

## Windows On The Past

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Historic Sites**

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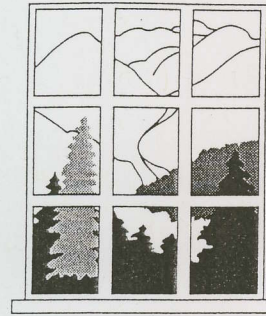
**TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA  
PLEASE DON'T DISTURB  
PREHISTORIC OR  
HISTORIC SITES.**

For further information contact: Supervisor's Office,  
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## Windows On The Past

# The Historic INDIANS OF THE MISSOURI OZARKS



MOHONGO & HER CHILD,  
1830  
(after Charles Bird King,  
in McKenney-Hall Portrait Hall)

## Mark Twain National Forest

United States Forest Mark Twain  
Department of Service National Forest  
Agriculture

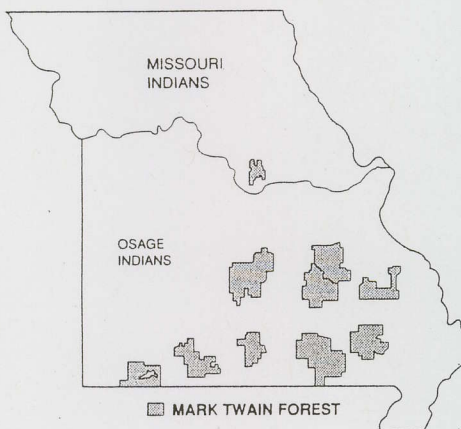


## Who were the Indians that lived in the area of the present-day Mark Twain National Forest?

The original Americans first entered North America over 10,000 years ago. Probably following large herds of animals, they moved from Siberia across a large land bridge into Alaska. This land bridge, known as "Beringia", is now under water. Gradually, after entering this new world, different groups spread throughout the continent, and all the way into South America. Through time, these Native Americans (Indians) developed a variety of different cultures. These different lifeways were as diverse in their own way as those which could be found in Africa, Asia, or Europe. Different Indian groups had different languages, clothing styles, religions, political structures, ceremonies, traditions, etc..

Usually when discussing Native American cultures a distinction is made between historic Indians and prehistoric Indians. Historic Indians include those groups that were present when white people arrived in North America. Generally, the historic Indian tribes are known by names which were written down by the first Europeans to move into or across an area. Frequently, the names which came to be recorded reflect European pronunciations of original Indian words or phrases. Mistakes or mispronunciations were fairly common. Indian cultures that existed before white people arrived are called prehistoric, because they predate (came before) the historic Indian groups. The information we have about prehistoric peoples comes from sources such as archaeology and oral history, rather than from written accounts. Often it is impossible to trace individual prehistoric cultures to specific historic Indian descendents.

In Missouri, the two primary historic Indian tribes were the "Missouri" and the "Osage". Other tribes that were in Missouri included the Sauk, the Fox, and the Illinois. Also, some later remnant tribes who had moved West in an attempt to avoid white settlers were in the state. But the Osage and the Missouri dominated the area from at least the early 1700s to the early 1800s.



Of the two tribes, the Osage were more dominant in southern Missouri, including parts of what is now the Mark Twain National Forest. The Missouri people were generally located in the northern portion of the state. Sometime around the early 1700s the Osage came into contact with French explorers, traders and settlers. It was these explorers who gave us much of the early information we have about the historic Osage. The rest of this brochure answers some frequently asked questions about the Osage.

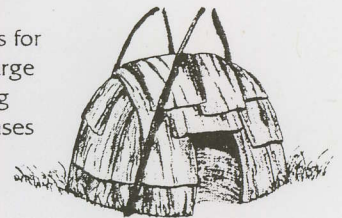
## Who were the Osage?

The Osage were a proud people who lived in villages concentrated in the southwestern portion of what is now Missouri. They spoke a language related to the language of the Quapaw, Omaha, Ponca, and Kansa languages. No one is sure where they came from, but some evidence suggests that they moved to Missouri from the Ohio River area. The name "Osage" is the French pronunciation of the Indian word "Wazhazhe" or "Whashash". This was the name the Osage used for themselves.

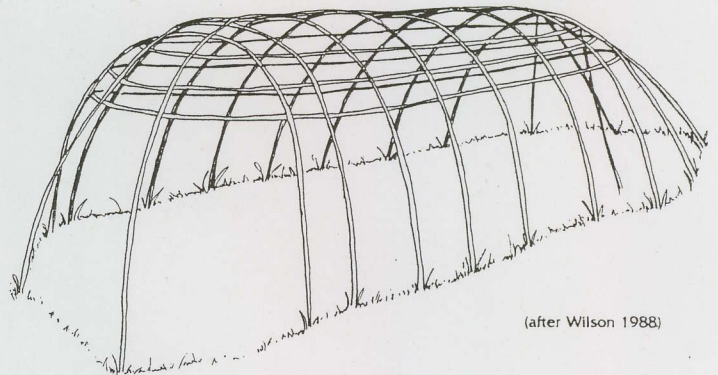
Two chiefs, and a council of clan elders known as "Little Old Men" governed the tribe. The chiefs and council had the job of keeping order, resolving disputes, and maintaining tribal standards. Like most tribal societies, Osage society was very democratic. The chiefs and council had to persuade people to follow their advice. The leaders had no real authority to force the people to do things.

