

Summary: An Ancient Past

California's First People

Between 10,000 and 30,000 years ago, Earth was very cold, and glaciers covered much of the land. Seas were lower, and a land bridge connected Asia and North America. Many scientists believe that the first humans in North America came from Asia across the land bridge. Others think people from Asia or Europe sailed here.

California's Indians tell oral histories about how human beings were created in California. One story says that gods created human beings while other stories say that animal spirits, such as Coyote and Lizard, made the first humans.

People have lived in California for at least 10,000 years. Back then, California was colder and had more wetlands. Lakes covered areas where there are now deserts. The land was rich in plant and animal life. Camels, giant sloths, mammoths, bison, and mastodons roamed the land. Early people hunted some of these animals for food and clothing. They used spears made of wood and stone.

Different Communities

The climate in California gradually got warmer. Oceans rose and lakes dried out. Large animals died out. People began settling down in one place. But groups of people were kept apart by the mountains and deserts.

Each group adapted to its environment, making use of the available resources. Over time, people living in different areas developed different ways of life. California's resources supported many communities. A community is a group of people who live together under the same laws.

About 500 years ago, perhaps three million people lived in North America. More than 300,000 people lived in California in small groups. Groups ruled by the same chief formed a nation. About 500 Indian nations lived in California, and over 100 languages were spoken.

These early people built homes along the coast, in river valleys, and in deserts. They trimmed trees to make them grow stronger and burned areas of grassland to enrich the soil. The Tongva first settled in the area that is now Los Angeles. Later, people from Spain and Mexico settled there because of its good resources and warm weather.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

oral history *noun*, an account of past events passed down through speech

adapt *verb*, to adjust to conditions

diversity *noun*, variety, differences

After You Read

REVIEW What is one thing we know about ancient people of California? Highlight three sentences that tell how ancient people survived in early California.

REVIEW Why did communities in California develop different ways of life? Draw a box around the two paragraphs that explain how diversity grew and created different communities.