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Summary Article: **Salish**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Member of an American Indian people who live in Montana, Idaho, Washington, and British Columbia, Canada. They speak a Salishan language and form two cultural groupings: the Interior Salish (Columbia and Fraser river basins), comprising various subgroups with a seminomadic lifestyle similar to the Plains Indians; and the Coast Salish (Puget Sound), who had a sedentary culture with Northwest Indian influence. The name 'Flatheads' was originally a derogatory nickname applied by groups that practised head deformation to those who did not. Today they live on small reservations and mixed communities in the USA and Canada; the Puget Sound Salish are the largest group, numbering some 11,000 (2000).

The Salish were a peaceful people, whose economy was based on salmon fishing, supplemented by hunting and gathering. They over-wintered in semi-permanent villages of sunken, earth-covered lodges, separating into small family hunting bands in the summer when they used rough shelters of bark and reeds. Most Salish subgroups consisted of several independent bands lead by a chief. The westernmost groups traded with the Northwest Indians and the easternmost with the Plains Indians, each adopting many of the cultural traits of their trading partners. The Shuswap in the west, for example, had a hierarchical society consisting of nobles, commoners, and slaves common on the coast, while those in the east hunted buffalo by horse and lived in skin tepees like the Plains Indians.

Salish religion was primarily shamanistic and animistic, and involved healing rituals and the belief in guardian spirits which were acquired by vision quests. The most important ritual was the guardian spirit dance held in winter. Coastal Salish totems were large ceremonial woodcarvings of realistic human figures, and were shorter than the totem poles of other Northwest Indians. Head deformation was practised by a number of Salish peoples; infants were strapped to hard cradleboards, flattening the back of the skull and producing a domed top. These groups called the Salish who left their skulls to form naturally 'flatheads', and the name was taken up by early travellers who misinterpreted the meaning. The easternmost Salish or Flathead proper of Montana never practised the custom. The men wore their hair turned up at the front.

The Salish of western Montana were originally granted a reservation on their homeland in Bitterroot Valley in 1855, but were relocated to the lower Flathead River basin, where they now share a 500,000-ha/1,250,000-acre reservation with the Kootenai and other peoples, and number about 2,000. They are officially known as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation. Their income is derived from ranching, logging, labouring, and the leisure industries, and the leasing of land used by a hydroelectric dam. Traditional crafts are preserved, and include quillwork and beadwork in geometric and floral designs. Most Salish are now Catholic.

The Puget Sound Salish of Washington are the largest group, and are also known as the Lushootseed. They comprise the Squaxin, Nisqually, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Stillaguamish, Tulalip, Swinomish, Skagit, Snoqualmie, Samish, Skykomish, Duwamish, and Steilacoom. Only eight of these have been granted reservations. Their economy is based on fishing, logging, and tourism, including gaming.

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