*This podcast helps you to understand the social and tribal structures of the Plains Indians and how this helped their survival.*

**Questioner**: We’re joined today by an expert on the Plains Indians to find out how they managed to survive on the Great Plains. Please start by telling us about the environment in which they lived.

**Interviewee**: Thank you. The Great Plains, also known as the Prairies, were a vast and hostile place, stretching from the Canadian border in the north all the way to the Mexican border in the south. The Plains are bordered by the Rocky Mountains in the west and the River Mississippi in the east. Extreme weather conditions, harsh terrain and mile upon mile of unforgiving territory are all features of the Plains.

**Questioner**: So how did the Plains Indians manage to survive?

**Interviewee**: Actually they did more than survive, they thrived in these conditions. Key to their survival was their use of horses, which allowed them to travel great distances across the Plains. They were very skilled on horseback which helped them to follow and hunt buffalo.

**Questioner**: They killed the buffalo for meat I presume?

**Interviewee**: They did, but that’s not all. The Plains Indians used every part of the buffalo from its hide (or skin) to its bones for weapons or tools. Not one part of the buffalo was wasted – in fact it was a sacred animal to the Plains Indians as their very survival depended on it.

**Questioner**: So how did they move around?

**Interviewee**: Again, the Plains Indians used their horses to transport all their belongings with them, relying on each member of their group to carry out specific jobs. They lived in tipis which were like tents made from buffalo hide. Tipis were warm, strong, waterproof and easy to put up and take down. This made them the ideal shelter for the Plains Indians’ nomadic life style.

**Questioner**: Did their society have a structure?

**Interviewee**: Absolutely, a very tight one. The Plains Indians were a nomadic group of hunter-gatherers who lived in small groups known as bands. The band was the basic unit of Plains Indian society. It was not practical for them to live in a large group because to do so would soon exhaust the available pasture for horses as well as the game available for food. Family life was important and families would join together to form a band of about 10–50 families.

**Questioner**: Can you describe some of the different roles of the members of the Plains Indian bands?

**Interviewee**: Men’s jobs were to hunt and provide food for their family. They also protected the band and were responsible for putting up and taking down the tipi. Women were highly valued as bearers of children and were responsible for raising children. The elderly were relied upon for their wisdom and advice.

**Questioner**: I’ve heard that the Indian men could have more than one wife.

**Interviewee**: That’s correct. Although most men had only one wife, richer men could have several wives. The dangers of warfare and hunting meant there were more women than men. Polygamy made sense as it led to more children being born and ensured the future of the band.

**Questioner**: Can you explain more about how the Plains Indians organised themselves as a society?

**Interviewee**: Very efficiently! Because the Great Plains was such a hostile place to live, it was essential that those living in an Indian band were well organised and co-operated with each other in order to survive. The leader of a band was a chief, a highly respected man who was helped by a council made up of the men of the band. Problems were discussed and the advice of the medicine man, chiefs and elders would be listened to, but these men would not tell the others what to do. Instead, the council members would continue to talk until everyone agreed on a solution to the problem. Every year the various Plains Indians bands would meet together as a Nation to discuss important decisions such as whether to go to war. All the men of a band also belonged to a warrior society, for example the Kit Foxes of the Sioux.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the Plains Indians’ beliefs including those about land, nature, warfare and property.*

The Plains Indians were very spiritual and believed that all living things – animals, birds, fish, plants and human beings – had a spirit. The Sioux believed that a Great Spirit called Wakan Tanka had created the world and all of life within the world. They believed that even the rocks, trees and streams had spirits and that these spirits influenced their lives. The Sioux tried to contact the spirit world through visions. All young boys were expected to try to receive their first vision. To do this, they would cleanse their body in a sweat lodge and then pray and go without food. Once a vision had been received, it would be interpreted by the Medicine Man and the boy would be given his adult name, based on the vision. The Sioux used their visions to help them plan and prepare for battles.

Dances and ceremonies also played an important part in the Plains Indians’ lives as a way of contacting the spirits. The Sioux believed in the circle of nature as they were physically surrounded by the circle on the horizon, the circle of their village and the circle of their villagers. They also lived through the circle of life from birth, childhood, adulthood, old age and eventually death.

