



"Land of The Kootenai"

The Kutenai Indians lived along the Kootenai river and its drainage's. The Kutenai's base camp was located in the Tobacco Plains, an area near the U.S.-Canadian border. Their geographic location helped in the shaping of their unique culture. They hunted for buffalo, elk, deer, and other large game like the Plains tribes, but they also fished like the Pacific tribes. The hunting diversities divided the tribe into the Upper Kutenai (Horse Indians) and the Lower Kutenai (Flatbows). The Upper Kutenai raised large horse herds. They lived close to the Rockies. Once or twice a year they rode out into the plains for a buffalo hunt. They traded their surpluses with the Lower Kutenai. The Lower Kutenai preferred canoes over horses. They hunted small game, speared salmon, and trapped fish. The river linked the two groups together. The river's shores provided some common campsites, wintering spots, and special ceremonial sites. Below is a list of known local Kutenai campsites collected from elders of the tribe:

1. **Vksuvk:** A prairie on the Kootenai River, near Libby, Montana. It was a main wintering site for one of the tribes bands. It also was a ceremonial site in the summer.
2. **Akii:** "Thigh Bone" An important wintering site on the Fisher River. The Sun Dance ceremony was held here at one time.
3. **Gomnini:** "Sleepy Place" A site located on Wolf Creek, a good hunting spot for blacktail and whitetail deer.
4. **Niltukp:** "Home of the Antelope" A large campsite where people came from as far away as Columbia Lakes and Tobacco Plains to gather Camas.
5. **Yakantvmkonamnvvmki:** "Human Skull on a Stick" This site is located near Canyon Creek. It is in reference to the discovery of an enemy's skull there.
6. **Akapatanana:** "Small piece of Animal Fat" Site located around Warland Creek, good

mountain sheep hunting.

7. **Akanuxo:** "Swift Current" An old and important wintering site of the Upper Kutenai. It is located on the Tobacco River.
8. **Aquanak Alamuko:** "Planting Place" An extensive prairie along the Kootenai River where tobacco was planted.

The Kutenai are a very interesting tribe. Their culture and traditions are just as diverse as the land that they inhabited. One would have to agree that they chose a beautiful place to live and call their homeland.

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