

MOHICAN HUNTING VILLAGE

NATIVE AMERICAN INTERPRETIVE TRAIL - WOODLANDS AND HUNTING GROUNDS

TRAIL STOP #4

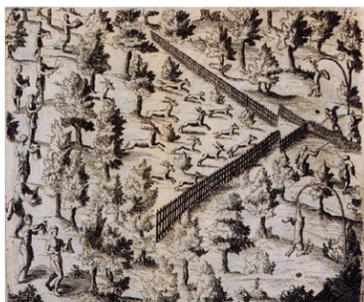
PANEL A

Imagine that you are a Native American a thousand years ago. You are a member of the Muh-he-con-neok, “The People of the Waters that are Never Still.” Your main village is near the great river that ebbs and flows. Your tribe includes many villages with thousands of your kin. Now that the corn has been harvested, your tribe has dispersed into the hunting grounds. You and a few other families have traveled a few days walk toward the rising sun, and set up camp near the Kamposoa Bog.

Now, immerse yourself in the experience.

It is fall, a time of great beauty in the Berkshires. A group of six families arrives at the bog after a leisurely journey from the summer residences in the Hudson River Valley. Upon reaching the spot where they will erect their dwellings – a sunny, flat, dry area next to a stream of crystal-clear water – they stop to rest, eat, and give ritual thanks for a safe journey and to ensure a successful hunt. Then they begin to construct their dwellings, cutting saplings to create frameworks over which woven mats or sheets of bark are fitted snugly. Some gather firewood or stones for cooking hearths. Others explore the area looking for deer trails, signs of other game, and nut trees. They cross open areas where the understory has been burned in recent years, and where abundant new growth shows many signs of deer.

They find familiar groves of chestnut and hickory nuts. The next day, a small group of experienced hunters sets out to plan the game drive. They choose places where animals can be driven into an ambush. Here they build some screens behind which hunters will crouch. That night rituals are observed in order to help assure a successful and safe hunt. On the following day, the hunt begins. Most of the group travels quietly out into the surrounding hills, then returns making a huge noise. Frightened deer, bear, and other animals are driven to the area where the hunters wait. As they pass through a narrow area, where some brush has been piled to direct their flight, they are brought within range of the hunters' spears.



By the end of the day, several dozen deer and other prey have been killed, and a work group led by one of the elder women is beginning the work of cutting and drying meat and stretching and scraping skins. The cache of blades left in a previous year has been found, and some women are making scrapers from the unfinished blades and attaching them to handles with fresh sinew.



That night they have a great feast. For the next several weeks work continues. Many hides must be prepared to keep the people warm during the coming winter. A group of women and children begin rendering nuts for oil. They boil a mixture of cracked nuts and water by dropping hot stones into a large birch-bark container. Then they skim off the oil and store it in smaller containers. Men continue to hunt, singly and in small groups. One woman makes a dozen large unfinished blades and caches them under a log for use when she next returns.

During this time a small group of men carefully burn several areas. They choose areas to be burned with care and wait for appropriate weather conditions. By the time the group is ready to leave, they will have burned acres of undergrowth. Next spring these areas will burst forth with new growth. Soon winter is in the air and snow is on the ground. The members of the group leave their home by the bog. They will move back to their winter village in a sheltered valley near a tributary of the Hudson River. They leave laden with furs, meat, and nut oil that will see them through the long winter.



Next year, or perhaps in a few years, they will spend another fall here at Kamposoa Bog.

This description of Native American life in the Berkshires is adapted from the report of archaeological investigations “Discovering the Ancient Past at Kamposoa Bog, Stockbridge, Massachusetts.” The study was conducted by UMass Archaeological Services in 1993. The snapshot of native life, although speculative, is based entirely on the evidence found during their archaeological investigations, and vividly describes how the Native Americans used and cared for this land for over five thousand years.

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