Land was sacred to the Sioux as they believed that they came from the earth, just like plants and animals. They were part of the land and the land was life itself. As such, they believed that the land could not be owned by an individual or even one Nation. Some land, such as the Black Hills, was particularly sacred as this was the place the Sioux took their dead for burial. The holy men sought guidance from the Black Hills when important decisions had to be made. The Plains Indians’ attitudes to land was one of the greatest sources of misunderstanding and conflict with white settlers, with many bands being prepared to fight to the death for their sacred lands.

The Plains Indians’ attitude to warfare was different from American settlers. Rather than long drawn out campaigns they would launch a series of raids against their enemy using relatively small groups of warriors. Their reasons for war could be to steal horses, seek revenge or to destroy their enemies. Unlike the settlers, the Plains Indians did not wage war in order to conquer land as they believed that no one could own land, nor did they wish to retain a piece of land as they were always on the move.

Fighting did not happen in the colder months of winter but in the summer when food supplies were plentiful. Plains Indians took scalps during battle as evidence of their success and these were dried and hung outside their tipis as trophies. They believed that if you took your enemy’s scalp he could not go into the afterlife so would not be there to fight you when you died. This was also the reason for mutilating dead enemies. Both practices were considered abhorrent by the Americans who fought against them.

When the gun arrived on the Great Plains, it might have made war even bloodier. However, the Plains Indians made war into a ritual in which it was considered braver to get close and touch your enemy in battle rather than kill him. This was called counting coup. Despite their fierce reputation, more Sioux were lost in hunting accidents than in battle between 1835 and 1845.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the US Government policy towards the Plains Indians and the creation of the Permanent Indian Frontier.*

When America was first colonised the people of the United States of America encountered the original inhabitants, the Indian Nations. This relationship varied from one of friendship and co-operation to hostility and even war. Each time a settlement advanced into an area inhabited by Plains Indians, the Indian Nations were destroyed. Initially the Plains Indians were treated as sovereign nations to be negotiated with. Early peace treaties saw them surrender some of their land to the United States, with their remaining land kept for them as a reservation. Eventually the term reservation referred to any piece of land in which Plains Indians lived, regardless of whether it had historically been their home.

However, over time the Plains Indians were seen as a barrier to western expansion and in 1824 the Bureau of Indian Affairs was set up as part of the US War Department to manage the relationship with the Plains Indians.

In 1830 the Indian Removal Act established the Permanent Indian Frontier in the West beyond the Mississippi River. The Frontier was the boundary between the United States and the Indian Territory. Each time a new US territory was founded, the Indian Territory shrank, until all that was left was the area of land that would eventually become Oklahoma. The Indian Removal Act also required thousands of Plains Indians living in the east to be moved to land in the Indian Territory, so that more land would become available for settlement. So many Plains Indians died during this forced removal process that it became known as the Trail of Tears and it was finally completed in 1838.

By the 1850s, settlers were moving onto the eastern edge of the Great Plains and many were beginning to travel across the Plains in search of a new life in the West. The US Government encouraged this movement to populate the west of the United States, but it also made the issue of protecting the Plains Indians more urgent. The US Government had begun a policy of ‘civilising’ the Indians by confining them to the reservations and forcing them to attend schools. One outcome of this policy was the Indian Appropriations Act of 1851, which was passed as a way of protecting Indians from westward expansion. In reality this meant setting up legally recognised reservations.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the factors which encouraged migration west across the Plains.*

**Questioner**: Why did settlers on the east coast of America decide to make the journey west?

**Interviewee**: Well, one of the main reasons was the poor economic conditions in the east. In 1837, the United States was faced with an economic depression which led to banks collapsing and savings being lost. Many businesses struggled, wages were cut and jobs were lost. People decided they wanted to seek a new life in the west and the fertile lands in California and Oregon sounded very attractive.

**Questioner**: So, people decided to go west to escape the economic depression in the east of the United States?

**Interviewee**: Yes, but that wasn’t the only reason for settlers travelling west. The Oregon Trail, which opened in 1836, made the journey more straightforward, although it was still fraught with dangers. The Trail was a route taken by wagons all the way from the Missouri River on the east of the Great Plains to Oregon, or to California, if the settlers turned south-west. As the Midwest became more settled, some settlers decided to go in search of open space once again. Farmers were tempted west by tales of freely available fertile land in Oregon and the sunny climate of California which made it ideal for growing fruit.

