

A JOURNEY
ACROSS
AMERICA:
THE GREAT LAKES
STATES

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BEFORE THE EUROPEANS

The Great Lakes and Their States

The Native Americans of northern Michigan had a legend they used to tell about Lake Superior. They believed that under the deep, choppy waters of the great lake—which they called Gitchigami—there lived a gigantic monster called Mishi Peshu. He was terrifying. Mishi Peshu had the face of a panther, the body of a serpent, and a back full of razor sharp spikes. Mishi Peshu spent much of his time sleeping under the cold blue waters of Gitchigami. He could suddenly become angry, however, thrashing about and making the lake very dangerous. Indians would give him offerings before they traveled on the lake.

Mishi Peshu is a symbol for the power and mystery of Lake Superior. The lake is unpredictable, just like Mishi Peshu. Its waters can go from calm to raging very quickly.

Lake Superior is one of the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are a group of five freshwater lakes located in the American upper **Midwest** bordering Canada. The five Great Lakes are Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Superior, Lake Ontario, and Lake Erie. These are the largest freshwater lakes on earth. Together they hold 20% of all the freshwater on the entire planet! How much is that? Imagine you filled five glasses with water. These glasses represent all of the freshwater on earth. One of those five glasses would be the Great Lakes.

How were the Great Lakes formed? Thousands of years ago, the weather was much colder. The Great Lakes region was covered by gigantic sheets of ice called **glaciers**. Eventually the climate changed, and the glaciers began to

Midwest: the part of the United States that lies west of Pennsylvania, north of the Ohio River, east of the Great Plains, and borders Canada on the north.

glacier: a large area of ice that moves slowly through a valley, down a slope, or over a plain



Native American depiction of Mishi Peshu (*upper right*), below him two serpents, and a canoe (*upper left*), from Agawa Rock, Lake Superior Provincial Park, Ontario Canada

move north as they melted. The water filled the land that had been pressed down by the glaciers, forming the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes touch eight different states in the United States, as well as large parts of Canada. This book is about the history of the Great Lakes region in the United States. This region includes the states of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. These are the states that surround the Great Lakes—or in the case of Michigan, are surrounded by the Great Lakes.

Great Lakes Names

Is it hard to recall the names of all five Great Lakes? If so, there is an easy trick to remembering. Just think of the word HOMES. Each letter stands for one of the Great Lakes: *Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior*.



The Great Lakes as seen from space

But long before there was a United States of America, or a Michigan or a Wisconsin or any of these states, this region was a wilderness. Covered in dense woods, the only people who lived here were Native American tribes who hunted and farmed these lands. Let's take a minute to learn about what the Great Lakes region was like a long time ago and about the people who lived here.

"Large Lake" Land

The land now known as Michigan is at the heart of the Great Lakes country. Michigan is very easy to find on a map, as it looks like a big mitten. Michigan is made up of two **peninsulas**, the Upper and the Lower Peninsula. Michigan's Lower Peninsula is surrounded by lakes Michigan, Huron, and Erie. Its Upper Peninsula is surrounded by lakes Superior, Michigan, and

peninsula: a piece of land nearly surrounded by water and connected with a larger body of land. An island is surrounded by water on all sides.

Huron. The word “Michigan” comes from an old Indian word *mishigamaa*, which means “large lake,” and looking at a map, we can see why!

A long time ago, a thousand years before the coming of the Europeans, Michigan was occupied by a people we call the Hopewell people. The Hopewell were a very large collection of Indian tribes that lived all over the eastern United States. They were peaceful people who lived in small farming villages. There were dozens of Hopewell villages scattered throughout western Michigan.

The Hopewell were most known for building large burial mounds. A mound was created by Indians heaping dirt, ash, shells, rocks, and other materials into a large pile. Sometimes the Hopewell buried their dead in the mounds; sometimes they were used as places of celebration or worship. Hopewell mounds can still be found in western Michigan, as well as in Ohio and Indiana.



