

Description of the ancient Shoshone people

The ancient Shoshone people were considered semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers. A nomad is someone who moves from place to place, rather than living in one place all the time. The Shoshone people traveled to be able to have enough food and as they traveled they hunted and gathered plants to eat. They mostly traveled on foot, but when horses were introduced, they used horses to travel as well. Everywhere they went they lived according to what the land around them provided for them. The expression So-so-goi means “those who travel on foot.” The ancient ones called the Shoshone by that name, but they are called Shoshone people today.

Clothing was mostly made from tanned animal skins. Men and women worked to make clothing all year round. The skins from elk, deer, and antelope made the best dresses or suits. Dresses and suits were decorated with shells and animal claws and teeth. Bones and porcupine quills were also used as decoration. Sinew from animals' intestine was used as thread. Moccasins were made from deer, elk, and moose hides.

Shoshone men did not originally wear Plains Indian warbonnets like the Sioux, but in the 1800's some Shoshone leaders adopted this custom from their neighbors. Shoshone women often wore basket hats. Traditionally, Shoshone people only cut their hair when they were in mourning (showing deep sorrow when someone dies.) Shoshone men and women both wore their hair either loose or in two long braids. (this paragraph adapted from http://www.bigorrin.org/shoshone_kids.htm)

Today, some Shoshone people still have moccasins or a buckskin dress, but they wear modern day clothes. They only wear their traditional clothing on special occasions.

Description of the land where they lived

The Northwestern Shoshone traveled with the changing season to survive the harsh environment of the Great Basin desert. In the early autumn, the Northwestern Shoshone moved into the region near what is now Salmon, Idaho to fish. In late autumn, after fishing was over, they moved into western Wyoming to hunt for buffalo, elk, deer, moose, and antelope. In the spring and summer, the Northwestern band traveled around southern Idaho and throughout northern Utah. Around late October, the band moved into western Utah and parts of Nevada for the annual gathering of pine nuts.

The area around what is now called Franklin and Preston, Idaho, was a permanent wintering home of the Northwestern Shoshone. It was called *Moson Kahni*, which means Home of the Lungs. The rocks in the area looked sponge-like and made the Shoshone think of lungs. In this area as well as the rest of Cache Valley there were natural places for the Indians to make their winter homes. The land along the Bear River was in a valley with lots of willows and brush. Willows and brush blocked the wind and snow during the winter months. There were several hot springs in the area and plenty of fish and other animals for food. (second paragraph adapted from <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=358827>)

Today some of the Northwestern Shoshone people live on reservations, but others live in communities like ours.

Description of their homes

Northern Shoshone used tepees, greenhouses, and sometimes caves for shelter. The tepee cover typically was made of ten to twelve buffalo hides. All members of the tribe helped make the teepee for individual families. It was never an individual endeavor. The cover was stretched around poles set up in a cone shape. There was a smoke hole left at the top which had flaps designed to control the hole according to wind direction. The tepees were well ventilated and cool in the summer and, with a fire, warm in the winter. On the floor of the tepees were backrests and bedrolls. Clothing, medicine bags, shields, bags and other articles hung from poles inside. Tepees were decorated with drawings of animals, birds, or abstract designs. Since the people were nomadic, the tepee was a very practical dwelling because it was easy to transport.

In the summer, dwellings were often made from green leafy branches placed over a pole framework. Willows, quaking aspen branches, reeds and tall grass were used in making summer shelters. These dwellings were also temporary, and could be left behind as the people moved to other areas. Caves were used as shelters and temporary dwellings. Bathhouses or sweat lodges were erected to be used as places for spiritual experiences as well as for personal hygiene.

Inside their homes, buffalo robes and other animal hides served as blankets and in some cases floor coverings. Dried moss was also woven into blankets. Woven sagebrush and juniper bark as well as boughs and cattail fluff served as mats and mattresses. Rabbit skins braided like rugs were made into quilts.

Today, Shoshone people live in modern homes like you see in neighborhoods around here.

What they ate

In the autumn, the Shoshone caught salmon and dried them for winter to use. They then traveled to hunt for buffalo, elk, deer, moose, and antelope. The meat was sun dried for winter use. It was very important to get the big game. The success of this hunt meant feast or famine. It also meant clothing and shelter for them. During the spring and summer they gathered seeds, roots, and berries, as well as dug for roots and hunted smaller animals. In the late summer, the Shoshone traveled to collect pine nuts. These nutrient-rich nuts were an important part of the Shoshone diet. They could be ground up into meal for mush (hot cereal) or roasted and eaten as a dessert or snack. In all seasons, fish were harvested for meals.

