

The Northern Pai People

Origins

As early as 13,000 years ago, humans left stone projectile points along Grand Canyon. Archæologists have found split-willow figurines in Grand Canyon made nearly 5,000 years ago.

Around AD 700, people began making reduction-fired gray ceramics along the Grand Canyon's south rim. They built connected, stone-and-brush structures and traded with ancestral Pueblo peoples to the east. Archæologists use *Cohonina*, the present-day Hopi word for Havasupai, to name this early culture.

Two centuries of drought from AD 1100 to AD 1300 stressed the Southwest and fostered change and relocation. At the height of the drought, new people from the west brought oxidation-fired brownware ceramics and brush-and-pole homes. Direct ancestors of the Hualapai and Havasupai, these arrivals carried the genetics and language of California coastal groups, the earliest peoples of North America.

These early Pai intermarried and absorbed whatever Cohonina people they encountered, for none remain today. Nonetheless, the Havasupai on the northeastern Pai frontier preserved legends of them and carried many Cohonina lifeways nearly into the present day.

Language

The closely-related Havasupai, Hualapai, and Yavapai languages of northern Arizona belong to the Hokan language family, once spoken by peoples scattered from northern California down the west coast and interior valleys into northern Mexico and along the Gila and Colorado River valleys of Arizona. Only Havasupai is still used as a first language today and represents a living example of North America's possible mother tongue.

The Hualapai people call themselves *Hwal Baaya*, "Ponderosa People." The Havasupai call themselves *Ha vsuw 'Baaj*, "Blue Water or Oasis People." Grand Canyon is *Ha Gtay Jgmima*, "Canyon of the Great River."

Original Range

The northern Pai lived south of the Colorado River from the Cerbat Mountains north of Kingman all the way to the Little Colorado River and Moencopi Wash on the east and bounded by the Mogollon Rim on the south. Probably never more than 2,000 people in all, they scattered over 7,000 square miles. The Pine Springs/Frazier Well area marked where the western Pai bands today consolidated as Hualapai abutted the eastern Havasupai group.

Life Style

Pai people hunted and gathered wild foods that they supplemented with cultivated crops. While foraging, they lived in small family bands of a few dozen persons. The Havasupai and a few other Pai bands became dedicated summer gardeners at spring-fed canyon locations. During these times the Havasupai lived in an organized community under a village leader. In winter they abandoned the shaded canyons for available fuel and wild foods at higher elevations. Their homes consisted of open ramada shades and wood-and-brush or wood-and-earth conical or domed wickiups.

The Havasupai used irrigation skills and farming practices shared by their Hopi neighbors to the east. Crops included corn, beans, squash, melons, sunflowers, and fruit trees. Contact with Hopi *katsina* theology also enriched Havasupai religion and mythology.

Pai people traded red ochre, obsidian, brain-tanned buckskin, horses, and abundant harvests for shells, fabrics, pottery, salt, semi-precious stone, and non-local foods.