The Caddo

Where Do We Get Our Information?

Caddo Voices
East Texas is part of the historic homeland of a society of farmers, warriors, potters, priests and traders known today as the Caddo. The more than 5,000 modern Caddo strengthen their ties to the past through stories, songs and dances that commemorate and celebrate events in Caddo history. Living Caddo are a valuable resource for anyone researching Caddo history.

The Past Speaks
A lot of what we know about the ancient Caddo comes from archaeology. Archaeologists are scientists who work slowly and carefully to keep dating and objects intact. After excavating a site, they share the artifacts and information they uncover with the world.

Early Explorers
"The Caddo are a populous nation of people, and so extensive that those who give detailed reports of them do not know where it ends... They have houses made of wood, cultivate the soil, plant maize and other crops, wear clothes, and punish misdemeanors, especially theft."
—Father Damien Massanet, 1690

Archaeologists carefully excavate at Caddoan Mounds, scraping away the dirt with small tools. Compare their technique to this Caddo cemetery destroyed by grave robbers using a backhoe.

Bar-Zin-Debar (Tall Man)

European explorers in the 1600s and 1700s recorded detailed accounts of what Caddo life was like at the time. A Spanish expedition produced this map which provides a detailed look at a Caddo village in 1691.
While the Caddo are often referred to as if they were a single, united group, they actually considered themselves a collection of many named extended family groups who shared a common culture of strict social rank. The scattered Caddo came together at mound centers like Caddoan Mounds during sacred and festive times.

**Adaptability in the Face of Crisis**

Caddo tribes maintained an adaptable political organization in order to meet the demands of a shifting local economy. For example, in the 1780s the Hasinai Caddo changed their social structure to eliminate the xinesi position as it was more advantageous for each village caddi to negotiate separately with the locally powerful Spanish and Comanches.

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**Independent but United**

The complex Caddo society of social rank was held together by kinship, expectation, and custom. Roles were defined by age, sex, and clan. As diplomats and negotiators, the Caddo attempted to work within the framework of white society to ensure their survival and prosperity. Here, the Caddo Business Committee visits the Oklahoma State Capitol in 1929 to negotiate for a better future.

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**Modern Tribal Government**

In the late 1900s, the remnants of the many named Caddo tribes united to save their shared culture, consolidating into one group for the first time. In 1936, Caddo leaders wrote a tribal charter and elected a formal government.

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Healthy Lifestyle
The Caddo farmed fields on the edges of woods, strung out for miles along streams and rivers. They ate very well off the land, hunting and gathering in the water as well as in the woods and supplementing their diet with farmed crops. The abundance and variety of food, and the constant exercise required to obtain it, kept the Caddo healthy.

A Time of Crying
Visiting Caddo country briefly in 1542, Europeans brought Old World crops like peaches and watermelon, which the Caddo quickly adopted. They also brought smallpox, measles and cholera to which the Caddo had no resistance. Three generations later, these diseases had killed as many as 95% of the Caddo. What do you think it felt like to be Caddo during this time?

A Living People
The Caddo survived their low point and rebounded to a current population of more than 5,000. Modern Caddo no longer live on a reservation; they live in houses and apartments all over America. Many still retain ties to their past by speaking the Caddo language, practicing customs and rites and attending dances and celebrations.

Learn Caddo words for foods
Beans = dabas
Bread = dus kut
Corn = kisi
Grapes = kee-swee
Meat dish = ha-bush-coo
Onion = dahaw
Pumpkin = ka-kee-kus-nee

Visitors to the Caddo Nation Web site can learn many Caddo words, including these for common foods.
Strategic Position
The Caddo homeland lay between the Great Plains tribes, the Eastern Woodlands tribes and the tribes of the Southeast. Taking advantage of this gateway position in the flow of trade goods, they managed a huge trade network, with themselves at the center. Caddo villages hosted yearly trade fairs with tribes from near and far. The Caddo traded many different things, but some of the most important were information, diplomacy, favors and political influence.

