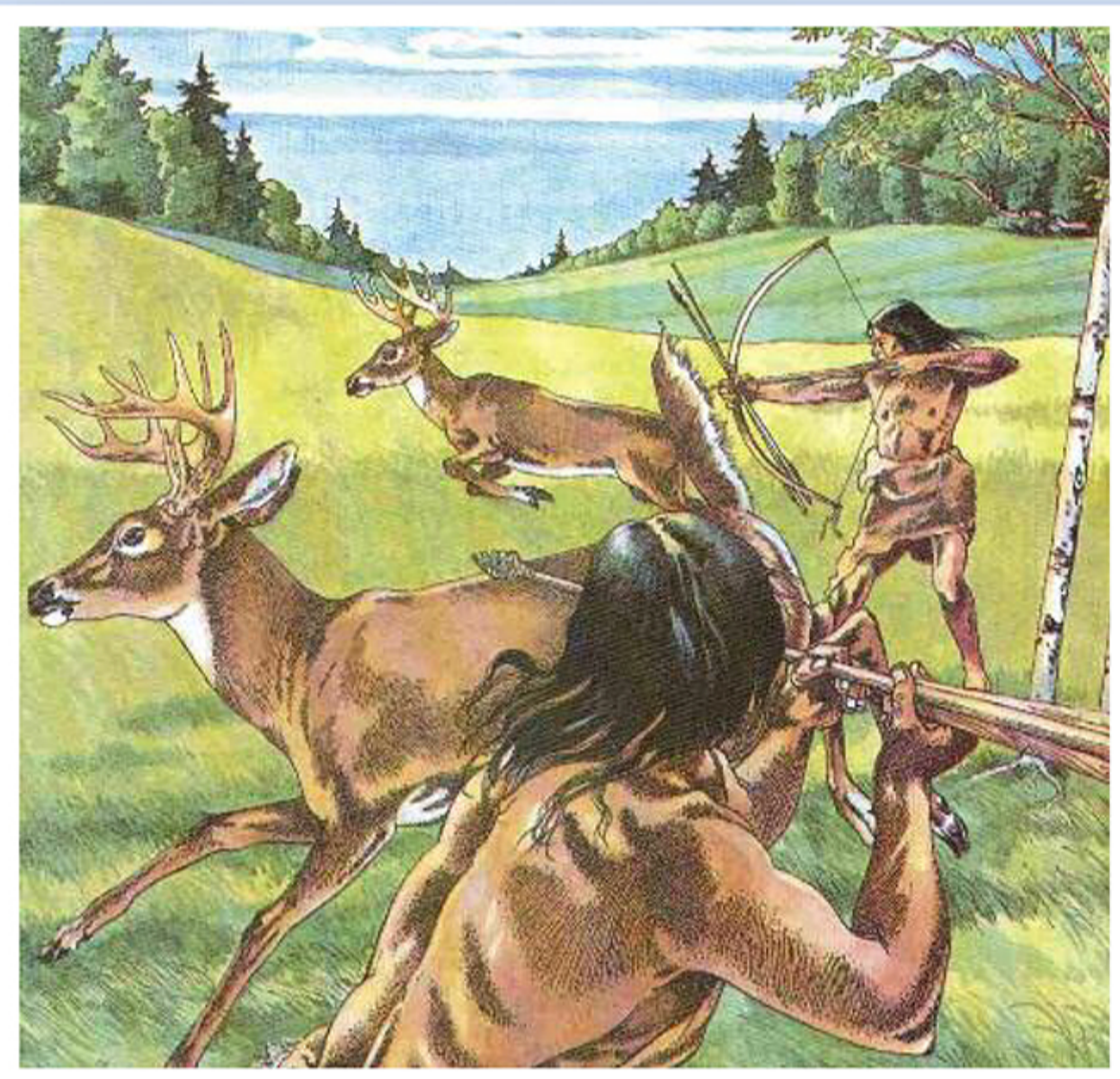


NATIVE NATIONS – PRE-EUROPEAN CONTACT

The centuries that followed the last ice age saw not only a flourishing of plant and animal life, but also human life. Evidence from the archaeological record of the region indicates that Aboriginal groups moved into the Grand River Watershed from the south.

By 500 AD, the peoples of the region began living in semi-permanent villages, abandoning the nomadic forager way of life in favour of settlement and agriculture. These 'Woodland People' are ancestral to both the contemporary Mississaugas and Six Nations. At the time of contact with the Europeans in the 1600s, the Iroquoian-speaking nations were the dominant group in the region, and a confederacy of several nations—the Attiwandaron (or Neutral)—were in control of the river and its surrounding areas.



◀ During the late stage of the last ice age, it is estimated that the Grand River Watershed was home to less than 500 hunter-gatherers who relied on stone and bone tools to hunt large game such as caribou and elk—animals that no longer call the area home—and possibly, mastodon and mammoth—species that are now extinct.

Native Nations hunting Elk. Source: Painting by Ivan Kosis.



◀ Reconstruction of the interior of an Iroquoian Longhouse. Crawford Lake – Milton ON.

Interior of a typical Longhouse



▲ Over 1,000 years ago, the people of the Grand River began to practice "slash and burn" agriculture, and settled in longhouse villages. The principal crops—often called "the three sisters"—were corn (maize), beans and squash. Fields were moved every eight or ten years to help retain productivity levels and whole villages were relocated every thirty years. Agriculture was supplemented with hunting wild game, fishing and gathering of nuts, berries and other fruits from the bountiful Carolinian forest.

Native Nations Farmers. Source: Painting by Ivan Kosis.



▲ Jacques Cartier arrived at Hochelega (now Montreal) in 1535, and with European contact came European diseases. It is estimated that by the 1640s, the Grand River Watershed had been largely depopulated, with more than two thirds of the original inhabitants of the area wiped out by epidemics of mumps, measles, smallpox, and diphtheria.

Jacques Cartier at Hochelega. Source: Illustration by Andrew Morris (1850), Library & Archives Canada

Many longhouse villages constructed protective outer fortifications

