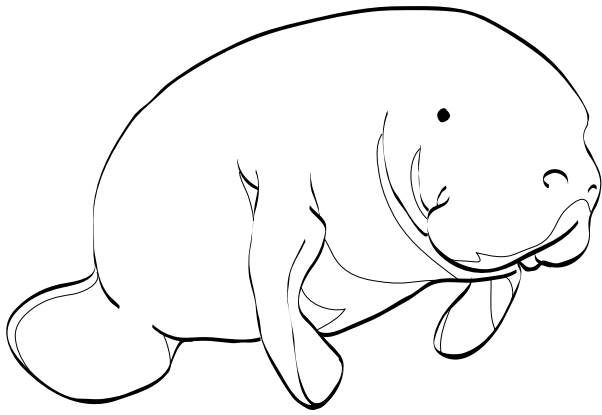


The Tequesta of Biscayne Bay



The manatee was considered a special food served only to the most important leaders of the tribe.

The Tequesta (tuh-KES-tuh) were a small, peaceful, Native American tribe. They were one of the first tribes in South Florida and they settled near Biscayne Bay in the present-day Miami area. They built many villages at the mouth of the Miami River and along the coastal islands. The chief lived in the main village at the mouth of the Miami River.

Like the other tribes in South Florida, the Tequesta were hunters and gatherers. They relied mainly on fish, shellfish, nuts, and berries for food. The men caught sharks, sailfish, sea cows, and porpoises in the waters of Biscayne Bay and the Miami River, while

the women and children collected clams, conchs, oysters, and turtle eggs in the shallow waters. The sea cow (manatee) was considered a delicacy and served mainly to the chiefs and other prominent leaders.

The Tequesta also gathered palmetto berries, coco plums, sea grapes, and palm nuts to eat. In the Everglades, they hunted bear, deer, wild boar, and small mammals. The Tequesta made flour by grinding up the roots of certain plants. Unfortunately, these food sources were not very plentiful along the southern coast, so the Tequesta never became a large or powerful tribe compared to their western neighbors, the Calusa.

The Tequesta used shells and sharks' teeth for a variety of tools. These included hammers, chisels, fishhooks, drinking cups, and spearheads. Sharks' teeth were used to carve out logs to make canoes.

During the 1500s, Europeans began arriving in Florida. At first, the Tequesta did not welcome these new visitors. But before long, the Europeans won their friendship by bringing gifts of colored cloth, knives, and rum.

The Tequesta numbered about 800, but they started to die out as a result of settlement battles, slavery, and disease. By the 1800s, the Tequesta tribe had only a few survivors.