Hopewell Culture mounds at the Hopewell National Historic Park, near Chillicothe, Ohio

After the Hopewell, other Indian tribes settled Michigan. The Potawatomi tribe hunted the forests of south and central Michigan. Further east, around Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair were the Huron tribe. We will learn more about the Huron later when we talk about the first European missionaries. The Ottawa lived along Michigan’s west coast. The Ottawa were traders who dealt in cornmeal, furs, skins, tobacco, and other goods. Much farther north, the dark, ancient forests of the Upper Peninsula were inhabited by the Ojibwe, a very large tribe who also lived in Canada. The Ojibwe mined copper and traveled about the Great Lakes in birch bark canoes.

What would Michigan have looked like five centuries ago? Let us imagine the region through the eyes of a Potawatomi traveler passing through around the year 1500.

Lake of the Clouds in the Porcupine Mountains of Michigan's Upper Peninsula



Like most of the Great Lakes region, Michigan was covered in thick forest. Beginning in southern Michigan and heading north, our Indian traveler would have walked for days through ancient forests of towering oak and hickory trees. The only break in the forests would have been the narrow hunting paths that crisscrossed the state, and the occasional open meadows, though these were rare.

Moving north, our hunter would have noticed the trees changing. Maples and beech trees would become more common, as well as pine, hemlock, spruce, and fir. As he reached the northern tip of the Lower Peninsula and crossed by canoe into the Upper, he would have noticed most of the great hardwoods give way to forests of red and white pine. If he continued west, following the trails of the Ojibwe, he would feel the ground rising beneath him and getting rockier. If he continued to the west and north, he would enter the Porcupine Mountains and the Keweenaw Peninsula, about which the Ojibwe traveled the shores of Lake Superior in their canoes, trading copper. If he continued west, our hunter would pass into the thick forests of Wisconsin.

A Journey Downriver

Wisconsin borders Lake Michigan on the west and also touches Lake Superior in the north. The name Wisconsin comes from an Indian word meaning “this stream of red stone”—a name the natives gave to the great Wisconsin River, which splits the state down the middle. This land was inhabited by several Indian tribes; the Ojibwe and Potawatomi lived there, but so did other tribes, such as the Winnebago and the Sioux.

These tribes survived by raising corn and hunting. They also fished, collected wild rice, and gathered sugar from maple trees. They were usually peaceful, although sometimes they fought with their neighbors over hunting lands.

If our traveler were to head south through Wisconsin, the easiest way would be down the Wisconsin River by canoe. In those days, the land of Wisconsin was covered from end to end in dense pine forests. One could walk for days without coming out of the woods. River travel was much easier. The trip would be easy going; drifting down the gentle river, our traveler would have seen walls of pine trees to his right and left for mile after mile. He probably would have seen Indian camps on the banks now and then, but his most frequent companions would have been the beaver, river otters, and muskrats, which would pop their heads up from the river now and then to look curiously at our traveler before disappearing beneath the water. The trip would not be without some work, however. Once in a while, our traveler would have to take his canoe out of the water and walk to avoid waterfalls.

Passing south, the river would turn sharply west. But our traveler is not going that way, for he is pressing on south towards our next region, Illinois.

