

The Tarahumara: a people apart

The Tarahumara, an indigenous group that lives in a remote area of Mexico, has long fascinated the outside world.

BASIC

The people on the left are members of a group in Mexico called the Tarahumara. They are an indigenous group. That means they were living in Mexico long before explorers from Spain arrived in the 16th century, much like our Native Americans. When the Spanish arrived here, the Tarahumara moved to a region called Copper Canyon, seen at right. They still live a very simple life, without cars, TVs, or other technology. **Could you live this way?** They have a very interesting belief system.

They value respect for one another more than anything else, and don't place any value in material things. **How does that differ from our culture?** Those who have lived among the Tarahumara say they are truly unable to tell a lie! **Do you believe this? Do you know anyone who never tells a lie? What would our society be like if we were like this?** NEXT



GENERAL

In the left photo, you see members of a group of people known as the Tarahumara, who live in Mexico. They are an indigenous group. That means they were living there long before explorers from Spain arrived in the 16th century, much like our Native Americans. When the Spanish arrived here, the Tarahumara moved to a region called Copper Canyon. Its very steep cliffs and very far-off location kept the Tarahumara safe from the Spanish. **How do you think geography often affects history?** The Tarahumara still live in this region, seen at right. They still live a very simple life, without cars, TVs, or other technology. **Could you live this way?** By Mexico's most recent count, there are about 106,000 Tarahumara, making them Mexico's second-largest indigenous group. They usually dress

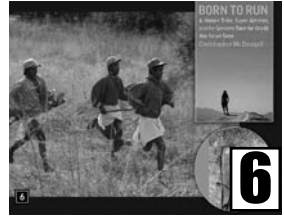
in brightly colored clothes, like in the photo. They grow corn and beans, and many of them also raise cattle, sheep, and goats. And they often move from one place to another with their livestock, so their homes are very simple. They have an interesting belief system. They value respect for one another more than anything else, and don't place much value on material things. **How does that differ from our culture?** Those who have lived among the Tarahumara say they are truly unable to tell a lie! **Do you know anyone who never tells a lie? What would our society be like if we were like this?** People have been very interested in the Tarahumara for a long time. Perhaps the most fascinating thing about them is their amazing skill at long-distance running. They can run for hours, and not even seem like they are tired! NEXT

ADVANCED

Have you heard of the Tarahumara, an indigenous group that lives in the Sierra Madre mountains in Mexico? This group, with its legendary athletic ability, has long fascinated the outside world. Originally the Tarahumara lived in much of the state of Chihuahua, but when the Spanish explorers arrived in the 16th century, the Tarahumara retreated to the Copper Canyon region, shown in the right photo. The nearly inaccessible canyons and remote location have helped keep the Tarahumara safe and their culture alive. The Tarahumara still live a simple life, in caves, under cliffs, and in small wood and stone cabins, and 21st-century technology has not reached them. By Mexico's latest count, there are 106,000 Tarahumara living in Mexico, making them Mexico's second

largest native Indian group. They grow corn and beans, and many of them also raise cattle, sheep, and goats. Nearly all the Tarahumara migrate in some form during the year. Many of them have converted to Catholicism, yet have incorporated their own ancient belief system. Those who have studied them say the Tarahumara have such a strict moral code that they are unable to tell a lie. **What would our society be like if no one was able to lie?** Respect for one another is considered the most important thing, and material possessions are unimportant. **Would we be better off as a country if we suddenly followed this code?** Yet it's another aspect of their culture — their legendary running ability — that attracts a great deal of attention. NEXT

The Tarahumara: a people apart (cont'd)



In a new book, the author delves into what makes the Tarahumara have a nearly superhuman running ability.

BASIC

A recent book—“Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Super Athletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen” — looks at the Tarahumara’s amazing abilities in long-distance running. They can run for hundreds of miles without stopping! **Do you know anyone who runs marathons or other long-distance events?** Some of this ability has to do with how the Tarahumara have adapted to their surroundings over the centuries. Friends and neighbors

might live quite far apart from one another, so the Tarahumara

are used to running many miles on narrow mountain paths. While most long-distance runners wear special, expensive shoes, the Tarahumara run barefoot, or in simple sandals, called huaraches, but never get injuries or foot problems. **Can you imagine running in these? Would you like to see the Tarahumara run?** NEXT

GENERAL

On the right you see a book that was recently published, titled “Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Super Athletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen.” The author, Christopher McDougall, is a long-distance runner himself, and he often had injuries and foot problems, like many other long-distance runners. **Do you run, or do you know anyone who runs marathons or other long-distance events?** One doctor told him to stop running, that it was destroying his body. McDougall didn’t believe it. He had heard about the Tarahumara and so he studied their culture to learn about how and why they are such amazing runners. Some of this ability has to do with how they have adapted to their environment over the centuries. Friends and neighbors might

live quite far apart from one another, so it became second nature to the Tarahumara to run many miles on narrow mountain paths. McDougall decided the running ability was simply a part of their culture, and that their graceful running is a trait they have kept for thousands of years, which our own ancestors once had, but eventually lost. “The Tarahumara have a saying: “Children run before they can walk,” McDougall said. “For them, running isn’t work ... It’s fine art, like it was for our ancestors.” McDougall also noted that while most long-distance runners invest in expensive shoes, the Tarahumara run barefoot or in simple sandals, called huaraches, but never get injuries or foot problems. **Can you imagine running in these? Would you like to see the Tarahumara run?** NEXT