**Questioner**: What about the idea of ‘Manifest Destiny’. What was this?

**Interviewee**: This was the idea that it was God’s will that the United States should expand its territory. Many Americans believed it was their God-given duty to spread their civilisation and democracy across the United States from east coast to west coast. Manifest Destiny was an idea that came about during the annexation of Texas from Mexico during the Mexican–America War of 1845 to 1848 and was used to justify the taking of huge areas of land from Mexico.

**Questioner**: A large group of Americans who headed west were known as the ‘forty-niners’. Can you tell me more about them?

**Interviewee**: This group of people headed west for one reason only – to find their fortune in the newly discovered gold mines of California. In 1849, gold was discovered in the foothills of California’s Sierra Nevada mountain range. At first, news of the discovery was slow to spread, but when it was published in a San Francisco newspaper, the news spread like wildfire and people began to arrive not only from the USA but from around the world. The Gold Rush meant that the population of California exploded from 15,000 people in 1848 to almost 250,000 by 1852. Shopkeepers and saloons set up to serve the needs of the miners but the combination of huge numbers of men, gambling and alcohol meant that the mining towns were extremely violent and lawless. By 1852 the Gold Rush was over and many of the miners moved on to seek their fortune mining for gold in the Rocky Mountains.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the process and problems of migration by contrasting the experiences of the Donner Party and the Mormons.*

The journey west took around four months and was long and hazardous for the pioneers attempting to migrate to Oregon and California. Settlers followed the Oregon Trail which led from the town of Independence in Missouri to Portland in Oregon or, if turning south-west at Fort Bridge, to California.

The Donner Party, led by brothers Jacob and George, set off from Independence in May 1846 and headed for California. They travelled in company with other wagons across the Great Plains. On arrival at the Little Sandy River, the Donner Party decided to head for Fort Bridger and take the Hastings Cutoff rather than follow the usual route to Fort Hall. Although this route was shorter it proved hugely more difficult as they had to cross the Wasatach Mountain range and then the Great Salt Desert. As a result, the Donner Party lost wagons, oxen and cattle, but more importantly, time. They finally got back on the main California Trail in October 1846, ready to cross the Sierra Nevada mountain range which was the final barrier to California.

Eighty-seven people began to climb the Sierras but the snow came early and the party, already weakened by their earlier experiences and low on provisions, were poorly equipped for a winter on the mountain. By mid-December people began to die and a small group set out to get help – some died on the way with the others resorting to cannibalism to survive. A relief party arrived in February 1847 but they could not rescue everyone immediately – out of 87 members of the party only 46 survived to reach California. When news of the suffering of the Donner Party spread east, it led to a temporary reduction in the number of people willing to migrate west.

The disastrous experiences of the Donner Party contrast with another group of pioneers to head west – the Mormons – although their motive was neither land nor gold.

In 1846 the Mormons, a religious group founded by Joseph Smith, decided to move west to an area around the Great Salt Lake, after years of persecution in towns they had tried to settle in. Their leader, Brigham Young, meticulously planned the journey west as they had to make the dangerous crossing of the Rocky Mountains. A small group began the journey in February 1846, building rest camps as they went where the following groups could safely rest and repair their wagons. Mormons travelled in groups of 100 or so wagons who could support each other on the long journey.

The Mormons built thousands of cabins for families at the Missouri River, in an area of the Plains they called the Winter Quarters, where the pioneers could wait for winter to pass. The winter of 1846 was harsh and fuel and food supplies ran low and disease spread. Hundreds died but those who survived continued their journey when the weather conditions improved.

Brigham Young organised a ‘Pioneer Band’ of around 150 men and 70 wagons to go on ahead of the rest of the group. Young had deliberately chosen a route west that avoided the possibility of conflicts with travellers using the now well-established Oregon Trail. It was the Pioneer Band’s task to choose the new trail and to ensure it was suitable for wagons to travel on. The later groups following on behind would then maintain the trail as they travelled along it. The Pioneer Band also built fords through rivers, set up ferries and planted food crops for the later harvest.