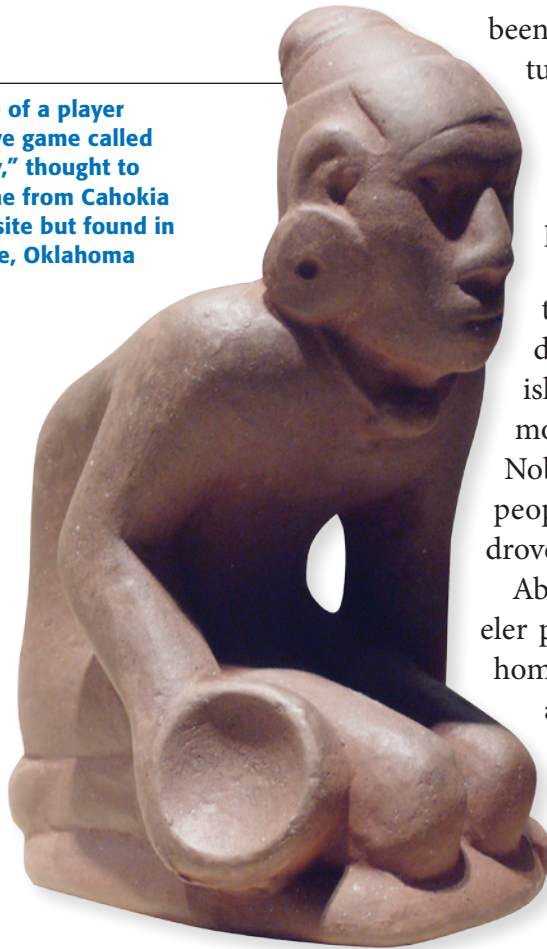


The Wisconsin River at its junction with the Mississippi

The Land of the Long-House Dwellers

Illinois is a great plain at the southern edge of Lake Michigan. This plain is rich and fertile, crossed by many rivers. Native people had lived here for thousands of years. At a place called Cahokia, the Indians of Illinois had built a wonderful city made up of hundreds of platforms and mounds. A mound called Monk's Mound reached 100 feet high, and is the largest Indian structure north of Mexico. The Indians who built Monk's Mound and the mounds of Cahokia are called the Mississippi Culture. They were great builders and artists. Many things made by the Mississippi people have

An image of a player of a native game called "Chunkey," thought to have come from Cahokia Mounds site but found in Muskogee, Oklahoma



been found: beautiful pottery, stone sculptures, copper jewelry, woven blankets, and art work made from shell beads. It must have been a marvelous thing to see the city of Cahokia with all its people living and working together.

By the time our traveler arrives, though, Cahokia has been abandoned. The Mississippi Culture vanished over a hundred years earlier. The mounds are silent now, the city empty. Nobody knows where the Mississippian people went, although some think war drove them away.

About the year 1500, the time our traveler passes through Illinois, the region is home to several tribes with names such as Kaskaskia, Peoria, Tamaroa, and many more. These tribes all banded together into a single group called the Illini, which is where we get the name Illinois. They lived in wooden long houses and farmed corn, beans, and squash. They liked to eat a dish called sagamite, which was a

kind of stew made from Indian corn and animal grease. The Illini sometimes fought wars against their neighbors over access to hunting lands.

Our traveler now passes through the lands of the Illini heading east, into our fourth region, Indiana.

Land of the Indians

Like Illinois, Indiana has been inhabited for thousands of years. The earliest natives here were **nomads**. Nomads do not settle down in cities or on farms; instead, they follow herds of wild animals, which they hunt for food. Much later the Hopewell Indians came to Indiana. They built villages and constructed huge mounds. The Mississippian people lived here as well, as did other tribes such as the Shawnee and Miami. In fact, so many Indians lived here that the place would become known as Indiana, "Land of the Indians."

Our traveler, walking east, would pass through rolling hills covered in large maples, oaks, walnuts, and poplars. He would use his canoe frequently, for this was a well-watered land crossed by over sixty major rivers. Hunting trails made travel easy, and there would have been many Indian settlements to stop at to seek food and friendship around a warm fire. He would have

nomad: a person who belongs to a people that moves from place to place and never settles in one place for long

to be careful, however. The tribes of Indiana were not always peaceful. If he were caught hunting where he was not welcome, or offended one of the tribes in some manner, things could get violent. Our traveler takes the northern route, passing along the shores of Lake Michigan, then crosses into the region known as Ohio.

