

CHAPTER 2

MONTANA'S FIRST PEOPLE

- What was Montana like before the first non-Indians arrived?
- Who called Montana home and how did they live?

The very first people to live in this region were **resourceful**. They were good at figuring out how to find or make what they needed, and they used what the land had to offer. They hunted and gathered food. They made tools, homes, and clothing. They traded with one another. They created art. They studied the stars, and they held religious ceremonies. Members of Montana's tribal nations are the **descendants** (a person's children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc.) of the very first people to live in this region.



Many of the animals that lived in Montana during the ice age are now **extinct** (gone).

12,000 TO 8,000 YEARS AGO (THE EARLY PERIOD)

No one knows exactly when people first came to Montana. We do know that people were living here over 12,000 years ago.

The land was very different then. It was the end of the last ice age. Ice covered much of Montana. The first people lived on the edge of the ice field. They hunted mastodons, mammoths, and ancient bison using short heavy spears.

These first peoples traveled in small groups. They knew where to find the things they needed. One place might have a special kind of stone, perfect for making hammers. Another place might have flint for making knives. They traveled to these places to gather the **resources** (useful things) they needed. They carried everything they owned with them. Do you think they owned a lot of things?



We don't have any pictures of ice age Montana. Here is what one artist thinks it might have looked like.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW?

There are no newspapers, photographs, or letters describing life during the ice age. So how do we know what it was like?

Archaeologists are scientists who study the past by analyzing **artifacts** (objects created by people) that people have left behind. If an archaeologist looked through your garbage can, what could she learn about you?

Archaeologists' close study of **ancient** (very old) artifacts is one way we can learn about the distant past.

Oral histories are important stories people pass down. When your grandparents tell you what life was like when they were young, they are sharing oral history. Oral histories are another way we can learn about the past. Montana Indians have oral histories that have been passed down for centuries. For example, the Salish and Pend d'Oreille oral histories describe giant animals. They also describe great floods, like ones that **geologists** (scientists who study the earth) believe happened 12,000 years ago.



Hunters used these projectile points hundreds of years ago. It is one type of tool that archaeologists now study to learn about the past.

8,000 TO 1,500 YEARS AGO (THE MIDDLE PERIOD)

About 8,000 years ago, the place now known as Montana began to grow warmer and drier. Many of the giant, ancient animals became **extinct** (gone). Smaller animals, like deer, antelope, and rabbits, filled the **plains** (flat land). More plants appeared. The people learned how and where plants grew and how to use them to make food, medicines, rope, shelters, and baskets.



Early peoples relied on plants for food and medicine. These women are digging prairie turnips to help feed their families.

As the **environment** (land, water, climate) changed, the people **adapted** (changed to fit new conditions). The big heavy spears they used to hunt large animals did not work for fast-moving game, so they learned to make new tools like **atlatls** (spear throwers).

The number of people who lived here grew. People still lived in small family groups, or **bands**, but they were more likely to meet other groups as they traveled. When two bands met, they shared information and ideas. They also traded with one another.

1,500 TO 300 YEARS AGO (THE LATE PERIOD)

About 1,500 years ago, the **climate** (typical weather conditions) changed again. The region became a little wetter and cooler. **Bison** (buffalo) filled in the grasslands. Soon they became the most important source of food for the people who lived here.

The bison provided many other things people needed as well. People made tipi covers and clothing from the hides, pillows from the hair, waterproof bags from the bladders, drinking cups and spoons from the horns, and knives and other tools from the bones.

Sometimes people worked together to lure herds of bison over cliffs in large **communal** (group) hunts. Other times smaller groups of hunters trapped bison in deep snowbanks.

At some point, people tamed dogs. Dogs became an important part of everyday life. Before horses, people used dogs to help them carry their things when they moved camp.



Montana's first peoples depended on buffalo for food, clothing, and shelter, but bison hunting was not always easy.

THE EARLY CONTACT PERIOD, 1492-1850

Europeans first came to the Americas in the 1500s. They arrived far from Montana, but they still changed life here.

Horses

The Spanish brought horses to the Southwest. Tribes in the Southwest began trading horses to other tribes. By the mid-1700s horses had come to the **Great Plains** (the flat land region west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains).