By early June 1847, the Mormons begun to follow the Oregon Trail, reaching Fort Bridger by 7 July, where they followed the same path as the Donner Party out of the Rocky Mountains to reach the Salt Lake Valley on 21 July. By the end of 1847, approximately 2,000 Mormons had reached their destination of Salt Lake Valley. From 1847 to 1869 Mormon pioneers made the journey west in organised wagon trains, travelling along the trails made by the first Mormon trailblazers.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the problems that arose in the settlement of the new state of Kansas.*

The passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 led to the opening up of two new territories for white settlement. The biggest issue facing these new territories was whether they would be free or slave states. The Act was a compromise between the North, which wanted to limit slavery, and the South which wanted to expand it. It was always considered unlikely that Nebraska would become a slave state, but it was left to the people of Kansas to decide whether or not they should become a slave state, once they had established an effective state government.

The Act resulted in a rush of both those in favour of a slave state and those against it, who were known as ‘free-soilers’. Both pro and anti-slavery settlers had begun moving into Kansas even before the land had been officially surveyed, not only because they wanted to obtain the best land but because each side hoped that by settling in sufficient numbers, they would be able to win the vote on whether Kansas became a free or slave state.

By 1856, Kansas had two opposing and illegally formed governments. Because neither side was prepared to compromise over the issue of slavery and a political solution was unlikely, both sides began to arm themselves. The resulting struggle between the two sides became known as ‘Bleeding Kansas’. Slave state supporters attacked the free-soilers and the ensuing violence resulted in the destruction of property and around 200 deaths. By 1858, the federal government was compelled to take charge and it was decided that Kansas would become a free state.

The white settlers not only faced political violence but trouble from the Plains Indians too. They also encountered hostility from fellow settlers over the land they had rushed to claim. This was because at first there was no official survey or governmental land offices, so disputed land claims were often settled with a gun rather than the law. Once settled in Nebraska and Kansas, those who had registered their land claim found their difficulties in beginning a new life were only just beginning, as we shall see in the next podcast.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the development and problems of white settlement farming.*

**Questioner**: Hello and welcome to another contestant on ‘List of Three’. You have chosen to answer questions on the problems faced by the early farmers and homesteaders on the Great Plains. Ready? Let’s start the clock. List three things which made life uncomfortable for the homesteaders as they tried to establish a life on the Great Plains.

**Contestant**: Water shortages, which meant it was difficult to keep themselves and their clothing clean; extremes of weather and dirty conditions due to their sod houses being made of soil, as this harboured pests and led to the spread of disease.

**Questioner**: Correct. For most homesteaders, wood was in very short supply. List three problems that a lack of wood caused the homesteaders.

**Contestant**: No wood to burn for fuel or cooking, to build houses from and to furnish their houses with.

**Questioner**: Correct. List three problems associated with the extreme weather on the plains.

**Contestant**: Harsh winters damaged or destroyed crops; the autumn rains could cause flooding and the hot summers meant there was often a drought as well as the risk of prairie fires starting.

**Questioner**: Correct. Give three problems the first farmers found when trying to farm the land.

**Contestant**: The soil was incredibly tough to plough as it had never been farmed before. The grasses that had to be cleared before crops could be planted had very dense and tangled roots. A lack of wood meant there were no fences around the growing crops, which could be easily trampled by buffalo. The crops the homesteaders planted were those they had grown in the east but these crops of maize and soft winter and spring wheats were unsuited to the harsh conditions of the Great Plains.

**Questioner**: Excellent – four correct answers given there. Thanks for playing. See you next time.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the reasons for tensions between settlers and the Plains Indians and the importance of the first Fort Laramie Treaty.*

**Quizmaster**: Hello and welcome to Look Back at History. Our contestant today will be focusing upon the tensions between the settlers and the Plains Indians from the 1840s onwards. If you are ready, then we will begin.

**Contestant**: Yes, I’m ready.

**Quizmaster**: Give three examples of ways the early settlers crossing the Great Plains affected the Plains Indians.

**Contestant**: The settlers placed extra demands on the scarce supplies of water; they interfered with the Plains Indians’ hunting by either killing or scaring away game; and they introduced previously unknown diseases, such as smallpox.

**Quizmaster**: Correct. By the 1840s, the increased number of settlers travelling across the Great Plains was beginning to have a negative impact on the Plains Indians. What did the US Government do in order to deal with the problem?

