**Historical Mythbusting #2**

**Virgin Wilderness Myth:**  When the European settlers arrived, they found a pristine, virgin wilderness.

When Europeans arrived, Native Americans had already altered their various environments to fit their cultural needs, and their numbers had been dramatically decimated by earlier contact with European disease.

Before Europeans arrived, the indigenous peoples had already altered the environment in at least three ways.

* **Agriculture.**Across the continent, thousands of acres of trees were cleared for the purpose of raising crops. In the Southwest and in the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys, tribes created a vast and sophisticated system of irrigation ditches and dams that dramatically altered the natural course of rivers and streams.
* **Fire.**Many tribes used fires to communicate, to clear fields for agriculture, to drive away unwanted insects, to push smaller animals out of the soil, to remove cover for potential enemies, to kill deer by encircling them with fire, and to force deer to go for food where the Indians could control them.
* **Pre-horse hunting practices.**The Plains Indians sometimes caught buffalo by stampeding them over cliffs or into rude corrals which killed many more buffalo than were needed.