

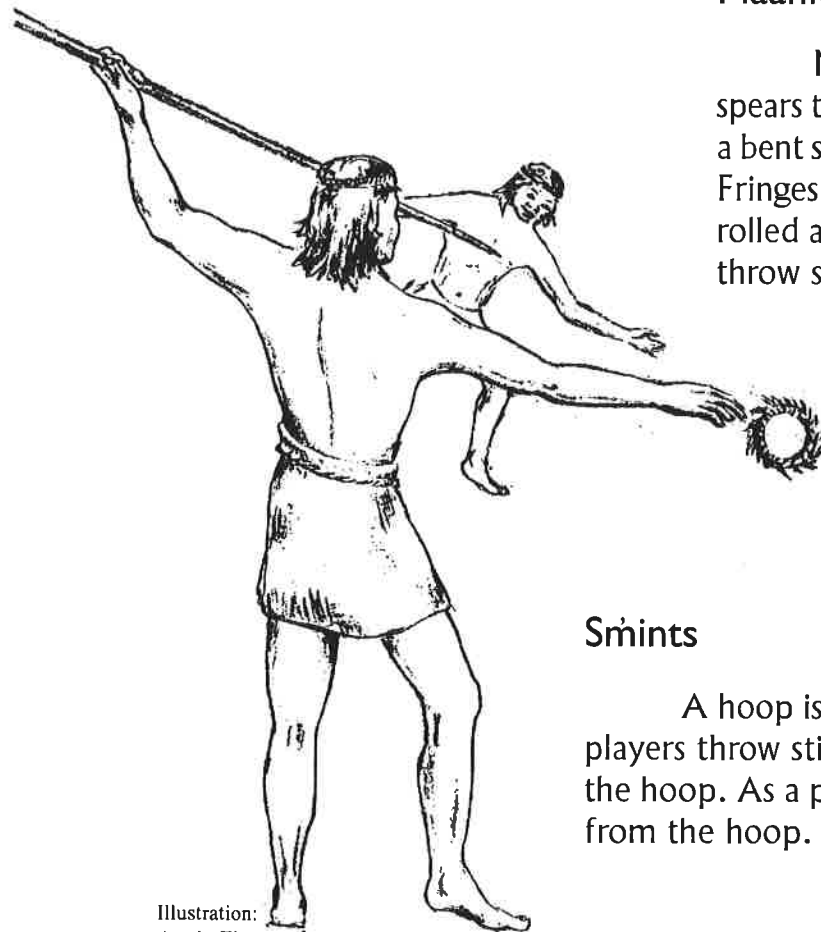
Games

Despite all the work in a Nisga'a village, people found time to play a variety of games.

Hoop Games

Maahldee'e

Maahldee'e is played by throwing spears through a hoop. A hoop is made from a bent sapling wound with cedar bark thongs. Fringes are left on the hoop. The hoop is rolled along the ground as the players try to throw spears through it.



Smints

A hoop is placed standing up on the ground. The players throw sticks or spears at it. They must hit inside the hoop. As a player gets better he stands further away from the hoop.

Illustration:
Austin Thomas

Ball Games

T'ak

Four players stand in a square. They throw a ball made from an animal bladder to one another by hitting it with their hands. They can not catch the ball. They try to keep the ball in the air as long as they can.

Gonhl

Gonhl is a lot like field hockey. The field is about one hundred meters long. There is a goal at either end of the field and these are marked by sticks put into the ground about three meters apart. The players are divided into two teams and each player has a hooked stick.

To start the game the ball is placed in a small hole in the ground in the middle of the field. One member of each team stands at the hole with the other members of his team a few steps behind him. At a given signal both players try to knock the ball out of the hole. Each team tries to drive the ball through the goal of the other team.

Guessing Games

Nisga'a played a variety of guessing games. These games were very popular. The players and some of the people who watched often made bets on who would win. The supporters of each player sang special chants to help him win. Three of these games are listed below.



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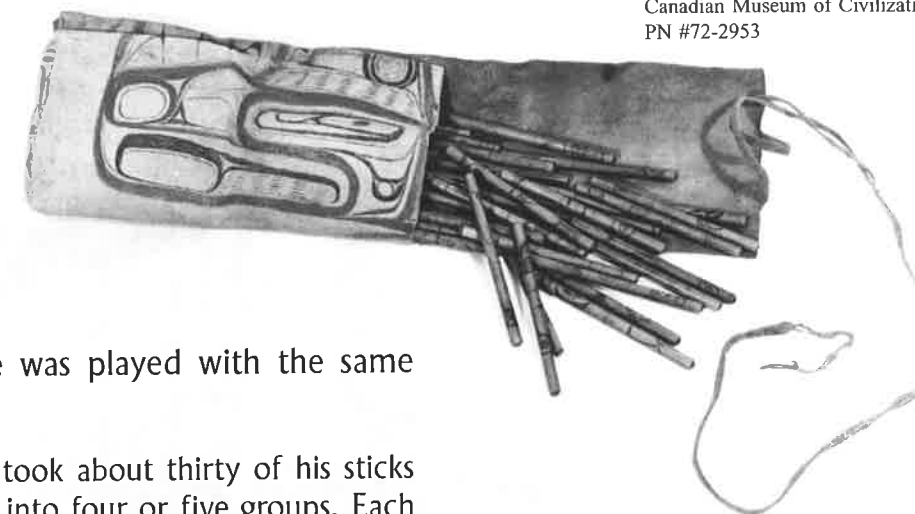
People spent much more time outside than they do today. In this photograph Wii Xha'a (seated left) and Txaalaxhatkw (seated right) play the game called Xsan.

Xsan

This game was played with a bundle of maple sticks. Two were marked. They could be marked with rings or with a crest of the player. The two marked sticks were "trumps".

To play the game a number of the sticks were divided into two bundles which were then wrapped in cedar bark. One of the bundles held a trump stick. The other player had to guess which of the two bundles held the trump. After each guess the bundles were quickly switched several times before being placed on the ground again.

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Mats'oon

This game was played with the same sticks as Xsan.

Player "A" took about thirty of his sticks and divided them into four or five groups. Each group had a different number of sticks.

Player "B" studied the bundles for a few seconds then put a blindfold over his eyes.

Player "A" changed the order of his bundles.

Player "B" tried to guess the number of sticks that were now in each bundle.

Both sets of gambling sticks shown on this page have been personalized by the addition of crests and other marks. The care taken in their manufacture shows both their importance and the pride that was taken in their ownership. Sticks like these were used in both Xsan and Mats'oon.



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Lahaal

This game was played by two people. One of the players wrapped a bone in cedar bark and hid it in one of his hands. The bone was just big enough to be covered. The other player tried to guess which hand held the bone. If he was right the other player had to give up one of his sticks. If he was wrong he had to give the other player one of his own sticks.

This game was sometimes played at night and the players sat as much as ten meters apart.