
History of the Cow Creek Umpqua Tribe: First Contact

The first outsiders to visit Cow Creek territory were a group of fur seekers who came in 1819. The Tribe was not interested in trading its furs for the goods that these strangers had to offer. When the Cow Creeks did not want to trade, the fur seekers open fire on the Tribe killing at least fourteen. Despite this horrible event, Tribal members and other fur seekers were peaceful over the next several decades.

Encounters with between the Cow Creek and non-Indians whites did not happen often. This all changed in 1826 when the Hudson Bay Company created a permanent trading post in 1826 near present day Elkton. Open trading between the fur trappers and natives resulted in the introduction of new goods, technologies and intermarriage between the traders and natives. Some of the new goods included needles and thread, beads, and wool and cotton.

In 1850, the United States government passed a law called Oregon Donation Act of 1850 which gave land in Oregon for free to white adult males or to married couples who would build their homes, settle and improve upon the land. This was all done without the permission of the native tribes of Oregon and created conflict between the newcomers and the Tribe. Ancestral homeland used for seasonal hunting and gathering was overrun by horses, cattle, and log cabins, limiting the Cow Creek access to food resources.

Then in 1851 new gold was discovered in southwestern Oregon and this brought many white people called miners who were seeking to make their fortune. Mining for gold created many problems for the tribe. Mining destroyed important fishing resources by covering the bottom of rivers and creeks with mud. In addition, Indians were forced from their villages as miners took over land.

Cow Creek tribal ancestors tried to remain peaceful with the newcomers. Miwaleta, a leader of the Cow Creek asked his people to act peacefully and not to go to war with the white settlers. Then in 1852 a young white settler stabbed a Tribal boy, an injury which led to his death. The white murder was never punished and Miwaleta learned that fair justice was unlikely to happen. White settlers also brought with them illness and disease. In the winter of 1852-53, Tribal ancestors suffered the death of several members, including Miwaleta, from a fever outbreak.

In 1853, war broke out in the Rouge River region. The Takelma tribe sent a runner to Cow Creek to entice the tribe into joining them in driving the miners from their homelands. The Cow Creeks did not join their Takelma kin, hoping for peace.

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New or important words	A sketch of my learning
Answer to text dependent questions	
What new information did you learn from this text? Be specific.	
What is the author's point of view? What evidence can you find in the text.	