

Native Americans of California 5.1.1 5.1.2

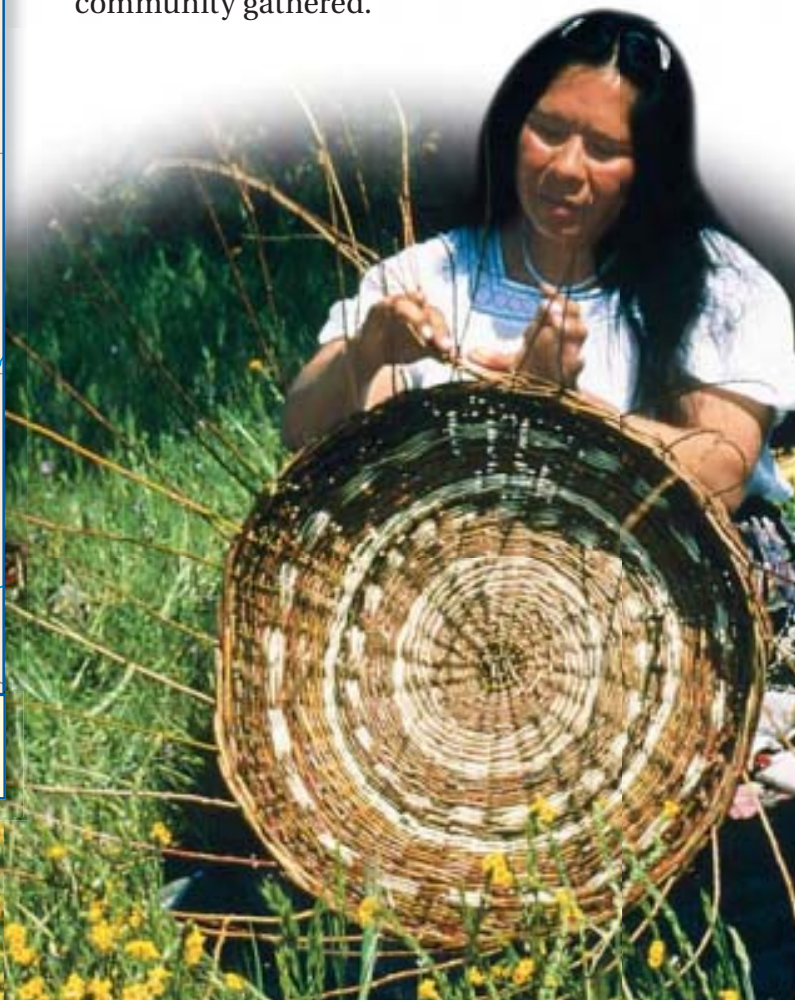
The Native American groups of what is now California are as varied as the geography of the state. Each group learned to adapt to the region where it lived. For example, people on the coast fished for food, while people in inland areas farmed. People such as the Yurok, in the northwest part of the state, shared customs similar to American Indians in the Pacific Northwest.

No one knows how many people were living in California before Europeans arrived. Most archaeologists believe that California had more than 300,000 people. Others think its population may have been as high as one million.

Look at the map on this page. As you can see, California has at least six different culture areas of Native Americans—Northwestern, Northeastern, Central, Great Basin, Southern, and Colorado River. The groups in each area have cultures that are alike in some ways. Groups in the Central culture area, for example, speak similar languages.

The Pomo

The Pomo live in western California and the northern part of the Central California area. Pre-Columbian Pomo lived well by using the abundant resources around them—gathering acorns, catching fish in woven nets and traps, and hunting small animals, birds, and deer. The Pomo also built roundhouses out of wood, earth, and grass, where they lived and where the community gathered.



The Pomo have a long tradition of basket weaving. In fact, many experts today think Pomo baskets are some of the finest in the world. Susan Billy, a Pomo master weaver, explains her craft:

“Among our people, both men and women were basket makers. Everything in our lifestyle was connected to those baskets.”

The Pomo wove many different kinds of baskets. The tightly woven pieces were often decorated with colorful bird feathers. A basket might carry a baby, serve as a cooking pot, or be used for storage. Today, Pomo baskets are highly valued works of art and are found in many museums.

The Desert and The Valley

The Central Valley is rich in natural resources. Pre-Columbian Miwok and other Native Americans of the area hunted deer, elk, and antelope, and trapped otter and beaver in nearby

▼ Basket weaving is an ancient traditional skill.



◀ Many Native American groups, including the Pomo, weave baskets.



▲ Pomo baskets are highly valued.

marshes. The forests held treasures, too. Each year the great oak trees became heavy with acorns. Miwok children climbed high into the trees to knock the acorns loose. Miwok women stood below, gathering the acorns into large baskets. The Miwok women then made soup, biscuits, and bread from the flour made from the acorns.

Pre-Columbian life in the desert of southern California was very different from life in the Central Valley. Desert groups such as the Cahuilla (kuh WEE uh), the Serrano, and the Chemehuevi (ch eh mih HWEY vee) learned to use desert plants. These Native Americans also farmed. When water was scarce, they used a kind of irrigation. The Cahuilla, for example, dug deep wells in the desert sand and banked sand around the wells, creating small lakes. They used the water to grow corn, squash, beans, and melons.

REVIEW How did the natural resources of the Miwok and Pomo differ from those of the Cahuilla? *Compare and Contrast*