Land of the Great River

Ohio takes its name from an old Indian word *ohi-yo*, which means “great river.” This is a reference to the great Ohio River, which runs through this land in the south. In the north, Ohio borders Lake Erie. The region has everything from plains and forests to rolling hills and stony mountains.



A portion of the Great Serpent Mound in Adams County, Ohio

Indians have lived in Ohio longer than any other state in the Great Lakes—almost 13,000 years. The first great Indian culture here was the Adena, between 1000 and 200 B.C. The Adena hunted, but they were not nomads. They lived in villages and farmed sunflowers and squash. Like other early Indians, they built mounds. One of their most magnificent mounds still exists today—the Great Serpent Mound in Adams County, Ohio. The Serpent Mound is a more than 1,330 foot-long mound shaped like a snake eating an egg. Nobody knows why the Great Serpent Mound was built, though people think it might have been a religious shrine of some sort. The Adena built other mounds as well, in which they buried their dead. Many skeletons of Adena people have been found in the mounds of Ohio.

pendant: a piece of jewelry that hangs by a cord from the neck

Ohio was also the home of the Hopewell people, whom we have already met. The Hopewell built cities and mounds throughout central Ohio and created some of the finest artwork of the Americas. We know of their art mainly through objects found in Hopewell graves. They made necklaces, detailed carvings of animals made of wood or bone, **pendants**, and woven mats. They could seemingly make art out of anything! Silver, copper, freshwater pearls, sea shells, shark teeth and even the teeth of grizzly bears were turned into beautifully crafted pieces of art.

By the time our hunter passes through Ohio, the Adena and Hopewell are long gone. Around 1500, Ohio was divided among several rival tribes, such as the Shawnee, Wyandot, Mingo, Ottawa, and Erie. Ohio was a very desirable place to live, and many of these tribes jostled each other for hunting lands. Other tribes from outside Ohio would occasionally move in as well, crowding the region and leading to more fighting.

Turning north from Ohio, our hunter would pass back into his homeland among the Potawatomi of southern Michigan.

Life among the Indians

We have learned about a lot of different places and tribes, each of them different. But you may have noticed that they also shared many things in common. What sorts of things were similar about all these regions and people?

Most of the land of the Great Lakes was heavily forested. Indians had cleared some of the land for farming or villages, but most of it was covered in trees, and crossed only by hunting trails.

Most Indian tribes of the Great Lakes survived by hunting, but also maintained small farms. The most popular crops were corn, beans, and squash, known as the “Three Sisters.” The Indians generally lived in shelters made of wood or birch bark and traveled in canoes. Though they lived in small villages, these villages were often taken apart, moved, and rebuilt elsewhere if they could find better hunting—or if war drove them away.

Most of the tribes were peaceful, but they were always prepared for war as well. Indian tribes typically warred over access to hunting lands or rivers. War could be brutal—Great Lakes Indian warriors fought with bows and arrows, spears, and the dreaded ball-headed war club, which was a wooden handle with a circular stone at the end, sometimes tipped with a spike. Indians sometimes attacked each other in raiding parties, killing warriors of other tribes and taking their women prisoner. But, though war was savage, it was also short. Conflicts were usually over quickly, and most Indian tribes wanted only to live in peace to hunt, farm, and fish.

However, life around the Great Lakes was about to change.

