



People of the Fresh Water Places

The closest, major settlement to Wachusett Mountain was apparently Washacum in Sterling. Populating this general area were **Wachusett** (the name means by the hill-the root “achu” as in “Massachusetts” means hilly place) and **Nashua tribes**, part of the **Nipmucks** who populated the



MEMBERS OF THE NIPMUC PEOPLE AT ROGER WILLIAMS PARK

area known today as Central Massachusetts. This name means “people of the fresh water places,” and they were primarily hunter-gatherers, although they practiced incidental farming where soil and landscape, as that found in river valleys, supported it. They managed the forests by burning segments of it, to improve hunting-this practice also insured better soil and cleared plots for farming. Agriculture was more important to tribes of southern New England than those farther inland and to the north, where hunting and gathering were predominant.

NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY

around Wachusett Mountain

A Legacy of Words Other Algonkian words we use today include animals and plants which were new to the early Europeans explorers and colonists, such as raccoon, chipmunk, moose, skunk, musquash (muskrat), squash, quahog (hard-shell clam), tautog (blackfish) and many others. The words “moccasin” and “toboggan” are Algonkian terms. Their name for the mountain just north of Wachusett, “Monadnock,” is now a geological term describing any peak that stands isolated and not within a range.



The Algonkin, Abenaki and Pequot Peoples

Native peoples of this wide, coastal-based region shared a similar tongue, referred to as Algonkian, which distinguished them from neighboring nations to the west, such as the Mohawks of New York State and the Iroquois of the Great Lakes. The root of the name Algonkian is uncertain-however, the Algonkian nations generally called themselves by the collective title “Ninnuock” meaning “the people.” At the time that Europeans arrived, Algonkian natives were comprised of seven confederated tribal nations. From the **Abenaki** people of the Penobscot and Kennebec river valleys of Maine (the name means “dawn people” or “easterners”) to the mighty **Pequots** of southern Connecticut (whose name means “destroyers”) they were adept at living off the land and the water. They led a communal lifestyle based on the extended family, with tribal government, religion, law, language and art.



AN ALGONKIN SHAMAN IN THE MIDST OF A TRIBAL RITUAL

A Glimpse into Native American Life

Many free interpretive programs are offered at Wachusett Mountain State Reservation. For information about them or our about guided tours, please call us at Wachusett Mountain State Reservation (978) 464-2987.



What They Ate. Acorns were a major component of the Nipmuck diet, collected from the forest floor and stored for winter, along with beechnuts, hickory nuts and chestnuts. They used bark and saplings extensively for construction of their long-house lodges and round, “single family” wigwams.

How They Traveled. These people moved according to the season, traveling often for 10-20 miles in a day to gather berries, nuts and tubers, tend scattered, farmed plots, to hunt and to fish. Entire villages would move as firewood was used up or to follow the cycles of game and fishing. A vast network of deer paths, stream beds and riverways were well traveled, linking tribes and spanning loosely-defined territories which tribes claimed as their particular hunting or fishing ground. Hollowed out logs were fashioned into canoes and stashed along the banks of water routes for an effective, long-reach method of travel.

How They Healed. Sweat lodges were common among the Algonkin. Rocks were heated by fire, piled up in the special lodge, and water applied to create steam-similar to the sauna bath that is popular with Scandinavians. According to the Narragansetts, the powerful confederation populating most of Rhode Island, the sweat lodge experience cleaned the skin and purged the body of sickness.

How They Played. Another feature of Algonkian settlements was a lodge built for gambling – a popular diversion. Europeans observed the natives playing their favorite game, called Hubbub, that involved wagering with painted bones tossed in a tray. Early colonists reported the natives yelling “Hub, hub, hub” in the excitement of wagering and tossing, and the word “hubbub” has passed from the white settlers lexicon and is still used today to connote the confused noise of many voices.

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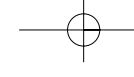


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NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY AROUND WACHUSETT MOUNTAIN

The natives of what is now New England were a distinct confederation, sharing a similar culture and language

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Acorns were a major component of the **Nipmuck diet**, collected from the forest floor and stored for winter, along with beechnuts, hickory nuts and chestnuts. They used bark and saplings extensively for construction of their longhouse lodges and round, "single family" wigwams.

These people were **on the move** according to the season, traveling often for 10-20 miles in a day to gather berries, nuts and tubers, tend scattered, farmed plots, to hunt and to fish. They would move entire villages as firewood was used up or to follow the cycles of game and fishing. A vast network of deer paths, stream beds and riverways were well traveled, linking tribes and spanning loosely-defined territories which tribes claimed as their particular hunting or fishing ground. They hollowed out logs to fashion canoes-these were stashed along the banks of waterway routes for an effective,

long-reach method of travel.

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Another feature of Algonkian settlements was a **lodge built specifically for gambling-a popular diversion**. Europeans observed the natives playing their favorite game, called **Hubbub**, that involved wagering with painted bones tossed in a tray, similar to dice games. Early colonists reported the natives yelling "Hub, hub, hub" in the excitement of wagering and tossing, and the word "hubbub" has passed from the white settlers lexicon and is still used today to connote the confused noise of many voices.

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