

AMERICAN INDIAN NAMES FOR TREES

Did American Indians Have Names For Trees?

Many times forestry books speak of the discovery of trees in North America with phrases such as "the tree was first discovered and named by" This makes it appear as though the American Indians were not aware of the trees and shrubs in their surroundings and that the European settlers were responsible for the identification and uses of trees. Nothing could be further from the truth. The American Indians had names and uses for all the plants in their environment.

The fact sheets in the *Natural Source* have identified the common names given to the native trees of South Dakota. Since many of these trees were native to a large portion of the plains, several common names are listed as each tribe had its own name, no different from the Germans, French and Spaniards calling maple, *ahorn*, *e'rable* and *acre*, respectively. Since the most recent occupants of what is now South Dakota are the Lakota and Dakota, the names they gave each native tree have been identified. For trees assigned individual fact sheets the common names given to them by other plains people, the Omaha, Pawnee and Winnebago, have also been identified, if known.

What Native Languages Are Spoken In S.D.?

The languages spoken in the central plains are classified under the broad category of Siouian languages. This group of related languages includes Winnebago, Dakota, Mandan, Hidatsa and Crow. It also includes the Dheginha languages which include Omaha. In the area which was to become South Dakota and Minnesota, lived the Dakota. The Dakota people are further divided into groups that spoke different dialects, Santee, Yankton, Yanktonai, Teton (Lakota), and Assiniboine. Each of these groups lived in different areas.

During the early 1800's, the Tetons occupied the area east of the Missouri River to the James, while the Santee occupied the large area between the Big Sioux River and the St. Croix. Each group spoke the Dakota language, but spoke a different dialect. On the fact sheets, the names given are from Lakota dialects.

How Were The Trees Named?

The names given to the different tree species often relate to their use or appearance just as do the names the European settlers gave trees.

Yamnúnugapi, the Lakota name for hackberry, comes from *yamnumnuga*,

"to crunch," because the berries were crunchy. The name for sugar maple, *canhasan*, means "white bark" in reference to the light colored bark of the tree.

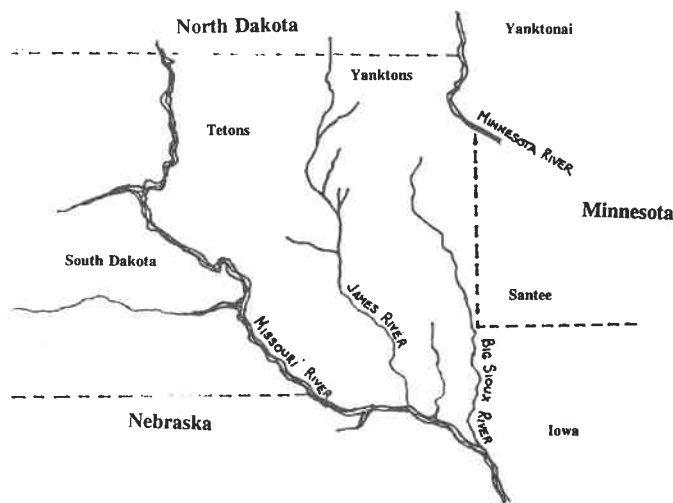
How Did American Indians Use Trees?

The American Indians made use of the trees and shrubs in their environment just as people in other cultures have. Since they were not an industrial-based economy, many of the purposes they had for trees were different from the European settlers. Boxes, crates, railroad ties, handles to agricultural implements, furniture, and wood framed houses were not a major part of their needs. They used wood products as poles for transporting or construction, ropes, bows, arrows, small implements, firewood and charcoal. The American Indians primary uses for trees were as foodstuffs and medicine. Maple trees

were tapped for syrup, berries collected and eaten fresh or dried for winter storage, and medicines made from fruits, nuts, leaves, twigs, bark and roots. The uses the American Indians had for each tree species are identified on the fact sheets.

Lastly, the religious value of trees should not be overlooked. Many of the American Indians place great spiritual value on trees. The Sacred Pole of the Omaha is made of cottonwood. The concept of sacred trees is not limited to only American Indian cultures. Trees have had special meaning to people of all cultures throughout history. In many cultures, the tree itself is not worshipped, but is considered the dwelling of the deity.

The following diagram shows the location of the Dakota east of the Missouri River in the 1830's.



References

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