**Contestant**: It introduced the Indian Appropriations Act in 1851, which set up legally recognised reservations which were supposed to protect the Indians from westward expansion of settlers.

**Quizmaster**: Correct. Why did the Oregon Trail cause a problem for the Plains Indians?

**Contestant**: It brought settlers across their hunting grounds, which disturbed the buffalo.

**Quizmaster**: Correct. The first Fort Laramie Treaty aimed to solve this. In what year was it signed and what did it require the Plains Indians to agree to?

**Contestant**: It was signed in 1851. The Plains Indians Nations, consisting of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Crow and Sioux, promised not to attack the settlers travelling along the Oregon Trail. They also agreed that the US Government could build some roads and forts in their territory.

**Quizmaster**: Correct. What did the US Government promise the Plains Indians when it signed the First Fort Laramie Treaty?

**Contestant**: That each Indian Nation would have an agreed hunting area and would be paid an annual subsidy.

**Quizmaster**: Correct. Who were the ‘negotiators’?

**Contestant**: This was the name given to the people who wanted a negotiated solution to the Indian problem. They mainly lived in the East of the USA and believed that the Bureau of Indian Affairs should retain responsibility for the Plains Indians and how they were treated.

**Quizmaster**: That’s correct. What was the name of the other group of Americans who had very different ideas about the Plains Indians?

**Contestant**: They were known as the ‘exterminators’ and they believed that the Plains Indians were savages that needed a military solution to control them. The exterminators were often settlers and miners living in the West who suffered Indian hostility and had the most to gain by the removal of the Plains Indians.

**Quizmaster**: The Fort Laramy Treaty of 1851 led to a period of peace with the Plains Indians, which was nevertheless tested by four factors. Can you name these factors?

**Contestant**: The Gold Rush of 1858, which led to large numbers of settlers heading to the Rocky Mountains and moving onto Cheyenne and Sioux Indian lands. This was a breach of the Treaty but the US Government did nothing about this. The second factor was the movement of settlers onto the Plains of Kansas and Nebraska. The third factor was the setting up of transport links across the Plains, which meant both mail coaches and railroad surveyors encroaching into Indian hunting areas. The fourth factor was not all of the Plains Indians Nations felt bound by the terms of the Treaty and so they continued raiding as before.

**Quizmaster**: Excellent – all four factors given. Finally, can you give me the date of the Mormon War and two causes of conflict with the Mormons?

**Contestant**: The Mormon War was from 1857 to 1858. Travellers on the Oregon and California Trails complained that the Mormons charged high prices. The federal government was worried about the Mormons’ policy of polygamy.

**Quizmaster**: Correct. Thank you for playing – see you all again soon for another edition of Look Back at History.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the problems of lawlessness in early towns and settlements. It will also look at how the government and local communities attempted to tackle this problem.*

The new mining towns that sprung up quickly in California had a problem with lawlessness. Politicians initially did not think that it was worth spending money on employing or training better law enforcement officers.

Most mining towns were in isolated areas whose populations grew very quickly once gold and silver were discovered. The majority of these towns attracted men who had left their families to make their fortunes, although in reality very few actually did. Often these new towns had many saloons, gambling houses and brothels. In the town of Aurora, around half of the 200-300 women that lived there were prostitutes.

The county Sheriff was an elected official who was responsible for law enforcement and ran the county jail. He was helped by the township constable or city marshall who ran the city jail and appointed his own police officers. The militia were a local company of men who set up units to replace the regular army. The militia existed until the Civil War broke out in 1865. The court system consisted of a Justice Court, a District Court and a Coroner’s Court to investigate deaths. A Grand Jury was responsible for investigating public offences. It had the power to hand down indictments which would then proceed to trial in the courts. Members of the Grand Jury were drawn from a list of registered voters in the county.

Lawlessness took many forms: conflict with the local Plains Indians bands was common, because of the disruption the settlers caused to their hunter-gatherer existence. Gold and silver was transported by stage coach or freight wagon and was often the target of highway robbery. In the absence of any organised law enforcement, vigilante justice was common with members of local communities taking the law into their own hands. Drunk and disorderly conduct was also common, with men arguing over women, gambling, mining claims and feuds between individuals. These were made much worse by the custom of carrying firearms and knives and many of these disputes ended in bloodshed and killings.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*