Gathering seeds was a hard task at times. When seeds were scarce, a woman might spend an entire day gathering enough for only one family meal. Digging Sticks were used for digging out roots and bulbs. Ground potatoes, camas, sego lily, wild garlic, cactus, and other bulbs and roots were harvested. Berries of all kinds were picked in the mountains and fields. Wild honey was gathered in the late fall.

The Shoshone also utilized other foods throughout the year as needed. A variety of birds, such as ducks and geese, common along the northeast shore of the Great Salt Lake, were used for meat and eggs. Particularly important were doves, sage hens, and quail. In times of extreme need, owls, hawks, and crows were also eaten. In addition, the Shoshone harvested several varieties of insects, including grasshoppers, crickets, insect larvae, and bee eggs.

Drinks were prepared from a variety of plants. Common drinks were peppermint tea and rose tea. Rabbit brush, sagebrush, and milkweed had parts that could be chewed as gum.

Today, Shoshone people might include some of these foods in their diet, but they most often eat food they purchased at the grocery store, or restaurants.

What their relationships were like (family, community, and outside their community)

The Shoshone, Paiute, Bannock and Ute people are related, and call themselves Newe or Neme (the People). Prior to contact with Europeans, the Newe groups formed small extended-family groupings that traveled. Horses, guns, white contact, and disease destroyed this social organization, resulting in more formal identities and larger-than-family band loyalties.

During the spring and early summer was the time when the people had time to socialize. The women talked about the latest happenings of the tribe as they were gathering food.

Love of children was a dominant belief of the Northwestern Shoshone and physical punishment was not highly employed. Shoshone children were taught at a young age to be hospitable and freely share what they had with guests.

Children were taught to honor and respect their parents, grandparents, and were advised that wisdom and knowledge come with age.

Most Shoshone people today still feel strong ties with their families and continue to teach these cultural values.

What things were valued and considered an important part of their culture, including what they thought about the earth

The Shoshone looked upon the earth not just as a place to live; in fact, they called the earth their mother. She was the provider of all they needed to live. Everything in their lives came from Mother Earth, so everything about the earth was appreciated and respected.

Northwestern Shoshone children like all children, loved to play. Their toys were made of materials available to them such as sticks, rocks, clay, and balls made of stuffed rawhide. Playtime for the children only happen in short amounts of time between all the jobs their family had to do each day. The children were expected to work hard and to share the family responsibilities. They were taught that guests were assumed to be cold, tired, or hungry, and they were to be fed. Upon departure, a guest was to be given a gift, with nothing in return.

Teaching was valued and happened often through storytelling by the elderly grandparents. The oral history, legends, and customs of the tribe were passed on this way. Wintertime was storytelling time, stories were told to children with a purpose more important than just recreation. Children were taught to be good listeners and never interrupt the storyteller. Most stories included animals the Shoshone people lived around and interacted with. In fact, all things in nature had a story and a voice—rocks, mountains, trees, animals, etc. Children were expected to stay awake during the storytelling. If one of the children fell asleep, the storyteller stopped speaking and ended the session.

Northwestern Shoshone people today

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation honor and preserve their traditional cultural heritage. They also place importance on education as a tool for success in the modern world. These values are reflected in four projects the Northwestern Band is currently working on at their tribal center in Brigham City, Utah.

Singing Project: The Northwestern Shoshone are learning traditional Great Basin poetry songs called *Shoshone Huvia*, which are the songs their grandmothers and grandfathers sang long ago. To better understand the songs, tribal members participate in field trips to ancestral places. They observe and learn about the native plants, animals, mountains, rivers, and sky, which inspired their ancestors to sing. Northwestern Shoshone elders help guide and inform this activity.

Library Project: The library of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation serves two purposes: to encourage literacy among tribal members of all ages and to be a repository of Native American cultural knowledge. The library's collection focuses on Native American contemporary literature, poetry, art, traditional stories and song, history, cultural traditions and arts, and modern social issues.

Shoshone Language Revitalization and Maintenance Project: The primary objective of this project is to generate previously unavailable documentation of the Shoshone language by describing and analyzing the dialect of Shoshone most closely associated with the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. The language is considered endangered, because the younger generations are no longer acquiring the language. The project is thus urgently needed before the last fluent speakers are no longer available to pass on their knowledge.

Beading Project: By meeting once a week for beading class, the Northwestern Shoshone want to preserve the aesthetic heritage of their tribe. During class, they enjoy associating with each other and teaching the younger members how to make beautiful traditional adornments.