

Hunter - Gatherers

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At first glance, the picture above may be associated with indigenous plains tribes of North America, but in fact, this is a picture of a Sami (Laplander) family from the region of Finland. This Finnish family represents a culture that once relied heavily on H-G practices.⁷

Historical & Current Practices

Hunter-gatherer societies have existed all over the world. Most cultures that have ever existed began with this most elemental form of survival strategy. Hunting and gathering is believed to be one of humanity's first and most successful adaptations, estimated to have engaged approximately 90 percent of human history.⁵ Typically nomadic in nature, hunter-gatherer subsistence practices required groups of people to move from place to place, hunting, foraging, fishing, and gathering wild plants and other edibles.⁴ Being mobile allowed small bands of people to explore different areas, maximizing potential food sources. These bands would periodically revisit known food sources, based upon the season and availability, altering settlement patterns as necessary.⁶ Depending upon available natural resources, this could require covering considerable distance. Eventually, as these distances were traversed, migration patterns would become more widely dispersed. As some groups would stay in some locations, others would move yet further to different locations. Over time, these hunter-gatherer bands grew into different tribes and cultures worldwide, and eventually into city-states, and even the large scale industrial societies we are familiar with today. While no longer practiced globally, this strategy continues today in many parts of the world in both part-time and full-time modes. Hunting and gathering as a method of food procurement continues to remain, and is here to remind us of our most humble of origins.

Current Challenges

While it may not be widely known, hunter-gatherers do in fact still exist.² Many people today may not see the subsistence practice of hunting and gathering as a challenge, but as our world is ever-changing, learning hunter-gatherer skills improves ones own abilities to provide and/or augment sustenance in the face of the ongoing challenges of our current global food systems. As more people wish to find healthier food alternatives to processed foods, hunting and gathering is seeing a resurgence in contemporary societies. Knowledge from our past can help see us through today. See our brochure for further take-aways on how you can become engaged in the hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

West Virginia Pre-Contact History

Period	Time	Characteristics
Paleo-Indian	10,500 B.C. to 8000 B.C.	Big game hunters, highly mobile bands
Archaic	8000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.	Mobile hunter-gatherer societies
Woodland	1000 B.C. to 1000 A.D.	Beginnings of village life, first domesticated plants, grit-tempered pottery, use of burial mounds
Late Pre-Contact	A.D. 1000 to 1650	Sedentary circular villages, true agriculture, shell-tempered pottery, bow and arrow technology



Of Local Interest

To bring this closer to home, the nearby Clover culture existed for approximately 600 years, beginning around 1000 C.E.³ They sustained themselves by utilizing the same hunter-gatherer techniques that preceded them for thousands of years before coming to settle in the area (as indicated in the grid to the right). A mixed-economy society of West Virginia, their predominate settlement grounds were about 19 miles east of Huntington in what is now the Green Bottom WMA (Wildlife Management Area).⁸ Foods obtained would have been local resources such as deer, elk & bison, various fish and fowl, turtles, native fruits, nuts, legumes, gourds, vegetation, and the more recent introduction of maize.⁷ Another WV site that is of significant historical importance is in St. Albans, WV. Excavations in 1964-1965, yielded projectile points ranging in age from 7900 to 6210 B.C.E.¹ The site is one of the oldest and deepest stratified sites of the Early Archaic period (8,000 – 10,000 B.C.E).⁹