

Comanches, the “Lords of the Plains”

As the train rumbles past Texas’ woods and prairies, picture the groups of great warriors who once ruled the territory extending from Nebraska to North Texas. Until the mid-1800’s, bands of Comanche Indians roamed this land. Comanches, often referred to as the “Lords of the Plains”, ruled over their territory with strength and cleverness as they struggled to survive in a changing world.

The Comanches are thought to be an offshoot of the Shoshoni tribe, starting out in central Wyoming in the 1600’s. They organized themselves into bands, which are groups of families smaller than a tribe, but still big enough to support themselves by hunting and gathering. In times of war, the bands would come together to defend their land, forming an alliance against outsiders. Though these bands were all unique, they shared a common language and culture.

Try to picture an artist’s depiction of the Comanches. Were they on horseback? Artists commonly portray Comanche on horseback, but this was not always accurate. They did not obtain horses until around 1680, but once on horseback, the Comanche were unstoppable, incredibly skillful and agile. They survived in teepees that could easily be turned into a travois- a kind of sled attached to their horses, which was very important with these groups moving frequently. Known as notorious thieves to their enemies, the Comanche bands used their equestrian skills in raiding and hunting.

Once the Comanche had driven out the Apache and Jumano tribes from the Southern Plains, they ruled that area, hunting and trading with Anglos and other Native Americans. Comanche traders often knew several languages including both tribal languages and European languages. As Europeans began moving into Comanche territory in greater numbers, more clashes occurred. Comanches had great conflict with buffalo hunters, who killed buffalo in large numbers for their hides. The buffalo was the main food source for Comanche bands, so their near extinction caused bitter hardships. This bitterness led to several battles including The Battle of Adobe Walls where tribes joined together to resist white settlement on Native American territory, but were defeated because the weapons and fortifications of the Anglos were far superior to that of the Native Americans

After many fiercely fought battles with Europeans, the Comanche, along with several other tribes, were forced to sign the Treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867. In this treaty, Comanches agreed to move onto a reservation. Still a strong and proud people, the Comanche continued to defend their land until the Red River War resulted in relocation of the Comanche to an Oklahoma reservation. By the 1880s the way of life and the buffalo were a memory of the past for the Comanche people.

Once ruling the Great Plains, the Comanche were eventually forced to conform to the changes being enforced by Western settlement. Modern-day Comanches are considered today to be one of the more educated tribes of Native Americans, with more students per capita enrolled in higher education. Even now, the Comanche still hold a reputation for strength and cleverness and we remember them as the “Lords of the Plains.”

Source(s):

Goodin, B. (n.d.) The Comanche Language and Cultural Preservation Committee. A Comanche History. Retrieved on January 3, 2011 from <http://www.comanchelanguage.org/Comanche%20History.htm>.

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