Family was important to the Osage. Large groups of related people, what we call clans, were the basic means of tribal organization. Clans were also important in religious ceremonies. For example, each clan had certain duties to do in the worship of the supreme spiritual power, "Wakonda".

Osage Indians lived in villages for part of the year, but also spent large amounts of time away on hunting trips. They had two types of houses for these different times - longhouses and wigwams.



(after McAlester and McAlester, 1990)



(after Wilson 1988)

The longhouse was the most typical structure in their villages.

It was a permanent structure, sometimes as long as 100 feet long, and 20 ft. wide, made of post frames covered with mats woven from rushes. Wigwams were used by the Osage as houses on their hunting expeditions. These temporary homes were easy to build. They were made of small circular frames of green poles covered with animal skins or rush mats. Wigwams were excellent temporary shelters, and as the illustration suggests, looked somewhat like modern dome tents.

At death, an Osage was buried with personal possessions, and enough food and water to last for the journey to the spirit world, generally three to nine days. Usually, prominent men were buried in small rock mounds ("rock cairns"). The scalp of an enemy was suspended above the rock cairn on a pole. It was believed that the dead man controlled the spirit of the scalped enemy in the spirit world. It was a great honor to the dead man for a friend or relative to hang a scalp over his cairn, and this act was taken very seriously. In order to get the enemy scalp, neighboring tribes were raided, which was one of the reasons the Osage were feared among other tribes. However, violence was not common in an Osage village; it was accepted only when getting a scalp to mourn a dead friend or relative, or when actually involved in warfare.

## How did the Osage live, and how did they use the forest?

Hunting was the most important means of getting food in Osage life. But, gathering wild fruits, nuts, and other plants was important too. Also, the Osage grew small plots of corn, pumpkins, and other plants. Hunting became even more important once horses showed up in the Missouri area in the late 1600s or so. The traditional Osage hunting grounds extended from the Mississippi River to the Red River in Texas!

Men and women both went on the long hunting expeditions. The men hunted and the women helped butcher and process the meat. Traditionally, the women also scraped and cured the skins. The bow and arrow was the main hunting weapon of the historic Osage. Bows were made of Osage Orange saplings and were three to four feet long. Buffalo hide or fox skin was used to make quivers for everyday use. Ornamental quivers were made from puma (mountain lion) or otter skin.

The hunting season began in February or March, with the black bear hunt. Later, when trade with the whites became important, the beaver hunt followed the bear season. In May, the Osage held communal hunts for white-tail deer or buffalo, and in August, the deer and buffalo were hunted again. Other small animals hunted were the muskrat, opossum, goose, and turkey.

Fresh meat was usually broiled or roasted. To preserve the meat, Osage women made jerky (dried strips of meat) and also a type of sausage. They made the sausage by washing the small intestine of the animal and turning it inside out so that the fat was inside. The intestine would then be filled with water and thin strips of meat, the ends would be tied, and the resulting sausage would be broiled over hot coals.

The Osage returned from their hunts to their villages in April to plant crops. The women were the farmers. They grew corn, squash, and pumpkins. The corn was usually broiled or roasted on the cob, but was also used to make corn meal and hominy. The women also gathered wild fruits and nuts as these foods ripened through the year. The wild foods included walnuts, hazelnuts, pecans, acorns, plums, pawpaws, persimmons, hog potatoes, and the water chinkapin.

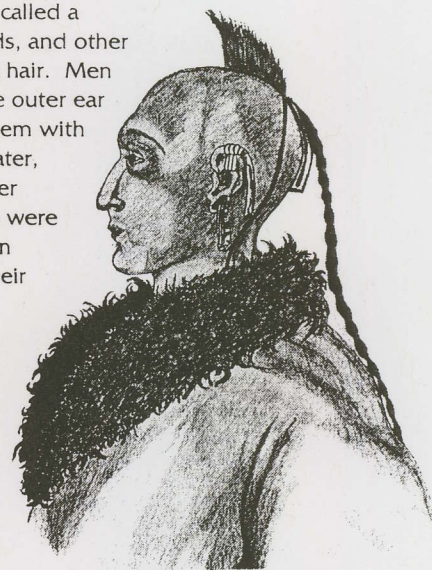
## What did the Osage look like?

Tall, well-built, handsome, and unusually light-skinned, the Osage were considered to be a striking looking people by the first Europeans who saw them. Most of the men were well over six feet tall. They were often described as very proud, or even arrogant. Of the Indian tribes in the Louisiana Territory, the Osage were the most feared by the Europeans.

