to water the plants. Once the land was prepared and planted, the Paiutes left their farms and gardens unattended until it was time for weeding. They used the time between planting and weeding to hunt and gather.

The Paiutes were prodigious hunters and gatherers. They gathered many types of fruit in southern Utah, including raspberries and strawberries, which could be eaten fresh or dried for wintertime. They even used chokecherry and elderberry; the latter can be made into a delicious fruit beverage.

Often, seasonal subsistence activities offered the Paiutes an opportunity for social and trade gatherings. Bands held community rabbit hunts, and rabbits then were used for food, clothing, and warm fur blankets. The Paiutes also came together to gather pine nuts in the fall, and harvesting pine nuts was an especially important Paiute subsistence practice. Pine nuts are a rich



# THE PAIUTES

source of protein, stay preserved in their shell for months, and have a delicious, nutty flavor. Another important social and economic event occurred in the springtime, when the Paiutes traditionally gathered around Fish Lake, Utah, for the beginning of fish-spawning season. Fish Lake serves as the largest body of water in the Paiutes' territory in southern Utah.

In addition to maximizing the food resources of their homeland, the Paiutes found a variety of additional uses for local flora. Some were used as medicine. Yarrow treated wounds and eased infections. Strawberry leaves and roots were helpful for upset stomachs when steeped in water and consumed as a tea. Other plants were used as tools that improved the Paiutes' quality of life. The Paiutes burned juniper bark to ward off insects. They used bark from the Fremont cottonwood to make clothing. They cut cedar poles to support their teepees and wickiups.

Clearly, the subsistence and trade practices of the Southern Paiutes allowed them to maximize the resources of their arid southern Utah homeland, but this lesson also seeks to teach students the current locations of the Paiutes by using the five contemporary bands of the Southern Paiute—Cedar, Indian Peaks, Kanosh, Koosharem,

and Shivwits—as the teams that trade with one another. It is important for students to realize that the Paiutes still live in southern Utah. In the 1950s and 1960s, due to the federal policy of Termination, the Southern Paiutes almost lost their last remaining Utah homelands. Today, however, after decades of struggle, the Southern Paiutes are again federally recognized, and they have regained some of their lands and are rebuilding their reservation communities.

The persistence and adaptability of the Southern Paiutes is still evident today. For more information on the history and current location of each of these bands, see the Southern Paiute Interactive Map, available at [www.UtahIndians.org](http://www.UtahIndians.org). For more information on the termination period, see “The Southern Paiutes of Utah, from Termination to Restoration,” lesson plan.