ADVANCED

A recently published book, “Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Super Athletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen,” is bringing new attention to the Tarahumara’s astonishing abilities as long-distance runners. Living at high altitudes has given them tremendous lung capacity, and having lived for generations amid a transportation network of narrow footpaths through the canyons, running for miles seems to be effortless for them. They can run hundreds of miles without stopping, and they face none of the injuries and fatigue that plague most long-distance runners. **Can you think of any unique adaptations people in your part of the world have had to make?** An integral part of Tarahumara culture is their “foot throwing” competitions, relays where the balls are kicked by the runners and

related to the next runner while teammates run ahead to the next relay team. These races can actually last days at a time. Christopher McDougall, the book’s author, is himself a runner, and, after being told by his doctor that running was destroying his body, he set out to understand how the Tarahumara can outrun anyone in the world and not suffer stress injuries. He discovered that the Tarahumara run either barefoot or in the simplest of huarache sandals, seen in the bottom photo. Despite decades of advancements in modern shoe design, most other runners continue to suffer stress injuries. **Why do you think running barefoot or in simple sandals would put less stress on the body than running in expensive running shoes? Have you ever tried running barefoot? How did it feel?** NEXT

The Tarahumara: a people apart (cont'd)

Thousands of cultures are at risk of disappearing.

BASIC Do you understand the quote here? What does Mr. Davis mean by “impoverished” here? (That we would lose a lot when we lose cultures, and having many different cultures makes the world a better place.) The Tarahumara have managed to survive for hundreds of years, but some people are worried that their way of life is now being threatened, as other people start coming into their area. This has happened throughout history all over the world. Many indigenous cultures still survive, but they struggle constantly. On the right



is a San — *sahn* — man, one of the Bushmen tribes of southern Africa. And on the left you see four chiefs from the Kayapo tribe, native to Brazil. A language is an essential part of a culture. **Do you understand why?** By 2100, more than half of the more than 7,000 languages spoken on Earth may disappear. **What do you think countries should do to protect their indigenous peoples?** END

GENERAL Do you agree with the quote on the screen? What do you think he means here by “impoverished”? Indigenous people often don't survive when a more powerful culture arrives. The Tarahumara culture, partly due to geography, has managed to endure for thousands of years, but now they too are facing problems as other people start coming into their area. The Mexican government even has a plan to build hotels and other attractions to bring tourists to their area. **How would this affect the Tarahumara people?** Over the centuries, hundreds of indigenous groups have disappeared from Earth. Many still survive, but they struggle constantly to keep their culture alive. More powerful groups want their land and their food supplies are

endangered. More than 300 million people in the world are indigenous, making up at least 5,000 different cultures in more than 70 countries. On the right is a San — *sahn* — man, one of the Bushmen tribes of southern Africa. And on the left you see four chiefs from the Brazil's Kayapo tribe. Researchers use the disappearance of languages as a way to measure the disappearance of world cultures. Every 14 days a language dies. By 2100, more than half of the more than 7,000 languages spoken on Earth — many of them not yet recorded — may disappear. Some countries are working to preserve their diverse cultures. In our own country, efforts are being made to preserve some of the dozens of Native American languages. **What do you think countries should do to protect their indigenous peoples?** END

ADVANCED What do you think of the quote on the screen? Do you agree? About 6 percent of the world's population is indigenous peoples, made up of at least 5,000 cultures in more than 70 countries. But modern development continues to encroach on the way of life of many of these groups, as their homelands and traditional food sources disappear. On the right is a San — *sahn* — man, one of the Bushmen tribes of southern Africa. And on the left you see four chiefs from the Kayapo tribe, native to Brazil. The Tarahumara culture, partly due to geography, has managed to endure for thousands of years, but is facing the same struggles as other indigenous groups. Some of the people now wear Western clothing, and their language, while still widely spoken, is slowly losing ground to Spanish. Officials in Chihuahua

are even planning development in the Copper Canyon area to attract tourism. **How do you think the Tarahumara would be affected?** Those who study this issue, like Davis, often use the disappearance of languages as a way to measure the disappearance of world cultures. Every 14 days a language dies. By 2100, more than half of the more than 7,000 languages spoken on Earth — many of them not yet recorded — may disappear. Some countries are working to preserve their diverse cultures. In Wales, a region of Great Britain with its own ancient language and culture, the Welsh language is taught in schools. And in our own country, efforts are being made to preserve some of the dozens of Native American languages. **What do you think industrialized countries should do to protect their indigenous peoples?** END