Horses changed everything. Horses could carry more weight for



Horses were so important that tribal artists often included them in the pictures that they drew.

farther distances than dogs could, so people could travel farther to hunt. As tribes traveled farther, trade increased. Through trade, many items made in Europe or on the East Coast of the United States came to the plains: beads, iron pots, knives, cloth, metal arrowheads, and guns.

Horses became almost as important to tribal people as bison. Capturing horses from other tribes became a way to gain honor. People measured their wealth in horses and gave them as gifts.

Horses led to more conflict between tribes, but they also provided more **opportunities** (chances) to trade and share ideas.

Disease

Imagine what would happen if a strange new **disease** (sickness) came to your town. The disease is very painful—and deadly. Most of the people who catch this disease die. The doctors do their best to treat it, but nothing they do



When tribal members got sick from new diseases like smallpox, no doctor could help them. The right medicine had not been invented yet.

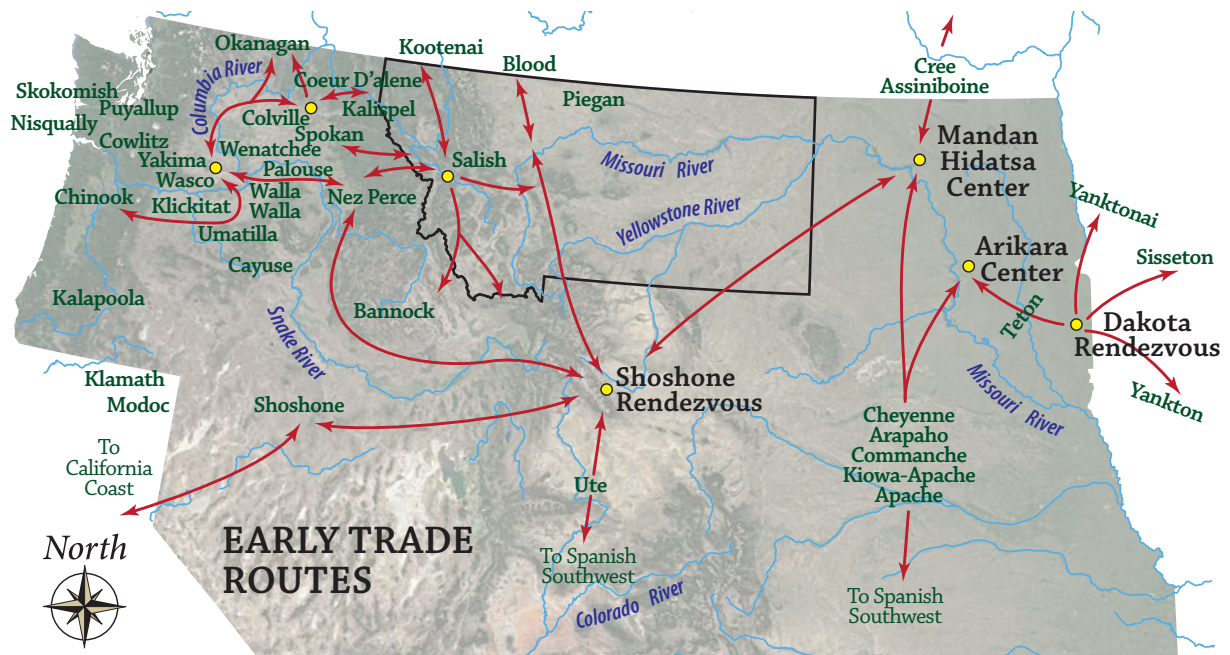
works. That's what happened to American Indian tribes when Europeans arrived in the Americas.

Europeans did not mean to bring new diseases, but they did. Native Americans had never been exposed to these diseases. Their bodies did not know how to fight them off. Disease spread when people met to trade. These deadly diseases may have come to our region by the mid-1500s. Fur traders wrote about a huge smallpox **epidemic** (rapid spread of disease) here in 1782. Some experts believe that many tribes lost between 50 to 90 percent of their people to these new diseases.

These diseases changed everything. Survivors were very sad. Some tribes became powerful (because more of their people survived). Others became weak (because so many people died). Some tribes combined to form new tribes.