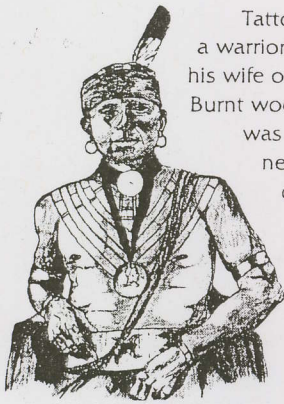
Osage men shaved their heads, except for the top-most area. This unshaven area formed a decorated ridge of hair called a "roach". Feathers, beads, and other ornaments adorned the hair. Men and women pierced the outer ear and lobe to decorate them with bones and shells, and later, trade items such as silver earrings. Bracelets also were fairly common; the men would wear them on their wrists and forearms.

Men traditionally dressed in a breech cloth (loincloth) with a narrow belt, leggings that reached to the hips, and moccasins. All of these items would have been made of deerskin.

Osage women traditionally wore deerskin dresses or skirts, leggings, and moccasins. Children wore little or no clothing until six or seven years of age. Adults of both sexes wore few clothes above the waist in warm weather.



"SOLDIER OF THE OAK",  
AN OSAGE CHIEF, 1804  
(from portrait in McKenney-Hall Portrait Gallery)



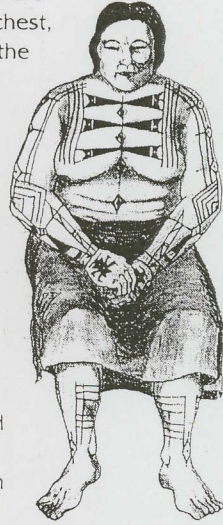
TATTOOED OSAGE MALE  
(from photograph in Scherer, 1973)

Tattooing was a mark of honor won by a warrior, but he could confer the honor to his wife or daughter, as well as to himself. Burnt wood was crushed, and this charcoal was forced into the skin with bone needles to form the tattoos. Men commonly were tattooed on their chest, shoulders, and back.

(Note the v-shaped patterns in the illustration.)

Women usually were tattooed on the forehead, forearm, wrist, and back of the hand. Less common areas for tattooing were the neck, chest,

back arms, stomach, and lower part of the thighs. The illustration of the Osage woman shows such tattoo patterns.



TATTOOED  
OSAGE WOMAN  
(after Chapman, 1974)

## Where are the Osage today?

As might be expected, the story of the Osage interaction with whites is a complicated one. Frenchmen traded with the Osage and exerted great economic influence among them until the late 1700s when the Spanish gained control of the area following the French and Indian Wars. Stories of the strength and aggressiveness of the Osage concerned the Spanish royalty. The Spanish authorities saw the Osage as a serious danger to their colonial interests. They sought the help of many different Indian tribes to destroy the Osage. But the Spanish authorities failed in their efforts due largely to a lack of administrative organization and a desire for peace on the part of many settlers and Indians in the region. However, even after formal peace agreements were made between the Spanish and the Osage, raids and counter-raids continued between the Osage and their Indian enemies. The French took over the area of "Louisiana" again around 1800, but promptly sold it in 1803 to the United States in the Louisiana Purchase. A period of treaty-making with the United States began for the Osage. Various treaties shifted the Osage from one area to the next, establishing reservations first in what is now Kansas, and finally in Oklahoma. By 1872, virtually all Osage Indians were living on a reservation in northeastern Oklahoma. Today, the Osage are a Federally recognized tribe. The Oklahoma reservation lists 10,000 names on its tribal roles.

## Who were the remnant groups that migrated into the area?

When the Spanish requested the help of the Delaware and the Shawnee in fighting the Osage, these tribes settled in the area between Cape Girardeau and St. Louis, a safe distance from the Osage villages. These were the first of the transient tribes to have claims on lands in Missouri.

During the War of 1812, many tribes moved around in their efforts to aid or combat the British. The Kickapoo were one such tribe, and they settled near what is now Springfield, Missouri. During the same period, the Delaware settled just below the Kickapoo, and the Shawnee held lands just east of the Delaware. Other "displaced" tribes who passed through Missouri included the Cherokee and the Creek.

The Iowa tribe hunted in Missouri, and may have had villages in the state. The Illinois had villages in Missouri for short periods, as did the Piankashaw, the Peoria, and the Wea. The Sauk and the Fox Indians lived in northeastern Missouri, and were involved in numerous encounters with non-Indian settlers following Missouri's statehood in 1821.

Most of these tribes previously had lived east of the Mississippi River as separate, often powerful tribes. New diseases brought by Europeans, such as measles, smallpox and tuberculosis were devastating to the Indians who had no resistance to them. Tribal numbers were drastically reduced. Pressure from settlers forced many eastern Indian tribes across the Mississippi river. Missouri was one of the stops along the "Trail of Tears" into what was then designated Indian Territory - Oklahoma.

## Recommended Readings

- Bailey, Garrick Alan  
1973 Changes in Osage Social Organization 1673-1906. University of Oregon Anthropological Papers, no. 5.
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- 1990 A Field Guide to American Houses. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York.
- Scherer, Joanna C.  
1973 Indians: The Great Photographs that Reveal North American Indian Life: 1847-1929, from the Unique Collection of the Smithsonian Institution. Crown Publishers Inc. New York.
- Wilson, Terry P.  
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