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The Rendille Tribe

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A Cushitic people of Kenya

The Rendille tribe is a Cushitic tribe that inhabits the climatically harsh region between the Marsabit hills and Lake Turkana in Northern Kenya. Here they neighbor the Borana, Gabbra, [Samburu](#) and [Turkana](#) tribes. Rendille are semi-nomadic pastoralists whose most **valued animal is the camel**.



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History of the Rendille people

The original home of the Rendille people was in Ethiopia. They were forced to migrate south into Kenya because of their frequent conflicts with the Oromo tribe over pasture and water for their animals.

Since they lived on desert land with unfavorable climatic conditions, the British colonialists were not interested in overtaking their area and the Rendille tribe was, therefore, not very affected by colonial rule in Kenya.

Culture and lifestyle of the Rendilles

Being pastoralists, the lifestyle of the Rendille revolves around their livestock. In the northern areas, camels are their main source of livelihood because camels are best adapted to the desert conditions that prevail in Northern Kenya. The camels are an important source of milk and meat for the Rendille people. When migrating to new pastures, the camels are also used to carry the family's possessions in specially designed saddles.

The Rendille people who live in the southern and less dry part of their region have historically had a good relationship with their Samburu neighbors. In fact, their relationship has been so close that they have adopted many of the customs and practices of the Samburu. Inter-marriage with the Samburu has led to the emergence of a hybrid culture. The southern Rendilles rear other animals including cattle, sheep and goats.

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Rendille age-sets and gender roles

Among the Rendille, a person's role in society depends on their age-set and gender. The Rendille have a well-defined age-set system, and a number of rituals take place every seven to 14 years to **initiate people into different age-sets**.

For men, circumcision is one of the most important rituals because it initiates one into warriorhood. The men are in charge of herding the livestock and protecting them from predators and rustlers from other tribes.

Rendille women are charged with household duties and taking care of the children. Age-sets among women are less defined since a woman is either married or unmarried.

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Rendille marriage

It is a taboo for a Rendille man to marry from within his own clan. Since many young Rendille people have very little contact with other clans, the **parents always arrange marriages for them**, and conduct all marriage negotiations including the bride price. Until he is married, a young Rendille man cannot have a house of his own.

Rendille housing and settlement

Unlike Kenya's other nomadic tribes, the **Rendille establish large settlements**. Entire clans often live together in one big village, and village populations may number in the hundreds. When migration time comes, the Rendille have a system to ensure that all clans have equal access to water and pasture for their animals.

Rendille faith and religion

Unlike other Kenyan Cushites, the Rendille have a very small Islamic following. Most Rendille still adhere to their traditional religion, where they worship their god, *Wakh* or *Ngai*.

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