Chapter 1 Review

Summary

- Thousands of years ago, the weather in the Great Lakes region was much colder than it is today. The Great Lakes region was covered by glaciers. Eventually the climate changed, and the glaciers began to move north as they melted. The water filled the land that had been carved out by the glaciers, forming the Great Lakes.
- Michigan, made up of the Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula, is surrounded by lakes Michigan, Superior, Huron, and Erie.
- A long time before Europeans came to Michigan, the region was inhabited by the Hopewell people, who were peaceful and lived in small farming villages. The Hopewell built large burial mounds. After the Hopewell, other Indian tribes settled Michigan. They were hunters, though some were traders or mined copper and traveled about the Great Lakes in birch bark canoes.
- Wisconsin touches Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. The state is named for the Wisconsin River, which splits the state down the middle. The native peoples of Wisconsin raised corn and hunted, fished, collected wild rice, and gathered sugar from maple trees. They were usually peaceful, although sometimes they fought with their neighbors over hunting lands.
- Illinois is a great plain that stretches from the southern edge of Lake Michigan. It was once the home of the native Mississippi culture that built Cahokia, a city made up of hundreds of platforms and mounds.
- The earliest inhabitants of Indiana were nomadic. Later, the Hopewell peoples came to the region, as did the Mississippi Culture. The region was heavily populated. By 1500, tribes gathered into a single group called the Illini lived in wooden long houses and farmed corn, beans, and squash. The Illini sometimes fought wars against their neighbors over access to hunting lands.
- Ohio is named for the great river on its southern border. Indians have lived in Ohio for almost 13,000 years. The first great Indian culture here

was the Adena, whose people lived in Ohio between 1000 and 200 B.C. The Adena hunted, but they were not nomads. They lived in villages and farmed sunflowers and squash. They built mounds. The Hopewell peoples also inhabited Ohio. Around 1500, Ohio was divided among several rival tribes, who jostled each other for Ohio's hunting lands. Other tribes from outside Ohio would occasionally move in as well. They crowded the region, which led to more fighting.

- Before the coming of Europeans, the Great Lakes region was largely covered with thick forests. Most Indian tribes of the Great Lakes survived by hunting and small-scale farming. The Indians generally lived in shelters made of wood or birch bark and traveled in canoes. Most of the tribes were peaceful, but they fought sometimes brutal wars over access to hunting lands or rivers.

Chapter Checkpoint

1. What happened to the lands in the area of the Great Lakes after the climate became warmer and the glaciers melted?
2. What are the first peoples called, who lived in Michigan and the Eastern United States long before other Native tribes? What is one thing you can remember about them?
3. Later tribes like the Potawatomi and Ojibwe settled in Michigan and Wisconsin. How did they live and survive?
4. How did the state of Illinois get its name?
5. What did the Mississippi culture of Illinois and Indiana build that makes them important for history?
6. Who were the Adena? Where did they live?
7. What are the "Three Sisters," and what do they show us about the life of Great Lakes tribes?
8. In what ways did the tribes of the Great Lakes region live in peace with one another? Why at times did they have conflicts with each other?
9. What were some of the natural resources available to tribes of the Great Lakes region?

Chapter 1 Review (continued)

10. What areas, towns, or land formations are named after Indian words or tribes where you live? Name three to four.

Geography Challenge

Use the map on the page facing page 1 as reference.

1. What are the five Great Lakes called? Name them and find them on a map.
2. Name a tribe that lived on both the north and south shores of one of the Great Lakes.
3. Name a tribe that lived in the lower peninsula of Michigan?
4. Name at least two rivers that connect and flow into the Mississippi River.
5. What is the river closest to the area where the Shawnee tribe lived?

Vocabulary and Important Names

1. What do we call a large area of ice that moves slowly through a valley, down a slope, or over a plain?
2. What do we call the U.S. region that lies east of Pennsylvania, north of the Ohio River, east of the Great Plains, and borders Canada on the north?
3. What do we call a piece of land that is surrounded by water on two sides?
4. What do we call a person who belongs to a people that moves from place to place and never settles in one place for long.
5. What is the name for structures that consist of artificial heaps or banks usually of earth or stones? These structures were used for burial places, sacred or religious spots, and defensive works.

Chapter Extra: What If . . .

Write at least a six sentence creative story using context clues from the book to help you tell your story. Add details and descriptive words to make your “What if” story more interesting. Use the following questions to help you write your story.

If you were a member of a Midwestern tribe, which tribe would you choose? What would your name be? What would your shelter look like? What would you eat? What jobs would you do to help your tribe? What would be a hardship or difficulty you might face?