

Summary: Coastal Peoples

Living on the Coast

Five hundred years ago, the California coast was home to many nations of people. There were deserts in the south and forests in the north. Most people in California ate acorns, the nuts from oak trees. Women ground the nuts and rinsed them to remove their bitter taste. They made acorn bread and soup.

All coastal people used the ocean as a source for food. They built boats and hunted seals, whales, and other animals found along the coast. The northern Yurok gathered shellfish. They also caught salmon in nearby rivers. In the south, people hunted tuna, porpoises, and other sea animals.

Northern Indians built homes with boards from cedar or giant redwood trees. In the south, the Chumash used smaller trees, tough grasses, and marsh plants to make cone-shaped homes, that could sometimes hold up to 70 people.

Coastal people made goods from natural resources. They made baskets from grass, reeds, and branches. A large basket could store 1,000 pounds of acorns. Hunting and making baskets were valuable services.

Trading Resources

Coastal Indians traded with people in other regions to get goods and services they wanted. An economy based on trade grew among communities in California. An economy is the way a group uses its resources to make, buy, and sell goods.

Coastal peoples used barter to exchange goods with people in the valley and deserts. Food, beads, and baskets changed hands. The southern Chumash also traded with people of the Channel Islands. Steatite, a soft stone from the islands, was prized. It could be carved into bowls, pipes, and ornaments. Island people traded steatite and fish for mainland goods, such as acorns.

About 800 years ago, the Chumash created money from a type of rare shell. By about 500 years ago, the Yurok and the Ohlone also used shell money. People who did not have goods to barter could use money to buy stone knives, animal hides, or services, such as the help of a healer.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

goods *noun*, items that can be bought and sold.

service *noun*, work people do for others

trade *noun*, the exchange of resources, goods, or services

economy *noun*, the way a group uses its resources to make, buy, and sell things

barter *noun*, the trade of goods and services without money



After You Read

REVIEW What are some ways Coastal Indians used the resources around them? Put a box around three sentences that describe the use of resources.

REVIEW Why did the people of the Channel Islands trade with people on the mainland? Highlight the sentences that explain what the people in the Channel Islands traded and what they received in return.