Trading Partners
Around 1686, the Caddo started trading with Europeans to get guns and ammunition, horses, cooking and farming utensils, beads, blue cloth and lace. The Caddo dealt strategically with Europeans throughout the 1700s, carefully cultivating alliances with them to maintain access to their goods and military protection. The diplomatic Caddo negotiated with different tribal and European groups at different times, depending upon their current agenda and needs.

Modern Gatherings
Just as their ancestors gathered for yearly trade fairs, modern Caddo gather for dances. Caddo culture is kept strong by youth organizations such as the Hasinai Society and the Caddo Culture Club. Both of these organizations attend dances in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana, the traditional Caddo homeland, gathering to celebrate Caddo culture.
Warriors and Peacemakers

Protected by their reputation as fierce and skilled warriors, Caddo communities rarely had to band together to go to war, relying instead upon diplomacy to solve conflicts. Though they would go to war if they needed to, the Caddo also experienced centuries of relative peace.

Diplomats and Politicians

During the 1600s and 1700s, Europeans walked a tightrope trying to keep claim on lands in the face of strong tribes. Due to their physical position between the Spanish and French, the Caddo became diplomats, brokering peace accords between tribes, between tribes and Europeans, and even between Europeans. This diplomatic tradition continued until the nineteenth century.

Patriots and Americans

The men and women of the Caddo Nation have fought in most American wars, starting with the War of 1812.

Stanley Edge spoke before the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1899. These two photos, taken the same day, show that the Caddo were true diplomats who could smoothly transition between worlds to help broker the most advantageous deal.

Sho-ee-tat (George Washington) led the Caddo Frontier Brigade for the Confederacy during the Civil War.

Twenty-three year old Caddo Thomas Leehmuis served in the U.S. Army in Iraq before dying in a roadside bombing on June 21, 2007.

The Caddo War and Diplomacy
You are currently standing in part of the traditional Caddo homeland. Many things have changed since the Caddo farmed this area, but many things have stayed the same. Walk in the footsteps of the Caddo by visiting the Texas State Parks and Historic Sites located in their homeland.

Caddo Lake State Park
Caddo Lake holds a special place in Caddo traditional history. The Caddo are said to have emerged into this world near Caddo Lake through a cave in a hill. The first Caddo brought along some things they would need to live above ground. Fire, pipe, and drum were carried by a man, while corn and pumpkin seeds were brought by his wife.

Mission Tejas State Park
Called Mission San Francisco de los Tejas, the Spanish established a mission near here in 1690 to convert the area’s 5,000 Hasinai Caddo. A part of one Caddo village can still be seen on guided tours. The Spanish considered this site ideal to spread the Catholic faith, as Caddo villages were trade meccas for other tribes.

Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site
A major regional trade center, Caddoan Mounds was a major settlement of the Caddo. The Caddo lived in a circular village of wattle and daub houses. A circular mound filled with the remains of hundreds of Caddoans was believed to be a temple mound. The mound was thought to be associated with the Caddoan afterlife, as it was a final resting place.

Atlanta State Park
Located on the Caddo’s eastern homelands for at least 10,000 years, the land and around Atlanta State Park was an ideal location for farming and hunting. The Caddo named the area Atlanta and cultivated a rich culture and history that can still be seen and experienced today.

Lake Tawakoni State Park
Lake Tawakoni State Park sits on 5,000 acres of water and offers camping, fishing, and boating opportunities. The park is a favorite among outdoor enthusiasts.

Purtis Creek State Park
Purtis Creek State Park is located near the Sulphur River and offers fishing, hiking, and bird-watching opportunities.

Lake Bob Sandlin State Park
Lake Bob Sandlin State Park is a popular destination for fishing, boating, and watersports.

Tyler State Park
Tyler State Park is located near Tyler, Texas, and offers hiking, camping, and scenic drives.

Caddo Lake
Caddo Lake is a reservoir that was created by the construction of a dam on the Trinity River. It offers fishing, boating, and camping opportunities.

Mission Tejas
Mission Tejas was a Spanish mission established in 1690 to convert the Caddo. It is located in Caddo Lake State Park.

Caddoan Mounds
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