

Ya'Xaik Life

The Ya'Xaik (pronounced yäh' khīk, gargled h), a band of the Alsea Tribe, lived for many thousands of years in what is now Yachats. They shared the same language and many of the same customs as the Alsea. The Ya'Xaik people cooked meals, built homes, worked to provide health and safety for their families, had cultural traditions and enjoyed games.

The Ya'Xaiks were hunters and gatherers, spending winters inland and summers on the coast. This area's diversity offered abundant food. Their meals consisted of smelt, salmon, birds, deer, whale, fruits, seeds, and roots of skunk cabbage and camas. A steady supply of meat was assured by smoking and drying.

To provide warmth and protection from our wet climate, Ya'Xaik, like other coastal

tribes, built underground homes with earth walls and gabled roofs split from abundant cedar trees fashioned into planks.

The Ya'Xaik had a rich spiritual life. Shamans underwent an intense spiritual journey and then provided guidance to the tribe. The Ya'Xaik believed the earth was flat, and where it ended, the after-world began. They also practiced head-flattening, a procedure that started soon after birth. This process indicated the people with higher status in the tribe and, they believed, would make them identifiable in the afterlife.

The Ya'Xaik enjoyed a rich tradition of functional and decorative arts. From single logs they shaped canoes. Using bear grass that still grows along riverbanks today, they wove water-tight baskets, sleeping mats, and a variety of protective clothing.

While their homeland has been forever changed, their traditions are remembered and practiced by coastal tribes.

Left: basket weaving was both a functional task and a decorative art.

More information at www.YachatsOregon.org/history

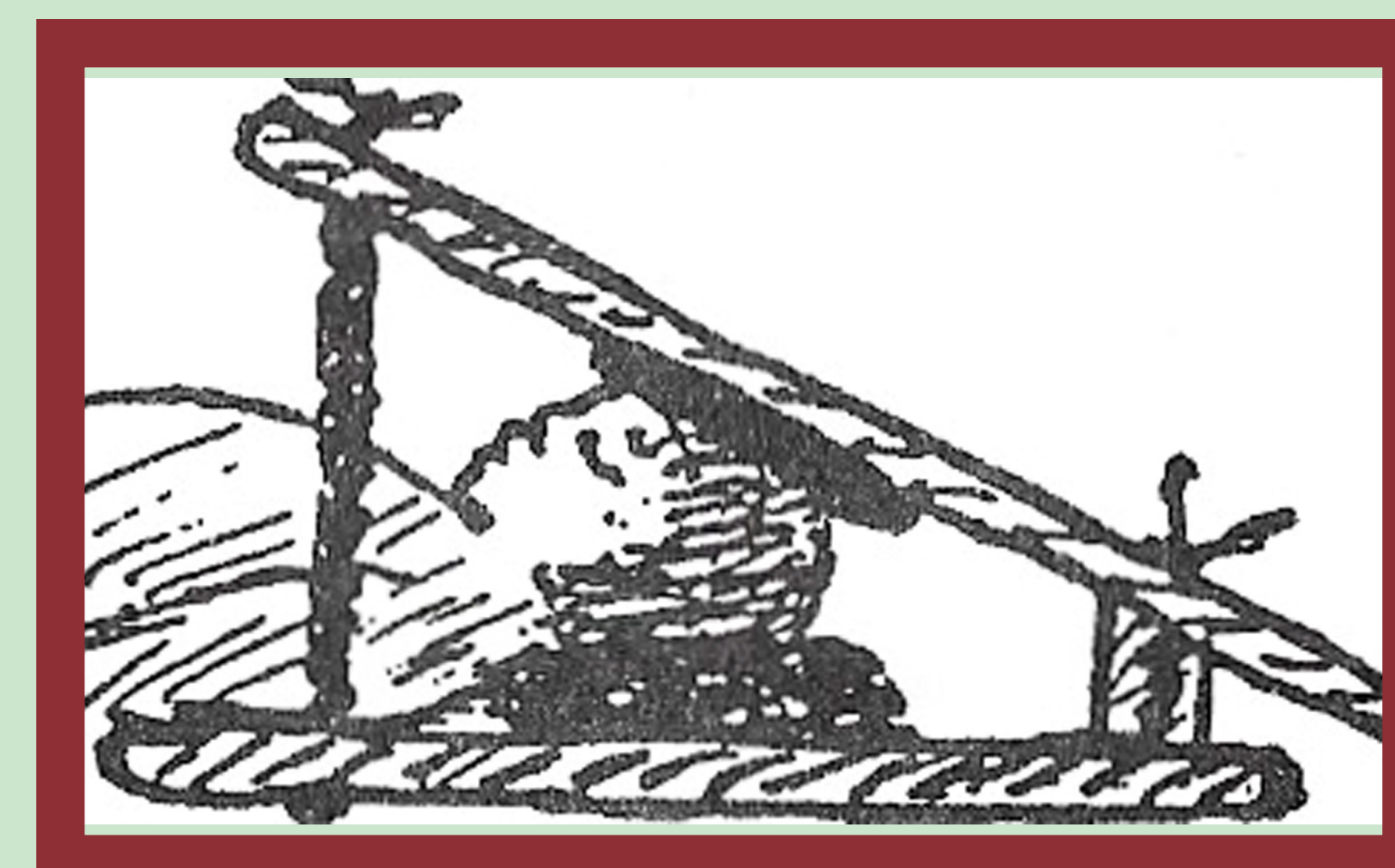


The Ya'Xaik people.



Art above and left courtesy
Siuslaw
National
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Shaman



*Childhood
head-
flattening*

Illustration from "The Indians of Yaquina Bay," by E. Wayne Courtney, republished 2006 by the Lincoln County Historical Society, Newport, Oregon

