

# Native American Canoes

The only form of transportation for the Native people long ago was on foot or on the water by canoe (**kənim**). There were many foot paths throughout Oregon to get from one place or another but if someone wanted to travel a long distance - it may be faster to go by canoe. Aside from travel, canoes were also used for fishing, gathering, and trading. There were canoes of all sizes and shapes depending on where the tribe/band was located or what the person was using it for. For example, an ocean (**saltəqw**) canoe would be larger with a bigger nose and higher sides than a river canoe.

There were many shapes and sizes of paddles (**isik**) as well. The shape and size of the paddle would be determined by the region the canoe came from and what type of canoe was being used. Different tribes and bands have different patterns for their paddles. The paddles are carved from hardwoods, such as ash, that are not prone to breaking.



Grand Ronde Paddles, 2013, Image by Michelle Alaimo



Canoe Bailer from Vancouver Island, Image from Smithsonian

Along with paddles, every canoe would also have a bailer on board. The bailer would be used for scooping water (**tsəqw**) out of the canoe when it comes over the sides. The bailer would be carved from wood or bark. Mats, made from cattail or tule, would also be found aboard the canoe. They would be used to sit or kneel on and once the canoe was on land, they would be used to cover the canoe.

The traditions canoes carry with them are being brought back into Native Communities today. Every year The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde take part in Canoe Journey. Members of the Tribe travel by canoe to the next closest tribe. At the new tribes, the canoes are welcomed and the travelers are fed a meal with singing and dancing to follow. Everyone camps for the night and then the canoes travel together to the next tribe. The pattern is continued until they reach the final destination. Each year the final destination changes so that different tribes have the opportunity to host the event.



Grand Ronde Canoe Family, 2014, Image by Michelle Alaimo