TRIBES OF MONTANA

By about 1820, most of Montana's current Indian tribes were already here. Many had been here since **time immemorial** (as long as anyone could remember). Each tribe had its own language, history, and ways of doing things. Some tribes were close **allies** (friends). Others sometimes fought. Each tribe had its own homeland, where its tribal members spent most of their time. However, people often traveled outside their homeland to hunt, gather important resources, and trade with other tribes.



GLOSSARY

Abandon leave

Adapted changed to fit new conditions

Allies friends

Allotment portion

Allotment policy dividing Indian reservations into separate farms for each family

Amber yellow

Ancestors family members who lived long ago

Ancient very old

Archaeologists scientists who study the past by analyzing objects people have left behind

Artifacts objects created by people

Assimilate/assimilation to be absorbed into the majority culture, in this case, the white American culture

Atlatl a spear thrower

Bacteriology the study of bacteria

Badlands an area created by erosion of rocks and hills with little vegetation

Band group

Bison buffalo

Boom time of great prosperity or rapid growth

Capotes coats made from thick wool blankets

Chinook a warm wind that blows down the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains

Claim take for their own

Climate typical weather condition

Communal group

Constitution document that sets the rules for government

Continent one of the main areas of land on earth

Continental Divide a mountain ridge that separates North America and determines whether water flows east to the Atlantic Ocean or west to the Pacific Ocean

Culture a shared system of behavior, attitudes, and understandings; language, customs, and ideas

Descendants a person's children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc.

Discrimination treating a group of people unfairly

Disease sickness

Distinct separate

Diversity variety

Drought lack of rain

Economy businesses and jobs

Environment land, water, climate

Epidemic rapid spread of disease

Erosion the process by which rock or soil is gradually taken away by wind, rain, or water

Essential most important

Extinct gone

Extinction death of a species

Fell cut down trees

Fertile good for growing things

Foothills hills at the edge of a mountain range

Geography where things are, the study of particular places

Geologists scientists who study the earth

Geology minerals, rocks, and soil and the study of these things

Great Plains the flat land region west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains

Homesteader someone who received land from the U.S. government in exchange for farming that land

Immigrant someone who moves to a new country to live

Immigrate move from one country to another

Indian agent a person (usually non-Indian) who the government put in charge of a reservation

Industries types of businesses

Leased rented

Lumber wood for building

Mechanization using machines to do the work that people once did

Natural resources things found in nature and used by people

Negotiate discuss to come to an agreement

Northern Divide landform that separates water that flows north from water that flows south

Opportunities chances for something better

Oral histories important stories people pass down

Pacifist someone who believes that problems cannot be solved by fighting

Pelts skins

Plains flat land

Poultry birds raised on farms, like chickens and turkeys

Poverty being poor

Prairies flat grasslands

Precipitation rain and snow

Predate come before

Prospectors people looking for gold or other precious metals

Published printed

Pull factors things that make people want to move to a new place

Push factors things that make people want to leave their homes

Push-pull factors things that influence immigration (that push you out of your home country and pull you to another place)

Reservation an area of land that a tribe or tribes reserved (kept) for their own use

Reserved kept

Residents people who live in a place

Resilience strength

Resourceful good at figuring things out

Resources useful things

Sovereign self-governing

Sovereignty self-rule

Spacious large

Specific exact

Strike gold discovery

Suffrage vote

Suffrage activist someone working to win women the right to vote

Surplus extra

Taxes money people pay the government so the government can provide services

Timber wood for building

Time immemorial as long as anyone can remember

Toxic poisonous

Traditional old

Transcontinental all the way across the continent

Transport move

Treasurer the person who keeps track of an organization's money

Treaty agreement between nations

Union an organization that stands up for workers' rights and fights for better pay

Unique not the same as any other

IMAGE CREDITS

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Montana Historical Society is abbreviated as MHS.

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p. 14, Ice age people, courtesy Montana Department of Transportation

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p. 15, middle, Anzick Site, chert preform, ca. 12,500 BCE, MHS L2014.01.02, on loan from Dr. Melvyn and Helen Anzick and Sarah Anzick

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